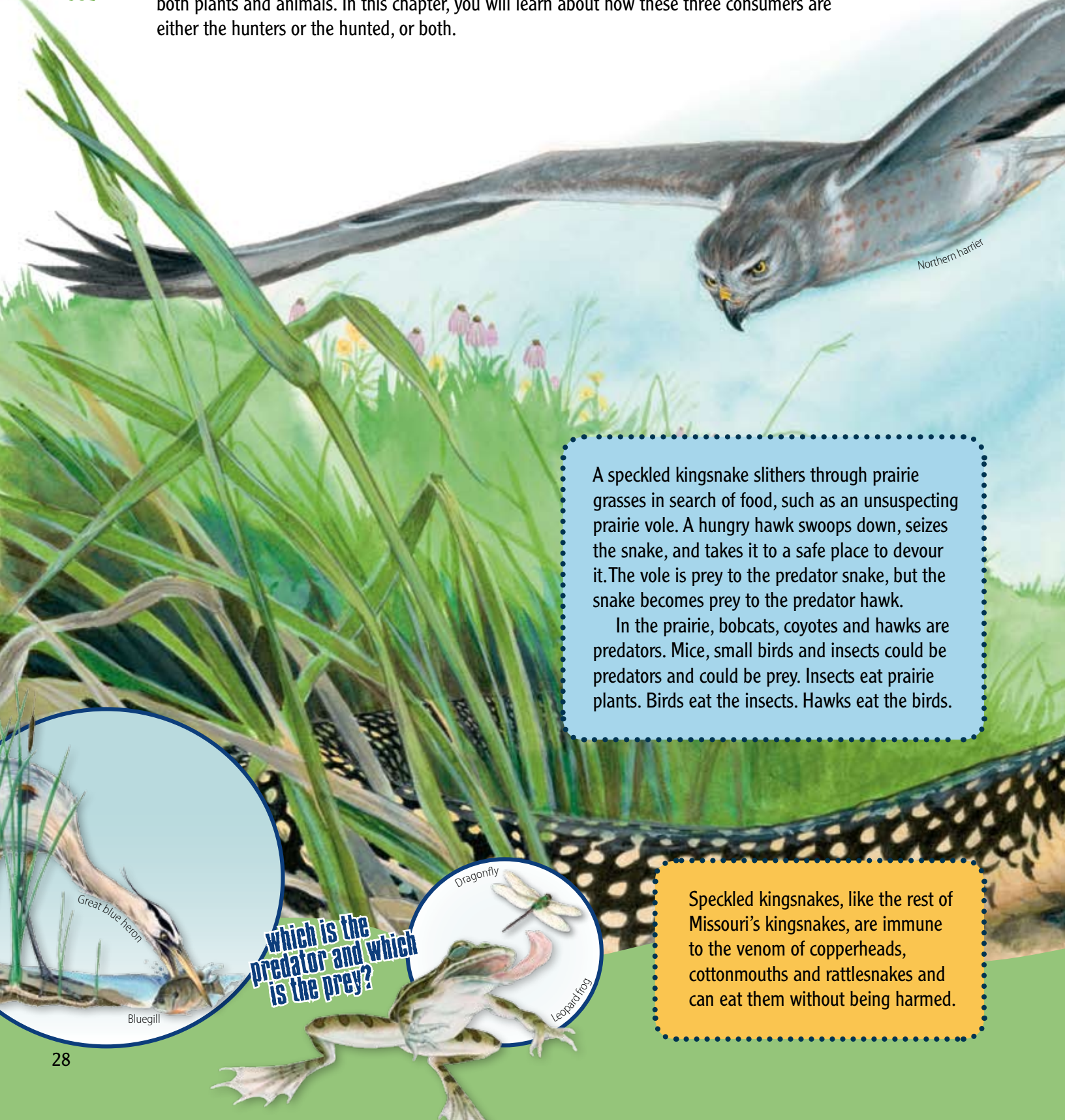


6

you want flies with that?

Producers make their own food using energy from the sun. Consumers get their food by eating producers or other consumers. Herbivores eat plants. Carnivores eat animals. Omnivores eat both plants and animals. In this chapter, you will learn about how these three consumers are either the hunters or the hunted, or both.



Northern harrier

A speckled kingsnake slithers through prairie grasses in search of food, such as an unsuspecting prairie vole. A hungry hawk swoops down, seizes the snake, and takes it to a safe place to devour it. The vole is prey to the predator snake, but the snake becomes prey to the predator hawk.

In the prairie, bobcats, coyotes and hawks are predators. Mice, small birds and insects could be predators and could be prey. Insects eat prairie plants. Birds eat the insects. Hawks eat the birds.



Great blue heron

Bluegill


which is the predator and which is the prey?



Dragonfly

Leopard frog

Speckled kingsnakes, like the rest of Missouri's kingsnakes, are immune to the venom of copperheads, cottonmouths and rattlesnakes and can eat them without being harmed.



Most activity in a pond, forest and prairie ecosystem revolves around food—making it, eating it or being it! Animals that hunt for other animals are called **predators**. Animals that are hunted by other animals are called **prey**. Many prey animals are herbivores. All carnivores and omnivores are predators, but some carnivores and omnivores become prey.

As the tiny tadpole on page 16 nibbled algae, it was hunted and eaten by the fish. The fish was the predator, and the tadpole was the prey. However, that fish had barely swallowed the tadpole when it was grabbed up and gulped down by the great blue heron. The great blue heron was the predator, and the fish became the prey.

Carpenter ants are predators that prey on and hunt other insects, but carpenter ants become the prey animal when they are caught and eaten by spiders and other forest predators. Spiders are predators, but become prey when rough green snakes hunt and eat them. Rough green snakes may be predators, but even they become prey when they are eaten by larger snakes.

Speckled kingsnake

Prairie vole

Bobcat

Ovenbird

Sowbug

Grassland crayfish

Crawfish frog

Leaf beetle

When digging underground, a prairie vole closes its lips tightly to keep dirt out of its mouth. Prairie voles will signal a threat by raising their forefeet, stretching their head forward and chattering their teeth.

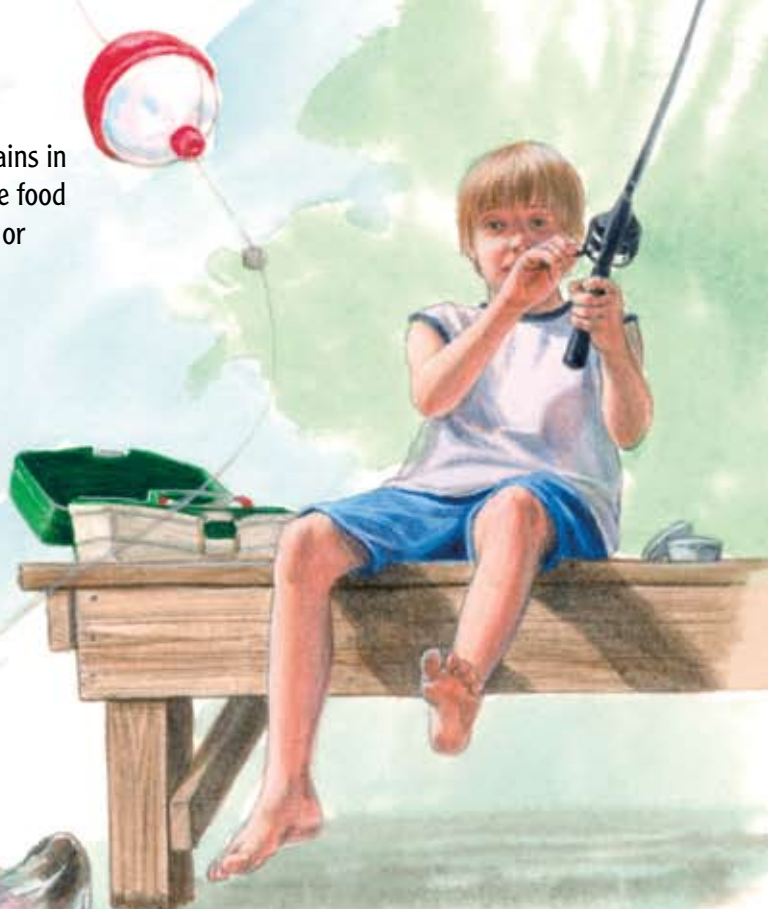
which is the predator and which is the prey?

Predators and prey are vital to passing energy up through food chains in any ecosystem. Carnivores and certain omnivores are the top of the food chain. Nothing eats a carnivore or omnivore but another carnivore or omnivore—one predator becomes the prey of another predator.

Predators hunt to survive. When they hunt, they help to control animal populations and keep food chains strong and ecosystems healthy and balanced.

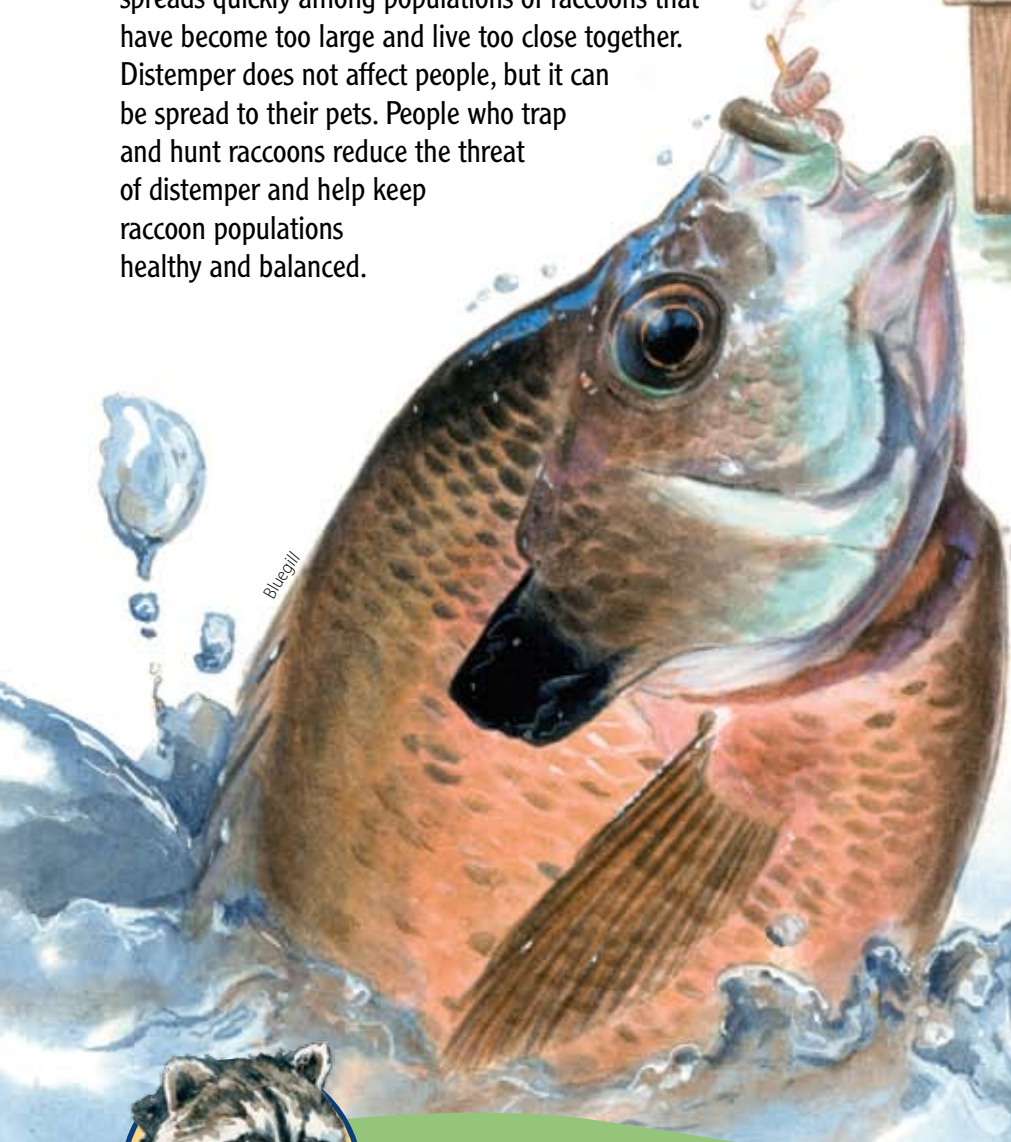
Humans are at the top of the many food chains. They are consumers. Some are herbivores (vegetarians), but most humans are omnivores. Some humans still hunt, fish and trap animals for food. When they take on these predator roles, they play a very important part in controlling animal populations and keeping ecosystems healthy and balanced.

For example, distemper is a serious disease that spreads quickly among populations of raccoons that have become too large and live too close together. Distemper does not affect people, but it can be spread to their pets. People who trap and hunt raccoons reduce the threat of distemper and help keep raccoon populations healthy and balanced.



Catch-and-release fishing is for anglers who simply enjoy the thrill of the catch and the knowledge that they've outsmarted a fish with their lures and bait. Bluegill put up a vigorous fight when hooked. They are fun to catch whether you intend to keep and eat them or to release them unharmed.

Fisheries biologists monitor fish populations and recommend how many and what size may be kept. Smaller, younger fish are usually protected, and enough adult fish are left to reproduce.



Bluegill



While raccoons can be delicious, and many thousands are eaten each year, hunters and trappers also sell their pelts at auctions. A raccoon's thick, soft fur is used for coats and collars.



Largemouth bass are a popular freshwater game fish in Missouri. Anglers must check fishing regulations every year to see what size and how many they can keep.

How would you know if this fish is legal to keep?



summary

Predators hunt other animals for food. A prey animal is a predator's food, but there are animals that are both predators and prey. The speckled kingsnake on pages 26 and 27 is an example of an animal that is a predator when hunting the prairie vole for food but is also prey when hunted by the hawk. People who catch fish and hunt deer and turkey for food play the role of predator in an ecosystem.

Why do some people think of predators as fearsome and frightening animals and think of prey animals as gentle and cute?



Wild turkeys eat acorns as well as insects, seeds and other nuts. They spend much of the year in forests but choose open areas at the edge of forests or grasslands for nesting.

Spring turkey hunting not only provides an opportunity to harvest a turkey for food but also provides perfect opportunities to see early spring wildflowers and to sit quietly and still enough in the woods to observe songbirds and other forest animals up close.



As of 2008, hunters have donated more than 1.4 million pounds of venison (deer meat) to Missouri food pantries through the Share the Harvest program.



Large deer populations create serious driving hazards. Hunters help reduce deer numbers.

That's more than 5.6 million quarter pound burgers!

During the fall turkey hunting season, a young male (jake), an adult male (gobbler) or a female (hen) turkey may be harvested. During the spring turkey season, only jakes, gobblers or bearded birds may be taken to protect hens and their young.

