

## Can You See the Forest Through the Trees?

When we look at the forests of today, we are looking back in time. We see the product of weather, soil and ecological conditions that occurred decades, perhaps even a century ago. We see all of the natural and human processes that have shaped those natural areas over time. Those processes include climate change, species competition, plant aging and decay, human and wildlife use. As most of the great forests in southern Ontario, including Rouge Park lands, were cleared in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the forests of today have a relatively short history.

These forests are the result of some pretty ingenious planning by "Mother Nature." What starts off as open ground evolves into a forest by following a process of succession, the series of steps that nature takes to convert an open area into a forest. Some species that require ample light, such as grasses, larger herbaceous plants and some trees establish themselves quickly on open ground. Soon seedlings from shade tolerant species emerge from beneath those sun worshipping plants, and dominate the next wave of succession in the forest growth. This natural course of growth will continue for decades, eventually resulting in a mature forest.

How does this relate to Rouge Park's restoration activities? Most importantly, we recognize that this is a natural process that will continue to occur as we strive to reestablish



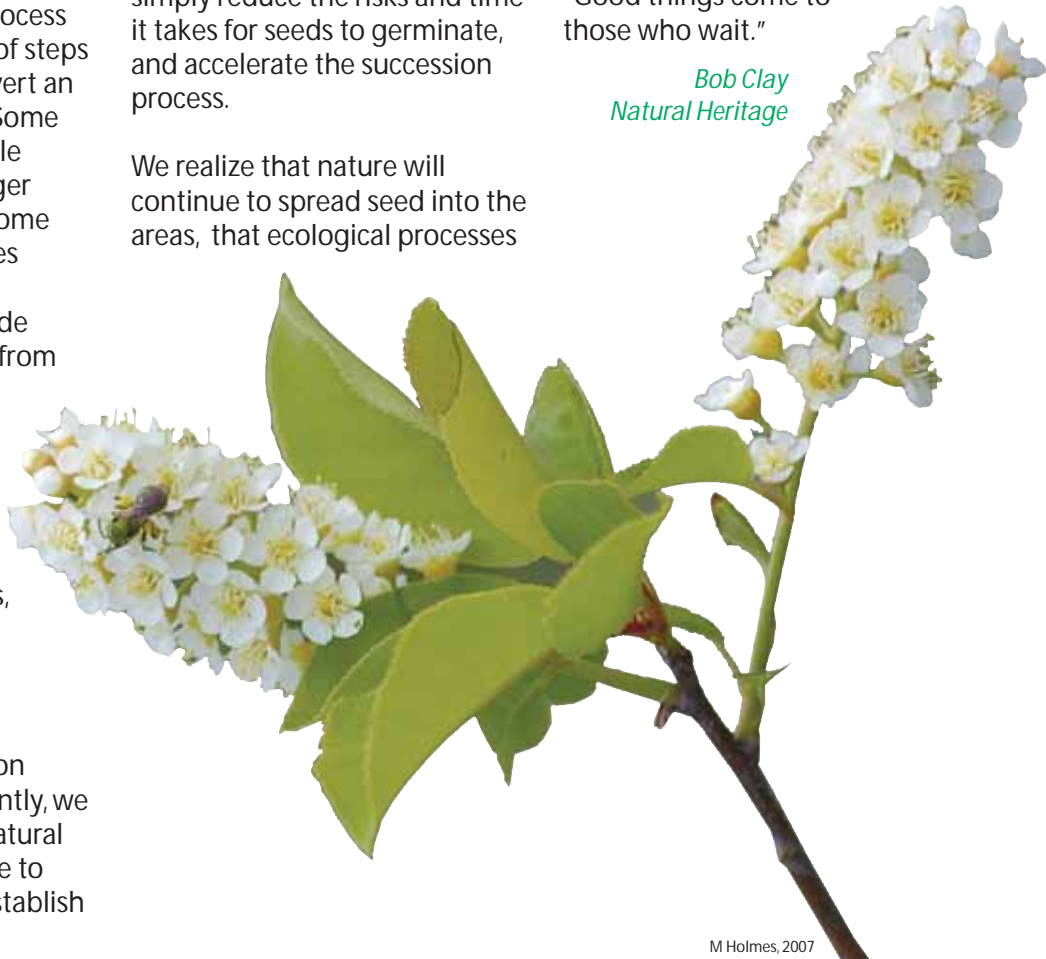
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forest areas. We design our projects to work in concert with this succession, rather than against it. We choose species based on existing soil conditions, moisture and a variety of other factors – all working within the scope of what would naturally occur. Our restoration efforts simply reduce the risks and time it takes for seeds to germinate, and accelerate the succession process.

We realize that nature will continue to spread seed into the areas, that ecological processes

will carry on, and that nature will be the ultimate designer of the habitats that develop. We also know that it takes time – lots of time! When you visit Rouge Park, many of these areas look like sticks and grasses right now, but they are the forests of the future. Like the saying goes, "Good things come to those who wait."

*Bob Clay  
Natural Heritage*



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