

MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST

VOLUME 87, ISSUE 3, MARCH 2026
SERVING NATURE & YOU





Dark Hollow Natural Area



Get inspired to go outdoors

Embrace the warmer spring weather by exploring this trio of nature activities.

Get Your Nature Boost

Join podcast host Jill Pritchard to explore everything in nature — from health benefits and wildlife viewing to unbelievable conservation stories. Find *Nature Boost* wherever you listen to podcasts.

Go Birding

Springtime is a great time to get out and go birding. The Missouri Birding Challenge is right around the corner in May. Informational webinars are available now at mdc.mo.gov/MObirdingchallenge.

Capture Memories

Nature photography can be incredibly rewarding. Grab a camera or your phone and head outside. Tips to get started:

- Find the right light — sunrise or sunset is a good time
- Pay attention to the background
- Remember the rule of thirds
- Keep your distance from wildlife

Discover Nature and **Never Lose Touch**.

For ways to connect with nature, visit mdc.mo.gov/neverlosetouch.





ON THE COVER

Emerging dogwood leaf at
Fuson Conservation Area.

DAVID STONNER

EF100mm lens, f/2.8 macro USM
1/100 sec, f/6.3, ISO 1000

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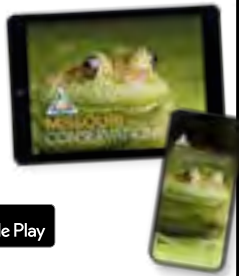
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Noppadol Paothong

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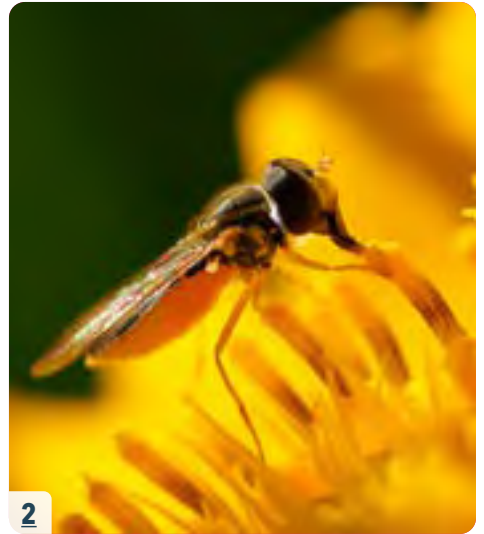
Active forest management aids
landowners in accomplishing
goals, protecting sustainability
and native species.

by **Jennifer Lindsay Kromann**

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Inbox



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

Submit your photos online via [flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2026/](https://www.flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2026/), [mdc.mo.gov/magazine-reader-photos](https://www.mdc.mo.gov/magazine-reader-photos) or by emailing readerphoto@mdc.mo.gov

- 1 | Bluebells at St. Francois State Park by **Mary E. DeGrant**, via website submission
- 2 | Flower fly by **Aracely Newton**, via website submission
- 3 | White dogtooth violet by **Bill G. Pinnell**, via Flickr
- 4 | American toad by **Jessica L. Duncan**, via website submission

➔ In the December issue we plan to feature even more great reader photos. Send in 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.



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

START THEM YOUNG

I have had a subscription to your magazine since I was 5 years old. I was always excited getting a new *Xplor* magazine in the mail. Now that I'm older, I still enjoy browsing through them. It's great that you teach people about our environment and how to keep it in better condition. The helpful tips to keep people safe and the fun facts are amazing.

I recently read the *Missouri Conservationist* and noticed the section in the back with the hunting, fishing, and trapping seasons [*Outdoor Calendar*, Page 33]. I find this very useful and will keep it to use for later reference.



Waylon McCracken via email

DECEMBER PHOTOS

I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed the readers' photos in the December issue [*A Collection of Moments*, Page 10]. I only wish the locations of the photos were included.

Leslee Jacobson St. Louis

We strive to provide as much information as possible alongside the photos we publish. However, in the December issue, since the photos are submitted by our readers, we are limited by the information provided. This serves as a good reminder, when submitting photos, always include your name, the location where the photo was taken, and a brief description of what the photo captures. —The Editors

Up Front



✦ I'm anxiously awaiting the start of spring — the soft, subtle bite from a crappie on the end of a line, the first gobble from a turkey, and early color of redbuds in bloom. The opportunities of spring are on their way, like the opening of catch-and-keep trout season at trout parks and snagging season for one of the ancient paddlefish that still inhabit our lakes and big rivers today.

Speaking of ancient fish, Missouri is home to three species of sturgeon — shovelnose, pallid, and lake. All three are part of long-term restoration efforts led by the department in partnership with federal agencies and our neighboring states. Once nearly eliminated from the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, hatchery production, stocking, habitat creation, research and long-term monitoring are being done to aid in their recovery (See *Bringing Back the Sturgeon*, Page 10).

Like sturgeon recovery, forest management crosses generations. The oaks planted by forest management today will provide shade and acorns for decades to come. The work of timber harvest, timber stand improvement, and regeneration efforts coupled with thoughtful decisions of present day forest managers shape wildlife habitat and forest health for years to come. These efforts play out in real time and are highlighted in *A Forest's Journey*, Page 22.

These are just two recent reminders — steady, persistent conservation work by state and federal agencies, private landowners, and engaged conservationists play out over generations. Your engagement, however big or small, ensures Missouri's fish, forest, and wildlife endure for generations to come.

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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Nature LAB

MDC uses research to improve fish, forest, and wildlife management

EDUCATION

Nature as a Learning Tool

Researchers look at how students experience MDC’s school curriculum

by Dianne Van Dien

✳ **Launched in 2009**, MDC’s Discover Nature Schools (DNS) curriculum provides hands-on science lessons centered on Missouri’s habitats and wildlife. Today, DNS lessons are taught in more than 900 schools across the state and are growing in popularity. Researchers at MDC and the University of Missouri recently began a study to gauge the effectiveness of DNS curriculum.

“There is a desire to understand the impact this curriculum is having on key student outcomes, especially outcomes related to science learning and connectedness to nature,” said MDC Science Unit Supervisor Ellie Prentice.

Researchers will also look at whether attending the Boone County Nature School (BCNS) deepens these outcomes. While all DNS lessons have outdoor components, time outside at BCNS is longer and more immersive. All fifth graders in Boone County go to BCNS three times over the school year for a total of seven days.



Students learn about science and nature through outdoor lessons at Boone County Nature School. The nature school is an 111-acre site dedicated to outdoor learning that opened in 2024, operated by Columbia Public Schools in partnership with MDC.

For the study, surveys will be given to fifth graders in three Missouri school districts: Columbia, which uses DNS as its science curriculum and whose students attend BCNS; another district that uses DNS but does not have a nature school; and a third district that does not use DNS. The same survey will be given at the beginning and end of the school year to see how students’ perceptions change after a year of instruction.

“We’re now piloting this in Columbia to see how the survey administration goes,” explained former MDC Scientist Angela Catalano. “We want to make sure the survey works well with the students and is accessible to them.”

In 2026–2027, the full-scale study will begin and will add the two other school districts (still to be finalized). Fifth graders from Columbia will also be asked to illustrate their nature school experience in a drawing and to write an accompanying caption.

“This drawing and writing exercise will allow us to see how learners are creating meaning based on their experiences in a way the survey alone couldn’t capture,” said MDC Social Science Program Coordinator Caleb O’Brien.

Findings from this research will be used to improve DNS programs.

At a Glance

Environmental education is known to promote learning, self-confidence, critical thinking, and connection to nature. To evaluate how well MDC’s Discover Nature Schools curriculum conveys these benefits, researchers are giving before and after surveys to fifth grade students.

Sample Survey Questions:

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|----|---|----|----|
| I know how the parts of nature interact. | 👍👍 | 👍 | 👍👍 | 👍👍 |
| I am interested in science. | 👍👍 | 👍 | 👍 | 👍👍 |
| I can solve problems. | 👍👍 | 👍 | 👍 | 👍👍 |
| I can use science to understand things. | 👍👍 | 👍 | 👍 | 👍👍 |
| I want to spend more time outside. | 👍👍 | 👍 | 👍 | 👍👍 |
| I can achieve my goals. | 👍👍 | 👍 | 👍 | 👍👍 |

In Brief

News and updates from MDC



Hailey Smith and her mother, Kelly, look for birds at August A. Busch Memorial Conservation Area during springtime.

LET'S GO BIRDING

POLISH OFF YOUR BINOCULARS — IT'S TIME FOR ANOTHER BIRDING CHALLENGE

➔ The Missouri Birding Challenge (MBC) is back! MDC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF) invite both new and experienced birders to join the 2026 MBC May 1-22.

In preparation for the 2026 MBC, join MDC and USFWS birding experts and enthusiasts for this special series of webinars on birding and key issues facing birds and bird conservation in Missouri:

- **Birding for (and with) Kids** with MDC Naturalist Austin Lambert, March 12, 6-7 p.m. — See *Get Outside* [Page 29] for all the details.
- **Missouri Birds and Habitats** with Missouri State Ornithologist Kristen Heath-Acre, April 16, 6-7 p.m. — New to birding or need a refresher? Join Kristen for a primer on identification of Missouri's common birds by sight and sound and their associated habitats. Whether new to birding or experienced, there are always tips and tricks to learn in the world of birds. Register at short.mdc.mo.gov/o3A.

MBC participants will compete alone or in teams in five categories based on age, birding location, or experience. Birders will use eBird (eBird.org) to record their lists of birds identified in public natural areas around the state or even in their own backyards.

There is a fee of \$15 per person, or \$10 per team in the youth Fledgling category. Fees are collected by MCHF and contribute to migratory bird conservation efforts and projects. Registration fees were reduced from last year, based on participant feedback, and a new Big Day category will challenge registrants to record as many bird species as possible in the 24 hours of May 9 — World Migratory Bird Day — a global birding event.

Once participants complete a category and submit their team's mandatory eBird report, they will be entered into a drawing for fun, bird-related prizes, such as binoculars and gift cards. The Missouri Birding Society (mobirds.org), Columbia Audubon Society (columbia-audubon.org), and the Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater Kansas City (burroughs.org) are prize sponsors of the 2026 MBC.

Register for the 2026 MBC April 1-30. Watch Birdwatching: Introduction and Benefits, a webinar about the 2026 MBC, at mdc.mo.gov/MObirdingchallenge.



AGENTS IN ACTION

By Holly Dentner

March 15 marks the start of paddlefish season, when thousands of snaggers hope to encounter this giant, ancient sport fish, which is also Missouri's official state aquatic animal. The start of this season also means our conservation agents are busy with enforcement to prevent the poaching of paddlefish eggs for illegal caviar sales.

"Paddlefish are a valuable resource and poaching for their eggs, or roe, is a significant threat," said Lieutenant Tyler Brown, Lake of the Ozarks district. "Missouri has strict regulations on the number and size of the paddlefish you can snag, but there are additional laws that apply to their eggs, too."

The *Wildlife Code of Missouri* says that extracted paddlefish eggs may not be possessed while on waters of the state or adjacent banks, and may not be transported, bought, sold, or offered for sale.

That means if you snag a paddlefish, you must transport the whole fish from the water to your destination. Once there, you can process the fish, including extracting any eggs. But it is illegal to buy, sell, or offer paddlefish eggs for sale in Missouri.

Unfortunately, poachers still try to steal valuable roe. A couple of incidents occurred last year at the Lake of the Ozarks. In both cases, agents received intelligence that paddlefish egg violations were underway and mobilized to gather evidence.

In one instance, agents spent 19 hours conducting covert surveillance before conducting a traffic stop to catch the suspects as they headed out of town. Agents issued the appropriate citations and seized 265 containers of processed caviar, 13 gallon-size bags of unprocessed paddlefish eggs, and 24 bags of paddlefish filets (see image above).

Another instance led agents to a group of people staying at a short-term rental. Once the group hit the road, traffic stops were made, citations issued, and evidence seized. In total, the suspects had over 120 pounds of processed caviar and unprocessed paddlefish eggs.

"Stealing hundreds of pounds of fish and eggs is an egregious violation of the laws intended to protect the paddlefish population in Missouri," said Brown. "It also affects the quality of fishing for everyone. These people are stealing from every citizen in the state."

This is just another example of our agents in action.

Ask MDC

Got a Question for Ask MDC?

Send it to AskMDC@mdc.mo.gov
or call 573-522-4115, ext. 3848.

Q: Last March, an F2 tornado moved through Arnold, causing considerable damage. Earlier on the day of the storm, we saw a mixed flock of northern cardinals and wrens. After the winds, only a couple of birds remained. Were they killed? Did they sense danger and flee? How do birds survive big storms?

➔ Birds often will flee large systems of thunderstorms. They can sense them far better than we can and will move. Sometimes they get caught in the system and are carried large distances — even hundreds of miles — to new locations, Missouri State Ornithologist Kristen Heath-Acre said.

For example, shortly after the Arnold tornado in March, a vermilion flycatcher visited Missouri. It's possible the small bird was carried by the storm from its home in the southwestern United States and Mexico. Sometimes, however, violent storms injure or kill birds.

Unless they are banded or tagged, scientists cannot really know what might befall a specific bird or flock. But there are documented instances of birds returning after large storms moved through their territories, although they may adjust their home range based on the loss of nesting habitat or food availability, Heath-Acre said.

Q: Which factor has the biggest effect on the timing of bluegills' spring spawn? Is it the temperature of the water, day length, or some other factor?

➔ Water temperature plays the biggest role in determining the spawning time of fish. For bluegill, the spawning



Vermillion flycatcher



American mink and plain-bellied watersnake

temperature is 70-75 degrees. Look for these fish to deposit eggs between mid-May to mid-August.

Bluegill have a fascinating breeding behavior. Certain non-nesting males — called “sneakers” or “satellites” — have the color pattern and behavior of females. They enter other males’ nest areas and fertilize eggs without alerting the territorial-nest-holding male.

Q: I was at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge near Puxico when I saw an American mink swim across a ditch and grab a large plain-bellied watersnake. It fought with the snake, dragged it up the bank, and disappeared with it into a hole. Do minks eat snakes?

➔ Yes, American minks will eat snakes and many other types of prey. These semiaquatic mustelids prey on mice, rabbits, and other terrestrial animals. But they also feed on fish, crayfish, and other aquatic life. Minks also predate waterfowl and their eggs during breeding season.

Minks are almost entirely brown, being somewhat darker on the back and toward the tip of the tail. They have white chins and some irregular white spots on the throat,

chest, and belly. Their summer coats are lighter and less dense than their winter coats.

Plain-bellied watersnakes are often seen basking on logs in shallow water, on branches above water, and along the shore. They tend to be pugnacious when cornered or attacked; they’ll often strike and bite viciously. They prefer quiet or slow-moving waterbodies, such as swamps, sloughs,

oxbows, seasonally flooded bottomland woods, drainage ditches, lakes, and ponds.

The plain-bellied watersnake is a medium-sized, heavy-bodied, dark-colored, semiaquatic snake with a plain yellow belly. It is mainly gray, greenish gray, or brownish black, with little or no pattern on its back. Populations in western Missouri are more likely to have blotches along the back and sides.

What IS it?

Can you guess this month’s natural wonder?

The answer is on Page 9.



WE ARE CONSERVATION

Spotlight on
people and partners
by Emily Franklin

John Haefner

→ John Haefner of Iron County seized the opportunity to acquire the 600-acre property where he enjoyed countless childhood adventures. Driven by a desire to honor the land that holds his cherished memories, he collaborated with MDC to restore the property to its pristine state. The results exceeded his expectations.

Honoring the past, managing for the future

Over the past decade, John has worked closely with Julie Norris, MDC priority habitat specialist, and engaged a forestry consultant to develop a comprehensive forest management plan for his land. He leveraged cost-share assistance to implement various management activities, including glade restoration, timber stand improvement, firebreak installation, prescribed burns, and the establishment of wildlife water facilities.

In his own words

"I am hooked and I couldn't have done any of it without MDC. It is truly a dream come true."

📷 by David Stonner



John and Delena Haefner (left) visit with Julie Norris, MDC priority habitat specialist, on their property.

What's **your** conservation superpower?

MONASP STATE ARCHERY CHAMPIONSHIP

Get ready for another exciting year of archery competition and fun at the 2026 Missouri National Archery in the Schools Program (MoNASP) State Archery Championship March 18–21 at the Branson Convention Center on the Landing in Branson.

Every March, the MoNASP State Archery Championship brings together talented youth archers from across the state to compete in a celebration of skill, sportsmanship, and teamwork. The MoNASP State Championship has seen tremendous growth and is the second-largest state archery tournament in the nation.

More than 4,300 student archers are expected to compete after working hard throughout the school year to achieve qualifying scores through various local MoNASP tournaments.

For more information and tournament details from our MoNASP partner, the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oUE.

HUNTING AND FISHING BOOKLETS AVAILABLE

Missouri hunters, trappers, anglers, and others can get free copies of MDC's updated booklets on spring turkey hunting, hunting and trapping, and fishing starting in March. Booklets are available at MDC regional offices, MDC nature centers, and other places where permits are sold. The handy booklets have information on related permits, seasons, species, regulations, limits, conservation areas, sunrise and sunset tables, and more. Get booklet information online at mdc.mo.gov using the search tool at the top of the homepage.



PADDLEFISH SEASON BEGINS MARCH 15



Paddlefish, named for their large, paddle-shaped snouts, are an ancient species that can grow to 7 feet and weigh more than 100 pounds.

Missouri's major paddlefish snagging waters include Lake of the Ozarks, Harry S. Truman Reservoir, and Table Rock Lake. The paddlefish snagging season for these and most other waters in the state runs March 15 through April 30. The season for the Mississippi River is March 15 through May 15, with a fall season of Sept. 15 through Dec. 15.

A fishing permit is required, unless exempt. The daily limit is two paddlefish, and the possession limit is four. No person shall continue to snag after taking a daily limit of two paddlefish on these waters. Learn more about paddlefish, snagging regulations, minimum lengths, snagging reports, and more at short.mdc.mo.gov/Z9B.

WHAT IS IT? GREATER YELLOWLEGS

Named for their prominent, bright, stiltlike legs, greater yellowlegs are large shorebirds that forage for worms and other invertebrates in flooded pastures, flooded row-crop stubble, mudflats, shorelines, and marshes. Their call is a loud series of *tew, tew, tew*, usually three or more in a row. Greater yellowlegs are often the first to sound the alarm when danger threatens, earning them the nickname tattlers or tell-tales.



Bringing Back the Sturgeons

MDC IS HELPING MISSOURI'S STURGEON POPULATION

by Andrew Branson

There is a group of fish that swims in Missouri's rivers that has the tail of a shark, whiskers like a catfish, and mouth like a sucker. These fish are called sturgeons.

Sturgeons are a primitive group of fish that has been around for millions of years. The first true sturgeons are believed to have emerged around 100 million years ago during the Upper Cretaceous Period.

Today, there are 27 species in the world, with eight species in North America. The three species that are found in Missouri are shovelnose, pallid, and lake sturgeons.

Some sturgeon species rank amongst the largest freshwater fish in the world. The white sturgeon, found in Pacific

coastal rivers of North America, reaches a length of about 20 feet, with a weight of nearly 2,000 pounds.

Missouri's sturgeons are not that massive, but our lake sturgeon may still reach an impressive 8 feet long and more than 200 pounds during its 150-year lifespan.

Sturgeons prefer larger rivers with silty or sandy bottoms and are extremely migratory fish. They can travel hundreds of miles each year on spawning migrations. In Missouri, sturgeons can be found in the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and the larger rivers that connect to them. Sturgeons are long-lived and have a slow reproductive rate. It takes many years for female sturgeons to reach reproductive maturity, and then

they often spawn only once between two and 10 years, depending on the species. This slow growth and late maturity make sturgeons especially vulnerable to overharvest for their meat as well as for their eggs, which is used for caviar.

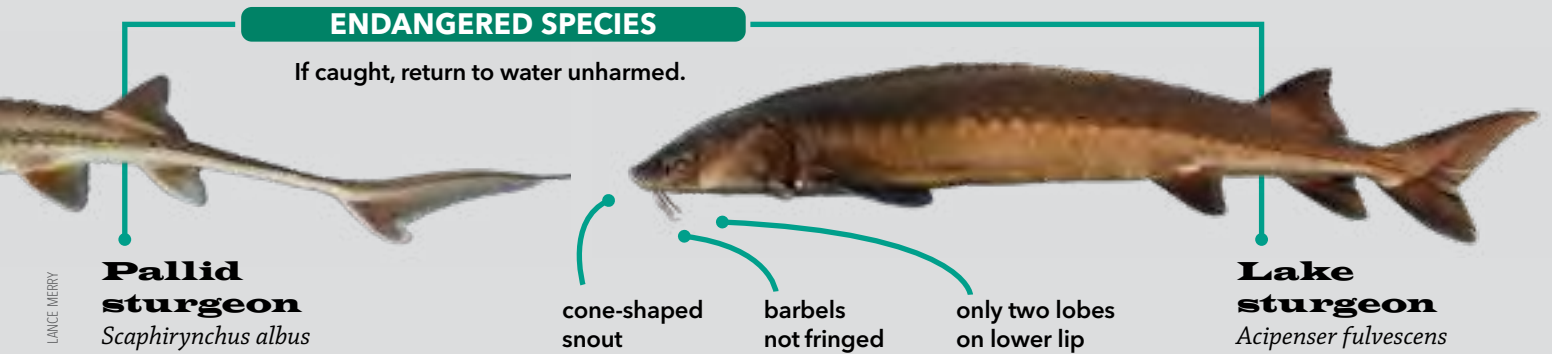
The construction of dams and other changes of river channels have destroyed much of the spawning and rearing habitat sturgeons need. This, along with overfishing, has contributed to the decline in the number of sturgeons. The lake sturgeon is listed as an endangered fish in Missouri, and the pallid sturgeon is listed as federally endangered. While our shovelnose sturgeon is not listed as endangered, it does have regulations that prevent its commercial harvest in parts of the state





Pallid sturgeon

PHOTOGRAPH BY
CLIFF WHITE



LANCE MERRY

Saving the Sturgeons

SHOVELNOSE STURGEON

Shovelnose sturgeons are designated as a game and a commercial fish in Missouri. Commercially, anglers pursue shovelnose sturgeons for their eggs, or roe, to make caviar, which is highly valued compared to most other commercial fish species.

During 2009–2010, MDC staff assessed shovelnose sturgeon populations to help guide management decisions. Due to shovelnose sturgeon populations appearing very similar to the federally endangered pallid sturgeon, in 2010 the commercial harvest of shovelnose sturgeons was prohibited where the two species coexist by the Endangered Species Act. In Missouri, commercial harvest of shovelnose sturgeons is now limited to the Mississippi River upstream of St. Louis (Pools 26, 25, 24, 22, 21, and 20).

In 2024, a multi-year study began to assess shovelnose sturgeon populations in the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. MDC scientist Joe McMullen studies Missouri’s big rivers fisheries and is involved with the shovelnose sturgeon study.

“The project will compare populations of shovelnose sturgeon where commercial harvest still occurs to those that have been unfished for many years,” McMullen said.

He says to be on the lookout for fish that have been tagged as part of this study.



MDC staff tags a sturgeon.

“Reporting tagged fish to an MDC office is important,” McMullen said.

If you catch a tagged fish, take note of the following information:

- Date and location of catch
- Full tag ID
- Length of fish
- Harvested or released

Some fish have also received a telemetry tag that is implanted into the body cavity of the fish to monitor their movement and migration.

“At the conclusion of the population assessment, we will evaluate the need for regulation changes to maintain healthy shovelnose sturgeon populations statewide and sustainable commercial fisheries on the upper Mississippi River into the future,” McMullen said.

PALLID STURGEON

Pallid sturgeons are listed as an endangered species federally and on the state level. Therefore, it is not a game fish

Reporting tagged fish to an MDC office is important. If you catch a tagged fish, take note of the following information:

DATE & LOCATION OF CATCH

FULL TAG ID

LENGTH OF FISH

HARVESTED OR RELEASED

and if caught must be released immediately unharmed. Once a commercially fished species, overharvest and the construction of dams and habitat loss have reduced their numbers to dangerously low levels. Another threat to their survival is hybridization with the more common shovelnose sturgeon.

MDC has a long history of working with pallid sturgeons. In 1992, MDC's Blind Pony Hatchery was the first hatchery to successfully spawn pallid sturgeons. To date, MDC has stocked over 480,000 pallid sturgeon.

Since 2005, MDC has been working with other state agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment Program. MDC's field station has conducted annual sampling for over 25 years. Adam McDaniel, Kasey Whiteman, and Megan Ryba are part of MDC's Missouri River and Biometrics Unit that participates in this pallid sturgeon effort.

McDaniel, an aquatic scientist, says some of the tools used for monitoring this rare species include trotline sampling for juveniles and adults; benthic trawling for very young sturgeon, which is similar to how shrimp are captured by pulling nets across the river bottom; and acoustic telemetry to track movement and habitat use of juveniles

and adults and identify spawning locations.

"Annual sampling shows that there are still some wild adult pallid sturgeon surviving in the river system, and that larval pallid sturgeons can drift over 800 miles before settling out," said Whiteman, Science Unit supervisor. "Current pallid sturgeon populations are stable, but there is not enough natural reproduction for a self-sustaining population, which is the ultimate goal of recovery. Little to no captures of wild pallid sturgeon, age 1 or 2, indicate that there is a bottleneck in fish growing to this age."

As part of this effort, adult pallid sturgeons are captured and transported to USFWS Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery in South Dakota. They are spawned in the hatchery and raised until they reach a year old. Then they are

stocked throughout the lower Missouri River to supplement and conserve genetic diversity in the population.

"Survival rates of hatchery-raised pallid sturgeon released at age 1 is quite high; however, it takes over a decade or more for those fish to become reproductive," said McDaniel.



MDC staff identifies a young pallid sturgeon.

In 1992, MDC's Blind Pony Hatchery was the first hatchery to successfully spawn pallid sturgeons. To date, MDC has stocked over **480,000** pallid sturgeon.

LAKE STURGEON

Despite their name, lake sturgeons are almost always found in Missouri's big rivers. While not federally listed as endangered, the species is listed as either threatened or endangered in 19 of the 20 states within the fish's original U.S. range, including Missouri.

MDC's fisheries management staff have focused on habitat restoration in Missouri, which has proven to be a success.

Through cooperative efforts with USACE, lake sturgeons have spawned at Mel Price Lock and Dam on the Mississippi River for four consecutive years. Fisheries Biologist Sarah Peper has worked to telemetry-tag and track lake sturgeons at the site, while USACE has modified flows to encourage the spawning.

MDC hatchery staff have relied on the USFWS hatchery system for decades to provide Missouri with fertilized lake sturgeon eggs and fingerlings that are ready to be stocked.

Forty years after the first hatchery-reared lake sturgeon stocking efforts in Missouri, MDC staff began collecting reproductively mature adults to gather and fertilize eggs, rear the hatchlings, and stock the fingerlings back into their natural habitats.

"In April 2025, we crossed a historic milestone," said Fisheries Biologist Travis Moore, who works closely with



Sarah Peper, fisheries biologist, inserts a telemetry tag into a sturgeon.

lake sturgeons. "For the first time ever, MDC staff collected wild broodstock and successfully spawned them at Blind Pony Hatchery. The fry were raised at Lost Valley Hatchery and the USFWS's Neosho National Fish Hatchery and stocked this fall."

Kurt Hentschke, manager at Hunnewell Hatchery, says this is a team effort.

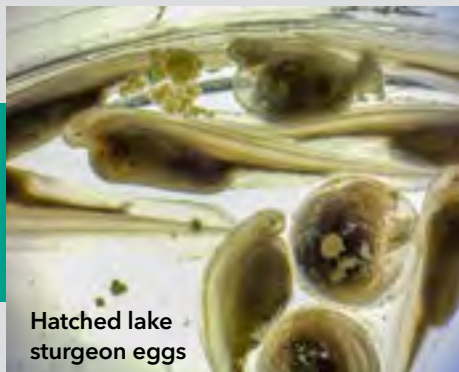
"Blind Pony and Hunnewell Hatchery staff worked together to spawn these fish at Blind Pony Hatchery," Hentschke said. "The fish were then raised to a larger size at Lost Valley Hatchery."

Lost Valley Hatchery plays a key role in rearing these fish due to the cooler temperatures they require.

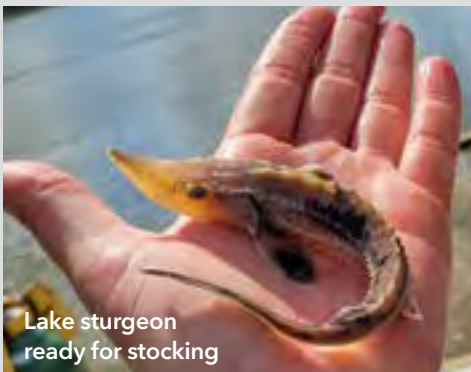
Rearing to a size greater than 6 inches is done solely at Lost Valley Hatchery," said Drew Burdick, hatchery manager. "This is an incredible achievement thanks to the collaboration between several state and federal agencies and other partnering organizations."

MDC is also working to develop better ways to feed these fish in the hatcheries.

"We are conducting feed studies to try transitioning lake sturgeon to a cheaper, easier to acquire commercial fish food like what is used for other species," said Nathan Storts, manager at Blind Pony Hatchery. "Currently they are raised on a diet of live brine shrimp, frozen brine shrimp, and blood worms, which is very expensive."



Hatched lake sturgeon eggs



Lake sturgeon ready for stocking



MDC staff with a mature lake sturgeon

MDC FILE PHOTOS

What to Do if You Catch a Sturgeon?

Lake sturgeons are becoming an incredible species recovery story in Missouri thanks to multiple generations of professionals dedicating their careers to management of this species.

Proper identification is key to determining what should be done with any sturgeon you catch. Shovelnose sturgeons are the only sturgeons allowed to be harvested in Missouri and regulations apply. Pallid and lake sturgeons are protected and must be immediately released unharmed.

Report any tagged fish you catch by calling the phone number on the tag or your local MDC regional office.

Sturgeons are an ancient group of fish and with proper study, management, and fishing regulations, they will hopefully be around for generations to come. ▲

Andrew Branson has been with MDC since 2005 and now works out of the headquarters in Jefferson City. He knows Missouri is a great place to fish and enjoys spending his free time doing just that.



NOFPADOL PAOTHONG



Lake sturgeon fry

The Perfect Dichotomy

THE SUN'S WARMTH HERALDS SPRING'S GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, he wrote, "It is one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade." In this one sentence, he perfectly captures the dichotomy that is a spring day in Missouri.

Heading into the spring season, there definitely will be days that feel like we are caught between two seasons. There might even be periods of time where it feels like winter wants to overstay its welcome. But if we follow the light of the sun, we know warmer days are ahead.

All of nature knows this. The trees and flowers awaken and start budding and blooming. Birds return and butterflies flutter about. Mammals that took to their dens for a long winter nap emerge to feel the warmth of the spring sunshine.

So, turn your back on winter's shade and follow the sun. We are headed toward spring.



FIELD SPARROW

Noppadol Paothong

EF800mm lens | 1/125 sec | f/8



**BLACK AND GOLD
BUMBLEBEE ON
WILD BERGAMOT**
Noppadol Paothong
15mm lens | 1/125 sec | f/16



**LETTERED
SPHINX MOTH**
David Stonner
RF100mm macro lens
1/500 sec | f/7.1



**WHITE-TAILED DEER AT RUNGE
CONSERVATION NATURE CENTER**

David Stonner
RF100-500mm | 1/500 sec | f/8



FOX SQUIRREL

Noppadol Paothong
EF100-400mm | 1/125 sec | f/5.6



**BIG CREEK
CONSERVATION AREA**

David Stonner
RF100-500mm | 1/500 sec | f/6.3

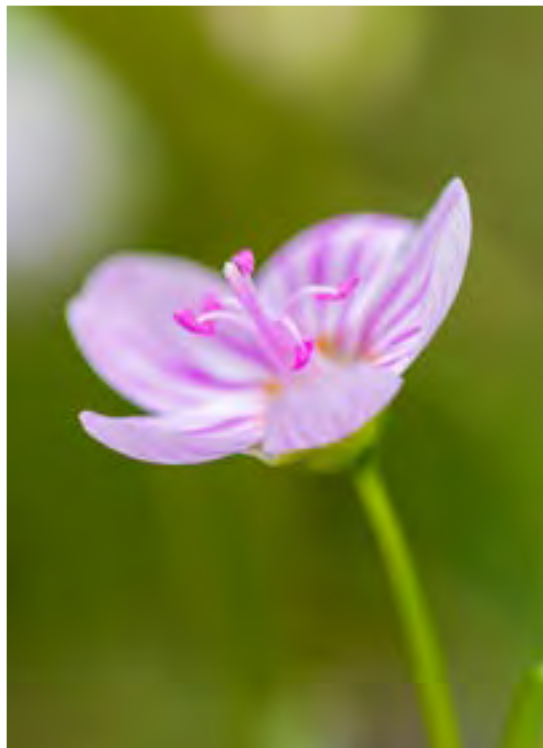


**WILD PLUM TREE AT
OZARK NATIONAL
SCENIC RIVERWAYS**

Noppadol Paothong
EF100-400mm |
1/320 sec | f/8



AMERICAN ROBIN
Noppadol Paothong
EF100-400mm | 1/400 sec | f/5.6



SPRING BEAUTY
Noppadol Paothong
EF100mm | 1/320 sec | f/4.5



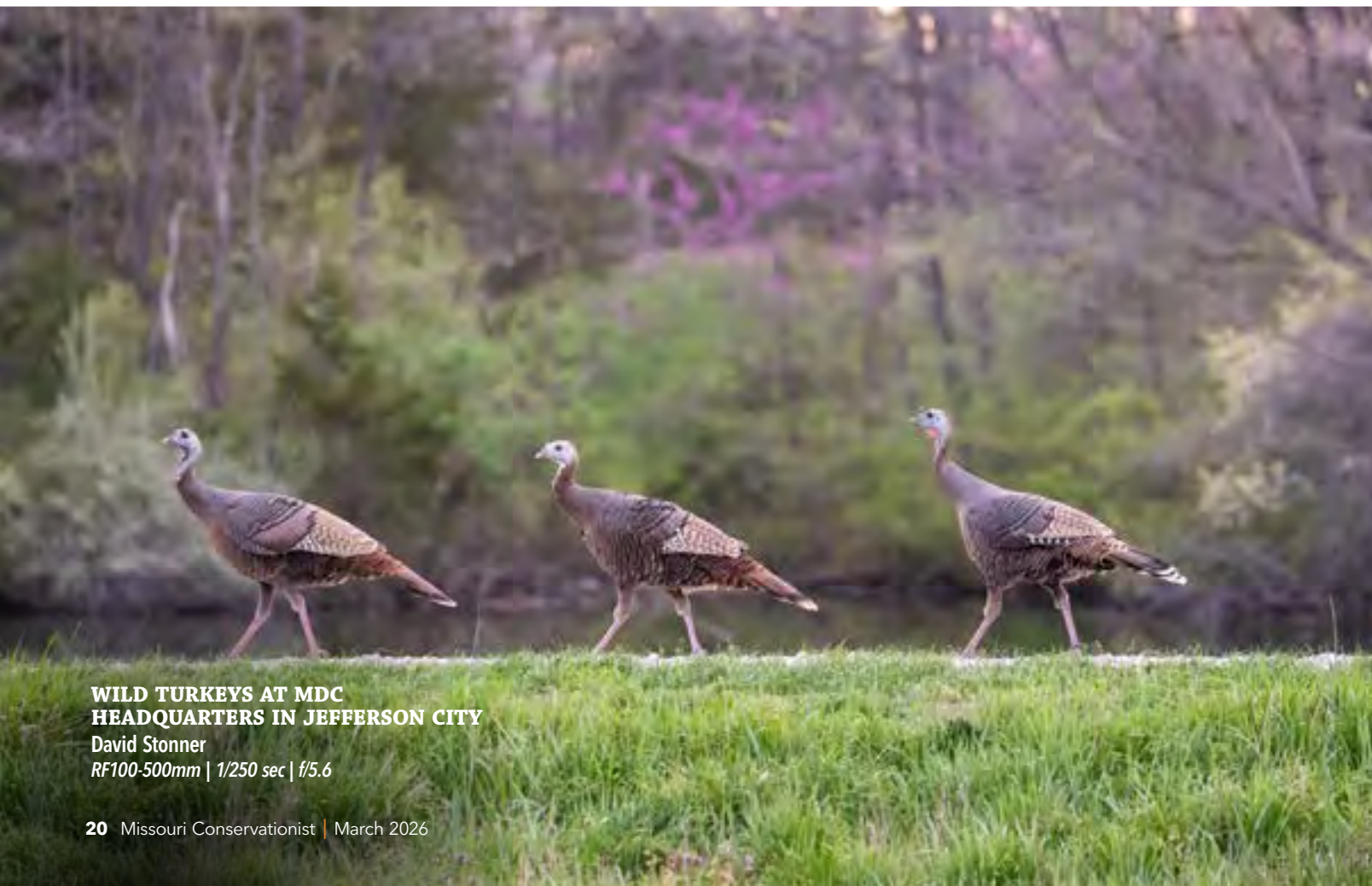
**REDBUD BLOOMS AT
RUNGE CONSERVATION
NATURE CENTER**

David Stonner
RF100mm | 1/100 sec | f/10



EASTERN COTTONTAIL KIT

Noppadol Paothong
EF100mm | 1/125 sec | f/4



**WILD TURKEYS AT MDC
HEADQUARTERS IN JEFFERSON CITY**

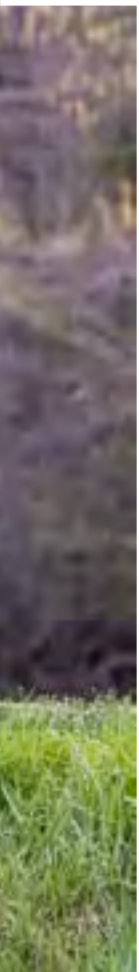
David Stonner
RF100-500mm | 1/250 sec | f/5.6



DOGWOOD BLOOMS

David Stonner

RF100-500mm | 1/500 sec | f/8



EASTERN TAILED-BLUE

Noppadol Paothong

EF100mm | 1/100 sec | f/5.6

A Forest's Journey

ACTIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT AIDS LANDOWNERS IN ACCOMPLISHING GOALS, PROTECTING SUSTAINABILITY AND NATIVE SPECIES

by Jennifer Lindsay Kromann

Joe Davis's family has lived in Callaway County since 1829. This extended family history instilled strong ties to the land, but a neighbor's "Tree Farm" sign increased Davis's passion for his land's legacy and inspired him to investigate forest management.

"I really wanted that sign on our property," Davis said. "Not realizing, of course, it would lead me down this journey of forest management. But people who own their own property are really proud of it and want to take steps to show it off."

Davis met with an MDC forester, who helped him develop and begin implementing a forest management plan. Since the Davis family also lives on the property, they decided on different nuances of management for several sections of the land according to soil type, existing vegetation, and what would accomplish key goals, all while protecting the aesthetics.

"I learned a lot about what we have on the property," he said. "For example, we have a really good stand of white oak, and when our forester walked through it, she was amazed. Foresters can see that and help you understand the value."

Recognized as the Missouri Tree Farmer of the Year in 2021, Davis is thrilled his children are learning so much being raised on family land and thankful for an opportunity to leave a continuing legacy.


"I'm proud of the work I've put into our property and trying to be a good steward," Davis said. "The actions we take should be setting up the next generation for success, and I think tree farming and forest management are a great way to do that."

Applying the Right Card

MDC Private Land Forestry Supervisor George Kipp, who oversees MDC foresters working directly with forest landowners, agrees.

"Trees touch everyone's life every day, even in the most urban populated places in the state," Kipp said. "Helping landowners and children make a connection in nature is the heart of what we do at MDC."

MDC works with partners, including the University of Missouri (MU), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Society of American Foresters, and local, state, and county foresters to deliver technical assistance.



"Helping landowners and children make a connection in nature is the heart of what we do at MDC."

George Kipp
MDC private land
forestry supervisor





Kipp recommends contacting the Call Before You Cut program for technical assistance, whether or not immediate logging is planned. This program provides detailed information, and landowners with 30 acres or more can receive a free visit from a forester, who can also engage other partners and programs.

Owning less than 30 acres does not bar landowners from receiving support. A variety of programs focus on collaboration to help landowners get to the right place according to their acreage and goals.

Retired MDC Community and Private Land Conservation Branch Chief Jason Jensen had a bird's-eye view of the programs designed to help Missouri forest landowners, regardless of whether they are managing for wildlife and native plants, increasing the natural beauty, providing recreation, generating profit from timber, or ensuring a long-term legacy.

"While it's pretty easy to get overwhelmed, foresters can help you realize and achieve your priorities by creating a step-by-step plan that will also protect your forest for years to come," Jensen

said. "We know a managed forest is going to be more productive, whatever your goals."

He said that thinned forests will be more resilient and able to withstand environmental- or insect-related threats.

"A managed forest is also much more beneficial for wildlife and more productive from a wood products perspective," he said. "Trees all compete for water, nutrients, and sunlight. A thinned forest is going to grow better than an overstocked, unthinned forest."

To help implement these plans, MDC, NRCS, and others have cost-share programs to reduce management costs.

"Our staff utilize a variety of different programs and funds when working with landowners — I often refer to our staff as having a deck of cards," Jensen said. "They go out and meet with landowners, develop a plan, and then they apply the appropriate card at the appropriate time."

Seeking Dynamic Partnerships

Even with the resources available, getting the word out remains important. According to the USDA National

"The actions we take should be setting up the next generation for success, and I think tree farming and forest management are a great way to do that."

Joe Davis



Woodland Owners Survey, family landowners own 84 percent of Missouri's 15.6 million forested acres, yet less than 10 percent are believed to have a forester-prepared management plan.

This need led Hank Stelzer, natural resources education director for MU Extension, to seek dynamic partnerships to increase education and access to forest management plans. The effort resulted in Engaging Family Forest Landowners, a program focused on the Missouri and Mississippi River Hills regions of east central Missouri. Two private companies partnered with MU Extension, who in turn partnered with NRCS to support landowners.

"It shows what can happen when groups are willing to come together for a common cause," Stelzer said. "We are fortunate in Missouri to have a tapestry of interested groups with a long history of supporting the future of our forests."

Building a Tree Life

While it won't always feel like a straightforward pathway, landowners in different regions of Missouri are sharing their success.

Andrew Krato purchased 20 acres of land north of Troy six years ago for his family to grow pumpkins and enjoy being out on the land. Excited to improve the property, he submitted two management plans for consideration. His monarch habitat plan was approved, but his forest management plan was not ranked high enough to be selected. However, he learned of an MU Extension program that could help create a plan with a better chance of approval.

"Billy McCaslin from MU reached out the next day, and he's phenomenal — you can tell he's passionate about the forest and is very knowledgeable," Krato said. McCaslin visited the site and, working with colleagues, created a detailed plan to match Krato's needs.

"It's so nice to have resources that help guide me," Krato said. "What I thought was natural and native was not natural and not native. I didn't realize it's not supposed to be here. When you are trying to build your tree life, you need to remove some things for other things to flourish."

For this reason, Krato plans to move forward with management regardless of whether a cost-share agency funds his official plan.

"I was someone who didn't know anything about this but learning what I have and what I can protect is key," he said. "We can't keep producing land, but we can keep improving it."

Watching Land Get Wilder

For forests in the eastern United States, which includes Missouri, there is a growing movement toward forest management to help protect native species, including the keystone white oak tree (*Quercus alba*) and oak trees as a genus. Oaks are renowned for their role in forest ecosystems, benefiting native plants and animals, making them indispensable in maintaining a healthy diversity of native species in our forests.

"Those who are interested in managing their land can make a tremendous impact on diversity and tree age as well," said Jason Meyer, executive director of the White Oak Initiative. "If you want oak to be on your property, you have to



"We can't keep producing land, but we can keep improving it."

Andrew Krato

manage your forest — disturbance is the key word. Otherwise, we allow our forest to slowly convert to shade-tolerant species. White oak benefits from our protection and that benefits the entire forest, providing over 500 animals and insects with food and shelter."

Meanwhile, a focus on native plants has led landowner and forester Greg Hoss to live in the privacy of a 116-acre managed oasis between Vienna and Dixon in Maries County.



“We spend a lot of time working and walking around our property ... watching our trees get bigger, seeing wildlife, and watching our land get wilder.”

Greg Hoss

“It’s truly magical,” Hoss said, having heard the same from many visitors to his property. “This place is so cool, but it’s so cool because we’ve made it that way.”

Hoss, a retired MDC forester, spent 17 of his 35 years with MDC running the George O. White State Forest Nursery. His passion and knowledge now fuel the creativity of having his property generate consistent revenue without leaning on traditional agriculture.

On Hoss’s property, which he manages alongside his wife, Patricia, visitors will find trees planted as a riparian buffer to protect a creek, a hazelnut seed orchard, stands of mature timber balanced with other younger stands only 10–15 years old, and about 10 acres sown to native prairie forbs and grasses. Hoss and his wife harvest various products throughout the year, including walnut syrup, wild fruits, and seed for native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees.

“If any of our grandkids need a leaf collection for school or Scouts, this is the place to come, as nearly every native Missouri tree and shrub is found here,” Hoss said. “And, of course, with all our

natives and diverse habitats, we have abundant wildlife.”

Hoss has done a lot of tree planting over the years, all focused on natives.

“We spend a lot of time working and walking around our property, and even after nearly 16 years here, we still have the excitement of finding new plants we have not seen before, arrowheads, neat-looking rocks, watching our trees get bigger, seeing wildlife, and watching our land get wilder.”

Leaving a Legacy

Missouri State Forester Michael Bill spent many days throughout his childhood exploring the woods on his grandparents’ farm — originally settled by his ancestors in Illinois during the 1830s. Eventually this inspired him to pursue his love of the outdoors by studying forestry and dedicating his career to effective management.

“Sustainable forest management requires a long-term view,” Bill said. “Most people prefer the look of a mature forest with a closed canopy and an open understory, but for some wildlife

Did You Know?

Having a forester-created management plan is a key step in cost-share programs that ease the financial burden for landowners who want to effectively manage their trees, wildlife, and natural resources.

Management plans serve as a guide and usually promote these types of activities:

“Weeding” the forest by removing invasive species and undesirable trees, while also promoting tree diversity.

Opening the forest canopy when needed to ensure sunlight reaches the forest floor to help seedlings.

Disturbances, such as prescribed fire, will promote a lush response of vegetation that tends to help wildlife.

Loggers Extraordinaire

When landowners are ready to harvest trees on their property as part of their management plan, they can contact a growing number of Master Loggers who have completed the Professional Timber Harvesting Program and Master Logger Certification Program in Missouri. While it still involves trust, seeking out loggers who have taken time to go through one or both of these programs reflects a commitment that can help landowners achieve their harvesting goals while protecting the future of the forested acreage.



Call Before You Cut

callb4ucut.com

877-564-7483

MU Extension

extension.missouri.edu

species, young forests are critical for their survival.”

“Young forests,” those forests up to 15 years old, provide important food sources and a place for some species to hide and protect their young from predators, he said.

“This is a key reason why it is important to ensure a diversity of forest age and habitat structure is available on the landscape,” he said.

Bill managed the 40,000-acre Sunklands Conservation Area near the Current River in Shannon County, Missouri’s largest conservation area. Because of effective forest management planning and implementation, it is home to numerous wildlife that call Missouri home year-round, as well as migratory species.

“Neotropical songbirds will winter in Central and South America but migrate in the summer to nest and breed in Missouri forests,” said Bill. “It feels good to know that the forest management that I helped implement when I was a field forester more than a decade ago is still providing critical habitat for many of these bird species.”

Although MDC manages large, forested areas, the vast majority of Missouri’s forests remain with private landowners, increasing the importance of sustainable forest management and the partnership between landowners and professional foresters, he said.

“When you manage your forest sustainably, you leave a legacy to the next generation that helps to ensure that our forests continue to provide high-quality forest products, clean air and water, and healthy wildlife habitat,” Bill encouraged. “Working with a professional forester to develop a plan for your property is the first step to help you start your forest legacy journey.” ▲

Jennifer Lindsay Kromann is a freelance writer and journalist who has always loved the natural world. A Missouri native, Jennifer now lives on the edge of the Ozarks, just outside of St. Louis, with her family.

Get Outside

in MARCH



➔ Ways to connect with nature



Seeing Red

Springtime in Missouri may have you seeing red. **Redbuds** start blooming in late March and continue through early May. They're one of our showiest native flowering trees. Adding to the color palette are Missouri's red maples. Though their reddish flowers aren't quite as spectacular as redbuds, they often pop out before anything else blooms, giving us reason to appreciate them as early signs of spring.

Luck of the Irish

Did you know there are shamrocks in Missouri? **Clovers** and **wood-sorrels** both have trifoliate leaves, like shamrocks. So, this St. Patrick's Day, no need to travel to the Irish Isle. Just head outside and look for the luck of the Irish in your own backyard.



Violet wood sorrels

White clover

Swan Song

Trumpeter swans are a sight to behold. Considered critically imperiled in Missouri, these massive migrating birds may be present at marshes, lakes, and rivers this time of year. Their voice is a low trumpetlike sound, while young swans' voices are higher and more nasal.

Setting Up Camp

You may notice webs in trees this time of year. These are silken tents made by **eastern tent caterpillars**. They set up camp in their host trees — usually trees in the rose family such as cherry, apple, and plums — just as their first leaves of the season appear. The severity of infestations is cyclical, and in many cases the defoliation is tolerated by the tree, so there is no need for alarm.



Natural Events to See This Month

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



Zebra swallow-tails appear in late March.



Red fox young are born.



Walleye spawning peaks in March.

TRUMPETER SWAN: OBELE OUTSIDE; WHITE CLOVER: VLADA, STOCK.ADOBE.COM



VIRTUAL

Birding for (and with) Kids

Thursday • March 12 • 6-7 p.m.

Online only

Registration required by March 12. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oU2.

All ages

Birding has a reputation for being a “retirement hobby.” In reality, it’s one of the most kid-friendly, curiosity-fueling, low-cost outdoor activities out there. Children are naturally good birders. They are observant, energetic, and fascinated by small details adults often overlook. This child-friendly presentation will break down what kids need to get started, lay the foundation for basic observation and bird identification skills, and discuss what parents can do to make the experience fun rather than frustrating.

VIRTUAL

LEARNING TO HUNT: Shed Hunting

Saturday • March 21 • 9-11 a.m.

Online only

Registration required by March 21. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oUu.

All ages

In the spring, while the grass is starting to grow, flowers are blooming, and new babies are being born, the deer are starting to lose their antlers. Shed hunting is becoming a popular outdoor activity. Join us and figure out the best way to find them.



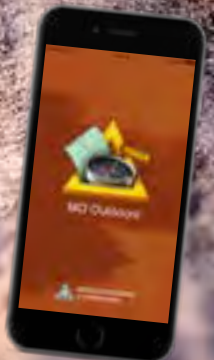
Pawpaws bloom through May.



Male common grackles arrive and set up territories.

EXPLORE MISSOURI

MORE TRAILS.
LESS SEARCHING.
GET THE **MO**
OUTDOORS APP.



Places to Go

NORTHWEST REGION

Nodaway Valley Conservation Area

A parade of wings

by Larry Archer

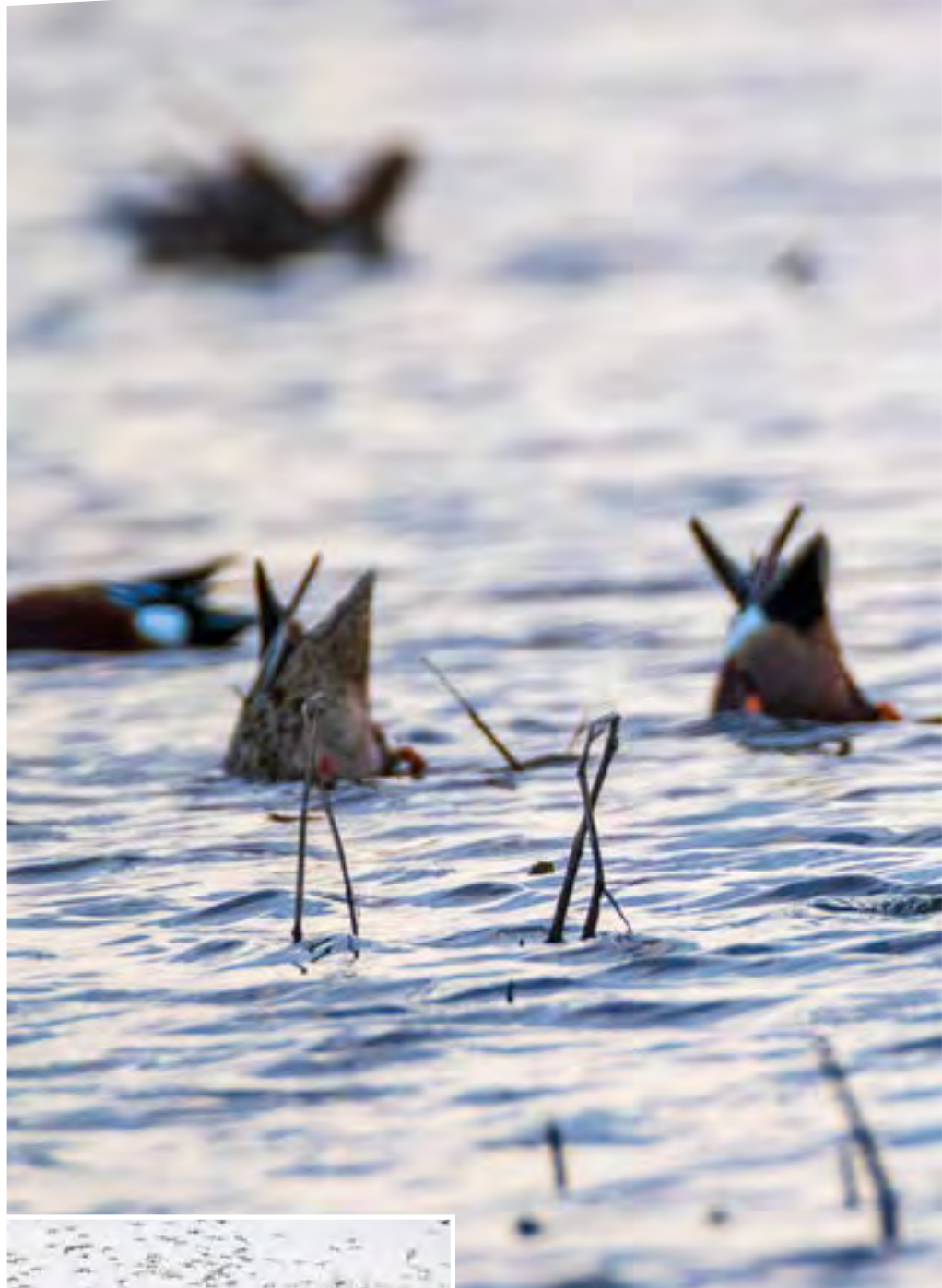
✳ There will be no fire engines, marching bands, or floats, but Nodaway Valley Conservation Area (CA) will be hosting its annual parade beginning in March.

Located in northwest Missouri's Andrew and Holt counties, Nodaway Valley CA's 2,100 acres of wetlands draw a parade of waterfowl and waterbirds that begins as the ice thaws, said Wildlife Biologist Craig Crisler.

"As soon as the ice melts, you'll see a lot of snow geese, Canada geese, and then as spring progresses, the waterfowl that move through basically get smaller in size," Crisler said. "Then you'll start getting mallards and pintails and some of the other dabbling ducks. As spring progresses you start getting some of the bigger shorebirds and wading birds, and the teal will be the last ducks to move through. Then you'll continue on with shorebirds migrating through all the way into May."

And while the focus may be on waterfowl and waterbirds, the area also draws the occasional uncommon visitor, he said.

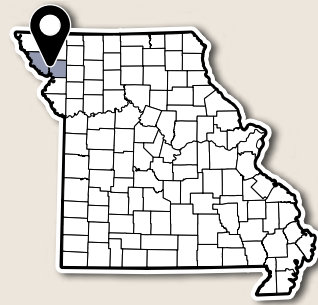
"You might see some birds in this part of Missouri that you don't see further east across the state," he said. "Stuff like yellow-headed blackbirds or cinnamon teal would be two bigger, more conspicuous birds you might see that we don't see every year."



"Bald eagles tend to follow those migrating groups of waterfowl and waterbirds and use them as a food source during migration."

— Nodaway Valley CA
Wildlife Biologist
Craig Crisler

DAVID STONNER









NODAWAY VALLEY CONSERVATION AREA

consists of 3,881.3 acres in Andrew and Holt counties. From St. Joseph, take I-29 north, then Highway 59 (Exit 67) west 3.5 miles, then Route B north 9 miles to the area.

40.0862, -95.0788

short.mdc.mo.gov/o3D 660-446-3371

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT

-  **Bicycling** Includes 10 miles of service and improved roads open to bicycling year-round.
-  **Birdwatching** Included in the National Audubon Society's Nodaway Valley Conservation Area Important Bird Area (short.mdc.mo.gov/o3K). The eBird list of birds recorded at Nodaway Valley CA is available at short.mdc.mo.gov/o3r.
-  **Camping** Designated camping sites.
-  **Fishing** Includes 4 miles of stream frontage along the Nodaway River. Catfish, sunfish.
-  **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, and rabbit.**
-  **Waterfowl 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 for details.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU VISIT



American beaver



North American river otter



Ring-necked pheasant



Northern shoveler



Oyster Mushrooms

Pleurotus ostreatus

Status

Choice edible

Size

Cap width: 1–6 inches;
stalk length: to 1¼ inches;
stalk width: to ¾ inch

Distribution

Statewide



Oyster mushrooms grow in clusters year-round on the stumps, logs, and trunks of deciduous trees. The cap is shell-shaped and semicircular with smooth edges and a velvety texture. The flesh is thick and white. There are no lookalikes in Missouri that are poisonous.



To be safe, always be certain of your mushroom identification before consuming. For more information, consult *A Guide to Missouri's Edible and Poisonous Mushrooms* at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZNf.



HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Oyster mushrooms are considered a prized culinary mushroom. People can grow them on coffee grounds and spent grain from beer-making. They are also being explored as a digester of inorganic waste and an environmentally responsible alternative to Styrofoam.



LIFE CYCLE

The oyster mushrooms' network of fungal cells — also called the mycelium — kills and eats plant parasites, known as nematodes, that damage plant roots. The nematodes provide the fungus with nitrogen, a nutrient that is otherwise difficult to break down in wood. This nematode-trapping ability is being studied as a possible biocontrol to prevent plant diseases caused by certain nematodes.

Outdoor Calendar

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



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.

FISHING

Black Bass

Impounded waters and non-Ozark streams:
Open all year

Most streams south of the Missouri River:

- ▶ Catch-and-Release:
March 1–May 22, 2026
- ▶ Catch-and-Keep:
May 23, 2026 –Feb. 28, 2027

Bullfrog, Green Frog

June 30 at sunset until Oct. 31, 2026

Nongame Fish Gigging

Impounded waters, sunrise to sunset:
Feb. 16–Sept. 14, 2026

Paddlefish

Statewide:
March 15–April 30, 2026

On the Mississippi River:
March 15–May 15, 2026
Sept. 15–Dec. 15, 2026

Trout Parks

State trout parks are open seven days
a week Mar. 1 through Oct. 31.

Catch-and-Keep:
March 1–Oct. 31, 2026

TRAPPING

Beaver, Nutria

Nov. 15, 2025–March 31, 2026

Special Trapping Season for Private Lands Only: Coyote, Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk

March 1–April 14, 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

Bullfrog, Green Frog

June 30 at sunset until Oct. 31, 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:
Sept. 15–Nov. 13, 2026
Nov. 25, 2026–Jan. 15, 2027

Firearms:

- ▶ Early Antlerless Portion (open areas only):
Oct. 9–11, 2026
- ▶ Early Youth Portion (ages 6–15):
Oct. 24–25, 2026
- ▶ November Portion:
Nov. 14–24, 2026
- ▶ Late Youth Portion (ages 6–15):
Nov. 27–29, 2026
- ▶ Late Antlerless Portion (open areas only):
Dec. 5–13, 2026
- ▶ Alternative Methods Portion:
Dec. 26, 2026–Jan. 5, 2027

Groundhog (Woodchuck)

May 11–Dec. 15, 2026

Pheasant

Youth (ages 6–15):
Oct. 24–25, 2026

Regular:
Nov. 1, 2026–
Jan. 15, 2027

Quail

Youth (ages 6–15):
Oct. 24–25, 2026

Regular:
Nov. 1, 2026–Jan. 15, 2027

Rabbits

Oct. 1, 2026–Feb. 15, 2027

Squirrels

May 23, 2026–Feb. 15, 2027

Turkey

- Spring:
- ▶ Youth (ages 6–15):
April 11–12, 2026
 - ▶ Spring:
April 20–May 10, 2026
- Fall:
- ▶ Archery:
Sept. 15–Nov. 13, 2026
Nov. 25, 2026–Jan. 15, 2027
 - ▶ Firearms (open areas only):
Oct. 1–31, 2026

Waterfowl

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



ILLUSTRATION: MARK RATHIEL



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The first day of spring is just around the corner. Take a cue from this furry friend and jump into the season with a sense of adventure. You may not be quite ready to take a dip into the water, but you can take a hike, cast a line at your nearest pond, or simply sit and watch the birds as they flitter about. Nature awaits. What will you discover?

 by **David Stonner**

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