

MOUNTAINS

Assault case on right-wing blogger closed

Joel Burgess Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE – Police say an assault case that led to the serious injury of a right-wing blogger is closed – even though he says it is not.

All leads have been exhausted into a Sept. 28 assault in which Chad Nesbitt, who runs the Facebook page Skyline News, was knocked unconscious and hospitalized with a brain injury, an Asheville Police Department spokeswoman said.

“We had a lot of people respond to the initial inquiry asking for assistance identifying the suspect. The detective did follow up with all the information he received and just wasn’t able to come up with anything,” said APD spokeswoman Christina Hallingse.

Hallingse, who made the comments Nov. 19, said the case will be reopened if there is any new useful information.

That was the same day Nesbitt appeared in court as he and a left-wing journalist, Veronica Coit, sought restraining orders against each other. The hearings, in which Coit claims Nesbitt came to her house and Nesbitt said people inspired by Coit’s social media posts to come to his property, was continued at the joint request of their attorneys.

Nesbitt, who suffered a spinal fluid leak, appeared in court with a cane. He



Madison Cawthorn is interviewed by right-wing blogger Chad Nesbitt following Cawthorn's win in the 11th Congressional District race on Nov. 3.

ANGELA WILHELM/CITIZEN TIMES

said he was having trouble walking and could not hear out of his right ear, but was seeing specialists and was hoping to be able to drive again. The former Buncombe County Republican chairman said other reporters were doing most of the posting on Skyline News, though he has ap-

peared in videos, including one Nov. 3 with winning GOP congressional candidate Madison Cawthorn.

On the Nov. 19 morning outside the courtroom, Nesbitt said a suspect in the assault had been identified but declined to give a name, saying it was an ongoing investigation. Later that day

when he was asked about APD’s statement that the case was closed Nov. 18, Nesbitt insisted it was still open and that there were “28 leads on other suspects.”

“I am now raising the reward to \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person who assaulted my security man and me,” he said in a text. The reward had been \$5,500.

In response, Hallingse said it had been made “very clear to him” that leads were exhausted.

Police say they believe the person involved is a white male, approximately 6 feet tall who was wearing a gray hooded sweatshirt, baseball cap and a dark face covering. APD can be reached at 828-252-1110.

The assault happened the night activists took to the streets to protest against a grand jury’s decision to not indict Louisville, Kentucky, police officers for killing Breonna Taylor, a Black resident of that city shot to death in her apartment during the execution of a search warrant. Nesbitt tried to film the demonstration as protesters tried to block his view. His bodyguard was pushed and fell into Nesbitt, police say. Videos showed various parts of the encounter, including Nesbitt lying near a parking meter, apparently unconscious.

The conservation success story of the iconic wild turkey



Frances Figart
Word From the Smokies

After reading last week’s turkey column, John Sinnott of Asheville contacted me to say that he recalled his father-in-law, the late George Cecil, grandson of George Vanderbilt, telling him a story about the reintroduction of the wild turkey.

“Years ago, George received a phone call from the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission asking permission to release a flock of wild turkeys on his property,” recalls Sinnott. “At the time, wild turkeys were very hard to find in the Asheville area. The man on the phone only had one condition: that the turkeys would not be hunted for game.” Cecil agreed and they released the turkeys on the Biltmore Estate.

Back when European settlers first came to Southern Appalachia, wild turkeys were plentiful. By the early 1900s, however, only a few were left, a decline that continued into the midcentury.

“Wild turkeys were nearly extirpated because of habitat loss and overharvest,” says Michael J. Chamberlain, a professor of Wildlife Ecology with the University of Georgia. Chamberlain studies the behavior of wild turkeys all over the southeastern United States where, thanks to a contraption known as a rocket net, biologists in the 1950s began to capture surviving individuals in various places and relocate them to suitable habitats from which the bird had previously disappeared.

“I grew up hunting turkeys in the fall and spring,” says Chamberlain, who got his B.S. at Virginia Tech, and his M.S. and Ph.D. from Mississippi State University. “When given the opportunity to study them in graduate school, I realized turkeys were a fascinating species. Since then, I have been working with them in field studies for more than 25 years.”

Chamberlain is focused on ensuring that we have sustainable populations of wild turkeys in the future. How could he study them closely for a quarter of a century and never grow bored?



The male eastern wild turkey has dark plumage with striking bronze, copper and green iridescent colors. COURTESY OF WARREN LYNN

“There are many unique characteristics of turkeys,” Chamberlain says, “but one that many find interesting is that they roost at night off the ground in trees. Turkeys are fairly large birds, so the fact that they sleep off the ground tells you much about what has shaped their ecology – that is, the risk of being killed by a predator at night. This also reveals that roost selection is a critical aspect of their behavior, as this selection can influence survival.”

Another fascinating aspect of Chamberlain’s work is turkey talk. “Turkeys communicate in various ways, from vocalizations to appearance,” he says. “It is believed that turkeys primarily recognize each other through these vocalizations and the appearance of their heads.”

Of particular interest are the social hierarchies that influence how individual turkeys behave throughout their lives. “Pecking orders introduce structure into the flocks we observe,” says

Chamberlain. “This structure is something we do not fully understand, but it clearly influences how they behave and interact throughout the year.”

Pecking orders begin to form when birds are only a few days old. Groups of males and females each have pecking orders where there is a dominant bird within the group and other birds are subordinate.

“Turkeys constantly test these pecking orders, by fighting, pecking at each other, chasing each other, and so forth, seeking to challenge the dominant bird and move up in the hierarchy,” Chamberlain says. Why? “These pecking orders dictate access to resources and breeding opportunities in the spring.”

Wild turkeys’ success is linked to areas with abundant grasses and shrubby vegetation that grow low to the ground. These plants harbor abundant insects and seeds, which dominate turkey diets.

The habitats where turkeys thrive are critically important to many other spe-

cies, such as black bears who share their requirement for hard mast like acorns in the winter. So, managing parks and forest lands to ensure turkeys can thrive should mean success for many other important species.

“The restoration of this iconic species is considered one of the greatest conservation success stories in the world,” Chamberlain says, “yet turkeys face ongoing challenges that have resulted in population declines in some areas. My work is focused on identifying the reasons for these declines, providing management agencies such as Great Smoky Mountains National Park with solutions to address them.”

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. Learn more at smokiesinformation.org and reach the author at frances@gsmassoc.org.

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Postal information

Citizen Times, USPS #236-000, ISSN #0336-0000, is published Monday through Sunday at 14 O. Henry Ave., Asheville, NC 28802. Periodicals postage paid at Asheville, NC 28802.
 Postmaster: Send address changes to Customer Service, PO Box 62670, San Angelo, TX 76906.