



FAMILY DAY | What Makes a Treehopper?

Saturday April 13, 2024

1-5pm

Gant Science Complex Light Court, UConn Storrs, CT

The Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and friends invite you to enjoy a fun-filled afternoon celebrating the re-opening of the exhibit *Natural Selection is Amazing! Exploring the Dazzling Diversity of Treehoppers* with a special Family Day program at UConn Storrs!

Treehoppers are insects distinguished by their impressive head ornamentation, called a helmet. Their helmets come in a wide variety of shapes and styles, mimicking everything from thorns to aggressive ants. These helmets don't just look cool—they've got a great evolutionary story behind them!

Explore the *Natural Selection is Amazing!* exhibit and learn about all things treehoppers from the evolutionary biologists who study and preserve these amazingly diverse little creatures.

Program highlights and displays include:

- Program co-sponsor [Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry](#) will be on site with a hands-on “Build Your Own Treehopper Helmet” station
- Scientific talks by the treehopper scientists who developed the *Natural Selection is Amazing* exhibit
- Preserved specimens from the [UConn Biodiversity Research Collections](#)
- Living plant specimens from the [UConn Botanical Conservatory](#)
- Activities to introduce visitors to the behaviors and diversity of treehoppers, exploring concepts like [mutualism](#) and [mimicry](#)

Family Days are free and open to the public!

Visit csmnh.uconn.edu/programs for more details and parking information.

If you require an accommodation to participate in this event, please contact the CSMNH at 860-486-4460 or CSMNHinfo@uconn.edu by **Monday April 8, 2024**.

The Connecticut State Museum of Natural History is part of the Institute of the Environment at the University of Connecticut

###

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Family Day Celebrates the Dazzling Diversity of Treehoppers on Display at UConn Storrs

Storrs, CT – The Connecticut State Museum of Natural History is celebrating the re-opening of their exhibit *Natural Selection is Amazing! Exploring the Dazzling Diversity of Treehoppers* with a special Family Day program at UConn Storrs. Family Days are interactive learning experiences for visitors of all ages, where natural history and scientific ideas are explored through hands on activities facilitated by researchers, students, and experts from a variety of disciplines. This will be the first Family Day the Museum has hosted since 2019, when the last AntU Day was held at UConn Storrs.

This spring’s event “What makes a Treehopper?” highlights the dazzling diversity of treehoppers, the subject of the Museum’s recently installed exhibit in the Light Court of the Gant Science Complex at UConn. The *Natural Selection is Amazing* exhibit focuses on treehoppers as a particularly vivid example of the way that natural selection shapes the physical form and behavior of living organisms in response to their environment over time. Treehoppers are insects distinguished by their impressive head ornamentation, called a helmet. Their helmets come in a wide variety of shapes and styles, mimicking everything from thorns to aggressive ants. These helmets mostly function as



camouflage or warnings, helping treehoppers blend in more effectively with their surroundings or look more dangerous to potential predators.

Through a range of displays and activities, “What Makes a Treehopper” will introduce visitors to the ecology, behaviors, and diversity of treehoppers while exploring concepts like [mutualism](#) (beneficial relationships between organisms), [mimicry](#) (when one organism looks or acts like another), and [morphological](#) diversity (the variety in the shape and form in a group of organisms).

UConn’s [Biodiversity Research Collections](#) (BRC) and [Botanical Conservatory](#) in the [Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology](#) will be on site with real research specimens on display. The BRC will show a variety of preserved treehopper specimens as well as some examples of the insects that treehoppers mimic with their helmets. The Botanical Conservatory will have living specimens representing some of the plants that treehoppers mimic, live, and feed on.

For those interested in learning more about the biology and ecology of treehoppers, evolutionary biologist [Dr. Cera Fisher](#) will give a talk titled “An Ant for a Hat: The Fashion-Forward Treehopper and the Evolution of Novelty.” Dr. Fisher was involved in the development of the exhibit on display, and her research in genetic analysis of treehopper helmet shapes has been published in *Nature Ecology & Evolution* and was [featured in a 2019 article in Smithsonian Magazine](#).

The CSMNH is excited to once again be collaborating with the [Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry](#) in UConn’s School of Fine Arts to bring natural history to life with a hands-on puppet-making booth at this Family Day. A highlight of the afternoon’s activities, visitors are invited to take inspiration from the exhibit and specimens on display to design a unique treehopper helmet. Workshop leaders from the Ballard will be on hand to help puppeteers of all ages construct a wearable treehopper “helmet” of their very own. For those wishing to enjoy a full day in Storrs, the Ballard is hosting an 11am performance of [Hao Bang Ah, Dragon! by Chinese](#)

[Theatre Works](#) at their location in Downtown Storrs. Visit their website bimp.uconn.edu for tickets and more information!

Family Days are free and open to the public! The “What Makes a Treehopper” Family Day will be held at UConn Storrs in the [Gant Science Light Court on N. Eagleville Rd](#) on Saturday, April 13 from 1-5pm. Dr. Fisher will give her talk twice, once at 2pm and again at 3pm. Parking is available in the North Parking Garage, adjacent to the venue. There is also limited on-street parking on N. Eagleville Rd. Visit csmnh.uconn.edu/programs for additional information.

If you require an accommodation to participate in this event, please contact the CSMNH at 860-486-4460 or CSMNHinfo@uconn.edu by **Monday April 8, 2024**.

The Museum would like to thank all of the groups who are helping to make this Family Day possible, in particular the Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology (EEB) and the research lab of Elizabeth Jockusch, whose research informed the exhibit; Dr. Cera Fisher for talking about her research; and EEB’s Biodiversity Research Collections and Botanical Conservatory for providing specimens for display. A special thank you to the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry for developing the treehopper helmet activity and to our media sponsor Connecticut Public for their invaluable support.

The Connecticut State Museum of Natural History is a unit of the Institute of the Environment at the University of Connecticut.

Contact: Elizabeth Barbeau

860-486-4460 | Web: csmnh.uconn.edu | Facebook: [@CSMNH](#) | Instagram: [@ctnaturalhistory](#)