



Accomplishments (2024-2026)

By Mary Catherine Johnston

Priorities emerged on reflection of the Thicket of Diversity (ToD) after 20 years of operation. The science research arm of the Big Thicket Association (BTA) had amassed mountains of data under four directors, and materials were scattered. Efforts were made to consolidate scientific data and researcher information into spreadsheets and folders, but everything needed to be reanalyzed, verified, and organized, including updating and re-vamping the ToD's website.

The work of Dr. Daniel Janzen in Costa Rica served as the inspiration for All Taxa Biodiversity Inventories. Great Smoky Mountains National Park of the National Park Service was the first to replicate the important work. One can not measure what is lost without an understanding of what one has. Thus, the movement to identify, tally, and compare species in diverse and changing habitats began. The Thicket of Diversity was founded in 2006 in cooperation with the Big Thicket National Preserve. During the formative years, the effort was funded through a variety of grant sources. Since 2012, the ToD has been officially approved as a Supplemental Environmental Project of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) *for Wetland Species and Ecosystem Analysis through Big Thicket National Preserve's Thicket of Diversity All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory*. This facilitated a revenue source from mitigation enforcement actions.

The ToD, since 2017, was sustained through the work of volunteers. The BTA with TCEQ funding was able to recruit and maintain active research projects. In 2024, Robert Laroche of Rice University completed *Exploring Tiger Beetle Diversity Associated with Salt Domes Across East Texas*, and Daniel Bennett of Stephen F. Austin University continued bee bycatch inventory. In 2025 Paul Tinerella who is affiliated with the North Dakota State Insect Reference Collection initiated *Continued Biotic Survey: Aquatic True Bugs (Insecta: Heteroptera: Nepomorpha, Gerromorpha, Leptopodomorpha) and Aquatic Beetles (Insecta: Coleoptera) of the Big Thicket Region, Texas, USA*. In 2026 JoVonn Hill of Mississippi State University was approved for *Survey of the Leaf (Chrysomelidae) and Rove (Staphylinidae) Beetles of the Big Thicket Region*.



Dr. Paul Tinerella and daughter, Camille

In the winter of 2026, an exciting development occurred with the hiring of a highly skilled graduate of Lamar University who, as part of a Master's Degree program, has taken on an internship with the ToD. Natalia Doiron's internship from the Rennes School of Business in France was approved and her contract with the Big Thicket Association secured. She was tasked with addressing environmental sustainability to ensure the non-profit's successful operation into the future.



Natalia with David Lewis, Macrofungi Researcher

The primary mission of the Thicket of Diversity is the collection of species inventory data. Natalia analyzed all research and compiled lists of species names verified by the National Park Service collecting standards. It sometimes involved contacts with researchers for clarification, GoogleScholar queries, and review of databases that housed vouchered specimens. If collected data did not meet standards, it was added to a Historical list. The compilation of the updated 2026 Taxa Tally was a monumental and exciting accomplishment.

Financial sustainability was discussed. TCEQ regulations were reviewed, and Doiron and BTA participated in a formal comment process regarding changes.

Doiron and ToD Chair, Mary C. Johnston, brainstormed ways to enhance efficiency with better management of assets. The Field Research Station, originally owned by the BTA, was donated to the National Park Service and is now managed by the BTA under a formal agreement. It is underutilized. Administration forms scattered in the files were organized into a single document for use by the BTA Board and staff. To enhance appreciation and awareness, the two compiled a history of the Saratoga building that, interestingly, is intertwined with the roots of the Big Thicket Association. A publication list of the posters displayed in the Field Research Station was compiled. Hidden and forgotten posters discovered in the files were printed and hung. To ensure that the FRS continued to be a Big Thicket asset, the two wrote a *Service Action Plan to Enhance Sustainability*. The possible event ideas could help increase the use of the building while promoting the image of the ToD to a growing audience.

The final task for Doiron was the development of a marketing plan. Grant options were explored, and a grant template was created. Tasks for volunteers and recruitment ideas with advertising were outlined. Facilitating community science by expanding the work of volunteers as they use new technology, such as the iNaturalist app, enhances the awareness of the general public of important inventory research.

The Thicket of Diversity website was reviewed page by page and completely updated. The site is currently not visible to the public as BTA Administration must determine integration of all sites before posting.

The support of intern, Natalia Doiron, has significantly benefited the Thicket of Diversity. Her focus on environmental sustainability with an international perspective was most timely. Funding cuts to government agencies with a climate change focus, such as the National Park Service, due to the current political atmosphere have been disastrous. Reduced capacity is critically impacting viability. Non-profits such as the Big Thicket Association must increase efforts. Stronger networking partnerships and encouragement of activities and research beyond the borders of the Preserve throughout the region will help ensure its future.

Analysis of the ToD from a business perspective not only celebrates the amazing accomplishments of the organization, but also outlines a blueprint for success. Thank you, Natalia, and the Rennes School of Business!