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Village lacking diversity of trees

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ENVIRONMENT NOTEBOOK

No need to worry if you saw strange people wandering around East Syracuse this weekend with hand-held computers. It was probably the SWAT group checking out your street tree.

In this case, SWAT stands for Student Weekend Arborist Team .

The team is a group of 12 Cornell University students and their advisers who spent Saturday conducting a census of street trees in the village of East Syracuse.

After eight hours of work, the group counted 934 trees.

"Out of the 934 trees, 729 were some type of maple," said Paul O'Connor , natural resources team leader for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County .

"When you do the math, that tells us that 78 percent of the street trees in East Syracuse are maple," O'Connor said.

"The recommendation is to have no more than 10 percent of street trees from the same species."

O'Connor said similar inventories taken across Central New York have found that the region's street trees have little diversity - a fact that points to possible trouble down the road.

"The idea is that if you have any one species, you're setting yourself up for some type of devastation in the future," O'Connor said. "If an insect or disease comes in and likes one type of tree, you lose all of those trees. We want to try to diversify the types of trees that we have."

Elephants on the move

The elephants at the center of a national debate - one that has focused attention on Syracuse's zoo - could soon be heading to a new home in Columbus, Ohio.

A committee of national elephant experts earlier this month recommended

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that two aging female Asian elephants, currently at the Detroit Zoo, be transferred to Columbus to live out their lives.

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The committee of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association recommended that the elephants - Wanda and Winky - be transferred as soon as possible.

The Detroit Zoo's decision to give up the elephants and stop keeping any elephants in captivity has fueled a debate among zoos and animal-rights groups. The Detroit Zoo touched off the debate when its director said elephants are not suited to be kept in cold Northern climates.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals seized on that statement and asked the Rosamond Gifford Zoo at Burnet Park to send its six elephants to a sanctuary in a warm climate. But Zoo Director Anne Baker said there is no reason to move elephants from Syracuse.

Wanda and Winky will join five other Asian elephants at the Columbus Zoo & Aquarium. The Columbus zoo has a two-acre yard and two smaller outdoor areas for their elephants. It also has a temperature-controlled, one-acre indoor facility.

Bulgarian visitors

A group of six dignitaries from Bulgaria visited Central New York last week to see and hear about research projects at the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry .

The group, in the United States for three weeks to learn about food safety, met Thursday with local scientists involved in SUNY ESF's biotechnology projects.

The group met with Charles Maynard , director of the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Center at ESF. Maynard has been working on a project to help develop a disease-resistant American chestnut tree.

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