STATE & WORLD

Scientists decry 'death by a thousand cuts' for bugs

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
Associated Press

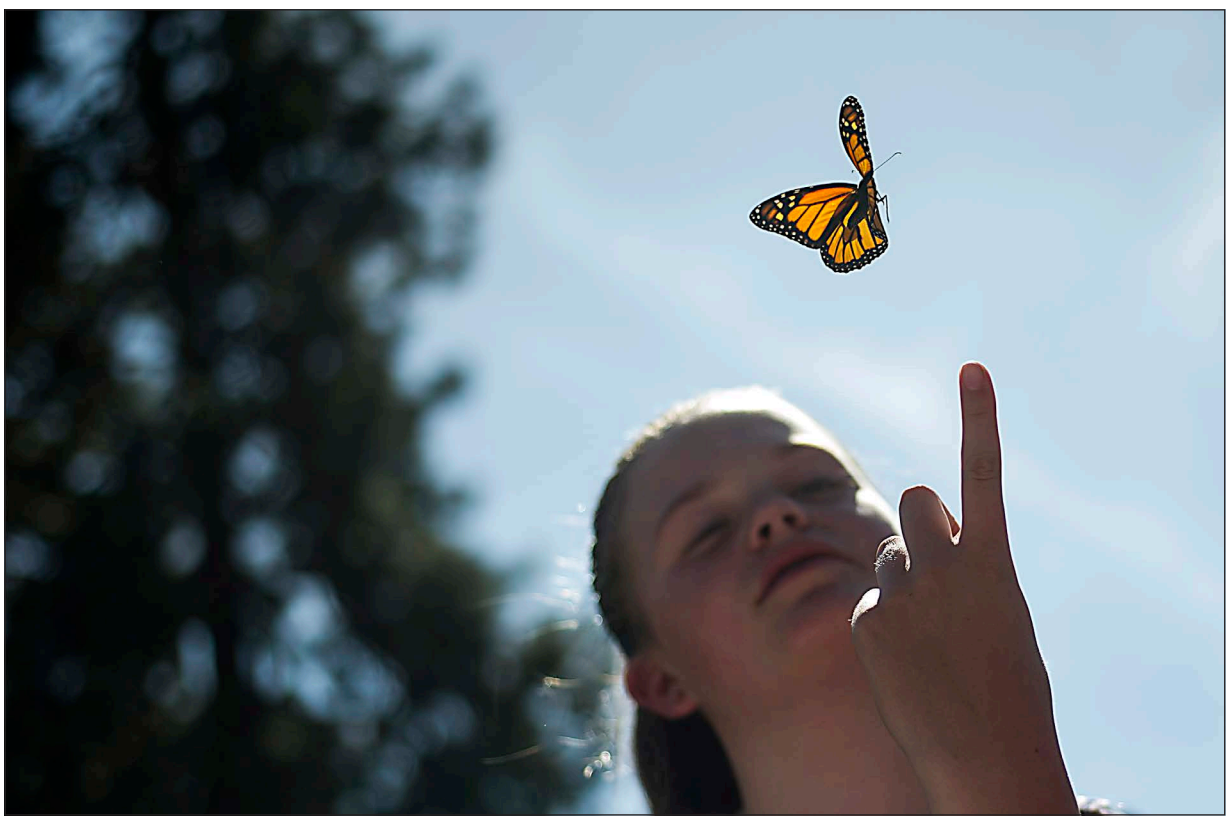
The world's vital insect kingdom is undergoing "death by a thousand cuts," the world's top bug experts said.

Climate change, insecticides, herbicides, light pollution, invasive species and changes in agriculture and land use are causing Earth to lose probably 1% to 2% of its insects each year, said University of Connecticut entomologist David Wagner, lead author in the special package of 12 studies in last week's Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences written by 56 scientists from around the globe.

The problem, sometimes called the insect apocalypse, is like a jigsaw puzzle. And scientists say they still don't have all the pieces, so they have trouble grasping its enormity and complexity and getting the world to notice and do something.

Wagner said scientists need to figure out if the rate of the insect loss is bigger than with other species. "There is some reason to worry more," he added, "because they are the target of attack" with insecticides, herbicides and light pollution.

Co-author and University of Illinois entomologist May Berenbaum, a National Medal of Science winner, said, "Insect decline is kind of comparable to climate change 30 years ago because the methods to assess the extent, the rate (of loss) were difficult."



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin file

A monarch butterfly takes flight from a child's finger after it was released by the Deschutes Land Trust in Hollinshead Park in September 2019. In scientific papers released this month, scientists say they worry the world is losing about 1% or 2% of its insects each year to human activity, with monarchs among the most revealing case studies.

Making matters worse is that in many cases, people hate bugs, even though they pollinate the world's foods, are crucial to the food chain and get rid of waste, she said.

Insects "are absolutely the fabric by which Mother Nature and the tree of life are built," Wagner said.

Two well known ones — honeybees and monarch butterflies — best illustrate insect problems and declines, he said. Honeybees have been in dramatic decline because of disease, parasites, insecticides, herbicides and lack of food.

Climate change-driven drier weather in the American West means less milkweed for butterflies to eat, Wagner said. And changes in American agriculture remove weeds and flowers they need for nectar.

"We're creating a giant biological desert except for soybeans and corn in a giant area of the Midwest."

— David Wagner, an entomologist who expressed concern over the loss of plant life necessary for insect survival

"We're creating a giant biological desert except for soybeans and corn in a giant area of the Midwest," he said.

Last week's scientific papers don't provide new data, yet show a big but incomplete picture of a problem starting to get attention. Scientists have identified 1 million insect species, while probably 4 million more are still to be discovered, Berenbaum said.

University of Delaware entomologist Doug Tallamy, who wasn't part of the studies, said they highlight how the world has "spent the last 30 years spending billions of dollars finding new ways to kill insects and mere pennies working to preserve them."

"The good news is, with the exception of climate change, individuals can do much to reverse insect declines," Tallamy said in an email. "This is a global problem with a grassroots solution."

U.S. CAPITOL SIEGE | WHAT RECORDS SHOW

Trump campaign aides, allies played key roles in Jan. 6 rally

BY RICHARD LARDNER AND MICHELLE R. SMITH
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Members of President Donald Trump's failed presidential campaign played key roles in orchestrating the Washington rally that spawned a deadly assault on the U.S. Capitol, according to an Associated Press review of records, undercutting claims the event was the brainchild of the president's grassroots supporters.

A pro-Trump nonprofit group called Women for America First hosted the "Save America Rally" on Jan. 6 at the Ellipse, an oval-shaped, federally owned patch of land near the White House. But an attachment to the National Park Service public gathering permit granted to the group lists more than half a dozen people in staff positions for the event who just weeks earlier had been paid thousands of dollars by Trump's 2020 reelection campaign. Other staff scheduled to be "on site" during the demonstration have close ties to the White House.

Since the siege, several of them have scrambled to distance themselves from the rally.

The riot at the Capitol, incited by Trump's comments before and during his speech at the Ellipse, has led to a reckoning unprecedented in American history. The president told the crowd to march to the Capitol and that "you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong." A week after the rally, Trump was impeached.

Women for America First, which applied for and received the Park Service permit, did not respond to messages seeking comment about how the event was financed and about the Trump campaign's involvement. The rally drew tens of thousands of people.

In a statement, the president's reelection campaign said it "did not organize, operate or finance the event." No campaign staff members were involved in the organization or operation of the rally, according to the statement. It said that if any former employees or independent contractors for the campaign took part, "they did not do so at the direction of the Trump campaign."

At least one was working for the Trump campaign this month. Megan Powers was listed as one of two operations managers for the Jan. 6 event, and her LinkedIn profile says she was the Trump campaign's director of operations into January 2021. She did not respond to a message seeking comment.

The AP's review found at least three of the Trump campaign aides named on the permit rushed to obscure their connections to the demonstration. They deactivated or locked down their social media profiles and removed tweets that referenced the rally. Two blocked a reporter who asked questions.

Caroline Wren, a veteran GOP fundraiser, is named as a "VIP Advisor" on an attachment to the permit that Women for America First provided to the agency. Between mid-March and mid-November, Donald J. Trump for President Inc. paid Wren $20,000 a month, according to Federal Election Commission records. During the campaign, she was a national finance consultant for Trump Victory, a joint fundraising committee between the president's reelection campaign and the Republican National Committee.

Wren was involved in at least one call before the pro-Trump rally with members of several groups listed as rally participants to organize credentials for VIP attendees, according to Kimberly Fletcher, the president of one of those groups, Moms for America.

Wren retweeted messages about the event ahead of time, but a cache of her account on Google shows at least eight of those tweets disappeared from her timeline. She apparently removed some herself, and others were sent from accounts that Twitter suspended.

One of the messages Wren retweeted was from "Stop the Steal," another group identified as a rally participant on a website promoting the event. The Jan. 2 message thanked Republican senators who said they would vote to overturn Biden's election victory. She also retweeted a Jan. 1 message from the president promoting the event.

Wren did not return messages seeking comment and locked her Twitter account after the AP reached out to her a week ago to ask her about her involvement in the Trump rally and the tweets she had removed. Several days later, she blocked the AP reporter.

Maggie Mulvaney, a niece of former top Trump aide Mick Mulvaney, is listed on the permit attachment as the "VIP Lead." She worked as director of finance operations for the Trump campaign, according to her LinkedIn profile. She did not respond to messages seeking comment.

The insurrection at the Capitol prompted Mick Mulvaney to quit his position as Trump's special envoy to Northern Ireland. The AP reviewed social media posts, voter registrations, court files and other public records for more than 120 people either facing criminal charges who, going maskless during the pandemic, were later identified through photographs and videos taken during the melee.

Man who smoked pot in Sen. Merkley's office is arrested

One of the supporters of President Donald Trump who entered the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 has been arrested and charged with trespassing and interfering with the certification of the 2020 vote.

Brandon Fellows, 26, of upstate New York, was arrested late Saturday "for his role in last week's riot and assault on the Capitol building," according to a statement posted by the FBI's Albany branch on Twitter.

Fellows previously told Bloomberg News he had "no regrets" for having entered the Capitol through a broken window, roaming the halls, and smoking a joint in the office of Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore.

Calls to Fellows' mobile phone went straight to his voicemail. In his recording, Fellows says he turned himself in "for supporting the Constitution," and that he's committed to continuing his fight against, "our overreaching government that has told us that we cannot go out and work, that we cannot go out to see our family, that we cannot even leave our house. I am happily being punished for that."

Fellows is one of about 100 people who've been charged in connection with the violent intrusion at the Capitol, which resulted in at least five deaths.

— Bloomberg News

STATE BRIEFING

Double slaying investigated in Portland

Portland Police were investigating an early morning double homicide Sunday in the city's Centennial neighborhood.

The victims' bodies were found when officers responded to the area at about 3:30 a.m. after a caller reported a shooting. Homicide Division detectives were investigating the scene, the Portland Police Bureau said in a press release.

The city continues to be plagued by an increase in gun violence, a trend that has also unfolded nationwide. As of Friday, Portland Police said there had been 51 verified shooting incidents and 16 people hit by gunfire in the city so far in 2021.

There were more than 50 homicides in the city in 2020, the most in 26 years.

— Bulletin wire report