

He's Rooted in Nature



David Galbraith

DAVID GALBRAITH WAS exposed to nature long before he learned how to walk or talk. Before he was born, his parents purchased a piece of land on the shore of Lake Huron just south of Kincardine, Ont. They built a cottage on the property the year he was born. He grew up by the lake, catching frogs and gazing at the stars. Having a father who was an amateur astronomer and a cottage neighbour who was an amateur entomologist further instilled his fascination with the natural world.

As the head of science at the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG), Galbraith works with researchers studying 10

square kilometres of natural habitat at RBG, including wetlands and forests that are home to more than 50 at-risk species. “We are Canada’s biodiversity hotspot in terms of plant species diversity,” says Galbraith, B.Sc. ’82 and M.Sc. ’86.

Visitors of all ages enjoy exploring RBG’s trails and observing the wildlife. Seeing children interact with nature always puts a smile on his face. “There’s nothing more delightful than having a little wild bird perch on your finger,” he says. “When I get a chance to see that, it absolutely touches the heart.”

Located in Burlington, Ont., RBG offers a variety of habitats, thanks to its

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proximity to Lake Ontario, and the Carolinian and Great Lakes Laurentian forests.

As an undergrad, Galbraith was drawn to U of G’s marine biology program, having admired the work of ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau. Zoology professor Ron Brooks hired Galbraith as a summer student. He spent four weeks in Algonquin Park, where he studied the population ecology of snapping turtles, which inspired him to pursue a master’s degree in wildlife biology. After completing his PhD at Queen’s University and post-doc studies in the United Kingdom, he joined RBG in 1995.

Even as technology infiltrates our lives, nothing can replace the sights, sounds and smells of nature. “Botanical gardens play an important role in plant conservation,” says Galbraith. “They give people a concentrated exposure to nature.”