

# Tree Urchin

Newsletter of the Maine Chapter, American Chestnut Foundation  
Volume 1, Number 1

Spring 1998

## Welcome aboard!

Welcome to the first issue of The Tree Urchin — the newsletter of the Maine Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation! We want to describe the work and progress that we have accomplished in the last few months, and invite you to join us in this important work to restore the American Chestnut to the forests, towns, and yards of Maine. In less than two weeks—on Saturday May 16—we will be having our second general meeting. It will be your opportunity to meet Fred Hebard---the Staff Pathologist at the Chestnut Research Farm in Meadowview, Virginia, and join in the planning of this year's work here in Maine.

## April meeting attracts support

A gathering at Medomak Valley High School's greenhouse was very productive. In response to about 130 announcements sent to current and past TACF (The American Chestnut Foundation) members, as well as Maine registered foresters, fish & game associations, and friends & acquaintances, we had a turn-out of 21 people representing an interesting assortment of chestnut enthusiasts. After introductions and discussion of the many aspects of our planned activities, several of us went to Neil Lash's greenhouse to pot-up 400 sprouting chestnut seeds that Welles and Eric harvested last October. In a few months these seedlings will be planted out into breeding nurseries at several locations to jump-start the backcross breeding program of TACF here in Maine.



Milling a dead chestnut (see story): from left, Fred Hebard, Clayton Totman, Doug Grotton, Welles Thurber, Malcolm Von Saitza

## An icy storm legacy

By Welles Thurber

The nightmare that seemed to me to be apocalyptic has become known as the Ice Storm of 1998.

As a forester with a tree farm, the primary purpose of which is oak veneer and mass production for wildlife, I cannot express the sense of loss I felt from the icy death of a huge percentage of my life's work. I must tell you, after the simple task of surviving was over, and the damage assessed, my first thought was "what happened to the chestnuts of Maine?"

Luckily, those chestnuts in my immediate mid-coast area were spared. All trees that I worked with last year were virtually untouched. I am sure, however, that many others throughout the state have been severely affected. Knowing that small limbs, large branches and even main trunks were damaged, we can assume that many of the remaining trees are on borrowed time. If blight is present, I guess that in 3-5 years we will lose many of our remaining chestnuts. So the race must begin now, to conduct an inventory of all the known trees, to assess their condition and desirability for breeding.

The last attempt at a systematic inventory was made in 1980 by a graduate student named Lance Conklin. Doug Stark, a chestnut enthusiast and former guardian of this noble tree is pulling together his notes from the Maine Forest Service Insect & Disease Lab. Between my notes and work, Doug's and many other sources, we will have a good picture of the status of Maine chestnut trees. And much work to do. By the May 16 meeting, I will have many tasks to assign. Let the chestnut hunt begin.

Coincidentally, we have received a request from Fred Hebart and Paul Sisco to assist Tom Kubisik, who is a plant research geneticist at the USDA/Forest Service Southern Research Station, at the Southern Institute of Forest Genetics in Saucier, Mississippi. Tom would like to relocate about 120 American Chestnuts from two plots in Maine to his research farm. He will extract DNA from these trees and incorporate this data into his statistical sampling of trees from the chestnut's original range.

Our inventory will help him.

## Planting honors Totman

On April 25, in Conway, Massachusetts, a dedication ceremony marked the planting of 200 American Chestnuts by the American Chestnut Foundation. The planting, named in honor of Clayton Totman of Waldoboro, was done by a large group of foundation members from Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, plus staff from Vermont. At 9:30 a.m. sharp, a U.S. Marine color guard assembled, and Tammy Carpenter welcomed all and introduced retired General Totman, who recalled fond memories of his youth on the Conway woodlot. It was a place to harvest timber and mill lumber with his father.

The woodlot also provided a retreat from the stress of military service for Clayton and his wife, Carolyn. Clayton witnessed the demise of the American Chestnut; now he is helping to sponsor the tree's revival. Future generations will thank him for his vision.

## Wanted: furniture maker

Brud Lucas of Searsmont has donated a dead 16-inch diameter at breast height American Chestnut to the foundation. The tree was cut and removed from the site. Shortly afterward, using Clayton Totman's Wood Mizer sawmill, a group of volunteers milled the tree. We now have this fine lumber available. The original goal was to acquire lumber for use in furniture making. Then, the completed furniture (desk, bureau, cabinet, etc.) would be donated to the Blaine House in Augusta, to publicize our work. Welles Thurber has the lumber, are you the cabinetmaker?

### Maine Chapter Steering Committee:

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Clayton Totman

# My visit to a chestnut breeding farm in Virginia

By Eric Evans

For our April vacation week this year, my family (wife Laura, and son Ben) and I had been looking forward to driving to Washington DC to visit friends and family. We decided to spend the middle of the week exploring Virginia, including the Research Farms of TACF in Meadowview. After touring Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and camping in the foothills in central VA, it was only another 3 hour's drive to Meadowview, 20 miles from the border with Tennessee. Compared with beating through Megalopolis, that part of our drive was a real treat! We enjoyed the blooming dogwoods and redbuds lighting up the lush green of the rolling farmland and the soft pastels of the deciduous hardwoods in various stages of flower and leaf!

In Meadowview we met Farm Pathologist Fred Hebard and his family and Geneticist Paul Sisco. Fred showed us most of their thousands of chestnut trees at various stages in the backcrossing breeding program, all in neat rows set 20 feet apart at the Wagner and Price Farms. We got valuable lessons in germination and seedling management, distinguishing American vs. Chinese characteristics, and evaluation of blight resistance.

Geneticist Paul Sisco is directing the molecular approach to breeding for blight resistance in the American Chestnut. His goal is to use gene mapping to learn how the genes that govern blight resistance interact. Ultimately this knowledge will speed up the breeding program and may lead to the creation of super-resistance. Paul is eager to include Maine chestnuts in his studies.

## Come to May meeting

We will have our next general meeting at 10 a.m. on Saturday May 16 as before at the Medomak Valley High School greenhouse (see directions below). There will be two major focus points for the meeting. The first will be a presentation by Research Farm Pathologist Fred Hebard, who quite conveniently will be in Maine for his annual May vacation at his camp on Lake Megunticook in Camden. The timing couldn't be better! Fred will describe the backcross breeding program that is leading to the creation of blight resistance in American Chestnuts, and how our work in Maine will mesh with his in Virginia. He will also explain other aspects of TACF's work such as resistance to insect damage, control of blight virulence, and possible approaches for eventual mass propagation and reforestation. Fred will also be recruiting helpers for his pollination activities in Virginia in early June. More about that later.

The second focus of our meeting will be to organize and coordinate our activities for the coming months.



Paul Rumney applies pollen to female flower on a Camden chestnut tree

### Directions to MVHS:

From U.S. Route 1 at Warren-Waldoboro town line, take Manktown Road. The high school is a short distance on the left.

## Special Thanks

For lots of help getting the Maine Chapter (ACF) off the ground, thanks to Plants Unlimited, Rockport, and Kim and Ed Slawson, Waldoboro.

Newsletter Editor: Steve Cartwright

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## YES. I want to help bring back the American Chestnut.

Enclosed is my membership support of: **Check here to ear-mark dues for Maine** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Gold Leaf, \$1,000 or more; \_\_\_\_\_ Silver Leaf, \$500; \_\_\_\_\_ Bronze Leaf, \$250;

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