

# Endangered list sought for rare firefly



Christopher M. Heckscher

A rare Bethany Beach Firefly in Dover, Del.

By RANDALL CHASE  
Associated Press

**B**ETHANY BEACH, Del. — Peering through the darkness under the faint light of a peach-colored moon, wildlife biologist Jason Davis spots a telltale green flash in the bushes.

Quick as a flash himself, Davis arcs a long-handled mesh net through the humid coastal air, ensnaring his tiny target.

Ignoring the mosquitoes, Davis heads to the open bed of his pickup truck, opens up a notebook-size metal testing kit and begins examining his find. Two minutes later, he makes his pronouncement.

“That is what I am calling bethaniensis,” he declares.

“Photuris bethaniensis,” aka the Bethany Beach Firefly, was first identified in the 1950s and has been found only in a sliver of southern Delaware coastland. Now environmental groups are shining a beacon on the luminescent beetle, whose unique habitat is threatened by coastal development, sea level rise, invasive plants and insecticides.

The Center for Biological Diversity and the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, both based in Oregon, are pushing for the federal Endangered Species list to include its first firefly.

Their petition to the U.S. Department of Interior says the Bethany Beach Firefly “is at immediate risk of extinction” from the “imminent destruction” of much of its habitat, noting plans to build expensive beach homes in one of the largest of the rare freshwater swales where the firefly has been found. The swales are shallow depressions tucked among sand dunes and fed by underground aquifers and rain water.

The Bethany Beach Firefly is already on Delaware’s endangered species list, but that only makes it illegal to transport, possess or sell them. The state has been unable to intervene in the development project because, unlike other states, Delaware doesn’t regulate most freshwater wetlands, which account for about 75% of all wetlands in Delaware. State environmental secretary Shawn Garvin suggests that should change.

“This is just an example of why the state would like to have some ability to engage in these types of projects in nontidal wetlands,” Garvin said.

Meanwhile, to avoid having to obtain a federal permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to dredge or fill in the wetland, the developer of the



AP Photo/Gary Emeigh

An aerial photo in Bethany Beach, Del., shows a wooden road built on pilings in one of the freshwater wetlands in coastal Delaware where the Bethany Beach Firefly, which some environmentalists want added to the federal Endangered Species List, has been previously found.

*‘NO ONE KNEW IF IT WAS STILL AROUND OR HOW COMMON IT WAS AT ALL, PRETTY MUCH BECAUSE NO ONE HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR IT.’*

Christopher Heckscher | environmental scientist who ‘rediscovered’ the Bethany Beach Firefly in the late 1990s

Breakwater Beach project has built an elaborate elevated wooden cul-de-sac on pilings in anticipation of building the homes, also perched on pilings.

“That firefly was at the top of my list to do a petition for fireflies,” said Tara Cornelisse, a scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity. “But when we were certain about the development going on in one of its habitats, that’s when we elevated it to an emergency listing.”

Immediate federal protection is unlikely, and the developer is moving forward with construction. A petitioner can request an emergency listing, but federal law does not provide for a separate emergency process. Guidelines call for a decision within 90 days on

whether a yearlong review is merited to determine whether action is warranted. Actually getting listed can take much longer still: “I think the average is 12 years,” Cornelisse said.

The petition says the Breakwater Beach development is destroying one of only seven freshwater swales where the firefly was previously found.

“They were superabundant in that one spot,” said Christopher Heckscher, an environmental scientist at Delaware State University who “rediscovered” the Bethany Beach Firefly in the late 1990s.

A lawyer for the developer questioned the petition’s timing and said it relies on limited data from two decades ago.

“Breakcap LLC has no reason to believe that any fireflies live in or along the interdunal swale within Breakwater Beach, let alone that Breakwater Beach is critical habitat for any species,” attorney Francis X. Gorman wrote in an email.

“It is curious that they are now — only after Breakcap LLC has obtained all required legal approvals to construct Breakwater Beach — seeking to have the Bethany Beach firefly listed as a federally-endangered species, notwithstanding the admitted decadeslong understanding of the firefly’s alleged limited range,” Gorman added.

Davis, a biologist with Delaware’s environmental department, began a survey in late June. He said his team caught and released about a dozen Bethany Beach fireflies at four of the first 20-odd sites they checked.

“I’m optimistic that we’ll hopefully find some more,” said Davis, who hopes to survey at least 40 freshwater swales. He’s been limited to state coastal parks, because no private property owner has given him permission to survey their land.

“Photuris bethaniensis” wasn’t considered a separate species until Frank Alexander McDermott, a DuPont chemist with a lifelong fascination with fireflies, published his findings in the Smithsonian Institution’s “Proceedings of the United States National Museum” in 1953.

He described a beetle with a distinct “double greenish flash” he first spotted at the north end of Bethany Beach in 1949. It took him several more years to capture enough specimens to make a scientific determination. Few paid much attention to the firefly thereafter, until Heckscher began a three-year survey in 1998.

“No one knew if it was still around or how common it was at all, pretty much because no one had been looking for it,” said Heckscher, who found the firefly at seven of 18 swales he visited.

Davis said he had planned his survey before the federal petition was filed.

Establishing that the firefly still exists is “very important,” he said. “I feel like the more we learn, the more questions we have.”

# THE ASTORIAN Classified



**CALL TODAY to place your ad**  
**503-325-3211**  
or 800-781-3214  
Email: [classifieds@dailyastorian.com](mailto:classifieds@dailyastorian.com)  
Web: [www.dailyastorian.com](http://www.dailyastorian.com)

**THE DEADLINE FOR CLASSIFIED ADS is noon the day before your ad is scheduled to run**  
All classifieds require pre-payment

<b>CLASSIFIED INDEX</b>	<b>NOTICES</b>	Special Notices.....104	<b>MARINE</b>	Boats for Sale.....251	<b>RENTALS</b>	Properties for Rent.....601-613	<b>PETS/LIVESTOCK</b>	Animal Boarding.....701
		Public Notices.....107	Boating Parts & Accessories.....254	Rooms & Roommates.....616	Feed-Hay-Grain.....704		Pets & Supplies.....710	
		Announcements.....110	Boats Wanted.....257	Commercial Rental.....619	Vacation Rentals.....622	Horses & Tack.....713		
		<b>PERSONALS</b>	Boat Trailers.....260	Marine Supplies & Equip.....266	Storage Space.....628	<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	Fuel, Heating & Firewood.....807	
		Lost & Found.....181	Boat/RV Storage.....269	<b>RVs &amp; Trailers</b>	Wanted to Rent.....634	Furniture & HH Goods.....810	TV & Electronics.....811	
		Personals.....184	<b>RVs &amp; Trailers</b>	RVs & Travel Trailers.....301-307	RV/Mobile Home Space.....637	Antiques & Collectibles.....813	Jewelry.....814	
		Fund-raisers.....188	<b>REAL ESTATE</b>	Campers, Utility Trailers.....310-313	<b>BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Arts & Crafts.....816	<b>APPLIANCES &amp; EQUIP.</b>	
		<b>AUTOMOTIVE</b>	Open Houses.....501	For Sale.....504-513	Business Opportunities.....643	Tools & Heavy Equipment.....851	Lawn & Garden Equipment.....854	
		Antiques/Classic Vehicles.....201	Lots & Acreage.....516	Income Property.....519	Business for Sale.....644	Appliances.....860	Medical Equip. & Supply.....866	
		Automobiles.....204	Real Estate Wanted.....531	Manufactured Homes.....522	<b>HELP WANTED</b>	Farm Equipment.....923		
		SUVs/Trucks.....207-210		Commercial Property.....525	Help Wanted.....651			
		4WD.....213		Real Estate Wanted.....531	Work Wanted.....652			
	Vans.....216			<b>SERVICES</b>				
	ATVs/Motorcycles.....219			Childcare/Adult Care.....661				
	Truck/Auto Parts.....222			Services.....664				
	Detailing.....225							
	Tires & Wheels.....228							

**Sell your vehicle**  
If it doesn't sell in two weeks, we'll give you **2 WEEKS FREE** for only **\$4995**

A small town newspaper with a global outlook  
the Astorian  
One of the Pacific Northwest's great small newspapers  
the Astorian  
[www.dailyastorian.com](http://www.dailyastorian.com)

**181 Lost & Found**  
Found Money on St Corner of 342 14th st  
Please Contact 503-325-4806  
**Go. Do.**  
[coastweekend.com](http://coastweekend.com)  
dining • the arts • music  
shopping • museums • classes • movies  
gardening • news • blogs • more  
Classified ads work hard so you don't have to.  
Call 503-325-3211 to place your ad today!

**181 Lost & Found**  
  
Small black Terrier mix found at Hwy-26 rest stop on 7/25. Please contact 503-347-1254 for more info.  
**204 Automobiles**  
Lincoln town-car Cartier, For sale! All power/rides a cloud. \$3,950  
Oceanpark WA 360-244-2826 360-665-0590  
ADDING a room to your home? Furnish it with items advertised in the classifieds.

**210 Trucks**  
  
1999 Chevrolet 1500 Tahoe For Sale, Runs and drives great. New Tags, No rust Located in Knappa  
176K Miles \$2,700 OBO 360-643-9720  
**216 Vans**  
Cargo Van For Sale Silver 2016 Ford Transit, Connect XLT Excellent Condition 52,000 miles \$16,500  
503-812-3489  
CLASSIFIED ADS work hard for you. Try one today!

**216 Vans**  
  
1993 Ford Aerostar For sale, 154K Miles, V6/ Auto, Air conditioning, Runs beautifully Located in Knappa \$1,300 OBO 360-643-9720  
**301 RVs & Travel Trailers**  
3 bedroom Mobile Home Near Beach Motivated Seller Warrenton \$29,900 OBO Call: 503-568-2455  
Going on vacation? Call 503-325-3211 to put a hold on your subscription.

**501 Open Houses**  
Open House Beautiful 4 Acre Country Home Located in Olney 91012 Hwy 202 August 4th, 1pm-4pm  
**504 Homes for Sale**  
  
House 1900 sq ft custom built home, 3 bedroom, 2 bath, large fenced back yard, hardwood floors \$375,000 for apt call 360-431-4834 or 503-556-9784 See at: 1101 Lakeview Dr, Ilwaco, WA, 360-431-4834 cjquilter70@gmail.com  
ADVERTISERS who want quick results use classified ads regularly.