Get closer to nature through free park lectures

By Charles Sowell
Special to The Greenville News

Most folks only notice dragonflies and damselflies when they wander into the insects' territory and suddenly find themselves eye to eye with the compound peepers of the bugs.

But if that is the extent of your contact with these fascinating creatures, you're missing out on a great deal beyond gossamer wings and brightly colored bodies.

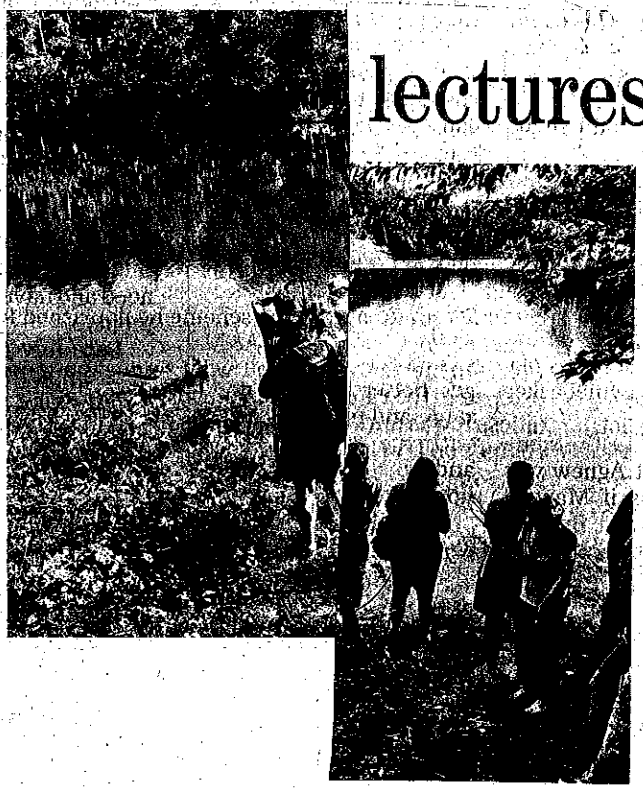
Wade Worthen, a professor at Furman University, led one of the free Friends of Paris Mountain State Park programs recently during which folks got a chance to peel away some of the secrecy surrounding "The Amazing World of Dragonflies and Damselflies."

One of the amazing facts Worthen revealed is that the male insects are territorial, staking out what they consider to be their turf and defending it quite rigorously against intruding males.

As about 25 people, ranging in age from infants in strollers and snuggly packs to silver-haired seniors, listened as Worthen used broad strokes to describe why the insects are worthy of more than a passing notice. For one thing, they are a major predator of insect pests like mosquitoes.

Dragonflies and their cousins the damselflies are most easily distinguished by the fact that dragonflies hold their wings perpendicular to their

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The free lectures on fourth Fridays at Paris Mountain State Park take an up-close look at nature. Dr. Wade Worthen leads a lecture on dragonflies. CHARLES SOWELL/CONTRIBUTOR



A dragonfly perches on a leaf at Paris Mountain State Park. CHARLES SOWELL/CONTRIBUTOR

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bodies when at rest and damselflies hold theirs in the parallel position.

Not only are dragonflies territorial, they also defend their mates through the egg laying process against other males who would also mate with the females. That way they make sure their genes are passed on.

And, a subject of Worthen's current research, they seem to segregate themselves according to height above the ground.

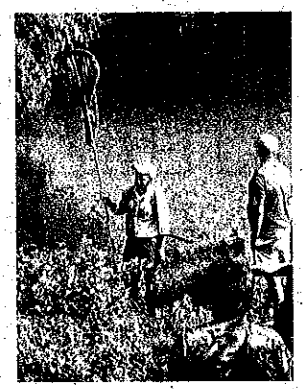
They seem to establish themselves, some at as little as 20 centimeters some as much as a few feet, depending on the size of the dragonfly, Worthen said.

Cathy Taylor, interpretive ranger at Paris Mountain, said Furman professors periodically speak at the Friends of Paris Mountain free lectures programs.

"We don't have any more Furman professors scheduled to speak through November," she said. But there are sure to be more.

The only fee is park admittance. The lectures are free and start at 10 a.m. every fourth Friday.

For more information, call Taylor at 864-244-5565 or email her at ctaylor@scprt.com.



Dr. Wade Worthen, with net, leads a group in searching for dragonflies. CHARLES SOWELL/CONTRIBUTOR