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# Tech researcher identifies new species of daddy longlegs

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When Matthew Bowser, a biology graduate student from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, discovered a daddy longlegs which appeared unusual last year, he said he knew James Cokendolpher, a research associate at the Texas Tech Natural Science Research Laboratory, was the person to contact.

"He was obviously the guy to identify them," Bowser said.

Bowser learned from Cokendolpher that he had discovered a new species of daddy longlegs.

He said he came across the daddy longlegs while investigating bristle tails, a type of small wingless insects, which a colleague had found. The discovery was made in the Mystery Hills section of the Kenai Mountains on the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska.

Bowser collected the daddy longlegs incidentally while capturing other organisms living with bristle tails.

At first the discovery did not seem unusual, but after studying the daddy longlegs, he said he knew it looked like something different.

Soon after contacting Cokendolpher about a year ago, Bowser received news that the species was new.

"Of course I was excited," he said. "It's just a neat thing to be able to do but not that unusual. There are a lot of things still out there to be found."

Cokendolpher has been studying arthropods and harvestmen, another name for daddy longlegs, since 1970. However, his interest in the field of entomology started much earlier.

"It started at age 4," he said, "I've been collecting arthropods my whole life."

A discovery of a new species of daddy longlegs in Alaska is somewhat unusual, but not unheard of, he said.

In the world there are around 7,000 species of daddy longlegs. Most of them are found in the tropics and other warmer regions.

"It'll be very useful in knowing what these animals do out on the snow and the ice," Cokendolpher said.

So far, Bowser said he has not found out as much about the new species as he would like.

He said he will need to take several steps to learn about the species, including making more visits to the remote region where the discovery was made.

Bowser and Cokendolpher are currently working on a collaborative article on the daddy longlegs to be published this winter.

He said he plans on making a couple of trips during the fall to continue the research. After those, however, his focus will turn to other research projects.

"We'll pretty much close the book on it as far as very focused work this fall," he said.

Bowser said Cokendolpher will write the majority of the article, which is already under way.

Cokendolpher said while the research on this particular species may slow down after this fall, the importance of the discovery is still evident.

"Down the road the animal may be used in medicine," Cokendolpher said. "They may have a whole different method of metabolizing."

Questions could be raised concerning the survival of the species in an extremely cold environment, he said.

For Alaska and the specific area where the species was found, the discovery could mean more focus and funding in the area.

Bowser, who works for the Kenai Wildlife National Refuge where the species was found, said it is good for the refuge because of the attention it has received.

"It's nothing like if we found a new bird or a new fish, but still it is newsworthy," he said.

To continue with the research of the new species, Bowser received a grant from the Arctic Audubon Society. With the money he was able to purchase flashlights with red lights, and other materials necessary for observing the daddy longlegs.

"What I'm hoping this program will do will be to bridge the gap so people have more of an awareness of what is going on in research in the natural world," said Arctic Audubon Society President Gail Mayo.

According to their Web site, the goals of the society include protecting the "Alaskan ecosystems by encouraging research, education and management that will contribute to appreciation and good stewardship of our natural heritage."

The grants offered by the organization are available to high school students as well as undergraduate and graduate students. However, high school students have not applied for the grant since it was started three years ago.

For Cokendolpher, the discovery and subsequent study has meant more opportunities for research projects down the road.

"Several people have contacted me who have collected in Alaska," he said.

Cokendolpher said he plans on looking at the samples these people have found when he receives them.

"Generally when you do research at Tech you submit a proposal," he said. "This one wasn't like that - it just fell in my lap."