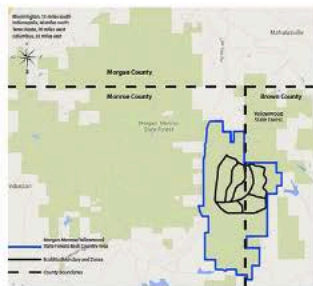


Newly discovered and endangered species could change Indiana forest policies

By Sophie Harris | swarris@reporter-times.com Updated Jul 3, 2016 0



A new species of spider was found during this year's Ecoblitz. Taxonomists are working with the Ecoblitz team to name and describe the find.



Photos courtesy of the Indiana Forest Alliance.



If thousands of unknown and endangered species were living undiscovered in local forests, big changes could be on the horizon. According to Jeff Stant, executive director of the Indiana Forest Alliance, that's exactly what's happening in the Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood state forests.

The alliance has been conducting its Ecoblitz, an ongoing inventory of plants and animals in the Morgan-Monroe State Forest, for the past three years, and during this time they've discovered a wide range of endangered and new species. According to a recent press release from the alliance, scientists have identified very rare bats, and three types of spiders were found in the state of Indiana for the first time.

An entirely new species of spiders was discovered, too, and they are now working with taxonomists to describe, name and publish information about their discovery.



Subscriber services

Access subscription services, view and update account information, and more

[View account info](#)

Submit a letter to the editor

If you're interested in submitting a Letter to the editor, guest column, or other news click here.

[Submit](#)

Most popular

ARTICLES

- Crash sends 7 to hospitals
- Neighbors protest recreational center proposal near Centerton
- Quincy man killed in ATV crash
- County affirms denial of variance for towing business
- No cause listed in fatal crash
- Newly discovered and endangered species could change Indiana forest policies

"We've been having quite a year with it," Stant said. Although he is unable to go into specifics until the Indiana Department of Natural Resources is aware of all the findings made by the Ecoblitz, Stant said he is able to speak generally about the nature of the findings.

To conduct the study, the alliance recruited nine different teams of scientists from 11 Indiana colleges and universities.

"For the past two weeks, we've been surveying for bats, reptiles and amphibians," Stant said. "We're finding all kinds of new species and nationally endangered species of bats. We've found four new species of male salamanders."

The group discovered a male spider entirely new to science, from the family Linyphiidae and genus Agyneta. They also discovered a white-banded fishing spider for the first time in Indiana.

Extremely diverse

Stant said the 900-acre area of the Morgan-Monroe State Forest and Yellowwood State Forest's backcountry area are some of Indiana's oldest and most undisturbed forests.

According to the press release, results from this inventory are illustrating that an extremely biodiverse area — plants, fungi, birds, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, fish, insects, spiders and more — exists in these forests. The first two years of the Ecoblitz identified 1,254 species and hundreds more are being recognized this year.

"Eighteen species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians on the federal or state lists of endangered species and species of special concern have been found in this forest," the release said.

Stant said the diversity they're discovering is astounding.

"The forest is very old and unmanaged," Stant said. "We need to find out what's in these older forests. It's an important issue because there's never been a survey done like this in these state and national forests. We need to know what's in them before they're logged."

He said it's imperative that the lands are checked thoroughly and that there's an accurate database.

- New attractions coming to the Morgan County Fair
- Elliott wins county council seat
- Fourth of July events on tap
- City BZA debates cell tower exception

Sorry, there are no recent results for popular videos.

Meet fitness friends

Hikers, bikers, runners, fitness enthusiasts, and health connections
www.myINstride.com

JR Ellington Tree Experts

24-hr emergency storm service.
Highest quality & best price 812-332-5882
www.ellingtontreeexperts.net

Curtis Orthodontics

Dr. Tod Curtis -- Braces for All Ages.
(812) 279-9473.
www.bedfordbraces.com

put your ad here with **DIRECT TEXT**

Submit your news

We're always interested in hearing about news in our community. Let us know what's going on!

Submit

GET
REWARDED
FOR
SHOPPING
THE **BRANDS**
YOU LOVE

JOIN NOW

NIKE APPLE Groupon
Disney store UNDER ARMOUR
STAPLES SAMSUNG

SHOP YOUR WAY

"The state of Indiana has never checked them. They don't know what's in here," Stant said. "This is the third year, and I thought we would wrap up this year, but we found so much new life that we're going to have to continue and dig in more."



Know before you log

Stant said the state has no immediate plans to log in the area, but its strategic plan has the Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood areas in an "active timber base," which means it could choose to do so at any time.

"It's possible in the next few years," Stant said. "The current plan would have them logging in the next decade, at least. So we are really under the gun to get this inventory done."

He said he hopes findings from the inventory would halt the logging process or at least cause state officials to go take a closer look at the creatures in the forest, particularly if they're endangered.

"They need to go in and look before they log," Stant said. "Maybe they just shouldn't log."

He added that the data should have a bearing on decisions about logging in our state forests.

"The current state administration has approved a policy to log through 95 percent of our taxpayer-owned state forests within the next 12 years, cutting 8,000 acres per year," Stant said. "But areas like this need special protection and should be permanently protected from logging. Imagine how many other species are in forests that are being logged. They've done no inventory at all."

More than the Amazon

He said this inventory is just scratching the surface.

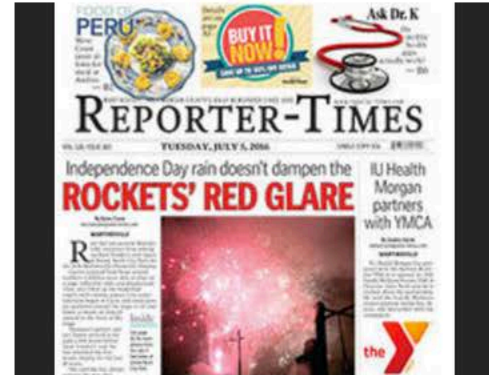
"In some measurements, Indiana has equal or greater diversity than the Amazon rainforest," Stant said. "Relative to other forests and natural areas on the planet, it's a very high level of biodiversity."

He said that old-growth hardwood forests in Indiana have about 30 to 40 times more plants and animals than in the western United States.

"Indiana has a storehouse of biodiversity," Stant said. "It exceeds almost any other forest in the country. It needs to be appreciated."

Archives

Latest eEdition



Stant said though most people think about biodiversity being eliminated when tropical rainforests are logged and developed, it happens in old-growth hardwood forests, too.

“There are probably 30 million more insect species on the planet that remain to be identified,” Stant said. “Scientists believe they live mainly in the Amazon rainforest and in old hardwood forests.”

Stant said his team’s main goal is to bring about awareness of the biodiversity in the area.

“There’s a lot more that’s happened besides what I mentioned, but we can’t reveal all our findings until the DNR has had a chance to review them,” Stant said.

According to the alliance’s press release, it has led the Ecoblitz from the beginning, and it worked with like-minded organizations such as the Hoosier Environmental Council, the Knob and Valley Audubon Society, the Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter, the Hoosier Herpetological Society, the South Central Indiana chapter of the Indiana Plant and Wildflower Society and the Hoosier Mushroom Society. The inventory is made possible with support from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust.

Reports from the first two years of the study can be found at indianaforestalliance.org/ecoblitz/. The Forest Alliance is currently awaiting permission from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to release its most current findings.

