



MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST

VOLUME 87, ISSUE 6, JUNE 2026
SERVING NATURE & YOU

3 Things You Can Do to Help Pollinators

1 Plant Natives

Native plants are a food source for monarch butterflies and other pollinators. Add the plants shown below to your landscape.

2 Keep it Blooming

Keep something in bloom each season. Some species bloom all year, others only in April and May, still others in July and August. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/monarch.

3 Get Involved

Protect native grasslands, provide nesting places, and become a wildlife gardener. To learn how, visit GrowNative.org.



Common milkweed



New England aster



Showy goldenrod



Prairie blazing star



Wild bergamot





ON THE COVER

Fireflies dance over the water at South Prong Access of Jacks Fork as stars peek through low clouds.

DAN ZARLENGA

14mm F1.8 DG HSM lens, f/2.0
15 second exposure, ISO 5000

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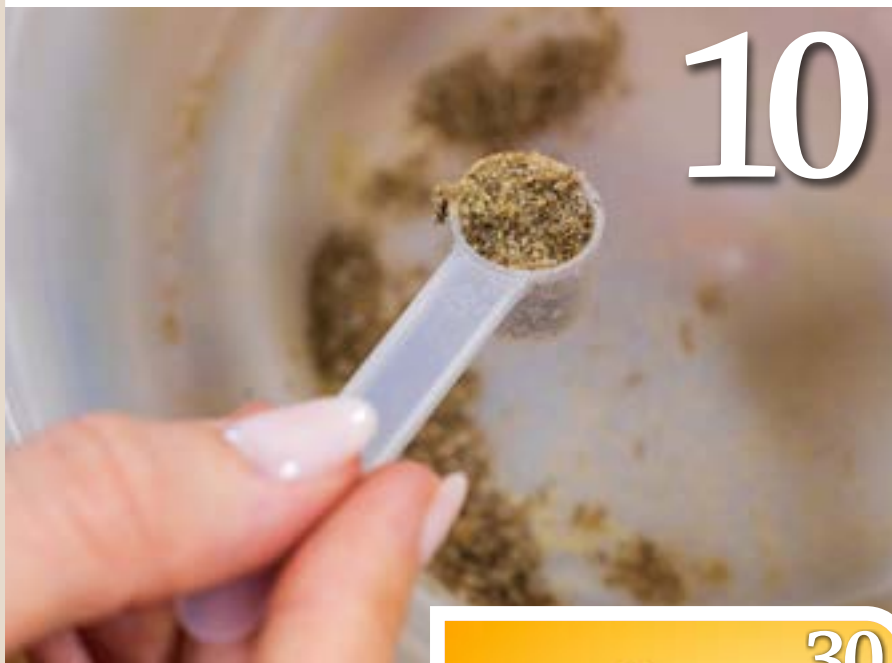
Download this issue to your phone or tablet at mdc.mo.gov/mocon.



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With longer days, nature reaches its crescendo.



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Inbox



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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 or by emailing readerphoto@mdc.mo.gov

1 | Fishing at Bennett Spring State Park by **Ryan C. Graham**, via web submission

2 | Blue dasher by **Steven Haddix**, via Flickr

3 | Red-winged blackbird by **Tammy Harmon**, via email

4 | Great spangled fritillary by **Kathy Duncan**, via Flickr

➔ 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

MAINE ATTRACTION

I moved to Missouri four years ago from a small town in Maine where I was the chairman of our Conservation Commission and treasurer of the Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative. I was (and still am) so impressed with your magazine that I mail a copy to my old team in Maine, and they love it as well. As we used to say in the Navy, "Bravo Zulu," or well done.

Fred Frodyma St. Louis

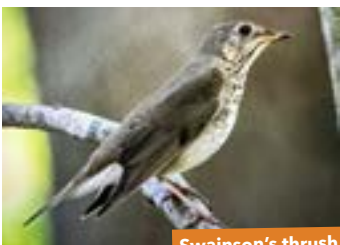
BASKETS AND BUTTERFLIES

May's issue was the best issue ever. I hope you can have more articles on nature crafts, like the hickory bark process (*Beauty from Bark*, Page 10). The butterfly article showed really good pictures (*Swallowtails of Missouri*, Page 22). I really appreciated seeing the different stages of a butterfly's life and the variety.

Anne Foust via email

CORRECTION

The photo of the bird on Page 7 of the May issue (*Ask MDC*) was misidentified as a gray-cheeked thrush. It is a Swainson's thrush.



Swainson's thrush



Gray-cheeked thrush

Up Front



✳ I love hearing from you, whether informally at the gas station, in person at events, through emails, or even a handwritten note. All are

important, but sometimes you get a special one, like this letter from 12-year-old Joshua, who lives with his parents and five brothers in Dardenne Prairie.

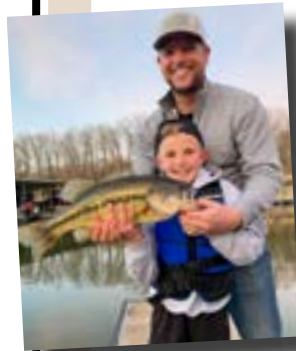
"I have been reading the *Missouri Conservationist* every month since I can remember. I would always find peace in reading them in my chaotic house. I have nostalgic memories of always enjoying reading them at either my grandma's house or I would literally steal them out of my older brother's room so I could read them. They are some of my favorite boredom busters. Reading these magazines has made me come to realize how beautiful Missouri is and how privileged I am to live here."

Joshua ended with a greatly appreciated suggestion: "If I had one recommendation to improve these articles (not that they aren't already amazing), I would say to add a section in one of the upcoming months about fishing for largemouth bass ... because fishing for largemouth bass has been my family's and friends' favorite hobby and passion."

Joshua, we have a bass article coming out next May. Thanks for your feedback, for reading our magazine, and for caring about conservation. The Missouri outdoors is a special place and the best boredom buster I know.

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

Inset photo: Joshua showing off his personal best largemouth bass, alongside his dad, in April 2023.



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Have a Question for a Commissioner?

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



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POLLINATOR ECOLOGY

Looking for Bugs in Sandy-Soiled Places

Biologists assess pollinator diversity on sand prairies in southeast Missouri

by Dianne Van Dien

✳ Scattered along the Mississippi floodplains are pockets of land called sand prairies. Despite sandy soil and patches of bare ground — or rather because of them — sand prairies are home to a unique array of plants and animals.

In 2024, MDC Pollinator Ecologist Alex Morpew and biologists Steve Schell and Josh Wibbenmeyer surveyed seven sand prairies in southeast Missouri. They visited both remnant and restored sites, focusing on pollinating insects and the plants they depend on.

“We wanted to establish a baseline understanding of the ‘flower-visiting’ insects,” Morpew said. “We know they should be highly diverse, not just because of the sand prairie element, but because the Bootheel is a transition zone between the Southeast, the Ozarks, and the Great Plains.”

The team collected more than 1,600 insects. Some bees and butterflies could be identified on the wing, but most were collected with nets or in tiny bowls that mimic flowers and brought back to the lab for identification.



Sand Prairie Conservation Area in Scott County (above) is one of the last remnant sand prairies in Missouri. This rare and unique habitat supports plants such as splitbeard bluestem, prickly pear cactus, jointweed, and spotted beebalm (left).

“With so much diversity,” Morpew explained, “we needed to look at the insects under a microscope to identify the species.”

Of the insects captured, more than 800 were bees, representing at least 114 species, or about 20 percent of the total number of bee species known to live in the state. A mix of habitat generalists and sand prairie specialists were found, along with bees that rely on pollen from specific flower species. The work of identifying the remaining insects, including beetles, wasps, and butterflies, is ongoing.

The team also identified at least 185 species of flowering plants of which seven are Missouri species of conservation concern.

“Every time we went out, we did our best to record every flowering species that we encountered, and we tried to get a rough estimate of their relative abundances across the site,” Morpew said.

The plan is to survey the sites every five to 10 years to see if the insect or plant communities have changed. This data, combined with the natural history and host plant requirements of the insects, can help inform management decisions on these lands.

At a Glance

Sand Prairie Pollinator Inventory

In southeast Missouri, 810 acres of sand prairie across seven sites were surveyed for pollinating insects. About 1,600 individual insects were collected; 52 percent were bees.

114 species of bees, including:

- 10 sand specialist species (live only in sandy areas)
- 14 pollen specialists (collect pollen only from specific plant species or families)
- 9 cleptoparasitic species (sneak into other bees’ nests and lay their eggs there)

Identification of wasps, butterflies, beetles, and other species is still underway.

Partners: Missouri Prairie Foundation, private landowners



The bee *Adrena beameri* was found on a sand prairie in Dunklin County, nearly 100 miles from its known range. A species of conservation concern, it specializes on *Coreopsis* flowers like tickseed. It has no common name.



Male short-horned cellophane bees (*Colletes brevicornis*) often sleep inside the flowers of the Venus’ looking glass, the flower on which these bees specialize.

In Brief

News and updates from MDC



LEAVE WILDLIFE WILD

YOUNG ANIMALS MAY APPEAR ABANDONED, BUT THAT'S USUALLY NOT THE CASE

➔ As you head outdoors this spring, you may encounter a variety of newborn wildlife. MDC asks that you leave wildlife wild by not interfering with newborn or young animals as it can do more harm than good.

"Young animals are rarely orphaned," said MDC State Wildlife Veterinarian Sherri Russell. "If the young are left alone, the parent will usually return. Parents are normally out searching for food and cannot constantly attend to their offspring."

Russell added that baby birds are typically the wildlife people want to help.

"If you see a chick on the ground hopping around and it has feathers, leave it alone and bring pets inside," she said. "It is a fledgling and the parents are nearby keeping an eye on it. Fledglings can spend up to 10 days hopping on the ground while learning to fly. If you find one that is featherless, you can return it to the nesting area, if possible, as it probably fell out of the nest."

Dogs catching baby rabbits and lawn mowers running over nests are other common issues.

"Rabbits seldom survive in captivity and can actually die of fright from being handled," Russell said. "Even if the animal is injured, return it to the nest because the mother will most likely return."

Despite what many think, wild mothers do not abandon their young because of a human scent, and most newborn animals do not survive in captivity.

"While people have good intentions, the care and rehabilitation of wild animals require special training, knowledge, facilities, and permits," she explained. "Without such care, wild animals will remain in poor health and could eventually die. And it is illegal to possess many wild animals without a valid state or federal permit."

Russell also noted that wildlife can become dangerous as they mature and can also carry parasites, disease, and can damage property.

"Native wildlife can carry mites, ticks, lice, fleas, flukes, roundworms, tapeworms, rabies, distemper, tuberculosis, respiratory diseases, and skin diseases," Russell said. "Some of these can be transmitted to humans."

Although tempting to take them into homes, the best help people can offer wild animals is to leave them alone.





An angler at Lake of the Ozarks was cited for taking five blue catfish over the limit.

AGENTS IN ACTION

by Holly Dentner

Missouri's conservation agents spend hours patrolling our rivers and lakes. This work assures the state's fishing regulations are being followed and helps keep people safe when they're out on the water.

Summer is prime fishing time, and when agents aren't keeping an eye on others, they often find time to enjoy a little fishing themselves. Such was the case a few years back when Corporals David Harms, Haeley Eichler, and Christine Boyd were fishing from Cpl. Harms' personal boat near Warsaw on the Lake of the Ozarks.

A boat pulled up to their location two separate times, and the man piloting it claimed they were fishing in the wrong location and needed to move. The man also claimed to have 25 fish in the bottom of his boat.

"We decided to make our way over to the boat ramp and check this guy's catch," said Cpl. Harms. "We identified ourselves as conservation agents and found 15 blue catfish and one channel catfish in the boat."

The man had no fishing permit but claimed it was in his vehicle. That's when Cpl. Harms ran the angler's license and boat registration through the system. It turns out the boat had been reported stolen from Camden County. The agents also saw a methamphetamine pipe on the dashboard of the vehicle.

The angler was arrested for the illegal drugs and stolen boat and received a citation for the overlimit of blue catfish. The daily and possession limit for blue catfish at the Lake of the Ozarks is 10, with a protected slot length of 26 to 34 inches. The daily limit may not contain more than two blue catfish longer than 34 inches.

"Most people we encounter are doing their best to follow the law and enjoying the great fishing opportunities we have in Missouri," said Cpl. Eichler. "In this instance, I think it will be the last time this guy brags to other people on the water about his catch."

Stay up to date on current fishing seasons and regulations at mdc.mo.gov/fishing.

Ask MDC

Got a Question for Ask MDC?

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



Rough-leaved dogwood

Q: What shrub is this?

➔ This tree is a native rough-leaved dogwood. The four-petaled white or cream flowers and the leaf veins curving to run parallel to the leaf edge suggest it's a type of dogwood. Viburnums also are common shrubs or trees with similar opposite leaves, but their leaves don't have this vein characteristic.

Rough-leaved dogwood is very common across the state, and its fruits are eaten by at least 40 species of birds, including turkey and quail. It can spread and become a problem in open grasslands and prairies, but it should "behave" in roadsides and wooded areas. It does have a propensity to send up new shoots from its roots or base, forming a bushy spread rather than staying a single-stemmed tree. Property owners might keep an eye on this tree in their yards if they don't want it to spread.

The flowers provide nectar and pollen to many native bees, including small and large carpenter bees, leaf-cutter bees, sweat bees, and mining bees.

The white, globe-shaped fruit — edible only to birds — develop from August through October. But nature-lovers enjoy seeing the flowers in late spring.



Common grackle

Q: When I put out shelled peanuts, grackles will sometimes pick them up and dunk them in the birdbath. I know raccoons wash food in water, but why would a bird do this?

➔ The grackles may be dunking peanuts because they prefer nuts to have a slightly mushier consistency. Water softens the food to a more enjoyable or palatable consistency, and it provides a way to include water into their diet. And, possibly, softened food might be easier for nestlings to digest.

According to a scientific study by researchers from McGill University, dunking behavior, the dipping of food in water, has been anecdotally observed in more than 25 species of birds in the wild, but its function and ecology have not been systematically studied.

The study showed "...the frequency of dunking was higher with hard, dry food than with soft, moist food. Thus, dunking appears to be a food-processing technique that eases ingestion of dry and/or hard food through softening."

The McGill researchers also noted, "Most grackles were observed eating dunked food on the spot, but because the breeding status of birds departing with dunked food was not known, we cannot reject the possibility that dunked food was given to nestlings; indeed, one free-ranging female was observed dunking bread and feeding it to a nearby juvenile in February 2002."

To read the McGill study, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oSy.

Q: What does groundhog scat look like?

➔ It's a great question, but I don't have a photo to share with you because groundhog scat is buried. Defecation usually occurs in a pile of soil at the entrance of the burrow. There, a hole is dug for the droppings, which are then buried with the front feet. The droppings are long and rounded (or slightly coiled). They measure between 1½ to 3 inches in length. If the woodchuck doesn't leave the burrow, defecation occurs in a blind tunnel, and the droppings are similarly covered with soil. The young defecate in the nest. The mother keeps the nest clean by changing the leaf-and-grass lining.

GET HOOKED ON FISHING

Want some free fun that gets family and friends outside in nature? Get hooked on fishing with MDC's Free Fishing Days June 6 and 7. During Free Fishing Days, anyone can fish in the Show-Me State without a fishing permit, trout permit, or trout park daily tag.

Other fishing regulations remain in effect, such as limits on size and number of fish an angler may keep. Special permits may still be required at some county, city, or private fishing areas. Trespass laws also remain in effect on private property.

Conservation makes Missouri a great place to fish, and Free Fishing Days encourages people to sample our state's abundant fishing opportunities. Missouri has more than a million acres of surface water, and most of it provides great fishing. More than 200 different fish species are found in Missouri, with more than 20 of them being game fish for the state's more than 1.1 million anglers.

What IS it?

Can you guess this month's natural wonder?

The answer is on Page 9.



**INVASIVE
SPECIES**

MISSOURI'S LEAST WANTED

Invasive nonnative species destroy habitat and compete with native plants and animals. Please do what you can to control invasive species when you landscape, farm, hunt, fish, camp, or explore nature.



The large, feathery seedheads of phragmites make this invasive grass easy to spot — and hard to ignore.

Phragmites

by Angela Sokolowski

Phragmites (*Phragmites australis*), also known as European common reed, is an invasive perennial aquatic or semi-aquatic grass. It grows up to 15 feet tall with stiff and hollow tan stems, long blue-green leaves, and large, dense, feathery seedheads.

Why It's Bad

Phragmites invades wetlands, shorelines, moist ditches, and floodplains, outcompeting native wetland vegetation that supports a wide array of wildlife, including migratory waterfowl. Dense stands form, altering hydrology and creating breeding areas for mosquitoes. Native phragmites occurs in Missouri, but new patches found in ditches or floodplains are most likely the invasive species.

How to Control It

Mechanical: Small patches may be controlled with repeated spading, tarping, or flooding. Spading involves severing the main stems below the soil surface with a shovel. Tarping is placement of thick black plastic over the plants through the growing season to block light and smother plants. Flooding may be effective if the stalks are cut below the water level.

Chemical: Herbicides with the active ingredient of glyphosate or imazapyr can be effective. Treat midsummer with imazapyr or late summer with glyphosate. Herbicide treatments in wet areas require the use of aquatically approved herbicides. Always follow herbicide label instructions.



To learn more, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oS9

MISSOURI STREAM TEAM RELEASES ANNUAL REPORT, HOSTS CELEBRATION

In 1988, a small group of anglers became fed up with unsightly trash disrupting their fishing in Roubidoux Creek in Pulaski County. These conservation-minded Missourians decided to clean this section of stream, thus forming the first Missouri Stream Team in 1989.

Fast forward more than three decades later. The Roubidoux Fly Fishers Association — Stream Team #1 — is still going strong and has been joined by more than 7,000 Stream Teams around the state with more than 58,000 volunteers who helped Missouri's streams in some impressive ways last year.

"Missouri Stream Team just released our 2025 Annual Report with some impressive accomplishments," said Stream Team Volunteer Programs Manager Rebecca O'Hearn. "During 2025, Stream Teams collected 506 tons of trash, planted 1,119 trees, stenciled 53 storm drains, conducted 334 water monitoring trips, educated 22,967 attendees, gave more than 58,900 volunteer hours, and much more."

The Missouri Stream Team Program is a volunteer-led effort to conserve Missouri streams. Sponsored by MDC, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and the Conservation Federation of Missouri, the program focuses on education, stewardship, and advocacy for Missouri stream resources.

O'Hearn added that the ongoing work of more than 7,000 Stream Teams and their volunteers have made significant positive impacts on the health of Missouri's streams over the last 36 years. That work includes volunteers giving more than 3.5 million hours of time, removing more than 15,079 tons of trash from Missouri waterways, planting 407,842 trees along streams, conducting 35,692 water quality monitoring trips, and stenciling 22,458 storm drains.

Learn more about Missouri Stream Team and read the 2025 Annual Report at mostreamteam.org/annual-reports.

WATERSHED CELEBRATION PLANNED

Missouri Stream Team and Stream Teams United invite Stream Teams from around the state to come together for the 30th Annual Watershed Celebration at Meramec State Park on July 25 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center and Overlook Pavilion.

Free Stream Team camping will be available. Lunch will be provided, and attendees are encouraged to bring a dessert to share. The day will include a variety of fun and educational activities for all ages.

For more information, including a full list of activities and calendar of the Watershed Celebration Weekend, visit Stream Teams United at short.mdc.mo.gov/oS2.

MAKE A SPLASH DURING FROGGING SEASON

Discover nature this summer during frogging season. Beginning June 30 at sunset through Oct. 31, those with a fishing permit or small-game hunting permit may frog for bullfrogs and green frogs.

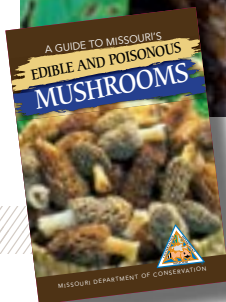
The fun does not have to end after catching frogs. Be sure to browse tasty recipes by visiting short.mdc.mo.gov/Zxz.

Buy Missouri hunting and fishing permits from numerous vendors around the state or online at mdc.mo.gov/buypermits. Once purchased, permits can be carried electronically through MDC's free mobile apps, MO Hunting and MO Fishing, available for download through Google Play for Android devices or the App Store for Apple devices.

WHAT IS IT?

CHANTERELLES

Chanterelles are funnel- or trumpet-shaped mushrooms with wavy cap edges. Most are bright orange or yellow, except for the black trumpet, which is brownish black. Chanterelles grow amongst grass and leaf litter in hardwood forests. They can be found singly, but are more commonly found in scattered groups, often in large areas. They will reappear in the same spot annually. Chanterelles are choice edibles.



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.



Members of the Chert Glades Missouri Master Naturalist chapter in Joplin collect seeds at Redings Mill Bridge.



*One
Seed
at a Time*

THE NOT-SO-UNDERGROUND HOBBY
OF NATIVE SEED COLLECTING

by **Kensi Tillman** | photographs by **Noppadol Paothong**



Seeds are collected still attached to the plant or inside the seed pod, later to be "cleaned" by removing the dead plant material from the seed.



The word "habitat" often conjures images of thick forests with tall, mighty trees or lush prairies dotted with colorful wildflowers. There are those, however, who don't view these mature landscapes as a final product of habitat. To many seed savers across the state, a Missouri landscape full of mature, thriving plants is only the beginning of a much bigger goal.

Seed collecting is an activity that is growing in popularity each year in Missouri. From the novice outdoor explorer to the seasoned naturalist with a deep-rooted appreciation for our local flora, many Missourians have taken to the outdoors to collect the seeds from a wide range of native plants.

Seed Sellers

For Mike Fiaoni, forest nursery supervisor at the George O. White State Forest Nursery, a native tree seed is the very foundation of his job.

"The heart of the nursery is the seed," said Fiaoni. "Without the seed, we don't have a nursery because we can't grow seedlings."

The nursery provides native trees and shrubs to thousands of Missourians each year, but the nursery would have no plants to provide were it not for seed-collecting Missourians across the state. Depending on the needs of the nursery,

different species of native tree and shrub seeds are collected by the public and sold to MDC via seed buying stations found in each region of the state. The seeds are then cleaned and stored by nursery staff, typically maintaining a five- to seven-year supply.

Collecting seeds to continue Missouri's vast varieties of beneficial trees and shrubs is, of course, a desirable goal, but many folks may not consider that seed collecting can also put some more change in your pocket.

Missouri's seed buying stations see people from all walks of life. Fiaoni shared that people sell seeds for all kinds of purposes, from a young boy saving up to buy his first puppy to a youth group raising funds for a mission trip.

Tree seed collecting and selling is a relatively long-standing tradition for some collectors, but it is also an activity that grows in popularity each year, with many more seed buying stations being added around the state in recent years.

"I believe these seed buying stations are very important for MDC," said MDC Forester Yvette Amerman, who has a heavy hand in the operation of seed buying stations in northeast Missouri. "George O. White State Forest Nursery is a wonderful resource for the citizens of Missouri. The citizens of Missouri who bring us seed are personally involved in growing trees for the future. The nursery pays for Missouri seed that is then planted in a Missouri nursery and eventually sold back to Missouri citizens."

Fiaoni recommends calling your local MDC regional office (find the phone numbers listed on Page 3) ahead of time to see when and if they are accepting your specific variety of seeds before loading up your seeds and heading to the buying station. He also suggests making sure fruit is ripe before collecting, and storing seeds in a dark, climate-controlled environment.

Habitat Heroes

While collecting tree seeds can be a great way to raise some extra funds, some seed savers collect for the sake of habitat. Creating more of it, that is.

Members of the Chert Glades Missouri Master Naturalist chapter in Joplin have been hard at work these past few years collecting, cleaning, and packaging more than 9,500 packets of native seeds.

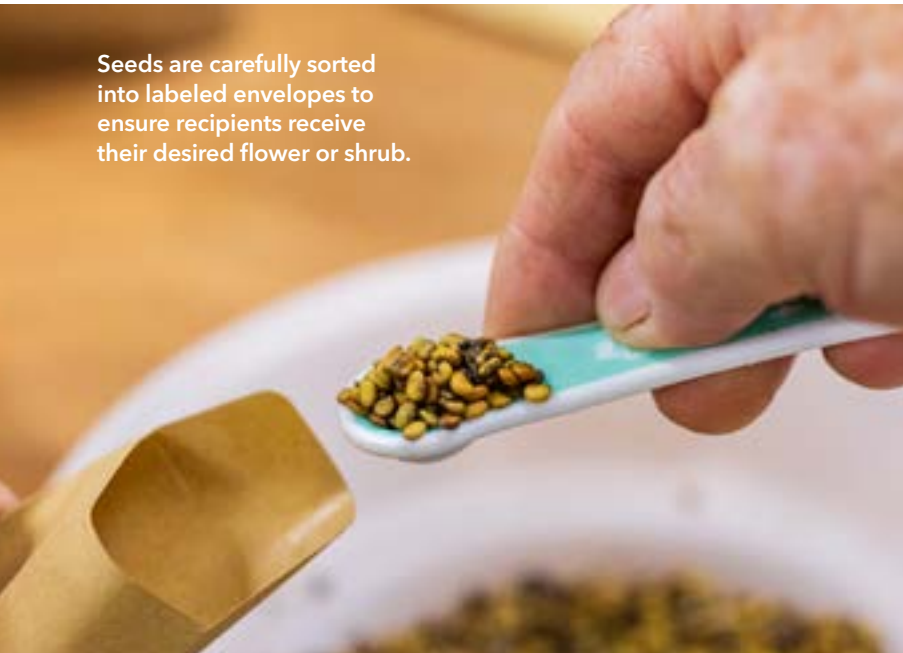
"I would say that this project is a part of the chapter's overall goal of directly influencing the community to help our local ecosystems," said Chapter President Emily Bowyer, who also serves as chair of the chapter's Native Seed and Plant Committee. "We provide a great deal of education and resources for people who want to get into native plant gardening."



A single seed plays many more roles in our ecosystems than just growing a new plant.



Seeds are carefully sorted into labeled envelopes to ensure recipients receive their desired flower or shrub.



Master Naturalists gather regularly for seed cleanings, where they clean, package, and inventory their native seeds for local giveaways.

provides many more benefits for wildlife and gardeners alike.

Aside from the countless benefits for local wildlife, providing beautiful native plants for local landscapes has another benefit — it makes people really happy.

“People can be really lovely with their reaction — they get so excited and grateful, which feels really good,” Bowyer said. “Just seeing the number of people who have either already started a native garden or who are about to begin is quite exciting, and it’s nice to be able to help in some small way.”

Collectors Beware

Collecting seeds from Missouri’s trees, flowers, and shrubs has proven to be a rewarding activity for many individuals across the state. Making some extra cash and furthering the benefits of having these native species in our landscapes are fantastic outcomes of seed collection. That said, there are still several things these collectors must keep in mind while gathering their seedy harvests.

There are both ethical and unethical ways to collect seeds. It’s the responsibility of the collector to make sure they abide by the proper regulations and methods to ensure the continuation of these plants for many years to come.

“It’s important to only collect from areas that allow it, such as private property with permission of the landowner,” said MDC Ozark Region Natural History Biologist Susan Farrington. “MDC does not allow seed collection (on MDC-owned property) without special permission, and other public land entities are likely to have the same policy, so it’s important to know what is or is not allowed.

Born out of a desire to provide more native planting opportunities to the greater Joplin area, the Chert Glades Master Naturalists’ seed project has been highly successful in its efforts. Regularly attending local events to hand out these free seed packets to the public, these habitat heroes have potentially introduced tens of thousands of new native plants to the Joplin area landscape. No small feat for a small group of dedicated naturalists, and no small impact for the countless pollinators and other local wildlife that certainly benefit from the valuable plants.

“We collect native seeds that are straight species (no cultivars), and preferably ones that are regionally native. It’s mostly forbs (flowering plants), some grasses, and a handful of shrubs,” said Bowyer.

The appeal of collecting from these plants that are native to the state, meaning they occur here naturally, is that they have adapted perfectly over time to Missouri’s constantly changing weather conditions. This makes these plants low maintenance once established. Additionally, animals native to this region have also adapted to using these plants as reliable food and habitat sources. Compared to cultivated plants that are purchased at the store, a native species



“Plants need their seeds to reproduce and to feed wildlife, such as goldfinches that collect seeds to feed their babies,” Farrington said. “So, if you are collecting, be sure to leave most of the seeds behind for those uses.”

A single seed plays many more roles in our ecosystems than just growing a new plant. While creating new plants is obviously a crucial function of seeds, they also provide a necessary food source for lots of wildlife, including many species of birds, small mammals like squirrels and chipmunks, and even our largest mammals like white-tailed deer and black bears. Seeds are a foundational element for much more than just our plants, so leaving plenty of this resource for wildlife is of utmost importance when it comes to seed collection.

“Never take seeds from rare plants,” Farrington said. “If you only see one plant, please don’t take its seeds. I would say there should be at least 10 plants present with seeds, and you should only take seeds from one of those 10. It may seem harmless to take seeds from one individual plant, but if there are lots of folks doing it, then there won’t be seed left for the wildlife to consume or the plants to reproduce.”

To Missouri’s dedicated seed savers, a mature plant or tree is only the beginning of a much larger story. From a great, white sycamore tree standing tall over a crystal-clear waterway to a bright, lush stalk of milkweed providing sanctuary to a migrating monarch butterfly, these plants offer much more than meets the eye. Every seed harvest is the start of a new chapter — one that will span many different seasons and generations. As these collectors continue their treasured hobby, they are not only preserving a piece of nature, they are nurturing the future of Missouri’s prized landscapes, one seed at a time. ▲



Kensi Tillman is a naturalist at Shoal Creek Conservation Education Center in Joplin. When she isn’t teaching nature programs to the public, she enjoys spending her time on the local waterways, exploring new travel destinations, and spending time with friends and family.

A night photograph of the Jacks Fork River. The foreground shows the dark, calm water of the river, which reflects the light from the sky. The middle ground is a rocky bank covered in dense, dark green forest. The background is a vast, starry night sky with the Milky Way galaxy visible, stretching across the upper half of the frame. The overall mood is serene and natural.

NIGHT ON THE JACKS FORK

A PREMIER OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

by Loring Bullard | photographs by Dan Zarlenga

This spot on the Jacks Fork River, far from the “light domes” of large cities, has great night sky viewing.



Buck Hollow



Stars peer through a veil of low clouds as night descends on South Prong Access.

THE CAMPFIRE is dying. Dinner is over, and the dishes are washed. Tents are up, and the pads and bags are laid out. Leaning back in my chair, I look up. A towering wall of gray dolomite rises to my right, bathed in warm evening sunlight. Across the river, car-sized boulders, obviously fallen from the bluff above, rest in crystal-clear, deep-green water. Downstream of the gravel bar, a riffle gurgles a lilting melody — one that will eventually lull me to sleep.

But not right now. Instead, I relax in my chair, listening to a pair of bullfrogs squaring off in a jug-o-rum duel from opposite sides of the river. Occasionally a twanging green chimes in. Toads begin to trill. A ruckus suddenly arising from all around — from low, wet spots on the gravel bar and from the warm slough behind me. Dragonflies buzz over the river, darting at insects, their wings glinting in the sun. I'm watching all this and listening.

But I'm also waiting for darkness. This spot on the Jacks Fork River, far from the "light domes" of large cities, has great night sky viewing.

The largest tributary of the Current River, the Jacks Fork flows largely through steeply sloping, forested land,

much of it in the Mark Twain National Forest. As part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, the valley of the Jacks Fork is protected from development and other intensive land uses. It is my favorite float stream. And tonight's upcoming event — viewing the starry night sky here in the heart of the Ozarks — is one of the premier outdoor experiences to be had in Missouri.

The sun slips low over a forested ridge. Shadows deepen. Slanting sunlight brings sharp relief to crags on the bluff face. The tops of lofty oaks and hickories are still brightly lit, but under the canopy, in the forest's dark interior, fireflies begin to flicker. A creeping purple tint gradually overtakes the dome of sky as twilight deepens and stars begin to pop out.



The Jacks Fork flows by Barn Hollow Natural Area.



GET OUT OF THE CITY

There is a marked contrast between the night sky on the Jacks Fork and what I can see from my backyard. In the city, even during the nearly moonless sky, just days before the new moon, only a few handfuls of stars are visible. On the Jacks Fork, thousands are visible.

The difference is artificial light. A dome of man-made light, called skyglow, forms over cities. These blobs of light, clearly visible from space, brightly delineate developed parts of the Earth's nighttime face.

On the Jacks Fork, artificial light is minimal — coming only from our headlamps, with their subdued red lights, or a satellite or plane passing overhead, or the faint skyglow from Mountain View, a small city about 5 miles to the southwest.

HELLO DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND

Artificial light at night doesn't just obscure our view of the stars. Excessive light at night is harmful to many species of plants and animals, especially nocturnal animals, disrupting their feeding, mating, or migrating. Nighttime is important to almost all living things. People need darkness, too. It's when we rest, recharging our batteries, and when



The Milky Way ignites the skies over the Jacks Fork with light from a billion suns.





Milky Way and firefly lights scatter through the darkness at Bluff View Access.

our bodies manufacture chemicals that help with healing and reducing anxiety.

As darkness descends on the Jacks Fork, fireflies begin their erratic spotlighting, a quasi-psychedelic light show on solid blackness. Some move rapidly, skimming just over the river surface — twin reflecting streaks, like blinking fighter jets flying in tandem. Others move more slowly with weaker flashes. Fireflies are an example of nocturnal insects harmed by artificial light at night. Their flashing, meant to attract mates, can't be seen by other fireflies in areas with too much light. As a result, these fascinating insects are disappearing from many urban yards.

In the distance, a barred owl hoots its plaintive *who-cooks-for-you*, soon answered by another owl farther downstream. Across the river a screech owl calls softly. What can't be heard, or seen, are the birds that may be passing high overhead in migration. Most birds migrate at night, navigating by the light of the moon and stars. The Jacks Fork lies in the Mississippi Flyway, a wide swath of land where migrating birds funnel through. On the date of this trip — in June — the BirdCast website indicated about 25 million birds were still migrating, even though the peak of spring migration had passed.

Migrating birds continue to follow their ancestral flyways. Unfortunately, skyglow around big cities in the flyway, like St. Louis and Kansas City, disrupt migration patterns as birds become disoriented and confused, often flying in circles or detours, needlessly expending energy. Many of them crash into brightly lit buildings. An estimated 600 million birds die each year in collisions with buildings. That's why Lights Out Heartland, a collaborative effort spearheaded by National Audubon Society and DarkSky Missouri, urges people to turn off lights in buildings during migration times.

NOT ALL DARKNESS IS THE SAME

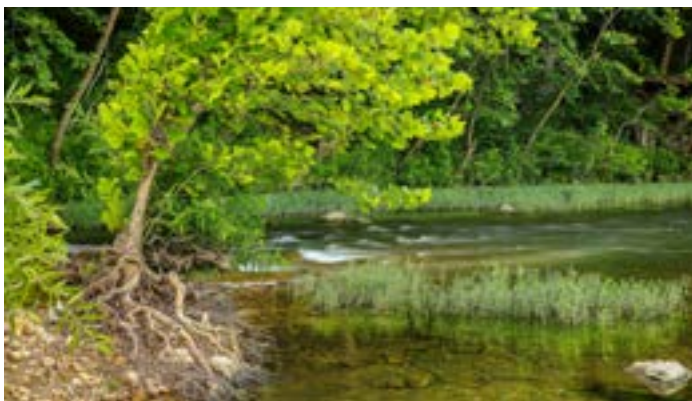
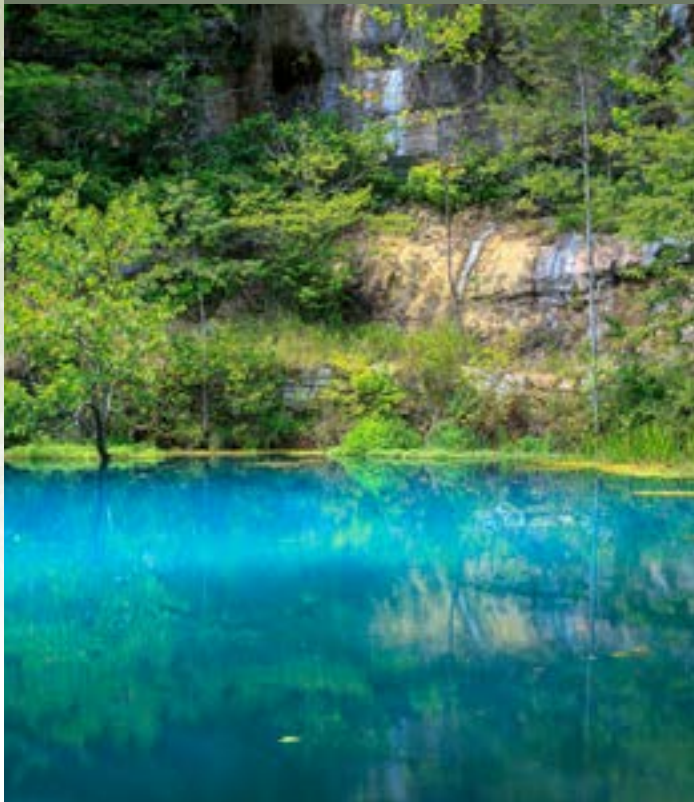
After midnight, high over the campsite, the Milky Way stretches from horizon to horizon. This rim-to-rim spectacle is a sure sign of good dark sky viewing. Dark sky viewing is best in dry air at high elevations where the atmosphere is thinner. But along the Jacks Fork, even with high humidity, the viewing is still spectacular because the sky is so dark. The darkness of places is measured using the Bortle Scale, from one to nine, with one being the darkest. This site rates a little over two on the scale. There are few places in Missouri with a Bortle rating as low as this stretch of the Jacks Fork.

Tonight's starry night sky is magnificent, although a bit surreal, with surroundings lit only by the pinprick lights from thousands of stars. The night sky is also inspirational — a poignant reminder that darkness is equally as important to us as day; that the health of people, as well as wildlife and plants, depend on this natural cycle of day and night, to which almost all life is tuned. We can more fully appreciate the pristine dark sky by visiting places like the Jacks Fork. But when we return home, we can also see more clearly how artificial light at night can diminish our outdoor experiences and negatively affect the wildlife we value.

BE A LIGHT SAVER

Luckily, many problems caused by artificial light at night are relatively easy to correct. DarkSky Missouri, an

DAYLIGHT VIEWS along the Jacks Fork are equally stellar.



organization seeking to protect the night sky, offers five principles for responsible outdoor lighting. Following these principles will preserve the quality of the night sky without compromising safety or security.

The first principle is to make sure the lighting is truly needed, considering the impact it might have on neighbors and wildlife.

Second, lighting should be targeted, shining only where it is needed. Elevated lights should be shielded, shining only downward, not outward or upward into space where the light does no good and is merely a waste of energy. Lights pointing upward or outward can interfere with the migration of birds or disrupt the feeding activities of bats and moths.

Third, use the lowest level of lighting for the job. The human eye is remarkably adept at seeing in dim light. Overly bright lights are not helpful, causing glare and obstructing our view. Contrary to popular notions, brighter lights do not always make us safer.

The fourth principle is that lighting should be controlled, so that it is turned on only when needed. Timers or motion

detectors, for example, are great options.

Lastly, warm-colored — or amber — lights are much better for wildlife than short-wavelength light of blue or violet colors. DarkSky International provides lots of information about “dark-sky compliant” lighting fixtures.

The magic of the dark night sky has left me awed and inspired, though sleep tugs at me. What a treasure we have in places like this, where we can see the night sky almost as our ancestors did — undiminished and unmarred. It is a gentle reminder that we should all be careful stewards of our natural world, making sure that our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy the night sky as we did here on the banks of the Jacks Fork. ▲

Loring Bullard is a freelance writer and former executive director of the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks. He serves on the boards of DarkSky Missouri, Ozark Land Trust, and Schoolcraft Chapter of the Ozark Society. Loring enjoys canoeing, camping, fishing, biking, and writing.

For more information on lighting, visit:

Lights Out Heartland — lightsouthheartland.org

DarkSky Missouri — darkskymissouri.org

DarkSky International — darksky.org



A Summer Song

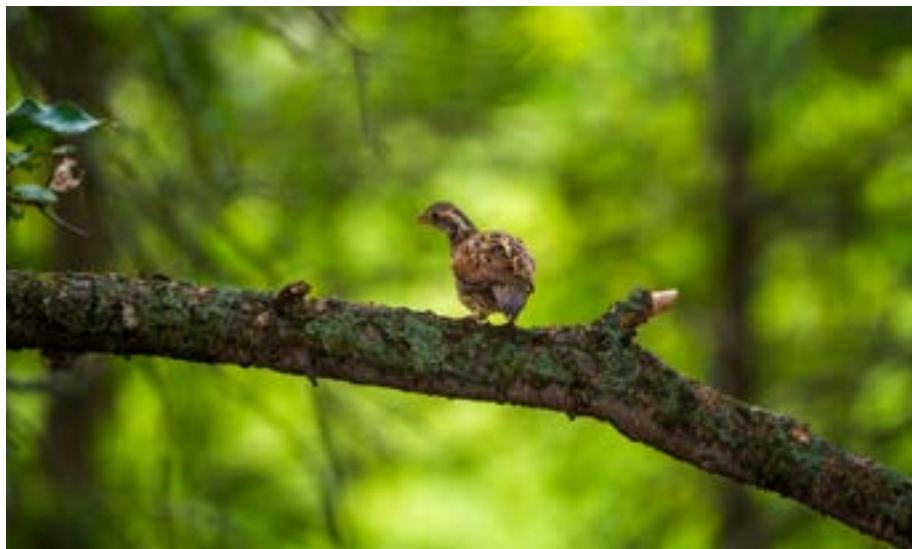
WITH LONGER DAYS,
NATURE REACHES ITS
CRESCENDO

Summer has a rhythm unlike any other season. The sun rises high in the sky, orchestrating long, hot days. Singing high in the treetops, cardinals, wrens, and robins meet the sunrise. Soon the grasshoppers, katydids, and crickets join the song, providing a continuous hum. Plants and trees reach their crescendo — heavy with fruits, lush green foliage, and colorful blooms. Wildlife provides a drumbeat of energy. Bees and butterflies flutter amongst flowers, while birds and deer care for young. As night falls, frogs and toads offer their melodic trills and bass-heavy croaks, while fireflies light the night sky.

We encourage you to get outdoors this summer and take in the show. Make some music of your own! What will your summer song sound like?



Dining Spider by David Stonner 100 mm lens, 1/160 sec, f/4, ISO 1000



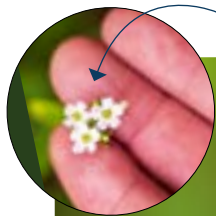
Northern Bobwhite Chick by David Stonner EF100-400 lens, 1/125 sec, f/5.6, ISO 800



Indigo Bunting by Noppadol Paothong
RF600mm lens, 1/500 sec, f/8, ISO 320



Amidon Memorial CA by David Stonner 35mm lens, 1.6 sec, f/22, ISO 100



Really, these flowers are TINY!



Tiny Flower by David Stonner

RF100mm macro lens, 1/500 sec, f/5.6, ISO 12800



Spider Lilies by Noppadol Paothong 105mm lens, 1/250 sec, f/4, ISO 250

"In summer, the song writes itself."

— WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS



Birdsong CA by David Stonner EF500mm lens, 1/160 sec, f/10, ISO 800



False Sunflower by Noppadol Paothong
15mm lens, 1/125 sec, f/11, ISO 800



Least Bittern Hatchlings by David Stonner
100mm lens, 1/250 sec, f/4.5, ISO 200



Black Swallowtail Caterpillar by Noppadol Paothong
105mm lens, 1/250 sec, f/8, ISO 800



Stony Point Prairie CA by David Stonner 400mm lens, 1/5 sec, f/5.6, ISO 200



Prairie Onion by David Stonner RF100mm macro lens, 1/500 sec, f/4, ISO 12800





Red-Tailed Hawk by David Stonner
RF100mm macro lens, 1/500 sec, f/4, ISO 12800



White-Tailed Deer by Noppadol Paothong
RF500mm lens, 1/80 sec, f/7.1, ISO 2500



White-Banded Crab Spider by Noppadol Paothong
105mm lens, 1/500 sec, f/10, ISO 220

Get Outside

in JUNE

→ Ways to connect with nature



Celebrate Missouri's Rivers

June is National Rivers Month. As the first day of summer approaches and the temperatures begin to rise, what better time to visit one of Missouri's many rivers. Whether you are swimming, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, or simply spending a leisurely day sitting next to the water, it's a great way to beat the heat. But this is also a time to think about the conservation and preservation of our rivers. Consider getting involved through trash clean-up or joining a local organization. Learn more at mostreamteam.org.

Nightly Party at the Porch Light

Did you know there's a party going on just outside your door at night, right under your porch light? It usually consists of a variety of insects, all vying for time under that golden, bright porch light. It's quite a scene! In the morning, you may see some stragglers from the night before, just hanging on the side of your house. Look for **click beetles**, **scarab beetles**, **owlflies**, and **green lacewings**, just to name a few.



Better with Butterflies

Summer is a great time to appreciate butterflies, and there's many ways to go about it. You can start a butterfly garden. You can watch and photograph butterflies. You can join a butterfly organization or get involved in community science projects. Learn more at short.mdc.mo.gov/4Qt.

Butterflies & Bug Identification:

- A: Spicebush swallowtail; B: Red admiral;
- C: Red-spotted purple; D: Eastern comma;
- E: Giant swallowtail; F: Monarch; G: Green junebug;
- H: Green lacewing; I: Owlfly; J: Eyed click beetle

What's That Sound?

If you are hearing a "song" for minutes at a time, but cannot distinguish if it is a cardinal, robin, wren, or even a frog, chicken, or cat, you may be listening to a **gray catbird**. These fine feathered soloists take to the stage — or dense foliage in shrubs and trees — and cobble together a variety of sounds they mimic, making it nearly impossible to distinguish at times.



Natural Events to See This Month

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



Yuccas bloom.



Flathead catfish spawn.



White-tailed deer fawns are born.

Find more events in your area at mdc.mo.gov/events

VIRTUAL

HUNTING SERIES: Waterfowl Hunting

Thursday • June 11 • 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Online only

Registration required by June 11. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/o5M.

All ages

Join us for this beginner's program to learn the basics of waterfowl hunting.

VIRTUAL

LEARNING TO HUNT: Getting Started

Thursday • June 25 • 6-7 p.m.

Online only

Registration required by June 25. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/o5A.

All ages

You have decided to begin hunting but don't know where to start. Let us help you. Through this class, we will explore the correct way to go about selecting the method, the game, and the equipment to have before you step out the front door. We will discuss topics like the safety of private versus public hunting, permits, and licenses needed to harvest game animals. We will even have a question and answer session.

Good Services

Downy serviceberry is one of Missouri's most popular native small trees for landscaping thanks to its pretty white springtime flowers, attractive summer foliage, handsome bark and branching habit, and gold, orange, green, and red autumn colors. The berries, which bloom from June through July, attract at least 35 different species of birds. Downy serviceberry is a great alternative to Callery — or Bradford — pear. MDC encourages the switch to this native tree.



Western ratsnakes lay eggs.



Eastern kingbirds nest.

MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST



As you get outside this month, take us with you! Download the **MO CON Mag** app to read this issue on your favorite device. Adventure can happen anywhere.



Places to Go

SOUTHWEST REGION

Stony Point Prairie Conservation Area

Flower sniffin' and bird watchin'
by Larry Archer

✳ **Just as some actors and actresses become typecast as action heroes, villains, or “the quirky best friend,” the same thing can happen to Missouri’s few remaining remnant prairies when they become known primarily for “flower sniffin’ and bird watchin’.”**

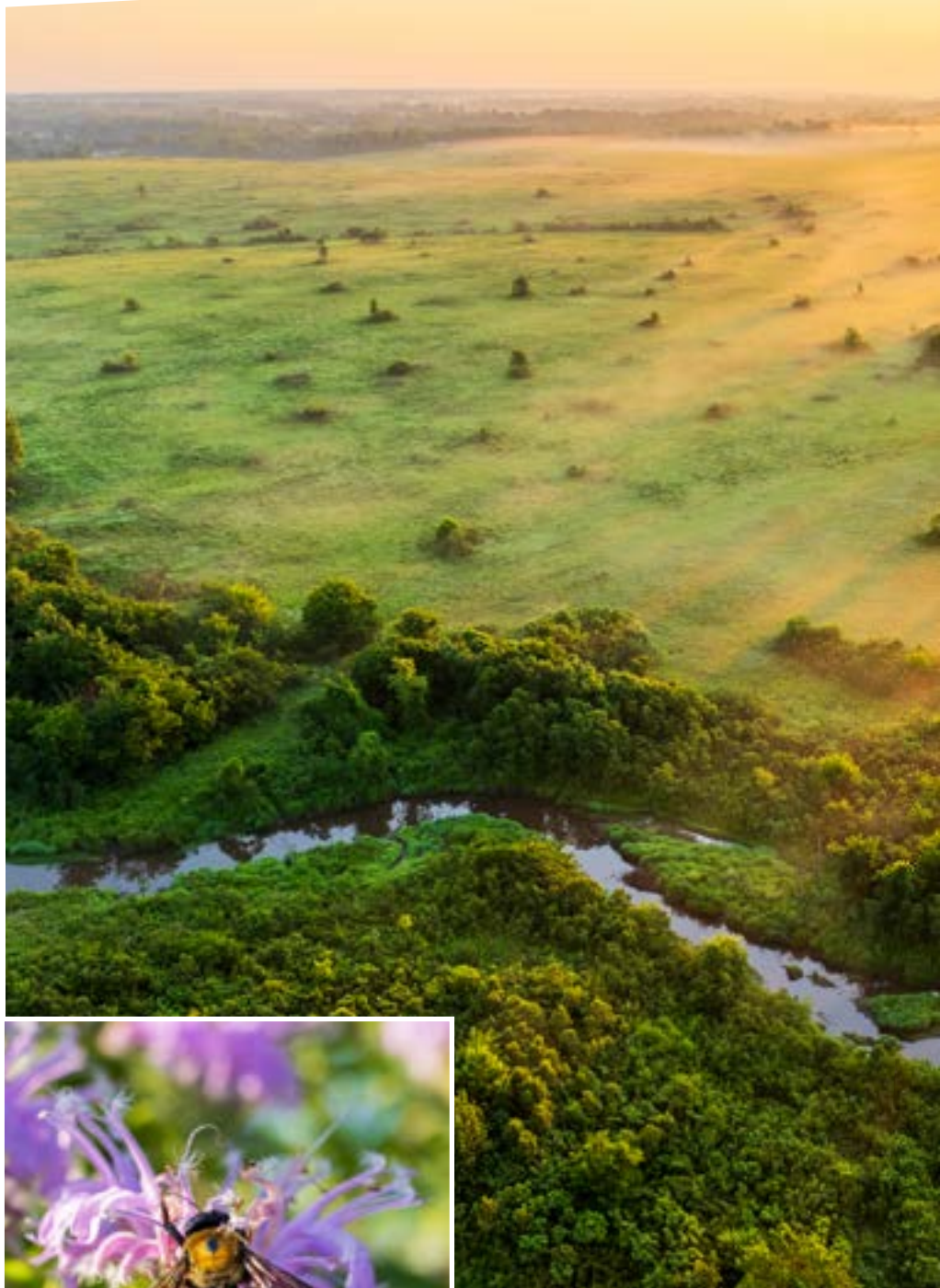
Such is the case with Stony Point Prairie Conservation Area (CA), whose 960 acres in Dade County host an abundance of both birds and blooms.

A maintenance regime that includes both grazing and prescribed fire keeps the area constantly regenerating, resulting in a variety of brighter blooms, attracting more insects and creating a welcome mat for grassland bird species, said North Slope Managing District Supervisor Kyle Hedges.

“Because of the grazing and because of the disturbance regime ... you get shorter areas and taller areas, so the grasshopper sparrows prefer the shorter stuff, Henslow’s sparrows prefer the thicker, thatchy areas,” Hedges said. “We have high numbers of both of those.”

The number and variety of birds found on the area have landed it on the Missouri Birding Trail, and the variety of birds is matched by the variety of plants, Hedges said.

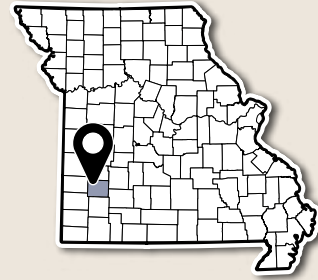
“There’s well over 200 species of plants there.”



“This is a sandstone prairie. The exposed rock scattered around is all sandstone. It’s never been plowed because it was too rocky, too stony.”

—North Slope Managing District
Supervisor Kyle Hedges

DAVID STONNER






STONY POINT PRAIRIE CONSERVATION AREA

consists of 960 acres in Dade County. From Lockwood, take Highway 160 west 4 miles, then Route D north 8 miles.

37.537, -94.0224

short.mdc.mo.gov/o5W 417-895-6880

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT

- 
Birdwatching Included in the National Audubon Society's Golden Grasslands Important Bird Area (short.mdc.mo.gov/o5d). Included in the Missouri Birding Trail (short.mdc.mo.gov/oin). The eBird list of birds recorded at Stony Point Prairie CA is available at short.mdc.mo.gov/o5P.
- 
Hunting Deer and turkey. Regulations are subject to annual changes. Refer to MDC's regulation page online at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zjw. Also **bear, quail, and rabbit.**
- 
Trapping Special use permit required.



Pale purple coneflower

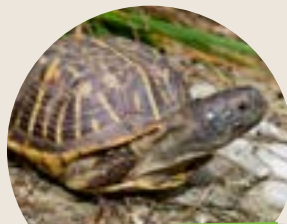
Indian plantain

Prairie blazing star

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU VISIT



Northern crawfish frog



Ornate box turtle



Northern bobwhite



Dickcissel



Eastern Musk Turtle

Sternotherus odoratus

Status

Once called common musk turtle or stinkpot

Size

2 to 4½ inches

Distribution

Nearly statewide, mostly restricted to counties along and south of the Missouri River



Eastern musk turtles — Missouri's smallest turtle species — spend most of their daylight hours buried in mud or resting along the bottom of a river, stream, swamp, slough, reservoir, or ditch. Eastern musk turtles are active bottom foragers, searching for a wide variety of food, including aquatic insects, earthworms, crayfish, mollusks, small fish, tadpoles, algae, plants and their seed, and dead animals. In fact, they keep a lot of these populations in check. The nickname "stinkpot" refers to the odor given off as a form of self-defense. The odor is produced by musk glands in the skin just below the upper shell along the sides.



HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Anglers occasionally catch eastern musk turtles on hook-and-line when using minnows, worms, or small crayfish for bait. The neck is surprisingly long, and the head can reach back as far as the hind legs. To avoid getting bitten, keep this in mind when handling this species.



LIFE CYCLE

In Missouri, females lay eggs in May through July. Typically, females lay two to five eggs, which hatch 65–86 days later. Most females dig a nest hole and cover the eggs with soil, but some musk turtles lay their eggs on open ground or under debris such as leaves, plants, rotting logs, or piles of sawdust. Occasionally, several females will share the same nesting sites, with many of the eggs intermingled. The lifespan for this species can be up to 30 years.

Outdoor Calendar

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



FISHING

Black Bass

Impounded waters and non-Ozark streams:
Open all year

Most streams south of the Missouri River:

- ▶ Catch-and-Keep:
May 23, 2026–Feb. 28, 2027

Bullfrog, Green Frog

June 30 at sunset–Oct. 31, 2026

Nongame Fish Giggling

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

Paddlefish

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

Trout Parks

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

Catch-and-Keep:
March 1–Oct. 31, 2026

HUNTING

Black Bear*

Oct. 17–30, 2026

Bullfrog, Green Frog

June 30 at sunset–Oct. 31, 2026

Coyote

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

Open all year

Crows

Nov. 1, 2026–March 3, 2027

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

Doves

Sept. 1–Nov. 29, 2026

Elk*

Archery:

Oct. 17–25, 2026

Firearms:

Dec. 12–20, 2026

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

Sora, Virginia Rail

Sept. 1–Nov. 9, 2026

Squirrels

May 23, 2026–Feb. 15, 2027

Teal

Sept. 12–20, 2026

Turkey

Fall:

- ▶ Archery Portion:
Sept. 15–Nov. 13, 2026
Nov. 25, 2026–Jan. 15, 2027
- ▶ Firearms Portion:
Oct. 1–31, 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, 2026

Woodcock

Oct. 18–Dec. 1, 2026

*Only hunters selected through a random drawing
may participate in these hunting seasons.

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.

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.





Serving nature and you®

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.

Free to Missouri households

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Purple poppy mallow taken at Diamond Grove Prairie Conservation Area.

📷 by **David Stonner**