

POWER PLAY: TIME TO REVISIT CHURCHILL FALLS 2

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PROGRESS



The right moment?

Peter MacKay's unlikely destiny

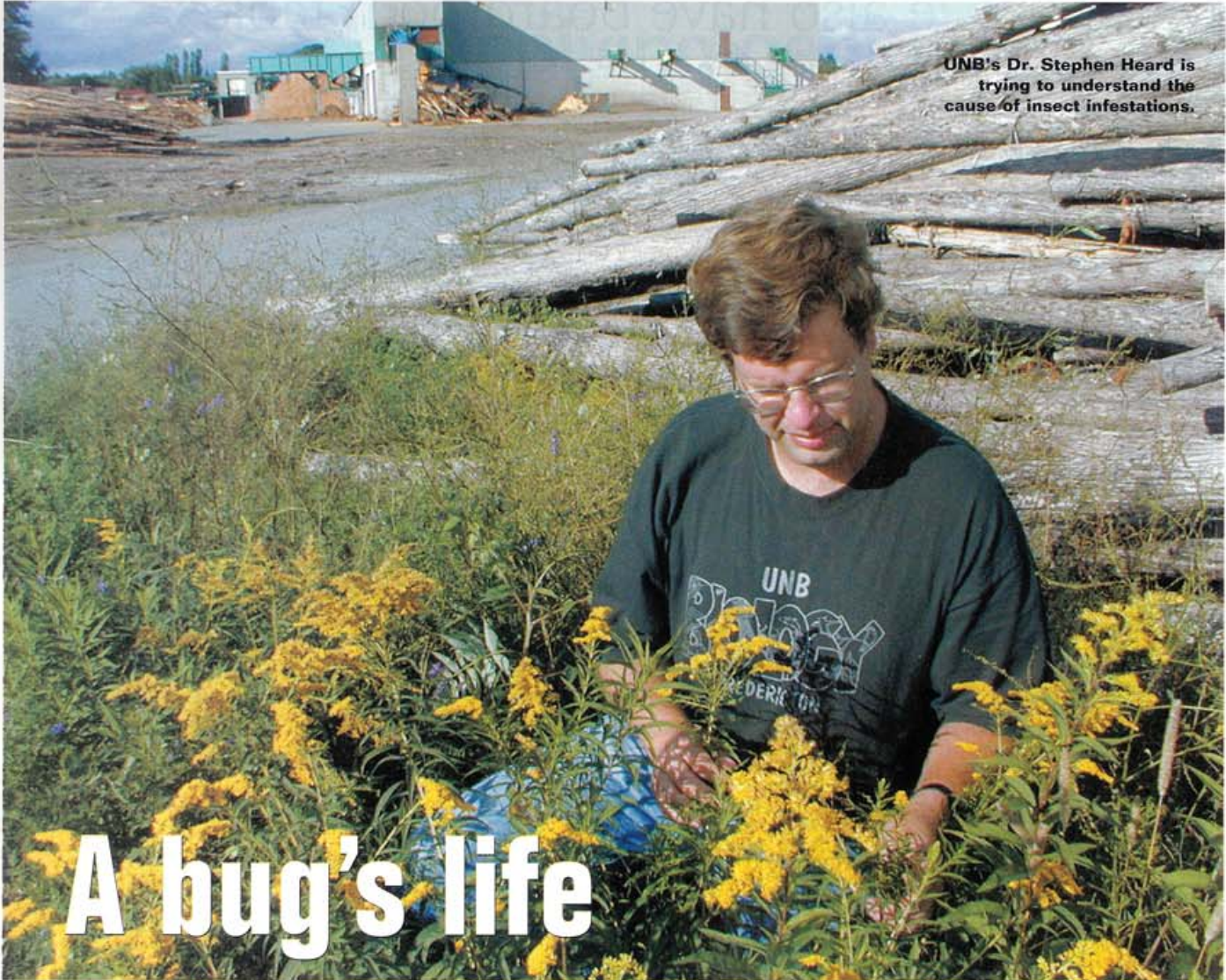
The CEO walk
Knowing when to go

Irving's
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UNB's Dr. Stephen Heard is trying to understand the cause of insect infestations.

A bug's life

Dr. Stephen Heard is proving that you need a lot more than honey to catch flies. An associate professor of biology at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in Fredericton, Heard recently was awarded more than \$99,000 by the Canada Foundation of Innovation to develop a biological method of predicting and controlling outbreaks of crop and forest pests.

In the early 1980s, a sudden population explosion of the spruce budworm in New Brunswick destroyed 16 million cubic metres of timber. Insects and the chemical methods used to control them still cost Canadian farmers and tree harvesters hundreds of millions of dollars every year. According to Heard, knowing when an infestation is about to

happen will let harvesters plan a response and a harvest method that will save money—or they could just let nature take its own course through the strategic use of parasitoids, the bugs that feed on the bugs.

Heard also wants to understand why insects suddenly shift from feeding on one type of plant to another, and why parasitoids attack insects that feed on the plants. Science still has a long way to go before it understands the overall cause of insect infestations. "A more general understanding is needed to know how and why it happens," says Heard.

Using chemical sprays already costs Canadian potato farmers about 7% of their total operating budget, and natural methods cost even more—up to 15 times

more than pesticides. That's why other methods are needed. Although Heard says that it's far too early to estimate the total cost savings of the prediction and parasitoid method he is trying to develop, he expects it would cost only a fraction of the money spent on chemicals.

Heard's research also may bring short-term financial benefits to the university and the surrounding community. Greg Kealey, UNB's vice-president of research, believes that having advanced research helps attract new students to the area. "The presence of four new doctoral students in a community always helps," he says, "plus some may choose to stay in the city after they graduate, which could help everyone."

— Laura Pellerine