

## AQUATIC INSECTS OF THE BIG THICKET REGION OF EAST TEXAS

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**Abstract.**—A survey of the aquatic insect orders Ephemeroptera, Odonata, Plecoptera and Trichoptera from the Big Thicket National Preserve and surrounding region of southeast Texas is presented. This area exhibits a diverse fauna of at least 249 resident species which includes 18 mayflies, 77 dragonflies, 34 damselflies, 18 stoneflies and 102 caddisflies. The dragonfly *Somatochlora margarita* and the caddisfly *Phylocentropus harrisi* are listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as "species of concern." Endemicity and new Texas and Big Thicket distribution records are also discussed.

The Big Thicket Primitive Area of Southeast Texas has been referred to as the "Biological Crossroads of North America," (Gunter 1993, Peacock 1994). Although the diversity in this region has never been in question, the definite boundaries of the region itself have been. Ajilvsgi (1994) discussed the history of the geographical boundaries of this area. In this paper, reference to the Big Thicket Primitive Area follows that used by Peacock (1994). It includes an area from Pine Island Bayou south to the Sabine River on the east, north for approximately sixty or so miles, westward along a geological line that passes below Lufkin to about Roan's Prairie, then swings southward in a modified curve to the mixed-grass prairies of east Liberty County (Figure 1). This extensive woodland area is one of the largest of its kind in the southern United States (McLeod 1971). The segment within the area defined as the Big Thicket National Preserve was America's first sanctuary of nature to be declared a national preserve (Peacock 1994). It collectively includes fifteen fragmented units of land and water corridors, designated by the U.S. Congress as federal property protected for the education and enjoyment of the American public.

Although surveys have been conducted for plants and vertebrates in the Big Thicket (Parks et al. 1938; McLeod 1971; Peacock 1994), little is known about the diversity of its insect fauna. The preserve includes ten distinct ecosystems. The National Park Service identifies them as: Baygall, Beech/Magnolia/Loblolly, Cypress Slough, Longleaf Pine Upland, Oak/Gum Floodplain, Palmetto/Hardwood Flats, Pine Savannah Wetlands, River Edge, Roadside and Arid Sandylands (Peacock 1994). Each of these ecosystems is home to many aquatic insects and serves as a western boundary for the distributions of a largely eastern fauna.

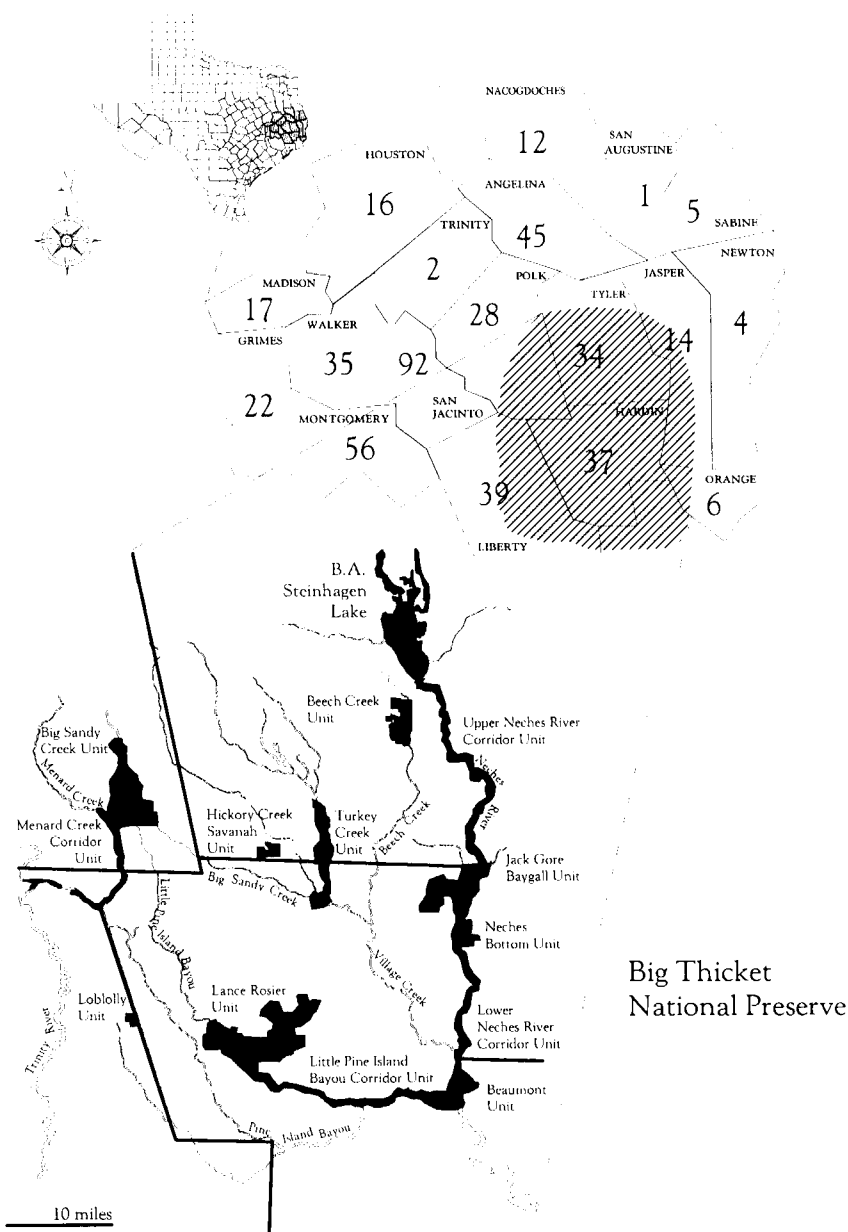


Figure 1. Species richness of Odonata in the Big Thicket Region and National Preserve. Numbers reflect species reported from each county within the region.

The authors have collected and studied aquatic insects in this area over the past 20 years, and intensively sampled its aquatic habitats since

1993, specifically, to assess the biodiversity of Ephemeroptera (mayflies), Odonata (dragonflies & damselflies), Plecoptera (stoneflies) and Trichoptera (caddisflies). These taxa are integral and important components of aquatic ecosystems throughout North America. Previous studies (Szczytko & Stewart 1977; Donnelly 1978; Moulton & Stewart 1997; Baumgardner et al. 1997) of aquatic insect species in Texas have included records from the Big Thicket Primitive Area.

### COLLECTION METHODS

Ongoing collections of Ephemeroptera, Odonata, Plecoptera and Trichoptera have been made from over 100 sites within the Big Thicket Primitive Area since 1993 (Figure 1). Collections consisted of aquatic and terrestrial sampling from springs, streams and standing bodies of water, primarily of the Neches, Sabine and Trinity River watersheds. Locations having high species diversity were revisited seasonally. Extensive collecting trips, each approximately three days in duration, were made monthly except during the winter months of December through February.

Immature stages were collected with dipnets, sieves and by hand-picking. Specimens were fixed in Kahles solution in the field, and returned to the laboratory where they were rinsed and permanently preserved in 80% ethanol. Adults of many species of Ephemeroptera, Plecoptera and Trichoptera were effectively collected with the portable ultra-violet (UV) light traps described by Moulton & Stewart (1996). As many as eight traps were operated on a single night. Each trap consisted of a portable light, powered by D-cell batteries and outfitted with a long wavelength, 8 watt UV bulb (Sylvania F6T5BL). The UV light was situated over a white enamel tray containing 80% ethanol. Each trap was operated from up to one hour before dusk until two hours after dark. During the spring and fall, when evening air temperatures ranged from 7 to 15°C, the UV traps were operated all night to allow for longer flight periods. Adult Odonata were collected during the day (30 min to 2 hr per site) using special long-handled and standard aerial nets, and placed in glassine envelopes and submerged in 99% acetone for eight to ten hours. Afterwards they were dried and transferred to polyethylene envelopes. Collections were supplemented by use of sweep nets and 6 m malaise traps, equipped with alcohol collecting heads (Debbie Focks Co., Gainesville, Florida). All insect material is deposited in the University of North Texas Aquatic Entomology Collection.

## RESULTS AND SPECIES LIST

The Big Thicket Primitive area, with its unique habitats, is home to nearly one-half (249 species) of the 511 species of Ephemeroptera, Odonata, Plecoptera and Trichoptera presently known to occur in Texas. This work has shown that three species in these groups are endemic to the Big Thicket region and several species, especially Trichoptera, are endemic to the entire western Gulf Coastal Plain area; the Big Thicket serves as the western boundary for their distributions.

The following species list follows the nomenclature established in each order as follows: Ephemeroptera (McCafferty 1996), Odonata (Garrison 1991), Plecoptera (Stark et al. 1986; updated 1997 on WWW) and Trichoptera (Moulton & Stewart 1997). Three species of stone-flies previously unreported from the state are noted with an asterisk (\*). The dragonfly *Somatochlora margarita* and the caddisfly *Phylocentropus harrisi* are currently listed as "species of concern" by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This federal listing identifies species "for which information now in the possession of the Service indicates that proposing to list as endangered or threatened is possibly appropriate, but for which persuasive data on biological vulnerability and threat are not currently available to support proposed rules" (USFWS 1996). Numbers in parentheses represent the number of species for each taxa.

**ORDER EPHEMEROPTERA (18)****Family Leptophlebiidae (3)**

*Choroterpes basalis* (Banks)

*Leptophlebia bradleyi* Needham

*Paraleptophlebia volitans* (McDunnough)

**Family Polymitarcidae (1)**

*Campsurus decoloratus* (Hagen)

**Family Ephemeridae (1)**

*Hexagenia limbata* (Serville)

**Family Caenidae (3)**

*Caenis amica* (Hagen)

*Caenis hilaris* (Say)

*Caenis latipennis* (Banks)

**Family Ephemerellidae (1)**

*Eurylophella doris* (Traver)

**Family Baetidae (2)***Acerpenna pygmaea* (Hagen)*Labiobaetis dardanus* (McDunnough)**Family Isonychiidae (2)***Isonychia arida* (Say)*Isonychia sayi* Burks**Family Heptageniidae (5)***Leucrocuta maculipennis* (Walsh)*Stenacron interpunctatum* (Say)*Stenonema femoratum* (Say)*Stenonema mexicanum integrum* (Ulmer)*Stenonema modestum* (Banks)**Likely to Occur in Big Thicket***Tortopus primus* (McDunnough) (Polymitarcidae)*Tortopus puella* (Pictet) (Polymitarcidae)**ORDER ODONATA (111)****SUBORDER ZYGOPTERA (34)****Family Calopterygidae (4)***Calopteryx dimidiata* Burmeister*Calopteryx maculata* (Beauvois)*Hetaerina americana* (Fabricius)*Hetaerina titia* (Drury)**Family Lestidae (3)***Lestes disjunctus australis* Walker*Lestes inaequalis* Walsh*Lestes vigilax* Hagen**Family Coenagrionidae (27)***Argia apicalis* (Say)*Argia bipunctulata* (Hagen)*Argia fumipennis violacea* (Hagen)*Argia immunda* (Hagen)*Argia moesta* (Hagen)*Argia nahuana* Calvert*Argia sedula* (Hagen)*Argia tibialis* (Rambur)*Argia translata* Hagen in Séllys*Enallagma basidens* Calvert*Enallagma civile* (Hagen)

*Enallagma daeckii* (Calvert)  
*Enallagma divagans* Sélys  
*Enallagma dubium* Root  
*Enallagma exsulans* (Hagen)  
*Enallagma geminatum* Kellicott  
*Enallagma signatum* (Hagen)  
*Enallagma traviatum westfalli* Donnelly  
*Enallagma vesperum* Calvert  
*Ischnura hastata* (Say)  
*Ischnura kellicotti* Williamson  
*Ischnura posita posita* (Hagen)  
*Ischnura prognata* (Hagen)  
*Ischnura ramburii* (Sélys)  
*Nehalennia integricollis* Calvert  
*Telebasis byersi* Westfall  
*Telebasis salva* (Hagen)

#### SUBORDER ANISOPTERA (77)

##### **Family Petaluridae (1)**

*Tachopteryx thoreyi* (Hagen in Sélys)

##### **Family Aeshnidae (7)**

*Anax junius* (Drury)  
*Anax longipes* (Hagen)  
*Basiaeschna janata* (Say)  
*Boyeria vinosa* (Say)  
*Coryphaeschna ingens* (Rambur)  
*Epiaeschna heros* (Fabricius)  
*Nasiaeschna pentacantha* (Rambur)

##### **Family Gomphidae (21)**

*Aphylla angustifolia* Garrison  
*Aphylla protracta* (Hagen in Sélys)  
*Arigomphus lentulus* (Needham)  
*Arigomphus maxwelli* (Ferguson)  
*Arigomphus submedianus* (Hagen)  
*Dromogomphus spinosus* Sélys  
*Dromogomphus spoliatus* (Hagen in Sélys)  
*Erpetogomphus designatus* Hagen in Sélys  
*Gomphus* (*Gomphurus*) *externus* Hagen in Sélys  
*Gomphus* (*Gomphurus*) *hybridus* Williamson  
*Gomphus* (*Gomphurus*) *modestus* Needham  
*Gomphus* (*Gomphurus*) *vastus* Walsh

*Gomphus (Gomphus) apomyius* Donnelly  
*Gomphus (Gomphus) exilis* Sélys  
*Gomphus (Gomphus) lividus* Sélys  
*Gomphus (Gomphus) militaris* Hagen in Sélys  
*Gomphus (Gomphus) oklahomensis* Pritchard  
*Hagenius brevistylus* Sélys  
*Progomphus obscurus* (Rambur)  
*Stylurus laurae* (Williamson)  
*Stylurus plagiatus* (Sélys)

**Family Cordulegastridae (2)**

*Cordulegaster maculata* Sélys  
*Cordulegaster obliqua obliqua* (Say)

**Family Corduliidae (10)**

**Macromiinae (3)**

*Didymops transversa* (Say)  
*Macromia illinoiensis georgina* (Sélys)  
*Macromia taeniolata* Rambur

**Corduliinae (7)**

*Epithea (Epicordulia) princeps* (Hagen)  
*Epithea (Tetragoneuria) cynosura* (Say)  
*Epithea (Tetragoneuria) semiaquea* (Burmeister)  
*Helocordulia selysii* (Hagen)  
*Neurocordulia alabamensis* Hodges  
*Somatochlora linearis* (Hagen)  
*S. margarita* Donnelly

**Family Libellulidae (36)**

*Brachymesia gravida* (Calvert)  
*Brachymesia herbida* (Gundlach)  
*Celithemis amanda* (Hagen)  
*Celithemis elisa* (Hagen)  
*Celithemis eponina* (Drury)  
*Celithemis fasciata* Kirby  
*Celithemis ornata* (Rambur)  
*Celithemis verna* Pritchard  
*Dythemis fugax* Hagen  
*Dythemis velox* Hagen  
*Erythemis simplicicollis* (Say)  
*Erythemis vesiculosa* (Fabricius)  
*Erythrodiplax berenice berenice* (Drury)  
*Erythrodiplax minuscula* (Rambur)

*Erythrodiplax umbrata* (Linnaeus)  
*Libellula auripennis* Burmeister  
*Libellula cyanea* Fabricius  
*Libellula deplanata* Rambur  
*Libellula flavida* Rambur  
*Libellula incesta* Hagen  
*Libellula luctuosa* Burmeister  
*Libellula lydia* Drury  
*Libellula needhami* Westfall  
*Libellula semifasciata* Burmeister  
*Libellula vibrans* Fabricius  
*Miathyria marcella* (Sélys)  
*Orthemis ferruginea* (Fabricius)  
*Pachydiplax longipennis* (Burmeister)  
*Pantala flavescens* (Fabricius)  
*Pantala hymenaea* (Say)  
*Perithemis tenera* (Say)  
*Sympetrum ambiguum* (Rambur)  
*Sympetrum corruptum* (Hagen)  
*Tramea carolina* (Linnaeus)  
*Tramea lacerata* Hagen  
*Tramea onusta* Hagen

### **Likely to Occur in Big Thicket**

*Enallagma durum* (Hagen) (Coenagrionidae)  
*Aphylla williamsoni* (Gloyd) (Gomphidae)  
*Epithea (Tetragoneuria) petechialis* (Muttkowski) (Corduliidae)  
*Libellula pulchella* Drury (Libellulidae)

### **ORDER PLECOPTERA (18)**

#### **Family Taeniopterygidae (2)**

*Taeniopteryx burksi* Ricker & Ross  
*Taeniopteryx lonicera* Ricker & Ross

#### **Family Nemouridae (1)**

*Amphinemura texana* Baumann

#### **Family Capniidae (1)**

*Allocapnia malverna* Ross

#### **Family Leuctridae (1)**

*Zealeuctra claasseni* (Frison)



**Family Perlodidae (4)***Hydroperla crosbyi* (Needham & Claassen)*Isoperla coushatta* Szczytko & Stewart*Isoperla mohri* Frison*Isoperla sagittata* Szczytko & Stewart**Family Perlidae (9)***Acroneuria arenosa* (Pictet)*Acroneuria evoluta* Klapálek\**Acroneuria frisoni* Stark & Brown\**Neoperla catharae* Stark & Baumann*Neoperla clymene* (Newman)*Paragnetina fumosa* (Banks)\**Perlesta bolukta* Stark*Perlesta decipiens* (Walsh)*Perlinella drymo* (Newman)**Likely to Occur in Big Thicket***Taeniopteryx maura* (Pictet) (Taeniopterygidae)**ORDER TRICHOPTERA (102)****Family Brachycentridae (1)***Brachycentrus numerosus* (Say)**Family Glossosomatidae (1)***Protoptila maculata* Hagen**Family Helicopsyichidae (1)***Helicopsyche borealis* (Hagen)**Family Hydropsychidae (12)***Diplectrona modesta* Banks*Cheumatopsyche burksi* Ross*Cheumatopsyche campyla* Ross*Cheumatopsyche passella* Ross*Cheumatopsyche pettiti* (Banks)*Hydropsyche bidens* Ross*Hydropsyche decalda* Ross*Hydropsyche mississippiensis* Flint*Hydropsyche orris* Ross*Hydropsyche rossi* Flint, Voshell & Parker*Macrostemum carolina* (Banks)*Potamyia flava* (Hagen)

**Family Hydroptilidae (33)**

- Hydroptila abbotti* Moulton & Harris
- Hydroptila ajax* Ross
- Hydroptila alabama* Harris & Kelley
- Hydroptila angusta* Ross
- Hydroptila bernerii* Ross
- Hydroptila hamata* Morton
- Hydroptila grandiosa* Ross
- Hydroptila morsei* Sykora & Harris
- Hydroptila novicola* Blickle & Morse
- Hydroptila quinola* Ross
- Hydroptila remita* Blickle & Morse
- Hydroptila scolops* Ross
- Hydroptila waubesiana* Betten
- Mayatrachia ayama* Mosely
- Neotrichia* sp. nr. *riegeli* Ross
- Neotrichia mobilensis* Harris
- Neotrichia vibrans* Ross
- Ochrotrichia tarsalis* (Hagen)
- Orthotrichia aegerfasciella* Chambers
- Orthotrichia baldufi* Kingslover & Ross
- Orthotrichia cristata* Morton
- Orthotrichia curta* Kingslover & Ross
- Orthotrichia instabilis* Denning
- Oxyethira elerobi* (Blickle)
- Oxyethira glasa* Ross
- Oxyethira janella* Denning
- Oxyethira lumosa* Ross
- Oxyethira novasota* Ross
- Oxyethira pallida* (Banks)
- Oxyethira roberti* Roy & Harper
- Oxyethira ulmeri* (Mosely)
- Oxyethira verna* Ross
- Oxyethira zeronia* Ross

**Family Lepidostomatidae (1)**

- Lepidostoma morsei* Weaver

**Family Leptoceridae (26)**

- Ceraclea flava* (Banks)
- Ceraclea maculata* (Banks)
- Ceraclea nepha* (Ross)
- Ceraclea ophioderus* (Ross)

*Ceraclea protonepha* Morse & Ross  
*Ceraclea tarsipunctata* (Vorhies)  
*Ceraclea transversa* (Hagen)  
*Leptocerus americanus* (Banks)  
*Nectopsyche candida* (Hagen)  
*Nectopsyche exquisita* (Walker)  
*Nectopsyche pavida* (Hagen)  
*Oecetis avara* (Banks)  
*Oecetis cinerascens* (Hagen)  
*Oecetis ditissa* Ross  
*Oecetis georgia* Ross  
*Oecetis inconspicua* (Walker)  
*Oecetis nocturna* Ross  
*Oecetis osteni* Milne  
*Oecetis persimilis* (Banks)  
*Oecetis sphyra* Ross  
*Triaenodes ignitus* (Walker)  
*Triaenodes injustus* (Hagen)  
*Triaenodes ochraceus* (Betten & Mosely)  
*Triaenodes pernus* Ross  
*Triaenodes smithi* Ross  
*Triaenodes tardus* Milne

**Family Limnephilidae (4)**

*Ironoquia punctatissima* (Walker)  
*Pycnopsyche antikai* (Walker)  
*Pycnopsyche indiana* (Ross)  
*Pycnopsyche lepida* (Hagen)

**Family Molannidae (2)**

*Molanna tryphena* Betten  
*Molanna ulmerina* Navás

**Family Philopotamidae (5)**

*Chimarra aterrima* Hagen  
*Chimarra feria* Ross  
*Chimarra moselyi* Denning  
*Chimarra obscura* (Walker)  
*Chimarra parasocia* Lago & Harris

**Family Phryganeidae (3)**

*Agrypnia vestita* (Walker)  
*Ptilostomis ocellifera* (Walker)  
*Ptilostomis postica* (Walker)

**Family Polycentropodidae (11)**

*Cernotina calcea* Ross  
*Cernotina spicata* Ross  
*Cyrnellus fraternus* (Banks)  
*Neureclipsis crepuscularis* (Walker)  
*Neureclipsis melco* Ross  
*Paranyctiophylax affinis* (Banks)  
*Paranyctiophylax serratus* (Lago & Harris)  
*Phylocentropus harrisi* Schuster & Hamilton  
*Phylocentropus placidus* (Banks)  
*Polycentropus cinereus* Hagen  
*Polycentropus crassicornis* Walker

**Family Psychomiidae (1)**

*Lype diversa* (Banks)

**Family Sericostomatidae (1)**

*Agarodes libalis* Ross & Scott

**DISCUSSION**

*Ephemeroptera*.—Eighteen species of mayflies, comprising 20% of the known Texas fauna have been documented from the Big Thicket. Baumgardner et al. (1997) listed six species previously unreported from Texas (Figure 2a). These included *Eurylophella doris*, a broad-ranging eastern North American species that constituted the first report of the family Ephemerellidae in Texas. The Big Thicket presumably represents the western distributional limit of this species. Based on indeterminate subimagos two additional polymitarcids, *Tortopus primus* and *T. puella*, are likely to occur in the Big Thicket.

*Odonata*.—The 111 species of Odonata occurring in the Big Thicket account for 57% of the total Texas fauna (195 species) and nearly a quarter (22.6%) of the North American fauna. Ninety-two species are recorded from the Big Creek drainage and vicinity in Sam Houston National Forest, San Jacinto County alone (Figure 1). This high species richness is due in part to the extensive collections by Donnelly (1978) in the area. This represents the greatest diversity of odonates in any specific area within the Big Thicket and undoubtedly represents one of the highest levels of diversity in the Odonata anywhere in the U.S.

Two species recently reported from the Big Thicket had previously been undocumented west of the Mississippi River (Figure 2b). *Gomphus exilis* was reported from Texas for the first time by Abbott (1996) based

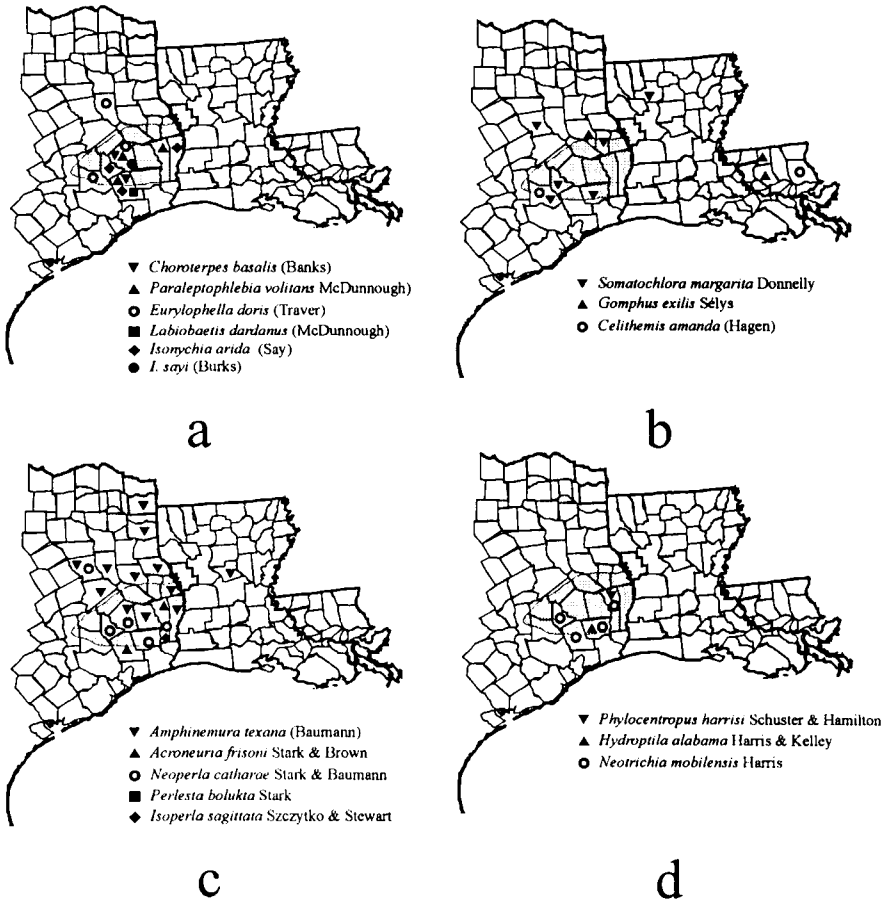


Figure 2. Interesting and unique species of West Gulf Coastal Plain aquatic insects; (a) Ephemeroptera, (b) Odonata, (c) Plecoptera, and (d) Trichoptera. Shaded areas represent Big Thicket Primitive Area (after Peacock 1994).

on a previously unpublished record from Nacogdoches County. Orr (1993) recently reported *Celithemis amanda*, from the Jones State Forest, Montgomery County, collected by Bob Honig.

The Texas or Big Thicket Emerald, *Somatochlora margarita*, is endemic to the Piney Woods of East Texas. This species is presently listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a "species of concern." *Somatochlora margarita* was previously known only from a few counties in Big Thicket (Figure 2b), but the senior author has taken it from as far northwest as Engeling Wildlife Management Area, in Anderson County,

Texas. The nymph of this relatively rare species is undescribed.

The Big Thicket represents the western distributional limit for several other odonate species. These include *Calopteryx dimidiata*, *Ischnura prognata*, *Nehalennia integricollis*, *Telebasis byersi*, *Tachopteryx thoreyi*, *Arigomphus maxwelli* and *Helocordulia selysii*. Based on their current range, species such as *Enallagma durum* (Coenagrionidae), *Aphylla williamsoni* and *Gomphus militaris* (Gomphidae), *Epithecya petechialis* (Corduliidae), and *Libellula pulchella* (Libellulidae), all having habitat requirements similar to those found in the Big Thicket (ranging from rivers to soft-bottomed lakes and bayous), may eventually be documented in the region.

*Plecoptera*.—The currently documented 18 species of Plecoptera occurring in the Big Thicket comprise 58% of the total known Texas stonefly fauna (Szczytko & Stewart 1977). Included are three new state records of species in the family Perlidae: *Neoperla catharae*, *Perlesta bolukta* and *Acroneuria frisoni* (Figure 2c). The current listing of *A. frisoni* is due to revision of *A. evoluta* by Stark & Brown (1991); previous records in Texas for both of these species were listed only as *A. evoluta*. The three species of *Acroneuria* occurring in the thicket are sympatric and all three were collected in a single night at Hickory Creek in Hardin County (Figure 1). *Perlesta bolukta*, previously known only from Oklahoma and Missouri, was collected at a single locality, Boykin Springs in Jasper county (Figure 2c). *Neoperla catharae* was collected at several locations within the thicket (Figure 2c).

Baumann (1996) described, *Amphinemura texana* from east Texas, based partially on material previously collected by us. He noted that *A. texana* seems to be restricted to the Piney Woods of east Texas and the adjacent area in the Kisatchie National Forest of Louisiana. This species had previously been reported from the state and region by Szczytko & Stewart (1977) as *A. nigritta*, a complex of sibling species included in Baumann's (1996) revision. A second stonefly endemic to the thicket, *Isoperla sagittata*, is rare and known only from Little Cow Creek in Newton County (Figure 2c). Adults have a short emergence period in February, and are therefore seldom collected. Based on its known distribution and habitat preference reported by Fullington & Stewart (1980), *Taeniopteryx maura* should occur in the thicket, but has not yet been encountered there.

*Trichoptera*.—The diversity of caddisflies in Texas was partially documented by Edwards (1973), who listed only 91 species, mainly

from the Edwards Plateau and limited collection sites in East Texas and the Trans Pecos area. A systematic survey was begun in 1990 by Moulton & Stewart (1997) to more thoroughly document the biodiversity of this important order in the state and specifically for the Big Thicket and surrounding area.

As part of this survey, intensive collections over the past seven years in the Big Thicket Primitive Area have produced 102 caddisfly species that represent over half of the 199 species now known from Texas (Moulton & Stewart 1997). Most of these species, including *Neotrichia mobilensis*, *Hydroptila alabama* and *Phylocentropus harrisi* (Figure 2d), are endemic to the Gulf Coastal Plain and the Big Thicket area represents their western distributional limit. There are no species endemic to the Big Thicket. *Phylocentropus harrisi* is presently treated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a "species of concern."

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