

# MOUNTAINS

## Assassin bugs discovered in Smokies



**Word from the Smokies**

Frances Figart  
Columnist

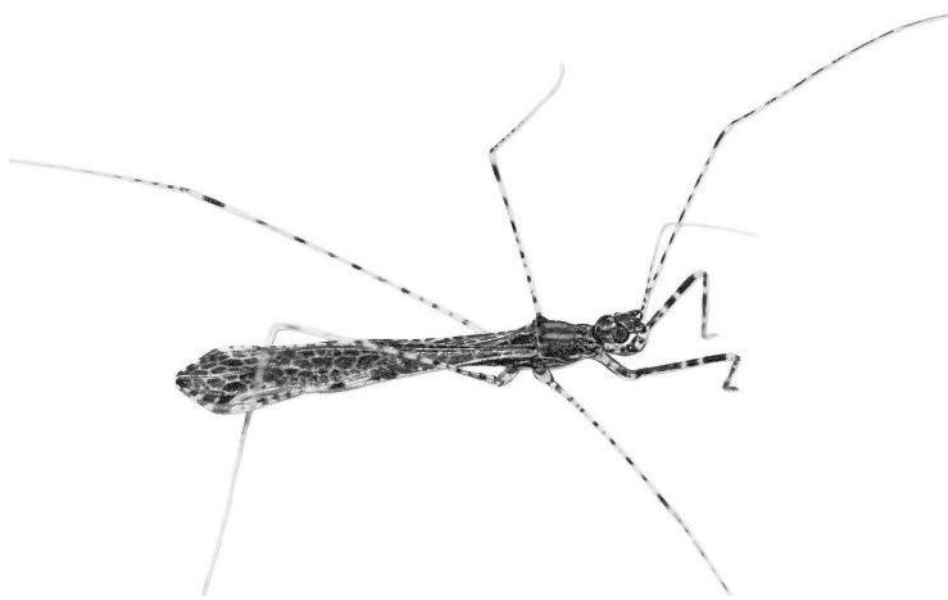
Great Smoky Mountains National Park is home to a renowned project that seeks to inventory its vast variety of life. Since 1998, nearly 11,000 species have been added to the park’s checklist — and behind each discovery is a unique story.

Will Kuhn made an unexpected species discovery earlier this year. He was working from his office at Discover Life in America (DLiA), the organization that manages the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI), which is the project aimed at cataloging every single species in the park.

“I was searching quickly through some bags of vials, mostly out of curiosity,” said Kuhn, who is DLiA’s director of science and research. “There were bags and bags of insects and other creepy crawlies collected in the early 2010s by Tree Teams.”

The Tree Teams were researchers who set out to collect arthropods — beetles, flies, wasps, and the like — living up in the canopy of the park’s declining American Beech trees. The project yielded thousands of arthropod samples collected over a few years from several study sites. Researchers and volunteers diligently sorted these samples by kind of arthropod and sent most of them off to specialists for identification.

Some of the specimens had lan-



**Tree Teams in the Smokies collected samples of slender-bodied insect with extra-long legs.** COURTESY OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS ASSOCIATION

guished in the DLiA office, however, waiting for an entomologist to take a peek. Enter Will Kuhn, who just happens to also be an entomologist.

“As I was rifling through bags of these Tree Team samples, two vials, each containing a single slender-bodied insect with extra-long legs, caught my attention,” Kuhn recalled. “There are only a few insects that meet this description in the park, and they are all exciting to me. There are three walkingstick species, none of which I’ve yet to encounter. There are three known species of stilt bugs — a group that is considered under-sampled in the park and therefore of especially high study value. And then

there is a single thread-legged assassin bug species (Reduviidae: Emesinae).”

Kuhn’s mystery specimens didn’t quite match any of those suspects. So, he took a few quick photos, made a cup of coffee, and pulled up his favorite website for identifying insects in North America, BugGuide.net.

“After a little digging, I tentatively identified them as two different thread-legged bugs, not previously known to exist in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Barce fraterna and Empicoris sp.),” Kuhn related.

Thread-legged bugs, like other assassin bugs, are predators of other insects and arthropods. They have a long, stout

“beak” that they use to stab into their prey, inject digestive enzymes, and then suck the juices out. As was later confirmed, Kuhn had discovered two new assassin bugs for the park.

There are undoubtedly myriad discoveries like Kuhn’s to be made just by identifying ATBI material waiting on shelves in the park and in museum collections worldwide. But this process takes time, expertise, and financial support.

If you enjoy learning about this kind of discovery, check out the latest issue of Smokies Life magazine, in which an entire article by Kuhn is devoted to “Stories Behind the Discoveries.” You can purchase the magazine at any park bookstore or online at SmokiesInformation.org.

If you would like to support DLiA’s future research and conservation in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, you can attend this year’s COVID-adapted fundraiser, the Great Smoky Mountain Salamander Ball on Wheels at the Parkway Drive-in Theatre in Maryville, Tennessee. Entertainment from the comfort of your car includes musical guest Bill Mize, the family-friendly movie “The Lorax,” and a reading of “The Great Smoky Mountain Salamander Ball” by author Lisa Horstman. Tickets are \$40 per carload and can be purchased at [dlia.org/event/salamander-ball-2020](http://dlia.org/event/salamander-ball-2020).

Frances Figart is the editor of Smokies Life magazine and the Creative Services Director for the 34,000-member Great Smoky Mountains Association, an educational nonprofit partner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Reach her at [frances@gsmassoc.org](mailto:frances@gsmassoc.org).

## Asheville pair charged with property crimes

**Karen Chávez** Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A West Asheville man charged earlier this week with multiple crimes including felony breaking and entering, is now in jail on a \$140,000 secured bond after Buncombe County Sheriff’s detectives and Asheville Police charged him with more crimes Sept. 24.

James Edward Thomas, 39, a former employee of Southern Road and Bridge, was originally arrested Sept. 22, according to the Sheriff’s Office.

Detectives with the Buncombe County Sheriff’s Office Property Crimes Unit obtained and executed a search warrant at Thomas’s residence, 14 Cub Place, at the onset of the investigation and recovered \$143,000 worth of stolen property from the Asheville area, including lawn mowers, generators and power tools.

As part of this investigation, Michelle Elizabeth Marken, 32, has been charged with three counts of possession of stolen property and has a \$10,000 unsecured bond, said Sheriff’s Office spokesman Aaron Sarver.

He said Marken lives at the same address as Thomas but the two are not married or blood related.

On Sept. 24, Sheriff’s detectives located a Kubota lawn tractor and 15-foot trailer. The amount of stolen property recovered now totals more than \$155,000, Sarver said.

Thomas now faces a total of 18 charges, including multiple charges brought by the Asheville Police Department for possession of stolen property, manufacturing marijuana and manufacturing a controlled substance within 1,000 feet of a school.

The charges filed by the Buncombe County Sheriff’s Office include:

- Eight counts of possession of stolen property/goods.
- Two counts of felony larceny from a construction site.
- One count of felony larceny of a motor vehicle.
- One count of breaking and entering.

This is one of the largest recoveries of stolen goods in Buncombe County since Sheriff Quentin Miller took office in December 2018, Sarver said.

Stolen items recovered by detectives to date include:

- Four Cub Cadet zero turn lawn mowers valued at \$35,000.
- One Troy-Bilt lawn mower valued at \$4,000.
- One stolen camper out of Orangeburg, South Carolina, valued at \$15,000.
- Eleven Marijuana plants growing inside one of the campers.
- One stolen Polaris Razor out of Orangeburg, S.C. valued at \$15,000.
- One Kubota lawn tractor valued at \$8,250.
- One 15-foot trailer valued at \$8,000.
- Multiple generators valued at \$8,000.
- Welding equipment valued at \$4,000.
- Various power tools (DEWALT) valued at \$40,000-\$50,000.
- Water tank and scaffolding valued at \$2,000.
- Miscellaneous hand tools valued at \$10,000.

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### BRIEFS

**Virus pandemic continues to hammer universities’ finances**

RALEIGH – The coronavirus pandemic is continuing to cause economic hardship for some of North Carolina’s universities. The Raleigh News & Observer reported Thursday that N.C. State announced new employee furloughs and salary cuts. And administrators at the University of North Carolina warned of similar actions as revenues drop.

Leaders at N.C. State said temporary furloughs and salary cuts are the result of a “sharp reduction in revenue” this fall in areas that include university housing, campus dining facilities and transportation. The school shifted to online learning and closed dorms this fall. So far this semester, revenue is down \$75.4 million. That’s a 61% drop for affected departments.

UNC is facing potential revenue losses of \$300 million this fiscal year. It has been trying to save money by limiting new hires and restricting spending on events and travel. There also have been furloughs and salary reductions in some auxiliary units. The \$300-million figure includes financial hits to campus housing, dining and health care.

**State initial unemployment claims slightly drop**

WINSTON-SALEM – North Carolina’s initial unemployment-insurance benefit claims showed a slight downward trend last week. The Winston-Salem Journal reported Thursday that the state had 12,591 claims for the week that ended Sept. 19. The number is slightly down from a revised 13,437 the previous week.

Since the pandemic began, the

highest weekly total for unemployment insurance claims in North Carolina has been 172,745. That was for the week that ended March 28.

Across the nation, there were 870,000 initial claims filed last week. For comparison, the national weekly peak was the 6.87 million claims for the week that ended March 28. The numbers were released Thursday by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Gus Faucher, chief economist for PNC Financial Services Group, said that unemployment “remains a huge problem for the U.S. economy.”

**State highway reopens after sand, water cleared**

OCRACOE ISLAND – A highway linking barrier islands on the Outer Banks reopened after water churned up by a tropical storm flooded the road and piled sand as high as 6 feet over the pavement.

N.C. 12 reopened to traffic at noon Thursday after it was closed near Hatteras and Ocracoke islands for days as crews worked to clear the remnants of flooding from Hurricane Teddy off the roadway, the state Department of Transportation announced.

The storm did not make landfall in the U.S. but generated high winds and waves off the coast, with high tides repeatedly sending tons of sand and water over the road, news outlets reported. Some motorists reported being stranded last weekend, authorities said. The Transportation Department said the highway did not suffer any structural damage.

The agency warned drivers Thursday to drive slowly as standing water and sand might still be present in some locations along the highway.

Associated Press

# Citizen Times

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