

University opens doors to small mammals

Historic forest to be replanted at U of T

BY BILL HODGES

In part of a growing trend, U of T will become home for another endangered ecosystem, restoring one of Toronto's formerly common types of forests.

The zoology department's landscape committee will replant a maple/beech forest in the area around Ramsay Wright Zoological Labs next summer as part of a larger effort to restore endangered biomes and make the university's landscaping more self-sustaining.

Jim Hodgins, a biochemistry technician in the zoology department, and chairman of the committee responsible for the project, hopes the maple/beech forest will show people a bit about the area's lost biological heritage.

"People are curious to know about the former forest of Toronto," Hodgins said. "Many people have not seen the

working parts of a maple/beech forest."

Over 100 species of trees, shrubs, wildflowers, ferns, grasses, sedges and mosses will be planted in the three zones bordering Ramsay Wright Zoological Labs. Hodgins expects to see an influx of butterflies, moths, katydids, toads, birds and small mammals coming to the site when it opens this summer.

The forest will become the fourth replanted ecosystem at the St. George campus. Earth Sciences currently has replantings of boreal and deciduous ecosystems and, most recently, an oak savannah planted last fall.

He said there are plans eventually to integrate the four naturalistic ecosystems into one nature walk.

According to Hodgins, the zoology department's decision to re-create the

forest is partially the result of U of T's integrated pest management program, adopted in 1993. The goal of this program is to achieve an ecologically balanced campus which is pesticide free, low on water usage, and less labour intensive within five years.

Hodgins hopes the example of the



new, naturalized landscape will encourage others on campus to copy their efforts—at Robarts or Sidney Smith, for example. Despite the fact that naturalistic landscaping would require almost zero maintenance, he believes it is unlikely that others will try this form of landscaping, still considered experimental by many.

According to Hodgins, several factors have contributed to the near extinction of Toronto's once common maple/beech forests. One of the biggest problems has been increased urban settlement with what he terms a lack of foresight.

"Cities such as Helsinki and Stockholm have this kind of biodiversity going into their core," Hodgins said. "We are losing our biodiversity. Forests have been retained by default. The land was preserved only because it had no commercial use."

To prepare the sites for the replanting, the soil's acidity had to be lowered from its initial alkaline level. Hodgins says the soil's high alkalinity is a result of the absorption of lime and sand leaked from the bricks, mortar, gravel and rubble from the former houses which occu-

pled the area where the Ramsay Wright building now exists. To lower the soil pH to levels found in natural ecosystems, over 50 bags of leaves collected during the fall, as well as an assortment of pine needles and chopped-up Christmas trees, have been buried on the site.

About 90 per cent of the plants to be used in the replanting were obtained from a rescue mission in Pickering's Altona forest, acquiring trees that would have been bulldozed over in the construction of a housing development.

A ceremonial first tree, a shagbark hickory donated by the Canadian Wildflower Society, was planted last October by Canada's first woman astronaut, Roberta Bondar.

The zoology landscape committee will present its final proposals for the site and request university funding of the project in March.

Historic forest being reproduced at university

By **Iain Wilson**

It may come as a surprise that many of the trees, shrubs and plants in Toronto aren't originally from the area. That's exactly the kind of reaction Jim Hodgins is looking for.

Hodgins and a volunteer group from the University of Toronto's zoology department are piecing

together the remnants of a maple/beech forest on the U of T's campus at 110 St. George in downtown Toronto.

When it's open to the public next summer, the forest garden will represent one of Toronto's major forest types that existed before the area was settled by Europeans.

The 15- by 15-metre forest garden will have more than 100 species of

trees, shrubs, wildflowers, ferns, grasses, sedges and mosses. Decaying logs and glacial boulders have also been brought in.

Hodgins, a biochemistry technician in the zoology department and chairman of the department's landscape committee, says the forest's high-profile location will serve as a constant reminder of the area's biological heritage to passersby.

"We're losing biodiversity and that's reflecting itself in the bird and insect populations," Hodgins said.

"In showing the biodiversity of the original maple/beech forest, one of the things we want to show is the beauty of many of the smaller species of that forest."

Many of the trees and shrubs now at the St. George location originally came from the Altona forest in Pickering.

Sections of the forest have been

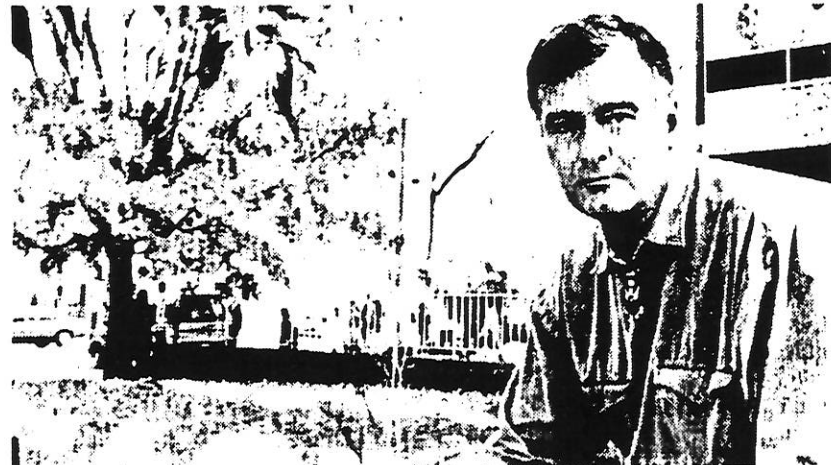
saved but other sections are slated for development.

Environmental groups have rescued some of the rare plant and tree species from the forest and have moved them to the U of T campus and several conservation areas in the Greater Toronto Area.

Hodgins said the Canadian Wildflower Society has also donated money to the cause.

The forest will also serve as a reminder of how much Toronto's biodiversity has changed. European tree and plant species, such as the Norway maple, the European buckthorn and the garlic mustard wildflower, are now commonly found in Toronto's ravines and parks even though they are not native to the area.

"Just by being there, the forest garden will entertain and educate people," Hodgins said. ●



Jim Hodgins and a group from U of T's zoology department are piecing together the remnants of a maple and beech forest at the University's St. George campus.

Photo by Marc Rochette