

Having trouble viewing this email? [Read it online.](#)



## From ANHC's Director

January  
2008

Happy New Year and welcome to our new e-newsletter "Natural News." Along with your holiday wishes and online shopping, you should have received our very first e-newsletter last month. December is a "natural" outreach time for us because our annual report ([2007 ANHC Annual Report](#)) is required to be delivered to the Governor and General Assembly on or before December 1. Over the last few years, this report has become much more than pages of statistics - it also helps the reader understand why those numbers are so important and what they mean to Arkansas's future.



The production of an annual report helps us to see not only what we have accomplished, but where we need to channel our efforts for the coming year. This year looks to be both exciting and challenging! We start this year with 63 natural areas, or 30,050 acres, to manage and protect. Each year our dynamic knowledge of Arkansas's rare places and species reaches new levels of refinement through research and inventory efforts. Our outreach efforts have also reached new heights, including visitors to the website, participation in citizen science, and adult programming.

This e-newsletter is for you, whether you are part of our new audience or a long-time partner and friend. We welcome your suggestions for future issues of the "Natural News" and envision that this e-newsletter will be shaped by your contributions and inquiries. We are excited about another year of working to protect Arkansas's natural heritage and hope you find this newsletter meaningful and enjoyable.

Happy reading!  
- [Karen Smith](#)

---

## First Ant added to List of Species of Special Concern

The notion of ant conservation would probably seem a contradiction in terms to some. True, there are ants that can be pests, from mild nuisances to major economic or health threats. Arkansas hosts a little over 100 ant species. Of those 100 or so ants, only about 25 can truly be considered pests. Most ants in Arkansas are widespread and not necessarily in any danger of becoming rare in the immediate future. However, there are a few ants in Arkansas that are rare. The Comanche harvester ant (*Pogonomyrmex comanche*) is one such species and the first ant to be considered a species of special concern in Arkansas.

A large, reddish ant, the Comanche harvester ant constructs nests in deep, sandy soil and harvests seed from a variety of plants for food, hence the name "harvester." Up until this past year, the Comanche harvester ant's only



documented Arkansas occurrence was in Miller County in the extreme southwestern corner of the state. Field surveys in the fall of 2007 reconfirmed that record and also documented the species in Nevada and Ouachita Counties. The Comanche harvester ant is considered rare in Arkansas because it appears to be closely associated with, and probably dependent upon, a rare natural community type, open sand barrens.

Arkansas's sand barrens, which are restricted to portions of the southwestern part of the state, can be thought of as mini-deserts. These areas have very well-drained sandy soils and host arid-adapted vegetation such as prickly pear and yucca. Good-quality sand barrens are rare in Arkansas now due to fire suppression and mining for sand. The Comanche harvester ant will be ranked at the state level as an [S1S2](#), denoting that this species is very vulnerable to extirpation. To learn more about the ants that occur in Arkansas, visit the Mississippi Entomological Museum's [Ants of Arkansas](#). Image courtesy of [Antweb](#). - [Michael D. Warriner](#)

---

## Education News: ANHC and Science Fairs

As most teachers, students and parents know, January and February are months for school science fairs. Staff from ANHC have been supporting this educational venue since 1997, when we discovered that some students at a local science fair were not being judged in the zoology category because the school could not find enough judges. Since that time, we have worked to make sure that Arkansas students interested in the fields of botany, ecology, and zoology have judges and recognition at their local, regional and state science fairs.

But, what exactly is a science fair and why are they important? A science fair project is the ultimate answer to the often asked student question: "Why do I need to learn this stuff, anyway?" It integrates, into one functional activity, virtually all of the skills and arts that are usually taught separately in many schools. When brought to completion, the project is a combination of reading, writing, spelling, grammar, math, statistics, ethics, logic, critical thinking, computer science, graphic arts, scientific methodology, self-learning of one or more technical or specialty fields, and (if the project qualifies for formal competition) public speaking and defense in front of expert judges.



Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, the world's largest pre-college science competition, describes a science fair as "...the only educational activity that allows students to teach themselves, to take from the established information what they need to discover something exciting and new, and to identify and choose the tools that they need to conduct and conclude their project. When a student completes a science fair project, year after year, through junior and senior high school, the science fair process yields mature, self-confident, skilled, and competitive young leaders who have career goals and the preparation, discipline, and drive to attain them."

In addition to judging middle school and high school fairs, last year, for the first time, a staff member mentored a student who came to us with a specific interest in the environment and the out-of-doors. This year, we are extending our support to include sponsoring an award at the state science fair competition in April that will go to the project which best incorporates aspects of Arkansas's natural heritage.

If you are working on any school project related to rare Arkansas plants or animals, you can find lots of valuable information using the ANHC's [Rare Species Search Engine](#). Good luck to all you future scientists!

## Sixth Year for ANHC Participation in SEEK Programs

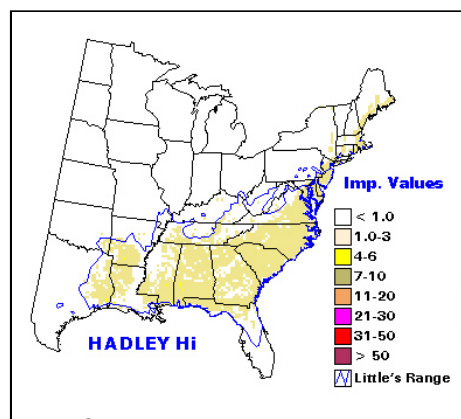


Each January since 2003, educators from the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission have conducted hands-on natural science programs for teachers in 4-H Science Enrichment Education for Kids program, or S.E.E.K. at the [C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center](#) in Ferndale. The SEEK program was established to help meet the science and socialization needs of home-schooled children and their parents. The program's mission is to concentrate on providing hands-on science experience in a fun & safe social environment. This year, ANHC programs will include two sessions on tarantulas and one session on river otters.

For more information on ANHC's educational resources visit [Learn](#).  
- [Jane Jones-Schulz](#)

## Understanding climate change: What it might mean for birds and trees

Climate is an important factor in determining where certain habitats and species occur. While the root causes of climate change are relatively well understood, how individual habitats and species will be affected is much less clear. Ecologists from the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Research Station have modeled the impact of different climate change scenarios on the potential habitat distributions of 134 tree species and 147 bird species ([Climate Change Atlas](#)). The models do not predict migration of species but rather the movement of suitable habitat for an individual species. That distinction is important as how a species moves in relation to a changing climate will also be influenced by such factors as habitat loss and fragmentation. For very rare habitat types, such as tallgrass prairie, there may be little if any available habitat remaining. - [Michael D. Warriner](#)



## Upcoming Events

**January 29, 2008. Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission Meeting:** The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission and staff will meet at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 29, 2008. The meeting will take place in the lobby conference room (room 170) of the Tower Building, 323 Center Street, Little Rock, Arkansas.

**March 4-6, 2008. Floodplain Ecosystem Symposium:** Integrating science into the restoration and management of floodplain ecosystems of the southeast. Peabody Hotel/Statehouse Convention Center, Little Rock, Arkansas. The ANHC is a co-sponsor of this symposium.

This email was sent to &\*TO; from the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission. If you are not interested in this type of information, you may [unsubscribe](#).

**ARKANSAS NATURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION**  
1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201  
Phone: 501.324-9619 / Fax: 501.324.9618 / TDD: 501.324.9150  
[arkansas@naturalheritage.org](mailto:arkansas@naturalheritage.org)

An agency of the [Department of Arkansas Heritage](#)

