MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST

VOLUME 86, ISSUE 12, DECEMBER 2025
SERVING NATURE & YOU

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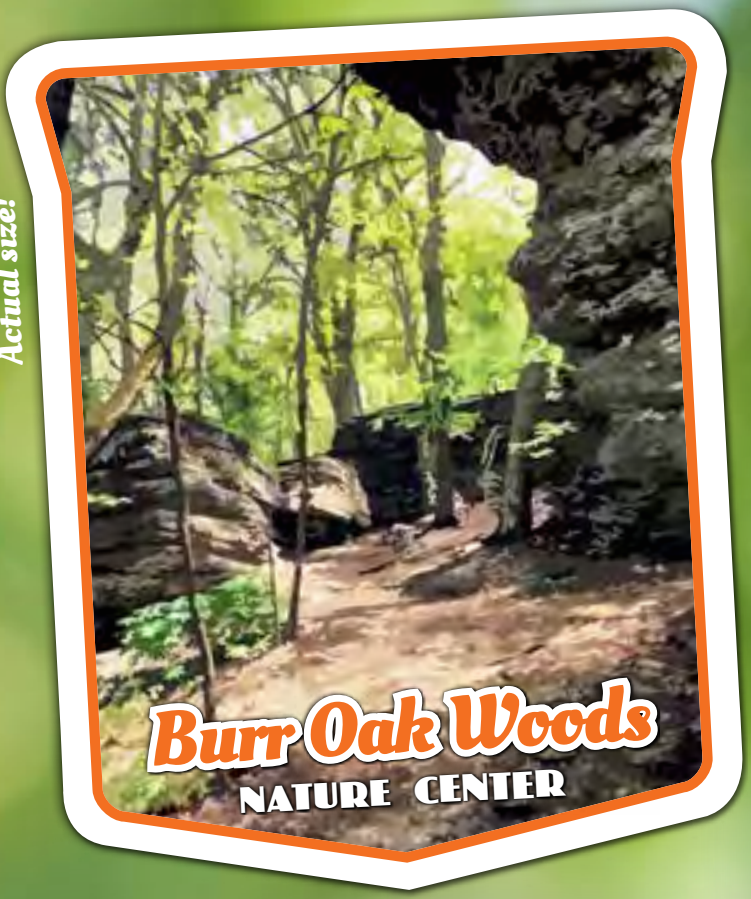

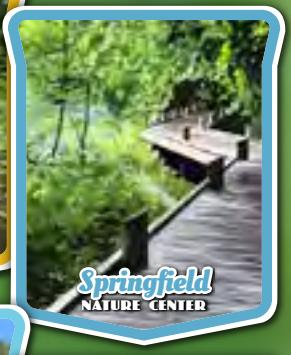

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MISSOURI
CONSERVATIONIST

ON THE COVER

A red fox.

BLAKE DIBELLO

Missouri Conservationist reader photo, submitted via the website.

Download this issue to your phone or tablet at **mdc.mo.gov/mocon**.

Download on the App Store | GET IT ON Google Play

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American avocets

Moth mullein

Three-toed box turtle

FEATURE

DEPARTMENTS

Avocets | Jian Xu | Flickr
Moth mullein | Peter Catalano | Flickr
Turtle | Jack Backs | Flickr

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Printed with soy ink

Inbox

Ethics in Wildlife Photography

by Noppadol Paothong

Photography is one of the most powerful tools for raising awareness. It's more than a technical exercise — it's a language of emotion and connection. Conservation photography isn't just about showing what something looks like — it's about helping people care about what they're seeing.

In the pursuit of a captivating image, it can be tempting to cross ethical lines, but doing so harms the very subjects we strive to protect. True wildlife photography is grounded in respect and care for the well-being of the subjects. Responsible behavior in the field means avoiding practices such as baiting, staging, or getting too close. Though these actions may seem harmless, they can disrupt natural behavior, cause stress, or even put an animal's life at risk.

Disturbing a nest or den for a closer shot, for instance, may cause parents to abandon their young or draw predators to a vulnerable area. Similarly, baiting animals alters natural behavior and can create dangerous dependencies or conflicts with humans. Ethical photographers recognize their presence in nature is a privilege, and the welfare of their subjects must always come before the photograph.

By practicing patience, integrity, and restraint, photographers can inspire respect for nature rather than exploitation of it. In the end, the most powerful images are those that tell authentic stories, revealing the beauty of wild creatures living freely and undisturbed in their natural world.

Want to see your photos in the *Missouri Conservationist*?

Submit your photos online via flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2026, mdc.mo.gov/magazine-reader-photos or by emailing readerphoto@mdc.mo.gov

We plan to feature more great reader photos in 2026. Use the submission methods, detailed in the box at left, to send us your best year-round pictures of native Missouri wildlife, flora, natural scenery, and friends and family engaged in outdoor activities. Please include where the photo was taken and what it depicts.

Goslings by Blake Dibello, via website submission

Letters to the Editor

Submissions reflect readers' opinions and may be edited for length and clarity. Email Magazine@mdc.mo.gov or write to:
MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST
PO BOX 180
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65102

READING ON THE ROAD

My granddaughter enjoyed her *Xplor* magazine while on a road trip with her dad. Thanks for offering this kid-friendly and educational magazine.

R. Samlow Smithville

Xplor *connects kids — and kids at heart — to nature and helps them find adventure in their own backyard. It is free to residents of Missouri. — The Editors*

HITTING THE HIGH POINTS

This *Conservationist* staff is really hitting the high mark of outdoor journalism. The eastern hellbender cover story in the August issue [*Wrinkled, Rare, and Remarkable*; Page 10], *Conserving Birds Beyond Our Borders* [September, *Nature Lab*, Page 4] and *Dark Skies* [September, Page 22] show the fascinating challenges confronting professional wildlife and fisheries biologists and resource foresters. The supporting photography was excellent, and your researchers' highlights were golden. Thank you.

John Buckner Hermann

HOORAY FOR SNAKES

Thank you for the picture of the prairie massasauga snake [October, *Ask MDC*, Page 7]. It was awesome, and it's such a beautiful snake. It's unfortunate that many people think the only good snake is a dead one. They need to educate themselves.

Sue Bullington Pleasant Hilll

Up Front

As we enter the holiday season, we will gather with friends and family to share traditions and reflect on the year behind and the year ahead. It's also a time to appreciate the landscapes and wildlife that shape our lives and the many people that keep conservation moving forward, many of which are captured in this issue. Much of my most memorable time is spent with family in the outdoors, as captured in the picture below.

Time in the outdoors often reminds me to slow down to enjoy and embrace what matters most. May this holiday season bring you time in the outdoors and moments of gratitude with the people and places that matter most to you.

JASON SUMNERS,
DIRECTOR
JASON.SUMNERS@MDC.MO.GOV

Our Mission

The Missouri Department of Conservation protects and manages the fish, forest, and wildlife of the state. We facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources.

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Have a Question for a Commissioner?

Send a note using our online contact form at **mdc.mo.gov/commissioners**.

Connect With Us!

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@moconservation
@MDC_online

Nature LAB at WORK

by Angie Daly Morfeld

The Missouri Department of Conservation team is diverse and dedicated to conserving, protecting, and improving our fish, forest, and wildlife resources.

Nick Oakley

WILD TURKEY PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Nick Oakley, MDC's wild turkey program coordinator, facilitates wild turkey research and monitors turkey populations using a variety of data sources, which he uses to provide regulation recommendations to the Missouri Conservation Commission. He also works with public and private land managers to improve turkey habitat across Missouri.

A TYPICAL DAY

Nick's typical day depends on the season and his current research project.

"You may find me working in the office, in the field, or with a landowner," Oakley said. "I spend a lot of time discussing turkeys with fellow turkey enthusiasts. I genuinely enjoy talking with folks who are passionate about wild turkeys. Their passion and excitement are contagious."

NOTABLE PROJECTS

Oakley says working on the Turkey Habitat Initiative (THI) has been one of the best projects he has ever been a part of.

"We are fortunate to have a strong tradition of conservation and turkey hunting in Missouri, so my goal is to continue to foster both."

Nick Oakley identifies plants and evaluates the structure of recently created turkey brood habitat, where young poults depend on specific vegetation conditions for survival.

BEN NICKELSON

Starting in the early 2000s, turkey numbers in Missouri began to decline due in large part to a lack of specific nesting and brooding habitat.

The THI gives landowners the necessary tools to start to reestablish high-quality nesting and brooding cover for turkeys. The results of this project should help to stabilize the population and move it in the right direction so that future generations can enjoy the resource.

"We are fortunate to have a strong tradition of conservation and turkey hunting in Missouri, so my goal is to continue to foster both and hopefully, through sound management and data-driven decision making, pass it to the next generation," Oakley said.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are interested in playing a role in turkey management, visit MDC's Turkey Habitat Initiative page online at **mdc.mo.gov/MOTurkeys**. Here you will find a whole suite of resources that can help you make a positive difference to turkeys in Missouri.

His Education

- Bachelor's degree, University of Missouri: fisheries/wildlife biology and forestry
- Master's degree, University of Wyoming: zoology

In Brief

DISCOVER NATURE THROUGH EAGLE DAYS

MISSOURI'S WINTER EAGLE WATCHING IS SPECTACULAR

→ Missouri's big rivers, many lakes, and abundant wetlands make it one of the leading lower 48 states for bald eagle viewing. Discover nature through MDC's Eagle Days events or on your own from December through February. Watch for eagles perched in large trees along the water's edge. Early in the morning you can see them flying and fishing for the day's meal. Be sure to dress for winter weather and don't forget cameras and binoculars. For scheduled events and tips for viewing on your own, visit **short.mdc.mo.gov/Zt6**.

NOPPADOL PAOTHONG

MDC AND MCFC RECOGNIZE MISSOURIANS FOR MAKING TREES WORK

For more than 30 years, MDC and the Missouri Community Forestry Council (MCFC) have recognized Missourians who prove themselves to be outstanding stewards of community trees through the Missouri Arbor Awards of Excellence. This year's awards were presented at the annual Missouri Community Forestry Council Conference in Kirkwood in September.

Congratulations to the 2025 recipients of the Missouri Arbor Awards of Excellence:

Winner of Individual Category —
Jason O'Malley, St. Louis

Winner of Individual Category —
Aaron Dohogne, St. Louis County

Winner of Municipal Category —
City of Kirkwood

Winner of Business/Institution Category —
Premier Charter School of St. Louis

Winner of Organization Category —
St. Louis Neighborhood Foresters

NEW NON-RESIDENT MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING PERMIT

Beginning Jan. 1, non-resident hunters in Missouri who want to pursue waterfowl, doves, snipe, woodcock, and rails will be required to purchase a new Non-Resident Migratory Bird Permit for $60. The new permit is part of a broader set of permit price adjustments by MDC and was approved by the Missouri Conservation Commission in October.

If non-resident hunters purchase a Migratory Bird Hunting Permit before Jan. 1, 2026, the permit will remain valid through the end of the season, Feb. 6, and no additional permit is needed for that season.

If non-resident hunters have not purchased a Migratory Hunting Bird Permit before Jan. 1, 2026, they must buy the new Non-Resident Migratory Bird Permit to hunt between Jan. 1 and the end of the season, Feb. 6.

Starting with the 2026–2027 migratory-bird hunting season, all non-residents must purchase the new Non-Resident Migratory Bird Permit.

Ask **MDC**

Got a Question for Ask MDC?
Send it to AskMDC@mdc.mo.gov
or call 573-522-4115, ext. 3848.


American robin

Q: Is there a reason we are seeing a lot of robins right now? I thought they flew south for the winter.

➔ It's common to see large winter foraging flocks of American robins, with other species mixed in as well, on the landscape in Missouri this time of year.

In the winter or non-breeding season in Missouri, robins and other species of birds — like European starlings or common grackles — are more gregarious than during the summer breeding season. They will group together in large foraging flocks in search of food, often berries. These flocks can number in the hundreds.

Robins also form communal roosts, which can be even larger — thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of birds. Favored roosting sites might be stands of eastern red cedars and vine-tangled woodlands that offer respite from wind and precipitation. These roosts can shift depending on weather patterns and when nearby resources (berries) are depleted. In spring, robins and other species will migrate north to their breeding grounds in the U.S. or Canada and disperse into smaller flocks or nesting pairs. Likely, a large roost exists near where you live.

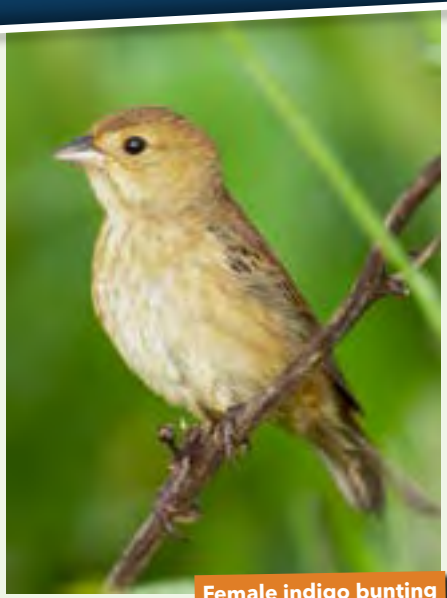

Long-tailed weasel

Q: What mammal is this?

➔ This is a long-tailed weasel, which is a species of conservation concern in Missouri.

The long-tailed weasel is a slender, long-bodied mammal with short legs and well-furred tail about half the length of the head and body. The head is small, flattened, and only slightly larger in diameter than the long neck. The ears are short and rounded, the whiskers prominent, and the small eyes beady. In summer, adults are usually dark brown above and yellowish white below with a white chin and black tail tip. In winter, the coat is paler, but sometimes in northern Missouri they have an all-white coat except for the black-tipped tail.

AMERICAN ROBIN: JIM RATHERT; LONG-TAILED WEASEL: (C) TWVPHOTO | DREAMSTIME.COM



Female indigo bunting

Q: I found this nest in brush about 3 feet off the ground and well protected by blackberry brambles. It's approximately 3 inches wide and 4 inches tall. The top is woven with fine strands of grass, and the bottom is composed of larger strands. Who made this nest?

This looks like an indigo bunting nest. These birds place their nests in shrubs about 1 to 3 feet from the ground, so this presentation is typical. They make cup nests made of fine grasses with thicker grass at the base.

A common bird in Missouri, indigo buntings perch in brushy fields, forest openings, woodland edges, yards, parks, and hedgerows. They are frequently seen flying up from gravel roads.

This is one of the most abundant and easily seen and heard birds in the state. To see them in the wild, find trees in a park, a clearing in the woods, or visit Katy Trail State Park on foot or bike. You'll notice them as they fly up from the ground or sit on a fence. In late spring, this species visits bird feeders.

What IS it?

Can you guess this month's natural wonder?

The answer is on Page 9.

INDIGO BUNTING NEST: RUTHANN RACKAWACK; INDIGO BUNTING: NOPPADOL PAOTHONG

Corporal Justin Emery
CAMDEN COUNTY CONSERVATION AGENT
offers this month's

AGENT ADVICE

Missouri is a great place to fish, even in the winter. If you're taking the boat out as the temperatures dip, keep these safety measures in mind. Check your equipment — including battery and life jackets — to make sure it's in proper order. Wear a properly fitted life jacket and be prepared should your vessel turn over. It takes mere minutes for hypothermia to set in. Give someone your plan for the day. Carry a radio or cell phone, but not in your pocket. A whistle is also a good idea because it can be used during times of distress. Be aware of changing weather conditions. Be respectful of others on the water and you'll have an enjoyable day.

PANCAKES

WITH MISSOURI MAPLE SYRUP, APPLES, AND PECANS

Few things bring a feeling of warmth and comfort like a stack of hot pancakes on a cold winter morning. And the crowning jewel on this stack of comfort is Missouri's native pecans, apples, and sweet maple syrup.

Makes 12 medium pancakes

MAPLE-SYRUP APPLES
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 large Missouri apples (peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch-thick slices)
½ cup maple syrup
½ teaspoon cinnamon

MELT butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add apples and 1 tablespoon maple syrup. Sauté for a few minutes until apples are tender. Mix in remaining maple syrup and cinnamon. Turn off heat and reheat briefly, if desired, just before the last pancake is cooked.

PANCAKES
⅔ cup white flour
⅓ cup whole-wheat flour
2 tablespoons yellow cornmeal
2 tablespoons turbinado or brown sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup buttermilk
1 cup plain low-fat yogurt
1 large egg
1½ tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
24 Missouri pecan halves, lightly toasted

WHISK together dry ingredients in a large bowl. In another bowl, whisk together buttermilk, yogurt, and egg until well blended. Add to dry ingredients and stir gently until just blended, but still lumpy (don't overmix). Gently mix in 1½ tablespoons melted butter.

HEAT griddle over medium heat. Melt a thin coating of butter over griddle. Drop batter by 1/3 cupfuls onto griddle. Cook pancakes until brown on bottom and bubbles form on top. Flip pancakes over and cook until bottoms are brown and pancakes are barely firm to the touch. Transfer to plate. Repeat with remaining batter, adding butter to the griddle as needed.

SPOON maple-syrup apples over pancakes and sprinkle with pecans. Set additional syrup on the table and use as needed.

This recipe is from *Cooking Wild in Missouri* by Bernadette Dryden, available for $16 at most MDC nature centers and online at www.mdcnatureshop.com.

PANCAKES: BERNADETTE DRYDEN; PECANS: (C) EALISA DREAMSTIME.COM

GIVE NATURE-THEMED GIFTS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Have nature lovers on your holiday gift list? MDC's online Nature Shop has you covered. Offerings include the ever-popular *Natural Events Calendar*, a variety of books, and more.

Holiday shoppers can also skip retail stores and visit one of our nature centers — located in Kirkwood, Cape Girardeau, Springfield, Kansas City, Blue Springs, Joplin, and Jefferson City — for an array of reasonably priced, nature-themed holiday gifts. To find the nature center closest to you, visit **short.mdc.mo.gov/4JV**.

Our holiday gift offerings include:

2026 Natural Events Calendar ($9) — This annual favorite has amazing images of native animals, plants, and places, along with phases of the moon, holidays and days of recognition, daily notes about natural events, and more.

You Discover Mini Field Guide for Xploring Outside ($8.95) — Adapted from MDC's *Xplor* magazine, this engaging new booklet combines 13 mini field guides into a single, convenient, on-the-go guide.

Coneflower Nature Journal ($8) — This journal includes simple tips to get started drawing or writing about nature. It is spiral bound with plenty of blank pages.

Cooking Wild in Missouri ($16) — This favorite cookbook features more than 100 recipes for native game, fish, fruits, nuts, and mushrooms.

Strange but True ($8.95) — This fun offering was adapted from the pages of MDC's *Xplor* magazine and features 350 weird and wild facts and illustrations about creatures that inhabit Missouri.

A Paddlers Guide to Missouri ($9) — This revised edition makes a great gift for canoeists, kayakers, and floaters with color photos, maps, and descriptions of 54 rivers and streams. The 102-page, spiral-bound guide includes trip planning tips, equipment recommendations, paddling pointers, and more. New to the 2023 edition are maps of the upper Mississippi River from Hannibal to St. Louis and an expanded section on the Big River.

Owl and Nuthatches Notecard Sets ($8) — This is great for gift giving. Each set includes 12 cards of either a barred owl or a pair of brown-headed nuthatches.

Missouri's Wild Mushrooms ($26) — This book is a great guide for hunting, identifying, and cooking the state's most common mushrooms.

Discover Missouri Natural Areas, Second Edition ($19.95) — This handy reference helps nature lovers experience 50 great examples of our state's natural heritage. The new edition features updated maps, text, references, and scientific names.

The Amphibians and Reptiles of Missouri, Third Edition ($29) — This classic book has been updated and expanded to a 522-page illustrated guide that provides descriptions, distribution, habitats, habits, breeding, and other information on nearly 130 species of native salamanders, toads, frogs, turtles, lizards, and snakes.

Purchase these and other items at MDC nature centers, through the MDC online Nature Shop at **www.mdcnatureshop.com**, or by calling 877-521-8632. Order early as some supplies are very limited. Applicable tax, shipping, and handling costs will apply.

WHAT IS IT?

AMERICAN BEAVER DAM

American beavers, considered "ecosystem engineers," construct dams using logs, mud, rocks, and grass. These dams provide habitat for plants, animals, birds, and insects. In Missouri, however, they are less likely to construct dams than they are in regions farther west and north. Instead, in our faster and fluctuating streams, they usually excavate a den or lodge in a high bank with an entrance below water.

DAVID STONNER

A Collection of *Moments*

READERS SHARE THEIR STORIES THROUGH PHOTOS

There is a rich history of storytelling that runs deep through the veins of human beings. From cave paintings — the earliest known form of storytelling — to oral narratives and the written word, people love to spin a good yarn. But there is purpose behind this time-honored tradition. To share a story with someone is to impart knowledge, provide a cautionary tale, or simply bring them along on an adventure they missed in person.

As times change, the methods by which stories are told do, too. Technological advancements like text, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, and Instagram provide opportunities for stories to be told faster and to a wider audience.

Cameras also are storytelling tools. They capture moments that can be told repeatedly without a single word. And that's what this photo essay is — your collection of moments. You, our readers, are telling a story with your shared photos. You are taking all of us on your adventures, and we are here for the tale. ▲

Blue Jay
John Middle Cain | via web

Bald Eagle
Raymond Huddleston | via Flickr

Eastern Bluebird
Barb M. Dowling | via web

Common Green Bottle Fly
Brad Wilson | via Flickr

Carolina Mantis
Mark Putnam | via Flickr

Eastern Comma Butterfly
Mark Putnam | via Flickr

Spur-Throated Grasshopper
Craig Alexander | via Flickr

Pleated Parasol Mushrooms
Kimberly Mathia | via Flickr

Great Horned Owl Joe Fasig | via Flickr

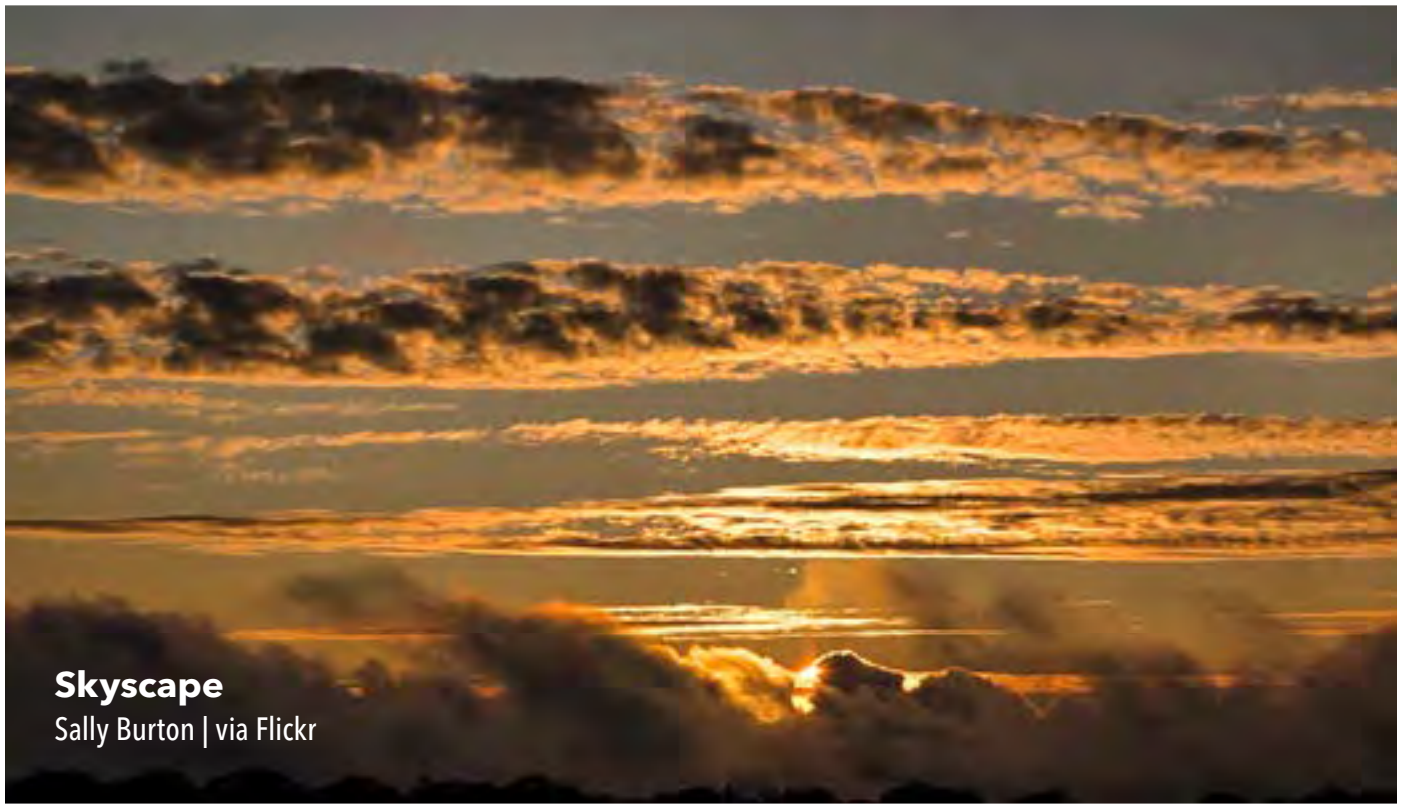
Collared Lizard
Kathy Bildner | via Flickr

Bobcat
Matt Lesniak | via web

Red-Tailed Hawk
Lecia Michelle | via web

Striped Skunk
Joe Fasig | via Flickr

Bald Eagle
Nolan Crank | via email



Skyscape
Sally Burton | via Flickr

House Finches
Ryan P. Perry | via web

Common Muskrat
Jack Backs | via Flickr

Longnose Gar
Alexander Jurkevich | via email

Little Blue Heron
Brad Wilson | via Flickr

Wild Turkey
Dean R. Specker | via web

Variegated Fritillary Chrysalis
Brian Hunt | via Flickr

Speckled Kingsnake
Zachary Snyman | via email

Red Trillium and Rue Anemone

Koral Martin | via web

Canada Goose

Doug Mansfield Wallace | via web

Wood Duck
Doug Mansfield Wallace | via web

Eastern Milksnake
Ross S. Griffin | via web

Sunflower Field Harold Rau | via Flickr

Whitebanded Crab Spider
William Allen | via Flickr

Pure Green Sweat Bee
David French | via Flickr

Get Outside in DECEMBER

Ways to connect with nature

The More You Snow

Trees prepare for the impending winter season — and the likelihood of snow and ice — by shedding their leaves. Without this additional foliage, trees collect far less precipitation and may fare better without the additional load.

Look around after a winter storm and see if you can identify the trees by the way they react to the snow and ice. Some trees, like cedars, are flexible and bend with the weight of ice and snow. Many trees that grow rapidly, such as silver maples, have relatively soft wood and their branches can break rather easily. Other trees, like oaks, grow slowly and have harder wood, so they are better able to withstand the rigors of a winter storm.

Frigid Fishing

Missouri is a great place to fish year-round. MDC stocks rainbow trout in certain lakes and streams in winter, beginning in November. In addition, bass, crappie, walleye, and catfish are popular wintertime fare. So, no need to store your pole and tackle. In the Show-Me State, the fish are always biting!

Deer of a Different Color

The deer that you are used to seeing in the fall, with their reddish-brown or tan coats, go through a bit of a wardrobe change for the winter months. Their color pattern changes to a grayish or grayish-brown. This is referred to as their winter, or blue, coat. The hairs of this coat are long and heavy. Each hair has many air spaces that act as insulators, helping to ensure warmth during cold weather. It also makes the deer more buoyant, allowing them to swim higher in the water during the winter months. The coat easily repels cold rain and wet snow.

Natural Events to See This Month

Here's what's going on in the natural world.

Christmas ferns grow on woody slopes.

Beavers swim under ice.

Snowy owls may visit the Show-Me State.

VIRTUAL

LEARN TO FISH: Virtual Fly Tying with TJ and Mike

Thursday • Dec. 11 • 6–7 p.m.
Online only
Registration required by Dec. 10. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/o4J.
All ages

Come and tie flies with TJ and Mike. The theme is antique flies. We will delve into the history of some old-fashioned flies and tell you some history about them.

LEARNING TO HUNT: Measuring Your Trophy

Saturday • Dec. 13 • 9–11 a.m.
Online only
Registration required by Dec. 12. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/o4U.
All ages

Ever wonder what people mean when they say their deer scored 170? Have you wanted to know if your harvest was a trophy-setting animal? Join us for this class to learn how to score your harvest and what animals can be scored. This class does not qualify you to become a scorer. An official scorer must score your animal to be eligible for any record setting.

Pearl of the Winter

Mushrooms aren't just a springtime delicacy. Some mushrooms, like oyster mushrooms, are available year-round. So, keep your skills sharp, get in the woods, and start your search. Oyster mushrooms are often found in clusters on stumps, logs, and trunks of deciduous trees.

Goatweed leafwings fly on warm days.

Ring-billed gulls gather along the Mississippi River.

GOATWEED LEAFWING, OYSTER MUSHROOMS: JOJO064, STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Places to Go

NORTHEAST REGION

Frost Island Conservation Area

Unique, but not a misfit

by Larry Archer

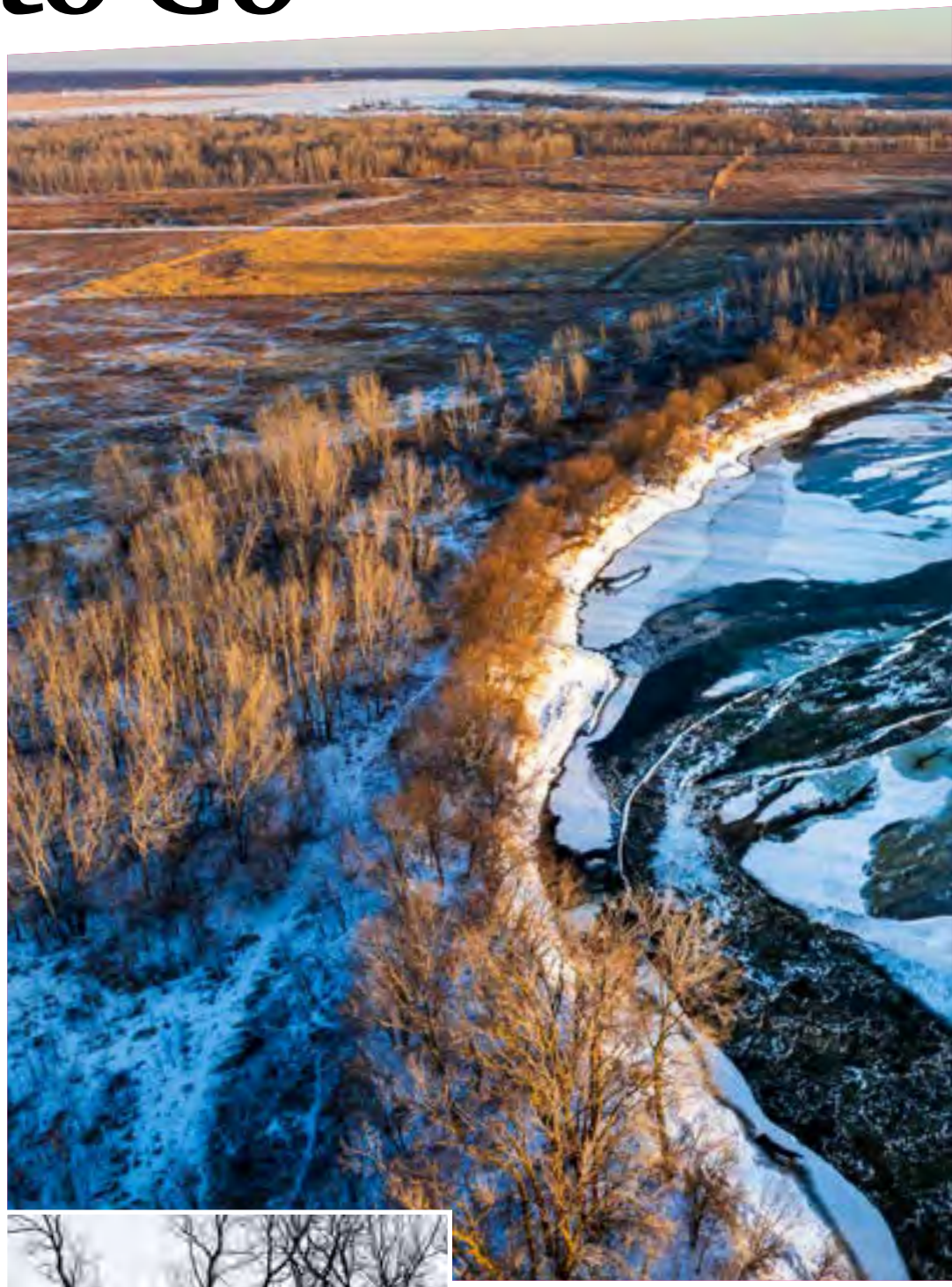
It is easy to see how one might confuse a place named Frost Island Conservation Area (CA) with a location from a Rankin/Bass animated Christmas special, but a visitor here is more likely to find sand prairies, fishing, or an occasional badger hole instead of a red-nosed reindeer, elfin dentists, or misfit toys.

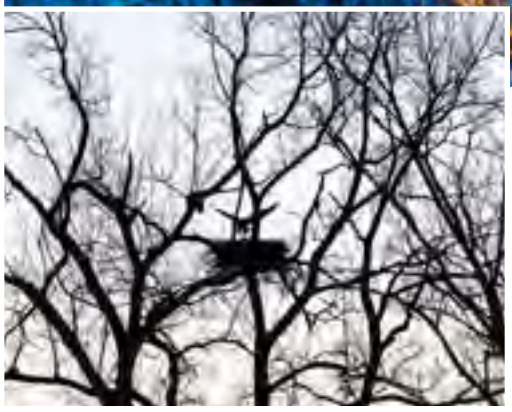
Located on 1,233 acres in northeast Missouri's Clark County, Frost Island CA also has a secret as mysterious as Frosty's stovepipe hat — it isn't really an island. Bordered on the north and west sides by the Des Moines River, it is more of a peninsula, but it might not have always been that way, said Wildlife Biologist Matthew Schwend, Frost Island CA manager.

"If you look at the map, there's an old water slough, so that might have been why it's called that," Schwend said. "Historically, it was, way back in the day, but it's not anymore."

And while its name and location suggest a frigid environment, it also features southern elements, he said.

"There are two sand prairies, which is kind of unique for the area," he said. "It's our only upland sand prairie in this part of the world that MDC manages."





"What's kind of neat about this area, for MDC land in my district, it's the only place you find prickly pear cactus. Down in southern Missouri, you see it like crazy. It's everywhere. But up here, it's on that sand prairie and that's it."

–Wildlife Biologist Matthew Schwend

DAVID STONNER

FROST ISLAND CONSERVATION AREA

consists of 1,233 acres in Clark County. From Wayland, take Highway 27 north 4 miles, then on Gravel Road 198 east 1 mile.

40.4491, -91.5595

short.mdc.mo.gov/okF 573-248-2530

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT

Bicycling Area includes 3.2 miles of improved, service, and unimproved roads open to bicycling year-round.

Birdwatching The eBird list of birds recorded at Frost Island CA is available at **short.mdc.mo.gov/okC**.

Camping Designated campsites. Open camping (walk-in, float-in, backpacking), except during deer and turkey seasons.

Fishing Includes 3.2 miles of Des Moines River frontage. **Catfish**.

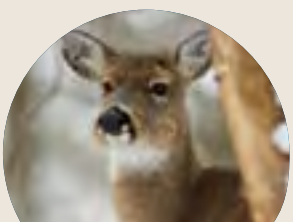
Hunting **Deer** and **turkey** Regulations are subject to annual changes. Refer to MDC's regulation page online at **short.mdc.mo.gov/Zjw**.

Also **dove**, **quail**, **rabbit**, and **squirrel**.

Waterfowl Hunting One large and two small wetland units. Open hunting. Regulations are subject to annual changes. Refer to MDC's *Migratory Bird and Waterfowl Hunting Digest 2025–2026* online at **short.mdc.mo.gov/4SZ**.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU VISIT

American badger



White-tailed deer

Ring-billed gull

Red-shouldered hawk

BADGER: TERRY SPIVEY, USDA FOREST SERVICE, BUGWOOD.ORG

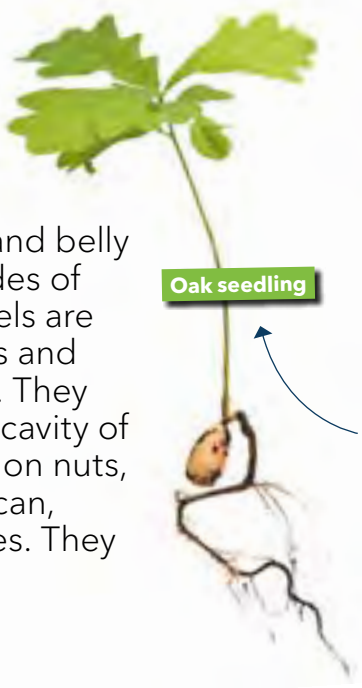
Wild Guide

Eastern Gray Squirrel

Sciurus carolinensis

Status	Size	Distribution
Common	Length: 14–21 inches; weight: ¾–1½ pounds	Statewide

The eastern gray squirrel is slender and smaller than its close relative, the fox squirrel. The fringe of the tail and belly are white and the back and sides of the body are gray. Gray squirrels are more common in bottomlands and rivers with a bushy understory. They build leafy nests in the fork or cavity of a tree. Squirrels prefer to dine on nuts, fruits, and buds of hickory, pecan, walnut, elm, and mulberry trees. They also enjoy field corn.



HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Gray squirrels are appreciated by wildlife watchers and hunters alike. People enjoy watching squirrels scamper around their homes, in nearby parks, and in wooded areas. Hunters also enjoy the delicious table fare squirrels provide. Up to 700,000 squirrels are taken annually in Missouri.

LIFE CYCLE

Gray squirrels have two mating periods — one in late December or early January and another from late May to early July. Pregnancy lasts about 45 days, and most litters, consisting of one to eight young, are born in February or March and July or August. They leave the nest for the first time at six to seven weeks old and are weaned about a week later.

ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

Squirrels have a habit of storing nuts in the ground, but they just as often have a habit of forgetting those stored nuts. Those unrecovered nuts eventually germinate, growing into trees that furnish not only food and shelter for subsequent squirrel populations, but also timber of economic value to humans.

Outdoor Calendar

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Give the Gift of Hunting and Fishing this Holiday Season

Purchase hunting and fishing permits for hunters and anglers on your holiday gift list from vendors around the state or online at **mdc.mo.gov/buypermits**. Remember, lifetime permits also make excellent gifts and can be purchased at lifetime.permit@mdc.mo.gov. For more information on lifetime permits, call 573-522-0107.

FISHING

Black Bass
Impounded waters and non-Ozark streams:
Open all year

Most streams south of the Missouri River:
- Catch-and-Keep:
  May 24, 2025–Feb. 28, 2026

Nongame Fish Gigging
Streams and impounded waters, sunrise to midnight:
Sept. 15, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Paddlefish
On the Mississippi River:
Sept. 15–Dec. 15, 2025

Trout Parks
During the catch-and-release season, Maramec Spring Park is open daily; other trout parks are open Friday–Monday.

Catch-and-Release:
Nov. 14, 2025–Feb. 9, 2026

TRAPPING

Badger, Gray Fox, Red Fox
Nov. 15, 2025–Jan. 31, 2026

Beaver, Nutria
Nov. 15, 2025–March 31, 2026

Bobcat, Coyote, Mink, Muskrat, Opossum, Raccoon, River Otter, Striped Skunk
Nov. 15, 2025–Feb. 28, 2026

Rabbits
Nov. 15, 2025–Jan. 31, 2026

For complete information about seasons, limits, methods, and restrictions, consult the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* at **short.mdc.mo.gov/Zib**. Current hunting, trapping, and fishing regulation booklets are available from local permit vendors or online at **short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZf**.

HUNTING

Badger, Gray Fox, Red Fox
Nov. 15, 2025–Jan. 31, 2026

Bobcat, Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk
Nov. 15, 2025–Feb. 28, 2026

Coyote
Restrictions apply during April, spring turkey season, and firearms deer season.

Open all year

Crows
Nov. 1, 2025–March 3, 2026

Deer
Archery:
Nov. 26, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Firearms:
- Late Antlerless Portion (open areas only):
  Dec. 6–14, 2025
- Alternative Methods Portion:
  Dec. 27, 2025–Jan. 6, 2026

Elk
Only hunters selected through a random drawing may participate in this hunting season.

Firearms:
Dec. 13–21, 2025

Groundhog (Woodchuck)
May 12–Dec. 15, 2025

Pheasant
Regular:
Nov. 1, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Quail
Regular:
Nov. 1, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Rabbits
Oct. 1, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Squirrels
May 24, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Turkey
Fall:
- Archery Portion:
  Nov. 26, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Waterfowl
See the Migratory Bird and Waterfowl Hunting Digest *or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZx for more information.*

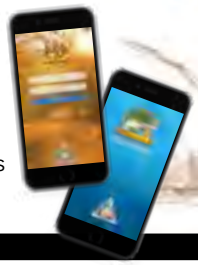
Wilson's (Common) Snipe
Sept. 1–Dec. 16, 2025

Woodcock
Oct. 18–Dec. 1, 2025

DUCK ILLUSTRATION: MARK RAITHEL; ENVELOPE: MIMOMY; STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Free MO Hunting and MO Fishing Apps

MO Hunting makes it easy to view permits, electronically notch them, and Telecheck your harvest. MO Fishing lets you view permits, find great places to fish, and ID your catch. Get both in Android or iPhone platforms at **short.mdc.mo.gov/Zi2**.



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@moconservation

Soon the sun will rise on a new year. You will be given the gift of a blank slate, a calendar of days just waiting to be filled. There are more adventures awaiting in Missouri's great outdoors, so get out there! What will you discover?

by **Noppadol Paothong**

Free to Missouri households

To subscribe, cancel your subscription, or update your address, visit **mdc.mo.gov/conmag**.