

Summary: David Lewis, Macrofungi

This researcher was not ToD funded.

Volunteer Extraordinaire

Mushrooms have fascinated David Lewis of Newton County, TX for over 35 years. As an undergraduate he pursued a degree at Lamar University as a chemistry major but then changed to environmental science. His interest in the Big Thicket area was inspired by Dr. Richard Harrel whose field trips were adventures. Interest in organic compounds and the exotic compounds found in fungi and plants led Lewis to a graduate degree in biology from Lamar University. His master's thesis was based on a study of East Texas mushrooms. It was during these years that Lewis began photographing mushrooms. Many of these photographs are now housed in Lamar University Library's Special Collections.

Lewis was employed as a chemist at Great Lakes Carbon in Port Arthur, then moved to Temple Inland, now West Rock. He retired in 2004 and spends his time writing and organizing his collections. Lewis has deposited around 8000 collections in museums or herbaria. Most are at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and S. M. Tracy Herbarium at Texas A&M University. Others are located at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, University of Tennessee, Louisiana State University and Universities in Oregon and Michigan. A few are at the Farlow Herbarium at Harvard.

Lewis is Past President of the Gulf States Mycological Society and has worked cooperatively with mycologists from around the country as well as from Europe, Russia, Asia, Canada and Mexico. The group organizes forays (weekend events) twice each year, usually in Mississippi, Louisiana or Texas and mushroom walks (one day events) here in the Big Thicket. Only a few mycologists have focused on Texas. 8,000 to 10,000 species are estimated to be found in the state but fewer than 1,300 have been identified to the species level. Because of this need, amateur mycologists can make significant contributions to science.

In 2006 the Big Thicket Association and the Big Thicket National Preserve established the Thicket of Diversity (ToD) modeled after the Great Smoky Mountains inventory work. David Lewis volunteered and serves as the leader for mushrooms. Lewis received \$890 for publication costs of a paper. He also facilitated funding for the ToD for the purchase of a microscope of \$8446 and its repair \$450. The researcher's extensive life work has been conducted as a volunteer and his Taxonomic Working Inventory Group demonstrated impressive success. More than 3000 specimens have been identified, representing over 650 species, with many new to the Park and state, and more than 20 new to Science! Lewis worked through the ToD under a permit with the NPS but has conducted research independently in recent years.

Lewis enjoys challenges. He went into mushroom taxonomy, the practice and science of classification, with little knowledge of it. He is now a recognized award winning specialist. He is a Research Associate with the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, IL, where 5000 collections of his fungi are deposited. He is an honorary staff member associated with the S. M.

Tracy Herbarium at Texas A&M University. In 2009 Lewis received The North American Mycological Association's award for Contributions to Amateur Mycology. In 2010 he received the Big Thicket Association's R.E. Jackson Conservation Award. David Lewis has even been honored by having four species of mushrooms new to science named after him.

Lewis presented a Science Café for the ToD and was a guest lecturer and field guide at Kountze High School. He regularly conducts Fungi Forays across several states and other interpretive events. He co-authored a beautiful field guide: *Mushrooms of the Gulf Coast States* in 2019. His wife, Patricia, passed away in that year and was a tremendous supporter (and organizer) for David. She was on the Board of Directors of the Big Thicket Association.

In 2019 *Mushrooms of the Gulf Coast States, a Field Guide to Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida* was published. It was co-authored by Alan E. Bessette, Arleen R. Bessette, and David Lewis.

In 2026 Lewis met with ToD Chair, Mary C. Johnston and the ToD intern, Natalia Doiron. He recommended using myCoportal to identify the most up-to-date listing of verified species that could be sorted and viewed by geographical distribution. Doiron listed all Texas vouchered species in the counties of Hardin, Jefferson, Tyler, Polk, Orange, Liberty, Jasper, and Newton. As of March 2026, macrofungi species numbered 1,429. Additionally, Lewis provided a listing of new species and his recent publications. This information will soon be updated on the next Taxa Tally and on the ToD website.

Submitted: Mary C. Johnston, March 20, 2026