

MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST

VOLUME 87, ISSUE 9, SEPTEMBER 2026
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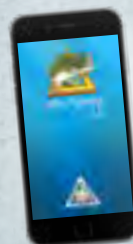
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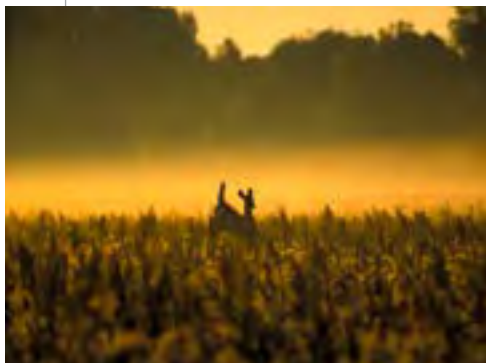


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ON THE COVER

A white-tailed deer captured bounding through a field by Jim Rathert, wildlife photographer for MDC from 1984–2006. Learn more about his legacy on Page 22.

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No generative AI is used
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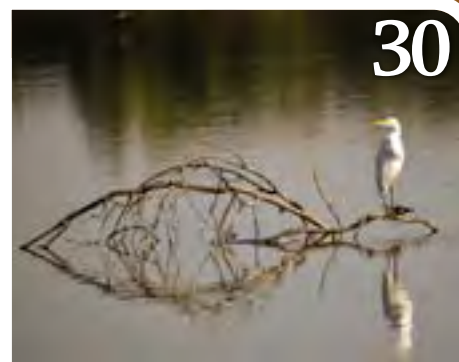
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Inbox



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

Submit your photos online via flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2026, mdc.mo.gov/magazine-reader-photos or by emailing readerphoto@mdc.mo.gov. *Missouri Conservationist* does not accept AI-generated photos.

1 | Marble Creek recreation area by **Craig Allen**, via website submission

2 | Jumping spider by **Craig Alexander**, via Flickr

3 | Pileated woodpeckers by **Mitch Odneal**, via email submission

4 | Jacks Fork jumping by **Bryan Hunt**, 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

STATE NURSERY

I wanted to thank MDC for the quality and availability of shrubs and bushes from the state nursery. The prices are more than fair, and out of the 50 black chokeberry plants I have ordered, only one has failed. That's a heck of a success rate. Great work and a quality product.

Todd Hohbein Kirksville

It's that time of year again — time to order your seedlings from the George O. White State Nursery. Find the flyer in this issue, follow the online link, and get your orders in. Some species will go fast. — The Editors

WON OVER A WEST VIRGINIAN

I grew up in West Virginia but moved here 20 years ago. And though I will always be a proud mountaineer with our beautiful rivers and streams, your magazine is second to none. I even get the kids' magazine [Xplor] to send to my niece. Keep up the great job.

Don Amoruso St. Louis

TO SERVE AND PROTECT

Your magazine is read as soon as it arrives. For everyone at MDC working in front, behind the scenes, and in the field, you have given the state of Missouri the best in the nation. Thank you all for your time and efforts. It has really paid off. An agent even came to my property years ago to help give me better deer and turkey ideas. Please continue to serve and protect what we have been given as you have in the past.

Jim Keithly via email

Up Front



✧ Earlier this summer, I had the opportunity to visit the new Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in Medora, North Dakota. They have done an incredible job of telling an inspirational story that chronicles Roosevelt's growth from a sick kid to a Dakota rancher to the nation's foremost conservation president.

I've shared stories of how time outdoors has created strong emotional connections with people and places. This is very true for Roosevelt. One of the most impactful stories for me was Roosevelt's journey to the Dakota Territory in 1883, following the death of his wife and mother. Roosevelt was in pursuit of a buffalo before they disappeared from the Great Plains. By 1883, the once great herds that covered the plains were relegated to a few scattered remnants. He was finally successful, but the hunt was hard and left a lasting impression. It was an experience that would shape Roosevelt's conservation ethic.

Roosevelt's conservation legacy is incredible — 20 million acres of public land protected, five national parks established, and the creation of the U.S. Forest Service. It's a legacy shaped by many significant conservation figures, with whom Roosevelt engaged frequently. His camping trip with John Muir to Yosemite clearly shaped his thoughts about wild places, a lifelong interest in birds, and ties to Audubon's early bird conservation societies, fueling the protection of Florida's Pelican Island, the nation's first wildlife refuge. He was surrounded by people who pushed his conservation thinking.

In 1887, he and George Bird Grinnell started the Boone and Crockett Club, the nation's first hunter-conservation group and often considered one of the major starting points of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Those founding ideas were science-based management, hunting as a conservation tool, and wildlife as a public trust. These ideas still guide the way we manage fish and wildlife in Missouri today.

Roosevelt knew he couldn't do it alone, and that mantra is driven home in this issue of the *Conservationist*. Our feature on the future of deer management (*Partnering for Missouri's Deer Herd*, Page 11) makes it clear — healthy herds depend on landowners, hunters, researchers, and wildlife managers pulling together. A centuries-old conservation ethic is kept alive not by one person, but all of us pulling in the same direction.

JASON SUMNERS, DIRECTOR

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Missouri Conservation Commissioners

Have a Question for a Commissioner?

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



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Margaret F. ECKELKAMP

SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

Where are the Whip-poor-wills?

Biologists look at the presence of whip-poor-wills across Missouri

by Dianne Van Dien

✳ **Eastern whip-poor-wills are so highly camouflaged that most people never see them.** Yet many know these birds from their *whip-poor-WILL* calls, which echo through forests on summer nights. Those calls, once common throughout our region, have been dwindling. MDC is now funding a four-year study to look at whip-poor-will populations statewide.

“We’re focusing on priority geographies — areas that MDC has identified as important to improve habitat for all kinds of species, including birds, mammals, and plants,” explained State Ornithologist Kristen Heath-Acre. “Within and near these areas, a University of Missouri PhD student, Natalie Ramos, is sampling for whip-poor-wills across a gradient of management and habitat types to see if what we’re doing in some of these units is leading to more whip-poor-wills.”

To sample (or survey for) whip-poor-wills, one listens. For this study, automated recording units



During the day, eastern whip-poor-wills blend into their woodland surroundings. At night, they forage in open understory and in fields along forest edges for moths and other flying insects.

(ARUs) are used to detect whip-poor-will calls in the designated locations. ARUs make it possible to cover more areas with fewer staff.

“Whip-poor-wills sing before sunrise and after sunset, but also throughout the night if there’s enough moonlight,” Heath-Acre said. “They need that moonlight for hunting prey on the wing because they hunt mostly by sight.”

The ARUs are set to record when the moon is brightest — roughly the seven nights leading up to a full moon and the seven nights after — which is when whip-poor-wills call the most. About 200 ARUs are deployed at a time. During non-recording weeks, Ramos downloads the data and moves the ARUs to new locations so all areas can be sampled during breeding season. In fall, the species migrates to Mexico and Central America.

Whip-poor-wills are acrobatic flyers, deftly maneuvering to catch insects in the air. Moths are their primary prey. More moths should mean more whip-poor-wills. So, the study, now in its third year, has another component — collection of moths and other night-flying insects — to see how different management types are affecting their availability.

Ultimately, said Heath-Acre, the study aims “to tease apart why there are whip-poor-wills in some areas of Missouri and not in others, and what we might be able to do to increase whip-poor-will abundance across the state.”

At a Glance

MDC’s Whip-poor-will Occupancy Study seeks to:

- Look at which habitat and management types support the highest number of whip-poor-wills and their main prey (moths).
- Compare whip-poor-will and night-flying insect populations in different management units: even- and uneven-aged forest, closed canopy, and no management.
- Offer management recommendations for increasing whip-poor-wills on public and private lands.



Scientists detect whip-poor-wills with autonomous recording units (ARUs) that are set to record when the species is most vocal.

Partners:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, University of Missouri, University of Illinois Natural History Survey

In Brief

News and updates from MDC



Waterfowl at
Duck Creek
Conservation Area

MANAGED WATERFOWL HUNTS

MDC OFFERS
HUNTING
OPPORTUNITIES
ON INTENSIVELY
MANAGED
WETLANDS ACROSS
THE STATE

➔ Reservations for managed waterfowl hunts open Sept. 1 and run through Sept. 18. MDC holds managed hunts for waterfowl on 13 intensively managed wetlands. These wetlands offer some of the best public waterfowl hunting opportunities in the state.

There are three ways to obtain a spot on a managed waterfowl hunting area:

- Missouri residents may apply online for a reservation, which guarantees successful applicants a place to hunt on a specific day at a specific area.
- Residents and nonresidents can hunt with a reservation holder for hunting parties up to four people.
- Residents and nonresidents can arrive at a managed waterfowl hunting area and draw for a spot in the morning drawing or "poor-line."

For more information on managed waterfowl hunts, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/opL.

Waterfowl hunting is also available on numerous conservation areas as well as public and private locations around the state. For more information on waterfowl hunting, check out the *Migratory Bird and Waterfowl Hunting Digest 2026-2027* anywhere permits are sold and at short.mdc.mo.gov/4SZ.



AGENTS IN ACTION

by Holly Dentner

Last September, Conservation Agent Makayla Ryan received a call from the local electric cooperative to report suspicious activity near a fiber optic line in Christian County. Technicians had responded to the location due to an outage, and when they arrived, they saw the line had been shot. There were seeds and feathers scattered around a burnt patch of ground, indicating that hunters were shooting doves off the powerline.



Corporal Walker talks to one of the people caught hunting doves over bait (left).

"The evidence of the fiber optic line damage and spread seed told us that someone might be hunting over bait," said Ryan. "I began working the area with Corporal Alex Walker to monitor the situation, and it didn't take long before we discovered what was going on."

Shortly after daybreak in mid-September, she heard gunshots coming from the property. She and Walker approached a man and woman who appeared to be dove hunting.

"They were hunting over the baited field and weren't the property owners," said Walker. "So, our next step was to contact the landowners to find out more."

After interviewing everyone involved, the agents learned that both individuals had permission to hunt on the property, and one of them had been hunting on opening day with a larger group of people.

"The landowner had spread the seed and was part of the hunting group on opening day," said Ryan. "We found out about the additional people involved after speaking with him."

According to the men, there were seven adults and two juveniles who were hunting on the property on opening day of dove season. They were issued warnings for taking/attempting to take migratory birds by bait. The man caught in person by Agents Ryan and Walker received citations for taking/attempting to take migratory birds by bait and subjecting others to the violations of the baiting rule.

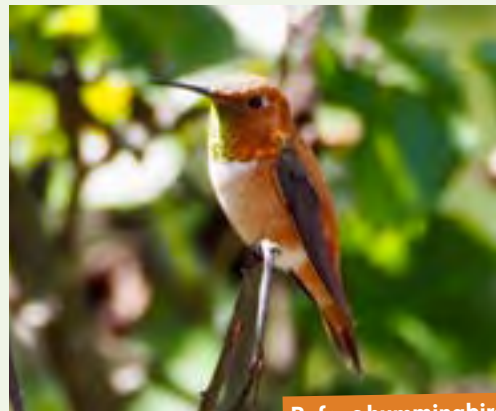
If you have questions about the regulations for hunting doves, contact your local conservation agent. See Page 29 for information.

Dove season runs Sept. 1 through Nov. 29, 2026. For more information, consult the *Migratory Bird and Waterfowl Hunting Digest 2026–2027* online at short.mdc.mo.gov/4SZ.

Ask MDC

Got a Question for Ask MDC?

Visit mdc.mo.gov/contact-us



Rufous hummingbird

Q: This rufous hummingbird has taken over one of my feeders, guarding it constantly. It is quite aggressive. Can you tell me more about this species?

➔ Rufous hummingbirds are known as one of the feistiest hummingbirds, according to Cornell Lab's All About Birds website. They even take on the larger hummingbirds of the Southwest, which can be double their weight. These little birds are long distance migrants, making their way from Alaska and Canada to wintering grounds in the southeastern United States and Mexico. In Missouri, rufous hummingbirds are rare autumn transients and winter residents, usually observed at feeders.

The male has rufous — or reddish — upperparts except for the greenish head and black tips on the tail feathers. Their throats flash orange-red in the sunlight but will otherwise appear black. The female and immature rufous hummingbirds are metallic green above and their throats are spotted with brownish and orange-red flecks.

These birds feed primarily on colorful, tubular flowers and get protein and fat from eating insects taken from the air and aphids gleaned from plants.



North American bullfrog

Q: These frogs keep getting into our house and are all over our yard. There isn't a water source close by; the nearest is perhaps a quarter mile away. What are they?

➔ This is a North American bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeianus*), which recently metamorphized from tadpole to froglet. Tadpole development takes about 11-14 months. In Missouri, they usually transform into froglets from June through August. Adult size may not be reached for another two to three years, and this frog's lifespan may be slightly more than seven years.

The North American bullfrog is Missouri's largest frog and can reach 8 inches from snout to vent. Bullfrogs lack a dorsolateral fold, a ridge of skin along each side of the back. In other members of the *Lithobates* genus — like the North American green frog — the dorsolateral fold is distinct.

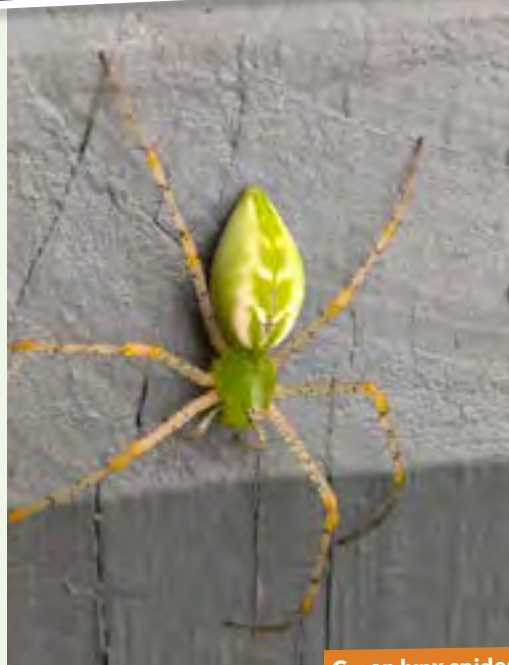
They are Missouri's most aquatic species of frog. They spend most of their time in or near lakes, ponds, rivers, creeks, drainage ditches, sloughs, and permanent swamps

and marshes. They'll burrow into the mud at the bottom of ponds and rivers to avoid winter temperatures. Both young and adult bullfrogs will move overland during heavy summer rains and can be seen crossing roads. Adults have been found to move infrequently between wetlands, but overland movements up to almost a mile can occur. Recently transformed bullfrogs have been known to make considerable movements.

Q: Can you tell me what this spider's name is? I haven't seen a spider like this before.

➔ This is a green lynx spider (*Peucetia viridans*). These spiders are usually found on the tops of plants and cacti in fields, prairies, xeric (dry) scrub, yards, and gardens. They mostly occur across the southeastern United States to California and are rarely reported in Missouri, according to Iowa State University's BugGuide website.

The females are large with leg spans of 70 millimeters and form egg



Green lynx spider

sacs in autumn. One of their means of defense is to squirt venom from their chelicerae.

This family of lynx spiders are so-called because some chase their prey with great rapidity over foliage; they even jump from branch to branch. But some also lie in wait near flowers and spring upon visiting insects. They don't form webs.

What IS it?

Can you guess this month's natural wonder?

The answer is on Page 8.



SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

Black-Tailed Jackrabbit

by Shelly Colatskie

Black-tailed jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus*) are the largest lagomorph species (rabbits, hares, and pikas) in Missouri. Related to rabbits, the black-tailed jackrabbit is a hare belonging to the genus *Lepus* (cottontail rabbits are in genus *Sylvilagus*). Black-tailed jackrabbits, while common in the west and southwest United States, are found only in southwest Missouri in shortgrass prairies, overgrazed dairy farms, and pastures with legumes and crops less than 2 feet tall. A state endangered species, black-tailed jackrabbits have not been officially reported in Missouri since 2009, and most sightings occurred in the 1980s.



WHY IT'S IMPERILED

Since Missouri is on the eastern edge of its range, black-tailed jackrabbits were never common. They likely expanded into Missouri in the 1930s due to the Dust Bowl and overgrazing. The species has likely suffered a natural range reduction due to healthier tallgrass prairie habitats and overhunting. Missouri's current population may be small to nonexistent.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Protect their remaining habitat, including shortgrass prairies and overgrazed agricultural fields, and avoid using nonnative plants such as fescue. Replant fields with native forbs and warm-season grasses and remove woody vegetation in open grasslands. To avoid damage to crops, build rabbit fences using chicken wire or woven wire at least 3 feet high and 6 inches underground.

If you or someone you know has seen a black-tailed jackrabbit in Missouri, please contact Shelly.Colatskie@mdc.mo.gov to report your sighting so MDC can assess their current population.

WHAT IS IT?

NORTHERN COTTONMOUTH

The northern cottonmouth is a venomous semiaquatic snake. Dark and heavy-bodied, its head is larger than its neck. It gets its name from the whitish lining of its mouth. When alarmed, a cottonmouth typically opens its mouth widely in a defensive posture, showing the cotton-white lining. A bite from a northern cottonmouth is dangerous, requiring immediate medical attention, but most species of venomous snakes are shy and normally avoid people.



2026-2027 Seedling Orders

GEORGE O. WHITE STATE FOREST NURSERY

Historically, the Seedling Order Form has been included in the September issue of the *Missouri Conservationist*. From now on, readers can access the order form online or by calling the nursery to receive a paper copy.

PLAN AHEAD AND ORDER EARLY

We accept mail-in orders from Sept. 1, 2026, to April 15, 2027, and online orders from Sept. 1, 2026, to April 30, 2027. We always sell out of some species quickly. To get the plants you want, please submit your order early. Check out our online catalog at mdc.mo.gov/seedlings for all available seedlings.

NEW THIS YEAR

As costs continue to rise for supplies and services, the nursery has made price adjustments due to those increased costs, including those species that take two years to grow.

The price for the following two-year-old species has doubled:

- Eastern white pine
- Hickories
- Pawpaw
- Buckeyes
- Deciduous holly
- American beautyberry
- White fringetree

Due to streamlining inventory, the following nonnative species will not be available:

- Norway spruce
- Loblolly pine
- Pitch x loblolly pine

Due to poor germination or short seed supply, the following species will only be available online while supplies last:

- Pecan
- Red buckeye
- White fringetree

Due to the species not germinating, we will not be able to offer the following species:

- Flowering dogwood
- Mulberry
- Tulip poplar
- Black chokeberry



COST

Prices range from \$0.44 to \$2.57 per seedling. Sales tax will be added to all orders unless a tax-exemption certificate is provided. A \$9 handling charge is added to each order, regardless of the number of seedlings. In-state shipping is \$15 per 100 seedlings with a \$15 minimum charge, and out-of-state shipping is \$30 per 100 seedlings with a \$30 minimum charge.

THREE WAYS TO ORDER: ONLINE, MAIL, OR FAX.

Scan the QR code below to place an order online or to download the Seedling Order Form booklet. If you'd like a paper copy of the Seedling Order Form booklet mailed to you, call 573-674-3229.



To order or check availability, scan the QR code or visit mdc.mo.gov/seedlings



George O. White State Forest Nursery
Missouri Department of Conservation
14027 Shafer Road, PO Box 119
Licking, MO 65542



Fax to:
573-674-4047

If you order by mail or fax, **do not** send payment with your order.

You can place your order online starting after midnight on Sept. 1, 2026.



PARTNERING FOR MISSOURI'S DEER HERD

WORKING TOGETHER, WE CAN
KEEP DEER HEALTHY FOR FUTURE
GENERATIONS

by Jason Isabelle and Lauren Hildreth

The word “wildlife” conjures up different images for different people. For some, it’s a songbird perching on a branch, a turtle sunning on a log, or a squirrel scampering up an oak tree. But for many, the image that comes to mind is of the white-tailed deer — a staple of our landscape. Many Missourians, like Mike and Dana Blevins, enjoy seeing this large, majestic mammal on their 300-acre property in Perryville.

“We take the side-by-side out with our grandkids, and we will always see deer,” they said. “Watching them year-round is a way we monitor the herd.”

White-tailed deer are an iconic species, one Missourians, including the Blevins and many others, care deeply about.



WHITE-TAILED DEER HISTORY

As abundant as white-tailed deer are today, it's difficult to imagine Missouri without them. However, a century ago deer almost disappeared from the Show-Me State due to widespread habitat destruction and unregulated harvest.

The Blevins have experienced the difference quality habitat can make to the herd.

"The previous owner of the property allowed high hunting pressure, ran cattle in the woods, and didn't manage the land for a healthy deer herd," they said.

Since purchasing the property in 1992, they started implementing habitat management practices, recommended by an MDC biologist, to increase deer numbers.

Today, Missouri has an abundant deer herd and nearly half a million people pursue them during hunting seasons. Yet, despite this success story and a now thriving herd, a threat looms large — chronic wasting disease (CWD). Although relatively rare in most areas of the state, if enough deer become infected with the disease, Missouri's hunting culture and deer herd will be forever altered.

WHAT IS CWD?

CWD is a deadly, contagious disease of white-tailed deer and other members of the deer family, including elk, another native Missouri species. CWD can spread when deer encounter each other or from the infectious proteins shed into the environment by an infected deer. At first, the disease spreads slowly within a deer herd. But if not managed, it begins to spread more rapidly, eventually infecting more deer.



This deer died from CWD in 2025.
It was found in Jefferson County.

WHAT HAS MISSOURI DONE?

MDC began testing deer for CWD over 20 years ago. Nearly 33,000 deer were tested across the state before the disease was first found in north-central Missouri in 2010. Because CWD was found early, MDC worked with hunters and landowners to embark on what would be the largest localized CWD response effort ever undertaken by a state wildlife agency.

Dave Murphy, a Clark County landowner and former conservation commissioner, has tested every deer harvested off his property since MDC began testing deer for the disease. He also worked with MDC to manage CWD when it was eventually found near his property.

"I liked the ability to figure out [with MDC] what we were comfortable with doing," Murphy said.

Murphy relied on friends and family to harvest additional deer from his property at a rate where he was comfortable. Landowners have always determined whether CWD management occurs on their property and the number of deer removed.

When the Blevins heard CWD was discovered in Missouri, they started educating themselves about the disease.

"We owned an archery shop and wanted to make sure we could provide correct information to our customers," said Mike Blevins.

They have also participated in post-season targeted removal efforts. Even with the removal of additional deer, both Murphy and the Blevins have successful deer seasons each year, harvesting enough deer to feed their families and donate to the Share the Harvest program.

Over time, thousands of landowners, hunters, and other conservation partners have worked with MDC to safeguard the herd, and these efforts have been recognized nationally as a model of success.

Because of effective management, 15 years after the disease was found in the state, less than 1 percent of deer test positive for CWD. Even in the counties where the disease was first found, less than 3 percent of deer test positive.

"I liked the ability to figure out [with MDC] what we were comfortable with doing."

— DAVE MURPHY, CLARK COUNTY LANDOWNER

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

At first, CWD spreads slowly within a herd. For years, only a small number of deer have the disease. Eventually a tipping point is reached when about 5 percent of the herd has the disease. Unfortunately, after the tipping point is reached, management actions to sustain a healthy deer herd become more difficult.

By harvesting additional deer where CWD exists, hunters can protect the herd and keep infection rates below the tipping point. Unfortunately, this is no longer an option in areas of high CWD infection rates.

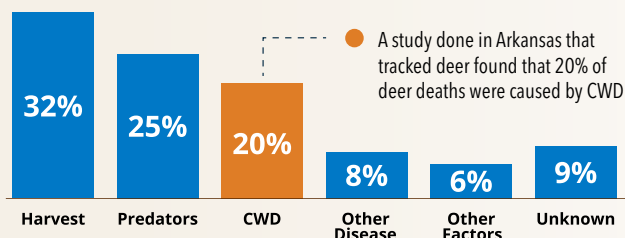
- Northwest Arkansas:**
CWD is the third highest leading cause of death of deer, accounting for 1 in 5 deaths.
 
- Northeast West Virginia:**
CWD is the leading cause of death of deer, killing more deer than hunters and predators do.
 
- Southwest Tennessee:**
Where CWD infection rates are low, buck harvest is increasing; in counties with high infection rates, buck harvest is declining.
 
- Southwest Wisconsin:**
In Iowa County, near where CWD was first found in the state, buck harvest is declining. The 2024 buck harvest total there was the lowest in 45 years. Just two counties away, where CWD is less common, hunters are harvesting record buck numbers.
 

These examples paint a bleak picture of what it's like to hunt in an area with high CWD infection rates. By working together, we can keep CWD infection rates low and maintain a healthy herd and strong hunting culture.

MYTH: CWD has never killed a deer

FACT: CWD kills many deer each year where infection rates are high

Cause Of Death Among Adult Deer in Northwestern Arkansas Where 52% of Deer Have CWD

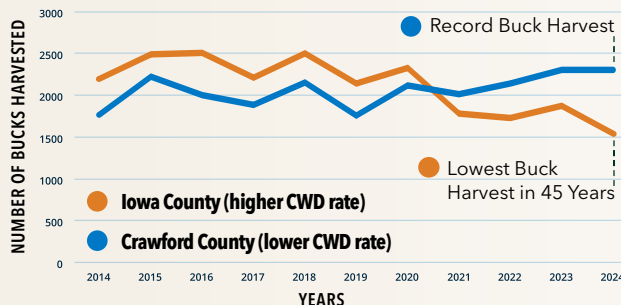


Jorge et al. 2025. Arkansas Chronic Wasting Disease Deer Study. University of Georgia.

MYTH: CWD does not affect deer hunting

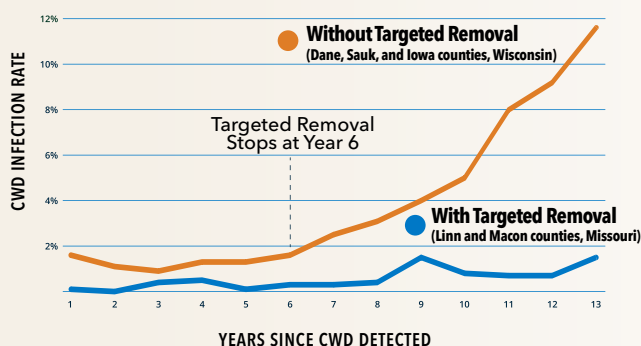
FACT: High CWD infection rates result in declining deer harvest

Iowa and Crawford counties, Wisconsin, buck harvest 2014-2024



MYTH: CWD management efforts are not effective

FACT: Targeted removal keeps a lid on CWD infection rates



REGULATION CHANGES FOR 2026

As CWD has expanded, the deer hunting regulations have become more complex. To adapt to changes in CWD distribution and in response to hunter input, the following changes will occur for the 2026 deer season. These changes will continue limiting the effects of CWD on Missouri's deer herd and simplify regulations for hunters.

1. Removing the CWD Management Zone:

The CWD Management Zone has been removed. In counties within 10 miles of where CWD has been found, placing feed and minerals for deer continues to be prohibited.

2. Changes to Mandatory CWD Sampling:

Beginning this fall, MDC will conduct mandatory CWD sampling throughout the state on a four-year rotation. Each county will have mandatory sampling one out of every four years.

3. Removing the Antler-Point Restriction (APR):

MDC has removed the APR statewide. The APR protects young bucks that travel many miles and can spread CWD long distances.

4. Removing the CWD Portion of Firearms Deer Season:

Removing this five-day portion of firearms deer season will simplify the structure of the season without significantly affecting harvest.

5. Increasing the Acreage for CWD Management Permits:

Landowners are now required to have at least 20 contiguous acres in a CWD core area to receive CWD Management Permits. This matches the acreage requirement for Landowner Deer Hunting Permits, reducing potential confusion for landowners.

For more information about deer hunting regulations, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oce.



This is proof of what can be achieved by working together to address a significant conservation challenge, and it's good news for Missouri's deer herd and for those that care about this important natural resource.

Yet despite this success, a significant challenge remains. Science tells us that once CWD becomes well established, management actions to sustain a healthy herd become more difficult. Keeping infection rates below 5 percent is our greatest opportunity to slow the disease. With infection rates still below this level in most areas, we have a window of opportunity, but it will not stay open forever and may already be closing in some areas.

"We're really counting on biologists to help manage this and we're willing to help in any way," said Mike Blevins when asked about the impact of CWD. "Being proactive is the answer. Keep moving forward."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Targeted removal is backed by science and has proven to be effective in Missouri. However, to keep CWD at bay, considerable effort must be sustained through time. Hunter and landowner support for, and participation in, targeted removal has declined. Because of this, MDC paused targeted removal efforts in December 2025. To continue to be successful in this work, at the scale needed, will take a strong public partnership where hunters and landowners work alongside MDC to keep the herd healthy.

Since announcing the targeted removal pause, MDC has continued to engage with the public to gather input on the future of deer management. These efforts included an online comment opportunity following the announcement, as well as eight deer management community conversations held across the state this spring.

These conversations reinforced the public's shared commitment to a healthy Missouri deer herd. Participants expressed a desire for clearer information about CWD and MDC's management efforts, as well as a greater opportunity to serve as partners in future deer management decisions.



“It’s a disease just like cancer in the body or an invasive weed in a field. Our job is to do what the biologists think is best to address the issue.”

— DANA BLEVINS, PERRY COUNTY LANDOWNER

As a result of this engagement and our continued evaluation, MDC will not conduct targeted removals this winter and currently has no plans to resume this approach. Instead, MDC will work alongside hunters, landowners, and other key partners to develop a localized approach in which hunter harvest is the primary tool to manage the deer herd and CWD during the regular deer season. This decision does not mean CWD is no longer a concern or that MDC is stepping away from disease management. Rather, it reflects the department’s commitment to working collaboratively with hunters and landowners to identify a sustainable path forward for managing CWD while protecting the long-term health of Missouri’s deer herd. It also does not mean that previous efforts were not effective. Many landowners and hunters were dedicated partners and worked tirelessly. These efforts made a difference and Missouri’s deer herd is healthier because of it. It’s simply time to adapt.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR MISSOURI’S DEER HERD?

We know from the experiences of other states that we must manage CWD or risk having a heavily infected herd and adverse effects on our strong hunting culture.

“It’s a disease,” said Dana Blevins. “Just like cancer in the body or an invasive weed in a field. Our job is to do what the biologists think is best to address the issue.”

And just like other diseases, CWD spreads silently and causes issues before any symptoms even appear, so early intervention leads to the best outcomes. That is why landowners, hunters, and MDC must partner together to minimize the impacts of CWD to keep the herd healthy.

This fall, MDC will partner with landowners to manage the deer population more intentionally in localized areas where CWD has been found. These efforts will involve encouraging landowners and hunters to harvest additional deer during the deer hunting season. By increasing deer harvest in these areas, CWD will spread less, the herd will be healthier, and quality hunting opportunities will be maintained in the long-term.

THE COLLABORATION CONTINUES

Nearly a century ago, Missourians worked together to restore the deer herd, achieving what seemed like an impossible task. Yet, through cooperation, collaboration, and a shared vision, a remarkable success story was achieved. It would be easy to take what we have for granted, but the threat we’re dealing with is very real. It will take hard work, dedication, and perseverance to preserve our legacy. By continuing to work together and remembering our shared goal of a healthy herd now and into the future, we can ensure the Missourians who follow us can be as fortunate as we are today. ▲

Jason Isabelle is a cervid program supervisor and a certified wildlife biologist. Lauren Hildreth is a wildlife program coordinator and a certified wildlife biologist.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Join MDC to protect Missouri’s deer herd! Hunter, landowner, and partner involvement is critical to managing CWD and protecting Missouri’s deer herd and hunting culture.

- 🦌 Harvest additional deer if you hunt in an area near where CWD has been found.
- 🦌 Have your deer tested for CWD.
- 🦌 Follow the carcass disposal regulations (statewide) and the prohibition of placing feed and minerals for deer (counties within 10 miles of where CWD has been found).
- 🦌 Educate yourself and others about CWD and the importance of CWD management.

To learn more about the disease and how you can help, visit **mdc.mo.gov/cwd**.

DUCK CALLS

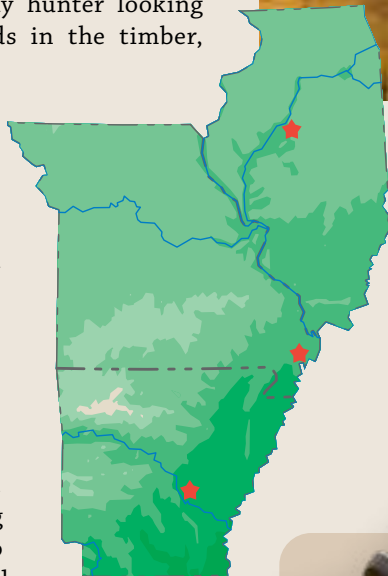
FUNCTIONAL ART
THAT ECHOES
THROUGH HISTORY

by **Gilbert Randolph**
photographs by **David Stonner**

The history of duck calls often centers around three places — Reelfoot Lake in New Madrid, Stuttgart, Ark., and Pekin, Ill.

The legendary Reelfoot Lake, born from the New Madrid earthquake of 1812, which shook Missouri's Bootheel, is remembered for its metal reed-style calls. Stuttgart, Ark., considered waterfowl heaven for any hunter looking to chase greenheads in the timber, is a long-time meeting place for callmakers and competition callers. Pekin, Ill., is home to Phillip Olt, who is credited with introducing a curved toneboard that most callmakers emulate to this day.

Anywhere waterfowl fly, there's a history of hunting and callmaking to go alongside and Missouri is no exception. From luxury checked calls made for wealthy clients in Kansas City to simple, turned calls made for the everyday hunter, callmaking was an important part of Missouri's history and remains so to this day.



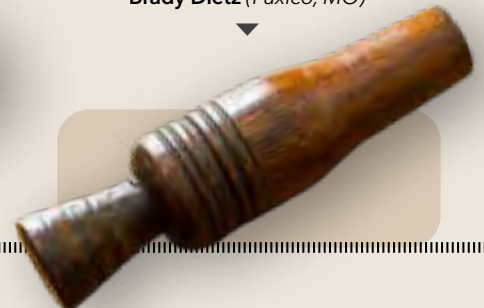
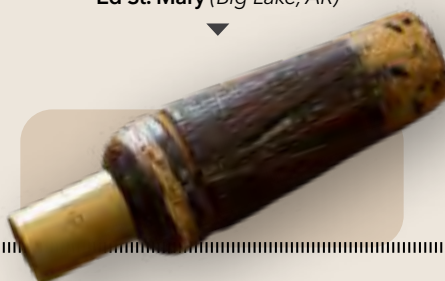
▲
An antique call made by
Don Wheatley (Kennett, MO)
with a curved toneboard
and wooden reed.



▲
Claude Stone (Senath, MO)
Ed St. Mary (Big Lake, AR)
▼



▲
Leonart Vaughn (Senath, MO)
Brady Dietz (Puxico, MO)
▼



MISSOURI GOES METAL

Modern duck call history in Missouri began with metal reed calls.

For those unfamiliar with how a duck call works, they typically consist of five main pieces. The barrel is a tube, often wood or acrylic, which the caller blows into. The insert is a piece that holds the toneboard, reed, and wedge into the barrel. Inserts were made with a variety of materials, from metal and wood to hard rubber and acrylic. Similarly, the toneboard is what the reed vibrates on to make sound. The reed vibrates as air passes over it. Reeds have been made from brass, copper, and according to Dale Bordulon, legendary Louisiana-style duck callmaker, even filed down from plastic combs. Wedges were often made of cork and were what held the reed to the toneboard.

While modern, mass-produced calls are most often acrylic or polycarbonate with a plastic reed, duck calls going back into the 1800s were made of wood and used thin metal sheets for reed material. A variety of styles of metal reed calls could be found throughout the state. It's these calls that characterized the early duck callmaking history of the state.



▲ An antique call with a metal reed made by William McWitz (St. Louis, MO).



▲ J.T. Beckhart (Bucks Point, AR)
John "Sandy" Morrow (Holcomb, MO)
▼



These antique toneboards are exposed showing metal reeds. The metal reed could be made of brass, copper, or German silver depending on what the maker had available.

From the collection of Tucker Sherrod.



BIG CITY MEETS THE SOUTH

Waterfowl Hunting and Wetland Conservation: A Model of Collaboration places some of Missouri's earliest callmakers in St. Louis, as well as southeastern Missouri. With both on the Mississippi flyway, it's no surprise that duck hunting was an important part of both places' history.

St. Louis was a major center of commerce and the confluence of America's two most iconic rivers, so it didn't take long for wealthy individuals from the area to get interested in waterfowl hunting. Well-to-do hunters from Missouri's city centers would often travel south to hunt both southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. Oftentimes, they would come in conflict with local hunters and get into fist fights, shootings, and some duck hunting lodges were even burned down.

MEET THE MAKERS

St. Louis callmakers William Mackwits and Thomas A. Morgan were producing duck calls as early as 1900 and were selling them in local hardware stores. Both used metal reeds, but where the Morgan calls were more typical of a Reelfoot style call, at least some of Mackwits calls had unique divots along the toneboard. One such call exists in Kansas City's John Braun's collection of duck calls, also mentioned in *Waterfowl Hunting and Wetland Conservation: A Model of Collaboration*.

Around the same time in the Bootheel region, callmakers with metal reed calls were being used in the Big Lake region of northern Arkansas and other areas in the state's southeast region. Ed St. Mary, born and raised in Lilbourn, Mo., became famous for making duck calls. While his calls are typically associated with Manila, Ark., Missourians from the area maintain his place as part of the history of their region.

James Tillman (J.T.) Beckhart, a legendary callmaker often associated with both the Big Lake region and Hornersville, Mo., was another significant figure in local callmaking and waterfowl culture. Beckhart lived in a variety of places, moving from Indiana to East St. Louis, Ill., before ultimately settling a few miles south of the Missouri border.

Beckhart's calls were characterized by German silver reeds, and he carved plain calls for local hunters, checkered calls that were a bit pricier, and much more expensive "fancy" calls for wealthy hunters who wanted a memento of their experience. As Ryan Graves, avid waterfowler, duck call collector, and historian reports, "the association of Beckhart's calls with Missouri is largely because Hornersville was the closest town he could use for a mailing address. I've therefore included him in the history of the Show-Me State on a technicality."

After his death, Claude Stone of Hornersville bought Beckhart's callmaking equipment and wood. Graves reported there was speculation that Stone helped Beckhart continue making calls in his later years. Either way, the Missouri connection with Beckhart was too strong to exclude his contribution to callmaking in the southeast portion of the state.

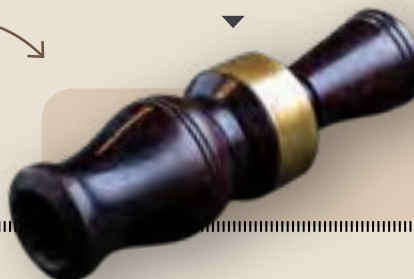


Tom Pierce (Hornersville, MO; ca. 1950s)
From the collection of Tucker Sherrod.
Christian Curtis (Sikeston, MO; 1997)



Wendell Fritz (Senath, MO; ca. 1970s)
From the collection of Tucker Sherrod.
Bennett Johnson (Walnut Log, TN; ca. 1940s)

Here we see a modern call, crafted in 1997 by Christian Curtis. A brass collar accents the walnut wood while a mylar reed sits within.



KANSAS CITY

Meanwhile, the Paris of the Plains was building its own history of callmaking and duck hunting. Like the eastern part of the state, Kansas City's hunters, both wealthy and working class, were chasing waterfowl in the areas surrounding the Kansas City metro area.

Bean Lake in Platte County was home to several well-known callmakers. An oxbow of the Missouri River, it was once a popular location for fishing, boating, and duck hunting. A 1917 newspaper article praised it as the best fishing in Missouri, while also bemoaning the unbridled gambling and drinking that happened in one of the lake's clubhouses. The lake has shrunk and hasn't held nearly as much water since the Missouri River was channelized in the 1930s and 1940s.



Copies of *Waterfowl Hunting and Wetland Conservation in Missouri: A Model in Collaboration* are available for \$40 at www.mdcnatureshop.com

MEET THE MAKERS

Born in 1872, Frank Dougherty was a Bean Lake resident who hand built his calls. He also served as a market hunter and guide for other duck hunters. According to Ryan Grave's research, Dougherty would checker his calls using a hacksaw. The other parts of the call were finished with sandpaper, a pocketknife, and other hand tools. This painstaking effort meant that Dougherty didn't produce large numbers of calls, but they are still sought after and collected today.

Dougherty's nephew Sean Dougherty said of his uncle, "On a typical day, Frank and his wife, Lottie, would host a dozen hunters. Lottie would serve them dinner consisting of roasted duck, fried rabbit (fried in duck fat), fresh catfish, seasonal vegetables, and certainly apple and pecan pie from their 10-acre apple orchard and numerous pecan trees."

In the mid-1890s, Frank met another market hunter named Victor Gilado.

"Frank only knew how to call ducks using his thumb and his lips," Sean Dougherty said. "Gilado taught Frank how to make duck calls out of wood. Frank's first duck calls were made from an old staircase. For the next 45 years, Frank handmade duck calls in Bean Lake on the family farm. Initially the duck calls sold for \$1 in 1900. Those same duck calls sell for \$1,000–\$5,000 today."

George and Bill Willis, also residents of Bean Lake, built popular calls. Bill eventually sold the design to Dr. E.S. Stofer of Kansas City. Born in 1886, Stofer served in World War I in field hospitals, returning to Kansas City to resume his practice in 1919. Both the J. Andrews collection and the Graves collection feature Stofer's work. Most of his calls were made with walnut barrels and the inserts were either walnut, maple, or cedar. Stofer's calls carried a variety of stampings, from E. STOFER KCMO and E. STOFER Lone Jack MO to BEAN LAKE E. Stofer Duck Call. Stofer was perhaps the most prolific, and according to *Waterfowl Hunting and Wetland Conservation: A Model of Collaboration*, he produced more than 40,000 calls.



Dr. E.S. Stofer made this call in Kansas City.
From the collection of Ryan Graves.

TRADITION CONTINUES

Today, callmakers of all varieties are keeping the art of duck callmaking alive.

Pete Frazier, who lives in Cape Girardeau and has been chasing waterfowl for 40 years, makes duck calls from river cane, a tradition reminiscent of Louisiana-style calls. He started after his mom passed away and he wanted to make something special for his dad for Christmas. At first, he built a pintail whistle. Now, he makes mallard calls, as well.

"I go out and cut my own bamboo and cane," Frazier says. "It's all collected from a 60-mile radius of Cape Girardeau. Every call is different because the cane is different."

Alongside a more modern style of cane call, Frazier makes a double reed metal call that is reminiscent of those early metal reed calls from Missouri's early callmakers.

Tucker Sherrod, who lives in southeast Missouri, is an award-winning competition caller, callmaker, and duck hunting historian. His family is from Hornersville, and he initially told me about J.T. Beckhart. Coming from an area with such a deep history of duck hunting and duck calls, Sherrod feels it's only natural that he has a connection to those early callmakers.

When I asked about his favorite vintage call, Sherrod said, "My Red Boyette call is probably my favorite call in my collection. It's a pretty rare old call and well known around Reelfoot Lake."



Made by Red Boyette.

From the collection of Tucker Sherrod.



Call maker Pete Frazier (pictured above) has a lanyard of cane duck calls that he has crafted. He takes it along on all his hunts and most have been used to bag a duck or two.





Sherrod's "holy grail" of vintage calls would be a checkered James Beckhart, a Victor Gilado, or a Jack Giraudo. Sherrod keeps his connection to duck call history alive through collecting, hunting, and participating in calling competitions.

There is a current need for more Missouri callmakers to continue the art of making metal reed calls. Rob Protzman, who runs Weston Waterfowl, may not be a Missouri callmaker, but he both collects and makes metal reed duck calls.

"For me, making metal reed duck calls is as much about preserving callmaking history as it is about having a unique sound that hasn't been heard by every migrating duck as they make their way down the flyways each season," Protzman says. "I've had the opportunity to make some different metal reed designs, but I stick with the tried and true Reelfoot style calls with a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch flat toneboard, metal reed, and wooden wedge."

While modern, mass-produced calls offer a low bar entry for waterfowlers, it's well worth the time for both callmakers and hunters to experiment with different styles of historical calls. Not only do they offer unique, individualized sound, but they make interesting

"For me, making metal reed duck calls is as much about preserving callmaking history as it is about having a unique sound that hasn't been heard by every migrating duck..."

— ROB PROTZMAN

additions to both the lanyard and the collector's stand.

For callmakers like Frazier and Protzman, duck calls are more than tools. They are functional art and a connection to the history of our state and the way previous generations hunted. Exploring this history gives a person the chance to feel that in every marsh, their calls echo alongside the calls of thousands of hunters and conservationists before them. And if we continue to value wetlands and the history of duck hunting, those calls will echo far into the future. ▲

Gilbert Randolph is a writer and an avid outdoorsman. When he's not creating stories in the digital space, he's exploring nature and sharing it with people.



Remembering Jim Rathert

A LIFE BEHIND THE LENS

I still remember the first time I saw one of Jim Rathert's photographs — a cover image of a prairie chicken booming on its lek. As a young photojournalist just starting out, I was so mesmerized by its beauty and charisma that the bird itself became an obsession — I've been drawn to grouse ever since. In that one image, Jim introduced me to both grouse and the mission of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC).

The *Missouri Conservationist* has been connecting readers to the outdoors since 1938, but it was Jim who taught generations of Missourians how to truly see what was around them. When he joined the magazine as staff photographer in 1984, he brought a patience and an artistry that changed what people expected from a conservation photograph. Over the next 22 years, he built an impressive catalog of more than 100,000 images, expanding the magazine's bird photography alone to cover over 270 species.

He set a standard at MDC that quietly became the reason someone like me could even dream of doing this work. When I was hired in early 2006, just before his retirement, I felt the weight of that immediately. I never thought of myself as his replacement. No one could replace Jim Rathert. What I could do, and what I've tried to do every day since, is follow in his footsteps: to keep pointing a camera at this state's wild places and make people care for them.

Jim spent 36 years with MDC, starting in wildlife research in 1970 before finding his true calling behind the camera in 1984. He didn't chase the photograph. He waited for it, sometimes for hours, tucked into a blind before dawn. That patience is in every frame he ever made. You can feel it.

Jim passed away on July 2. There will be a lot said about his career, his 100,000 images, his decades of covers and back pages. I think the truest way to honor him isn't with a list of accomplishments but by doing the thing he loved most — loving and caring for nature, the way his images have always been a love letter to it.

— Noppadol Paothong

5



Jim Rathert joined MDC in 1970 as a wildlife researcher. He became a wildlife photographer in 1984 and continued until his retirement in 2006.

Photograph by Cliff White

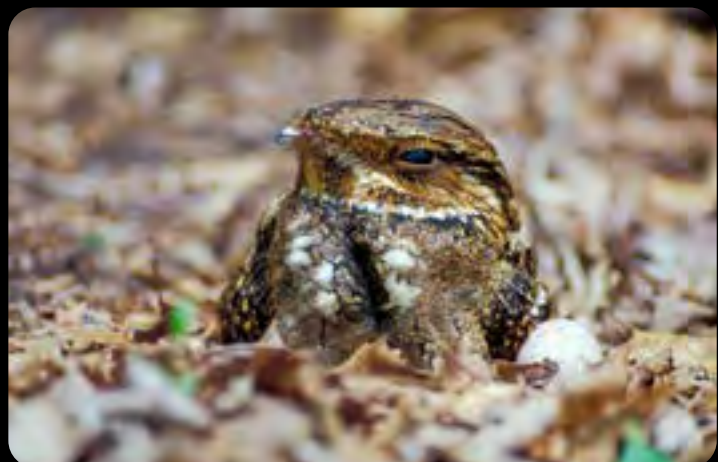


RUFFED GROUSE

1989

1991

2001



TOP: Ruffed grouse drumming, April 1989; BOTTOM LEFT: Greater prairie-chicken, 1991; BOTTOM RIGHT: Chuck-will's-widow on nest, 2001

2000

1994



SALAMANDER

2000



TOP LEFT: Scaly blazing star (*liatris*), August, 2000; TOP RIGHT: Helton Prairie Natural Area with liatris, July 1994;
 BOTTOM: Spotted salamander, September 2000

BISON

1997



9

FLY CATCHER

2003



6

TOP: Bison, 1997; BOTTOM: Scissor-tailed flycatcher, 2003

2004

LUNA MOTH



5

2003



5

"He brought a *patience*
and an *artistry* that
changed what
people expected from
a conservation photograph."

— NOPPADOL PAOTHONG

1995

BLUEBELLS



5

TOP: Luna moth on celandine poppy, 2004, ABOVE: Green treefrog, 2003;
RIGHT: Virginia bluebells at Meramec Conservation Area, 1995

1995

PICKLE CREEK



▶ 7

ABOVE: Pickle Creek waterfall, 1995;
TOP RIGHT: Pink morph oblong-wing katydid, 1990s;
RIGHT MIDDLE: Black saddlebag skimmer, 1988;
BOTTOM RIGHT: Opossum family, 2004

1990S



1998



2004



Get Outside

in SEPTEMBER

→ Ways to connect with nature

September's Fall Color Forecast

The forecast for September is calling for fall color.

Fall color begins in mid-September, and native sumac ushers in the season, turning brilliant red along roadsides. Virginia creeper and poison ivy join the show, contributing their red leaves. Sassafras is often relegated to a supporting role, but it is truly a standout with its blend of canary-yellow, orange, red, and purplish-red leaves. Trees such as hackberries, black walnut, green ash, and cottonwood offer a contrasting yellow to the picture. By late September, black gum, dogwood, and bittersweet are also turning.

Missouri is home to a variety of trees, shrubs, and woody vines, and each have leaves that turn color at different times during the fall season. The progression of color change occurs in phases and can last up to eight weeks. Check back next month for October's fall color forecast.

Jack Frost Lurking

Look for **dittany** and yellow and white crownbeards this fall while they are in bloom. Note their location and plan to return in December to look for frost flowers.

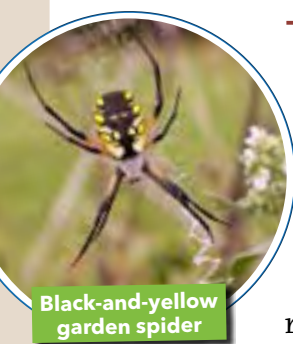


Dittany

Tending Garden

Black-and-yellow garden spiders tend to spend ample amounts of time near homes and gardens this time of year. They are fascinating both for their color patterns and for their remarkable web architecture.

These spiders are harmless and are beneficial to humans. They help control pest populations, especially in gardens.



Black-and-yellow garden spider

Fall Gets Nutty

Black walnuts are ripening. Missouri is the world's top producer of black walnuts, which have been designated as the state's official state tree nut. Used in baking, salads, and ice cream, black

walnuts are versatile. Black walnuts are in the same family as pecans, which are also ripening this month. Much like black walnuts, they are enjoyed in many recipes. But remember, humans aren't the only ones waiting to get a crack at these nuts. A variety of wildlife enjoy them, too. Squirrels, as an example, are busy gathering pecans and walnuts to store for the winter.



Black walnut



Pecans

Natural Events to See This Month

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



White bass school.



Eight-spotted forester moths fly during the day.



American white pelicans visit wetlands.

VIRTUAL

Stream Team Orientation and Onboarding

Thursday • Sept. 10 • 7-8 p.m.

Online only

Registration required by Sept. 9. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oqV.

All ages

This live and interactive program introduces the Stream Team Program to prospective and new volunteers. During the session, we will cover:

- What is Stream Team and how can you get involved?
- How can you register and create or join a team?
- How can you report your service activities?
- Where can you find nearby events and opportunities?

OZARK REGION

Montauk Veterans' Free Fishing Day

Saturday • Sept. 12 • 7 a.m.-7:30 p.m.

Montauk State Park, 345 County Road 6670, Salem, MO 65560

Registration is not required. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oq9.

Veterans and their families

Veterans can pick up their free fishing tag the day of the event at the Dorman Steelman Lodge in Montauk State Park. The spring branch will be reserved for veterans and their family members only. Hooked on Vets will provide assistance and attendance prizes. Lunch will be provided. Tagged fish will be stocked, with prizes available as well.



Eastern
hellbenders
breed.



Crayfish
mate.

→ CONSERVATION NEAR YOU

Craving more local conservation connections? Find events near you at mdc.mo.gov/events, or catch the latest on social media. Reach out to your closest regional office and learn about events from MDC staff. Outdoor fun awaits. Get out there!



Get Social

Join the conversation and connect with us on social media. Search "MO Conservation" to follow us on Twitter (X), Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and Flickr.



Conservation Headquarters

573-751-4115

PO Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180

Regional Offices

Central

573-815-7900

3500 E. Gans Rd.
Columbia, MO 65201

Kansas City

816-622-0900

12405 SE Ranson Rd.
Lees Summit, MO 64082

Northeast

660-785-2420

3500 S. Baltimore
Kirksville, MO 63501

Northwest

816-271-3100

701 James McCarthy Dr.
St. Joseph, MO 64507

Ozark

417-256-7161

551 Joe Jones Blvd.
West Plains, MO 65775



Southeast

573-290-5730

2302 County Park Dr.
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

Southwest

417-895-6880

2630 N. Mayfair
Springfield, MO 65803

St. Louis

636-441-4554

2360 Hwy. D
St. Charles, MO 63304

Places to Go

SOUTHEAST REGION

Otter Slough Conservation Area

For a swamp vacation

by Larry Archer

✱ When planning a Florida vacation, most choose a beach or theme park over a swamp. But when planning a September hunting, fishing, birding, or paddling trip in Missouri, consider the swamp first.

Located on 4,859 acres in southeast Missouri, Otter Slough Conservation Area (CA) has fields, woods, and a popular fishing lake, but what really sets it apart is Otter Lake, one of Missouri's few remaining swamps, said MDC Wildlife Biologist John Marshall.

"It is 250-ish acres of remnant cypress tupelo swamp that's pretty unique," Marshall said. "Folks will kayak it. Obviously, it's a very popular duck hunting location. There're not many opportunities to hunt in that kind of a system."

Despite its unique nature, Otter Lake has competition for the most popular water body on the area. The 93-acre Cypress Lake draws anglers from throughout the region, but the lake closes to fishing on Oct. 15, he said.

"Then that lake becomes refuge for waterfowl season, so there's usually a good number of folks fishing there towards the end before it closes up."

During waterfowl season, several roads and areas are closed to traffic, so Marshall suggests visitors look for closure signs and check with area staff.



"We get a lot of birders throughout the spring and fall. In September you're going to see the arrival of blue-winged teal, shovelers, and pintail. We've still got some black-bellied whistling ducks on the area, Canada geese, black-necked stilts."

— John Marshall,
MDC Wildlife Biologist

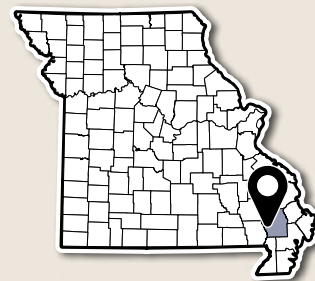
WHAT
TO
LOOK
FOR
WHEN
YOU
VISIT



Western lesser siren



The sun sets over one of the many pools that make up the wetlands of the nearly 5,000-acre Otter Slough Conservation Area. In addition to managed wetlands, the area also includes approximately 250 acres of remnant cypress tupelo swamp. Pools not covered with water host wildflowers and the insects they attract, such as water smartweed and katydids (inset).



OTTER SLOUGH CONSERVATION AREA

consists of 4,859.1 acres in Butler and Stoddard counties. From Dexter, take Highway 60 west, Route ZZ south 10 miles, and County Road 675 west 2 miles to the area entrance.

36.7245, -90.1011

short.mdc.mo.gov/4Ld 417-895-6880

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT



Bicycling Bicycles and horses allowed on public roadways. Bicycles allowed on designated service roads. Seasonal restrictions apply.



Birdwatching Included in the National Audubon Society's Otter Slough Conservation Area Important Bird Area (short.mdc.mo.gov/oST). Included in the Missouri Birding Trail (short.mdc.mo.gov/oin). The eBird list of birds recorded at Otter Slough CA is available at short.mdc.mo.gov/oSS.



Camping Three primitive camping areas.



Fishing 93-acre Cypress Lake. Black bass, catfish, sunfish, white bass.



Hunting Dove, rabbit, and squirrel. Deer hunting allowed only through managed hunts.



Trapping Special use permit required.



Waterfowl Hunting Morning draw. Regulations are subject to annual changes. Refer to MDC's *Migratory Bird and Waterfowl Hunting Digest 2026-2027* online at short.mdc.mo.gov/4SZ.



American lotus



American beaver



Southern leopard frog



Double-crested
cormorant



Gadwall



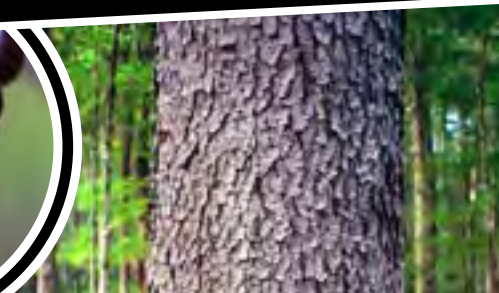
Black Cherry

Prunus serotina

Status
Edible

Size
Height: to 60 feet

Distribution
Statewide



Black cherry trees are medium to large in size with a straight trunk and a rounded canopy. Between April and May, white cylindrical flowers, approximately 2-3 inches long, bloom in clusters. As black cherry trees age, the bark goes from smooth and dark reddish brown to black, broken, scaly plates with turned-back edges. Black cherry trees can thrive in a variety of soils but do best in upland woods and along streams.



ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

If you are going to pick black cherries, best get to them quickly because you won't be the only one. At least 33 species of birds — including bobwhite, wild turkey, and ruffed grouse — as well as raccoons, opossums, squirrels, rabbits, and others also consume the fruit.



HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Black cherry trees are valued both for their wood and fruit.

Demand for black cherry wood ranks second only to black walnut. With its rich red color and ability to hold its shape, black cherry wood is used to make furniture, lumber, and veneer. It is also valued in landscaping projects.

The fruit, which ripens in August through September, is dark purple to black and grows in clusters of 15-30. The fruit has a bittersweet taste and is used in jellies and wine.

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

Streams and impounded waters,
sunrise to midnight:
Sept. 15, 2026–Feb. 15, 2027

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

Catch-and-Release:
Nov. 13, 2026–Feb. 8, 2027

TRAPPING

Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk

Only foot-enclosing traps and
cage-type traps may be used.
Aug. 1–Oct. 15, 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.

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

Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk

Aug. 1–Oct. 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

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HARVEST



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MANAGE DEER AND FEED FAMILIES.

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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.

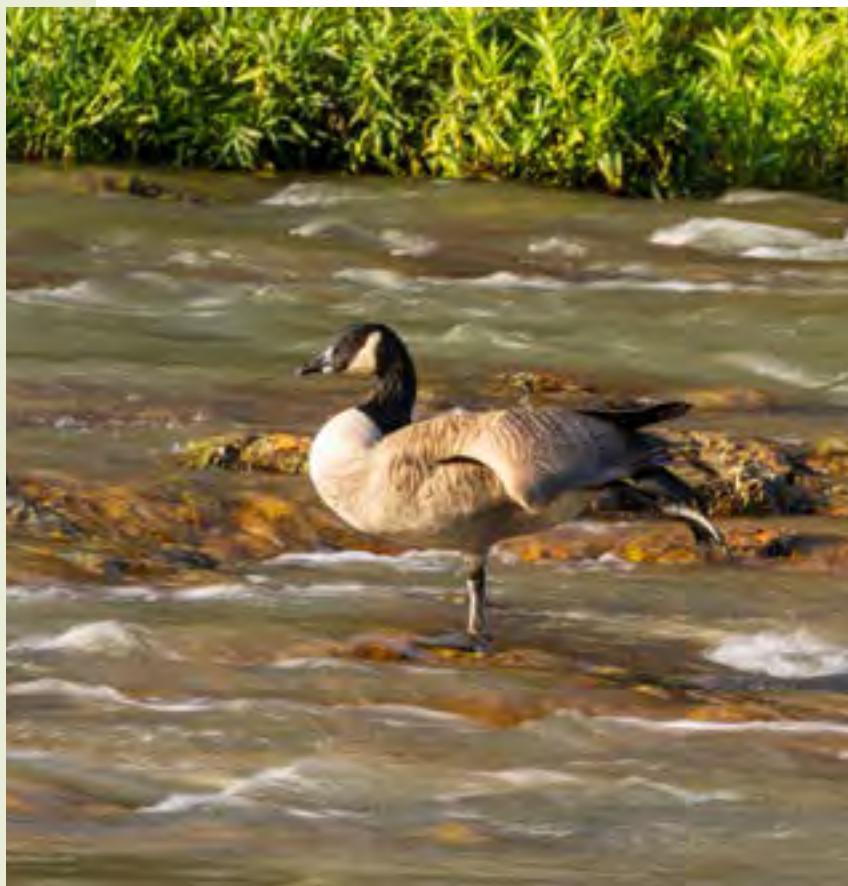
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A Canada goose wades in water at Shoal Creek.

📷 by **Noppadol Paothong**