



Into the Woods: UC-Davis research scientist and professor and 1983 JMU alumnus Dave Rizzo.

Top science stories of 2002

Alum's research on forest plague's threat to giant redwoods is No. 43 of *Discover* magazine's top 100 science stories of 2002

Discover magazine has ranked the research of JMU biology alumnus David Rizzo, class of 1983, as No. 43 of the top 100 science stories of 2002. Rizzo is a research scientist and professor at the University of California-Davis.

Two years ago, the forest pathologist and colleague Matteo Garbelotto identified the microbe that had been killing the oaks of coastal California. Last year, public clamor grew as Rizzo's ongoing research confirmed that California's beloved giant redwoods are also susceptible.

The microbe, *Phytophthora ramorum*, a distant relative of the fungus thought to have caused the Irish potato famine in the 1840s, has also infected more than two dozen other plant species, like bay laurel and rhododendron. Scientists and agriculture officials fear it could reach across the Sierra Nevadas and into eastern forests.

It is a national priority now," says Paul Tooley, who leads the U.S. Department of Agriculture's studies into the threat the disease might present to a variety of East Coast plants.

Rizzo credits his interest in plant biology to his days at JMU and hikes into Virginia's woods and forests with biology professor Norlyn Bodkin, now retired.

"There's more to biology than in a test tube," Bodkin says. "I didn't believe in dragging stuff into the lab. We were out in the field a lot." During those hikes, Bodkin pointed out sprouting stumps, which is all that were left of the American chestnut, wiped out by a blight in the East in the early decades of the 20th century.

"I thought that was interesting that a disease could wipe out a whole forest," Rizzo recalls. "Little did I know that I would be working on a disease that might do the same thing."

Find *Discover* magazine's story, "43 Forest Plague Threatens Redwoods," on page 36 of its January 2003 issue.

See "Woodland Wizard," the full story of Rizzo's work at <http://www.jmu.edu/montpelier/issues/fall02/main/woodland.html>

