

Green Peace

DUKE FARMS HAS TAPPED RUTGERS TO
RID ITS FORESTS OF INVADERS.

• The two fawns scampering within feet of Steven Handel's minivan inside the grand Duke Farms Park in Somerset



County are one reason three Cook College professors, a post doc, and students are on the grounds on an almost daily basis. "Doris Duke was opposed to hunting and hundreds of deer have devoured many of the plant species here," says Steven Handel, professor of ecology and evolution and director of the

Center for Urban Restoration Ecology. "The Duke Charitable Foundation has hired us to figure out a way to reduce the deer herd without hunting and bring back native wildflowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees to decimated areas."

One of the first tasks is to rid the 2,700 acres of nonnative species.

"Look at these horrible barberry bushes and this Japanese stilt grass; these Asian invaders are a threat to all native American forests," Handel says from inside a 10-foot wire fence designed to keep deer out. "They're not only unattractive to humans and unappealing to deer, but they stress all native plants in their path. Right now we are conducting an inventory of all species on the property, which will help us formulate a plan on how best to eliminate certain species and reintroduce others."

Duke, a billionaire philanthropist who died in 1993, inherited the property from her father, James B. Duke, the founder of American Tobacco Co., following his death in 1925. James employed the designer James Greenleaf to create the park within his estate. Highlights include 11 gardens designed to showcase international horticultural styles, man-made lakes, and various fountains, waterfalls, and sculptures.

Now that portions of the farm are open to the public on a limited basis, the foundation is determined to come up with a master plan to restore the grounds and increase access, says Handel. "Prospects for the public, as well as for collaborations with Rutgers faculty and students in any number of disciplines, are limitless."

DORIS DUKE STIPULATED THAT DUKE FARMS, LARGE ENOUGH TO HOLD THREE CENTRAL PARKS, BE USED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH.

PHOTOGRAPH, TOP, COURTESY OF KARYN MALINOWSKI; DORIS DUKE, FROM B.TTMANN/CORBIS; DUK FARMS, NICK ROMAN.NKO