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Entomologist takes love of insects on the road

Austin Jones wants the world to know that there's so much more to insects and arthropods than creatures that sting or ruin your picnics, and he's taking that message on the road.

Jones is an instructor based in Fayetteville. He also serves as the director of undergraduate education and the outreach coordinator for all things entomological. He has one foot in the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences, and another in the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service.

For the past few months, he's been raising money to complete his Ento-Roadshow, a mobile entomology STEAM classroom. STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. Schools and youth organizations that would like to schedule a visit can contact Jones at akj003@uark.edu.



Young insect enthusiasts pose in front of the trailer that is becoming the Ento Roadshow, a mobile entomology classroom.

"Insects and other arthropods like spiders, centipedes and crustaceans are unsung heroes and villains of ecosystems that rarely get noticed by most folks unless they are biting, stinging, eating their food, or just plain annoying them," Jones said. "But not only are most bugs beneficial to society, they are also the most diverse and easily accessed animals for study and collection by the average person."

Putting their collective magnitude in perspective, Jones said two out of every three known living things on earth are insects.

"They are everywhere and doing everything imaginable from flying across continents and oceans to liquifying their own bodies to metamorphose," he said. "They are extremely economically important as pests, pollinators, decomposers, producers of products like honey and silk, sources of nutrition for wildlife, livestock and people, and even as entertainment.

"You wouldn't believe the number of songs, TV shows, movies, artworks and legends that involve bugs!" he said.

Jones said he is eager to take his knowledge and specimens housed in Fayetteville "and get them out to the rest of Arkansas," with particular emphasis on rural locations. So far, I have made it to nine stops in three counties and have goals once the exterior is completed to visit all 75 counties of Arkansas.

"That was of special interest to me having been a rural home-schooled kid here in the Natural State," he said. "It has been so amazing to see it come alive and to now have it on the road." Read more [here](#). ■

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Arkansas black bear populations are on the rise ... slowly

Black bear populations are slowly rising in the bottom land hardwood forest of southern and eastern Arkansas according to wildlife expert Don White, Jr.

Population modeling results from a recent study led by White indicate that the population density of black bears in the West Gulf Coastal Plain — WGCP — of southeastern Arkansas is approximately one black bear for every five square miles. The black bear population in the area is growing at approximately 4 percent per year.

As the bear population has expanded in the WGCP over recent years, interest in hunting bears in the area has increased as well. However, establishing and maintaining sustainable harvest levels requires reliable information on the population status. To assist the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, or AGFC, with setting harvest levels, White led a population study using hair snares across the region.

“To establish and maintain sustainable harvest levels for black bears, AGFC biologists need to know the number of bears that occur in the region and the growth rate of the population,” White said.

In the past five years, White and his field crews placed 360 hair snares throughout the WGCP, including the Felsenthal and White River National Wildlife Refuges and the Trusten Holder Wildlife Management Area.

“A hair snare is nothing more than two strands of barbed wire stretched tightly around three to five trees,” said White. “Attractants such as candy flavorings and fish were then hung from a rope located at the center of each enclosure. As a bear is attracted to the scent, the bear crawls under or steps over the barbed wires. As they do, the bears get their hair snagged by the barbs. From these hair samples, DNA is extracted and used to identify each bear.”

Because the DNA of bears in southeastern Arkansas is slightly different from the DNA of bears in the Ouachita and Ozark Mountains, DNA can also be used to better understand the movement of bears between different areas of the state.



Black bear photographed as part of Don White, Jr.'s, research. Taken at hair snare on the White River NWR. (UA-Monticello image)

“Bears from the Ouachita Mountains in western Arkansas may be dispersing and moving south and southeast. My AGFC colleagues and I are using our bear genetics data to better understand bear dispersal and map the locations of bear movement corridors. This is important work because genetically connected bear populations are healthier bear populations. Connected populations do not suffer the consequences of limited genetic variability like isolated populations do,” White said.

Throughout each nine-week collection period, field crews checked each hair snare every seven days. These crews consisted mostly of undergraduate wildlife conservation and management students in the College of Forestry, Agriculture, and Natural Resources at the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

“Opportunities to get paid to work on research projects provide students with valuable educational and professional opportunities,” White said.

White is a wildlife ecologist for the Arkansas Forest Resources Center of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture housed at UAM and has studied black bears of Arkansas for nearly 20 years. He is also a James White Endowed Professor of Wildlife with the University of Arkansas at Monticello. ■

Arkansas Ballot Issues

The Arkansas Constitution allows legislators to refer three amendments to voters on the General Election Ballot. In 2023, Arkansas lawmakers filed 33 proposed constitutional amendments for the 2024 ballot. Through their committee process, legislators narrowed down the proposals and referred only one proposal to the November ballot.



- Issue 1: Allowing State Lottery Proceeds to Fund Vocational or Technical School Scholarships for Arkansans.** An Amendment to the Arkansas Constitution to provide that lottery proceeds may be used to fund or provide scholarships and grants to Arkansas citizens enrolled in vocational-technical schools and technical institutes.
- Issue 2: Repealing Pope County Casino License and Requiring Local Elections.** An amendment requiring local voter approval in a countywide special election for certain new casino licenses and repealing authority to issue a casino license in Pope County, Arkansas.
- Issue 3: Arkansas Medical Marijuana Amendment.** Issue 3 proposes changing two existing Arkansas laws: Article 5, Section 1 of the Arkansas Constitution, titled “Initiative and Referendum,” and Amendment 98, known as the Arkansas Medical Marijuana Amendment of 2016.

Find the complete text of each proposal and a link to subscribe to our monthly ballot issue newsletter at uaex.uada.edu/ballot. ■

Updated flu, COVID-19, RSV vaccines now available

As children return to school and families resume busy fall schedules, it’s important to stay safe and healthy by getting updated COVID-19 and flu vaccines. The RSV vaccine is also recommended for adults 75 and older.

Bryan Mader, extension health specialist and assistant professor, said vaccines are critical to personal and community health.

“Vaccines, especially those used to help prevent flu and COVID, are vitally important for your personal health, but also for the health of those around you,” Mader said. “Most basically, flu vaccines can help to prevent people from getting sick with influenza. Additionally, people who were vaccinated and did become ill had reduced severity of symptoms and overall time of illness.”



Flu season in the U.S. generally spans from October to May, with peak season during the colder months from December to February. Mader said that because the influenza virus changes from season to season, it is recommended that everyone 6 months of age and older get a flu vaccine each year.

As of Aug. 30, the FDA has authorized the new 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Novavax. Vaccination is especially important for those at high risk of severe COVID-19, including people ages 65 years and older, people with underlying medical conditions, including those with compromised immune systems, people living in long-term care facilities and pregnant people.

The RSV vaccine is recommended for adults 75 and older, Mader said. “Adults aged 60-74 who are at an increased risk of RSV – including those who have a chronic heart or lung disease, have a weakened immune system, have severe obesity and/or diabetes and those who may live in a nursing home or other long-term care facility – should receive a single dose of an RSV vaccine,” Mader said.

Read more [here](#). ■

October Birthdays

Portia Short - Oct. 1
Larry Pryor - Oct. 2
Bobby Hall - Oct. 2
Frank Jones - Oct. 3
Gerald Klingaman - Oct. 3
Stanley Carter - Oct. 3
Paul Beck - Oct. 3
Craig Andersen - Oct. 4
Jimmie Bowling - Oct. 5
Judy Riley - Oct. 5
Lazaro English - Oct. 5
Sheila Whiteley - Oct. 5
James Lipsey - Oct. 7
Suzanne Wiley - Oct. 8
Al Rosendale - Oct. 9

Glen Ford - Oct. 10
Billie Coleman - Oct. 10
Lorene McGuire - Oct. 10
Charlotte Trent - Oct. 10
Debbie DeRossitte - Oct. 10
Judith Urich - Oct. 11
Armenthia Willis - Oct. 12
Elinor Coates - Oct. 13
Jack Boles Jr. - Oct. 13
Bruce Knox - Oct. 14
Richard Poling - Oct. 14
Carroll Prewett - Oct. 15
Tom Troxel - Oct. 16
Carolyn Meeks - Oct. 17
Gail Torok - Oct. 17

Ron Baker - Oct. 17
Mary Parker - Oct. 18
Cecilia Harberson - Oct. 18
Hugh Plumlee - Oct. 19
Mable Tate - Oct. 19
Pam Cannada - Oct. 20
Renee Myers - Oct. 20
James Clower - Oct. 21
Tom Riley Jr. - Oct. 22
Mark Bryles - Oct. 23
Wanda Snyder - Oct. 23
Janice Gooch - Oct. 27
Janella Pugh - Oct. 31

Message from the director



I am writing this column on the first full day of fall. It hasn't felt much like autumn in the past couple of weeks, but if AccuWeather is to be believed, that great Arkansas fall weather should be arriving just about right on schedule. After a long, hot summer, fall is always a welcome relief. There

is plenty to like about this time of year besides the great weather, though. Kids are back in school and out of the house, which is always nice. Football season is in full swing. That can be a good or a bad thing, to be fair. So far, this year has been mostly good for the Hogs (excepting a bit of unpleasantness in Stillwater and Arlington). And deer season is fast approaching. My bowhunting friends are already locked and loaded for opening day – figuratively speaking, of course.

In Extension, fall is one of the busiest times in an always-busy year. Harvest season keeps agents and specialists alike jumping. This month, we had the added excitement of hurricane remnants crawling right over the Delta at the peak of harvest. Extension personnel provided exceptional service to our stakeholders, offering advice and assistance to keep harvest progressing as rapidly as possible in

advance of the storm and thoroughly assessing damage in its wake. I hesitate to give a shout-out to specific personnel because I know a lot of our folks were working hard through this event, but Jarrod Hardke and Zachary Treadway were very much in the spotlight, as our rice and cotton crops were at a particularly vulnerable stage when the bad weather hit. As would be expected, they served us and our stakeholders exceptionally well.

Speaking of being in the spotlight, fair season is in full swing as I write this. Nothing puts our county Extension staff in the spotlight like the county fair; it is an all-hands-on-deck event. For those of you in the counties, I know that this time of year means a string of long days and late nights – and maybe even some challenging interactions with parents, exhibitors, etc. I also know that family obligations don't slow down to accommodate the fair-week schedule. For what it's worth, I very much appreciate the effort. I have had the chance to stop by a couple of fairs this year. What I have heard consistently and repeatedly is lavish praise for the local Extension staff from stakeholders. "We couldn't do this without them" is a common refrain. I hope that sentiment will help keep you warm on a crisp autumn evening. ■