

Faculty of Education University of Toronto

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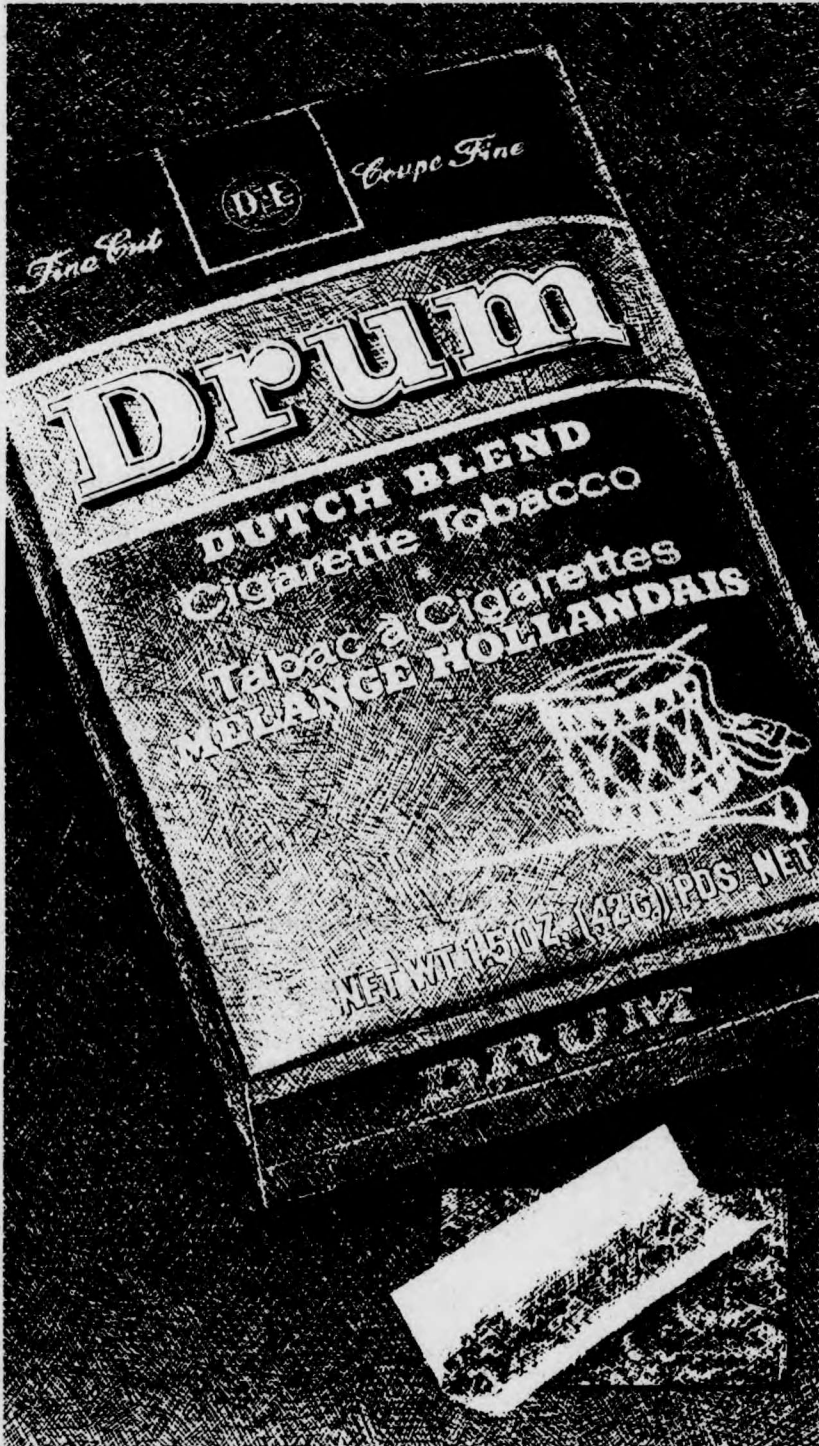


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York professors pool resources, strive to end parasitic diseases

By JOANNE CIRILLO

Dr. Kenneth G. Davey left McGill University, as Director of the Institute of Parasitology, in June 1974 to become Chairman of the Department of Biology at York. He presently concerns himself with administrative duties, his graduate students, his duties as Chairman of the Canadian Committee of University Biology Chairmen, lobbying with government agencies in order to get more funds for university research, acting as a consultant for international agencies concerned with Tsetsefly control and his own research projects. He will be teaching a course in Invertebrate Physiology in January.

Dr. Davey combines his laboratory facilities with other members of the department to form a group of 20 researchers: 15 professors, three research associates (with the rank of assistant professor but without a teaching load) four post-doctoral fellows and eight students at the Ph.D. or Masters level. By combining individual grants awarded to the professors by the National Research Council (NRC) and about \$400,000 (spread over five years) supplied by the NRC Negotiated Development Grant, funds for the group amount to about \$150,000 per year.

Primarily, the researchers are concerned with the hormones of

neurosecretory cells, particularly those involved with reproductive cycles of various invertebrates.

One of the more interesting subjects of this research is the Tsetse fly. This insect, which transmits a parasite that causes sleeping sickness in man and ngana in domestic cattle, has rendered large tracks of arable land in Africa uninhabitable. Dr. Davey has been studying Tsetse flies since they became available as research subjects in 1968. Their unusual reproductive cycle is of particular interest because the insect is viviparous (deposits larva, not eggs).

The female fly nourishes one larva at a time on milk she produces. The system is somewhat similar to the human one. The nine days required for the female to complete the cycle and deposit a larva, which is considerably heavier than itself, represents a weak link in the life cycle that researchers are hoping to exploit.

It has been discovered that the secretion of a 'juvenile' hormone (JH), controls whether the insect remains a larva or becomes a female. When this hormone is introduced artificially it can cause the insect to die. Chemical companies are developing compound similar in structure to JH as insecticide.

One such insecticide has been

available to Dr. Davey who is testing to discover why death occurs. By testing the hormone on Nematodes, flatworms, snails and other Molluscs, Dr. Davey believes that the neurosecretory cells are stimulated to produce hormones at the wrong time in the life cycle and this causes death. Since all organisms from Hydra to human have neurosecretory cells, there could be serious problems when using JH as an insecticide.

Rhodnius Prolixus is a favorite insect for research with Dr. Davey group and constitutes over half the work done by the researchers. Rhodnius is a South American equivalent to the Tsetse fly. It is a blood feeder that primarily feeds on birds but can adapt itself easily to humans. The parasite transmitted by Rhodnius is similar to sleeping sickness. It produces Chagas' Disease and its symptoms are the same as those Darwin allegedly suffered after he visited South America. Research on Rhodnius is concerned with the hormonal control of reproduction as it related to neurosecretion and JH.

Dr. Davey's group also studies hormonal control in a Nematode found in the muscle of cod fish. Some Nematodes are parasitic to humans. Dr. Davey claims that York is about the only laboratory in the world which deals with Nematode hormones.



Vanier college held its 10th anniversary celebrations last weekend. Pictured above is York president H. Ian Macdonald joining in the fun at the Vanier college dinner.

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