



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2026

Xplor

100TH ISSUE!

CONTENTS

FEATURES

Here's our guide for exploring outside, organized by season for a year's worth of fun.

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99 WILD WAYS TO XPLOR

At *Xplor*, we never miss the chance to celebrate a milestone. We like the pointy hats, the games, and the cake — especially the cake. So when we noticed this would be our 100th issue, we knew we needed to do something special.

Xplor landed in mailboxes for the first time in February 2010. (Wow, that was a long time ago!) The first issue had a dancing prairie-chicken on the outside and a simple idea on the inside: We wanted to inspire our readers to explore nature. Over the next 16 years, we tried to do just that.

To celebrate this milestone, we chose one exploration idea from each of the past 99 issues and smooshed them all between the covers of this magazine.

So read on ... but just for a little bit. Then put the magazine away.

Go outside.

Xplor.





Want to explore past issues of *Xplor*? Find them online at mdc.mo.gov/xplor.



Xplor

GOVERNOR

Mike Kehoe

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Edward C. Clausen
Margaret F. Eckelkamp
Frank H.B. Kruse
Raymond T. Wagner Jr.

DIRECTOR

Jason A. Sumners

XPLOR STAFF

ARTIST Matt Byrde

PHOTOGRAPHERS Noppadol Paothong
David Stonner

DESIGNER Marci Porter

ART DIRECTOR Ben Nickelson

EDITOR Matt Seek

SUBSCRIPTIONS Marcia Hale

MAGAZINE MANAGER Stephanie Thurber

All content created by Missouri Department of Conservation staff unless otherwise noted.

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ON THE COVER

Every *Xplor* cover ever made!

FALL



1

Wander around a fall forest

The Show-Me State's forests reach their showiest in mid-October when oaks and hickories blaze with color. But pretty leaves aren't the only wonders you'll find in a fall forest. Lots of critters — from squirrels to songbirds — are busy gathering food for winter.



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016

2

PEEK IN ON PELICANS

It's hard to miss an American white pelican. Weighing up to 30 pounds and with a 9-foot wingspan, a pelican is one of the biggest birds in North America. Their striking white feathers and enormous orange beaks make them even easier to spot. Peek in on these jumbo jets of the bird world at Missouri's marshes and lakes in October.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024



3

WHAT IS IT?



- 1 My eyes are big, but I am small.
- 2 I usually jump before I crawl.
- 3 I use a rope to catch my fall.
- 4 You might spot me on a wall.

MAY/JUNE 2024

For the answer, go to No. 23.



4

TAG A MIGRATING MONARCH

In mid-September, orange-and-black monarch butterflies flutter thousands of miles south to spend winter in Mexico. You can help biologists track their movements by netting migrating monarchs and putting tiny identification tags on their wings. Learn more at monarchwatch.org.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2010

5

Welcome Back ELK

Huge herds of elk once grazed across most of

Missouri, but by the late 1800s the last wild elk had disappeared into some hunter's stew pot. Now the big browsers are back, baby! Biologists rounded up elk from Kentucky and turned them loose in a wild corner of the Ozarks. To see Missouri's mightiest mammal, follow the driving tour at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZY3.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021



6 MAKE A MILKWEED BRACELET

Native Americans made cord from plants like milkweed. Collect milkweed in the fall, when it's brown and dormant. Cut off stems a few inches above the ground, so they will regrow next spring.



- 1 Snip branches off the main stems then step on the stems to crack them open.
- 2 Peel tough outer fibers from the stem's spongy inner core and gather the tough fibers in a skinny bundle, about 3 feet long. Spray the bundle with water.
- 3 Grab the middle of the bundle with your hands 2 inches apart. Pinch the bundle with one hand and twist the fibers in only one direction with the other. When the fibers are tight, bring your hands together, and a loop will form.

- 4 Hold the loop in one hand. With your other, twist one strand of fibers.
- 5 When that strand is tight, bring it up and over the top of the other strand. Repeat with the other strand. Pinch the junction of the strands to keep the twisting tight.
- 6 Continue twisting and swapping strands until the cord is long enough to fit around your wrist. Tie a knot in the end of the cord to keep it from unraveling.
- 7 Place it around your wrist and stick the knot through the loop.



OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2010

7 FIND A FOREST FLYER

At night, while other squirrels are curled in leafy nests dreaming of acorns, flying squirrels dive through the dark, gathering the real thing. To see these nocturnal nut-munchers, put your bird feeder near a porch light. If you hear a soft *whump*, flip on the light to catch a flying squirrel eating seeds.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2012



© JOE McDONALD / GETTY IMAGES

8 Get a MUSHROOM'S autograph

Mushrooms release dust-like "seeds" called spores. To see what they look like and create some cool art, place a mushroom cap on white and black paper taped side by side. Cover the cap with a bowl and leave it alone overnight. In the morning, lift off the cap to reveal a beautiful pattern.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2011



9 HUNT FOR HUGE TREES

A bald cypress in New Madrid County has a trunk over 325 inches around. A scarlet oak in Wayne County is 150 feet tall. And a cherrybark oak in Scott County has branches that stretch out 138 feet! Other giant trees may be waiting for you to find them. For tips on measuring big trees, check out the SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021 issue.



10 LOOK FOR LIFE IN THE LITTER

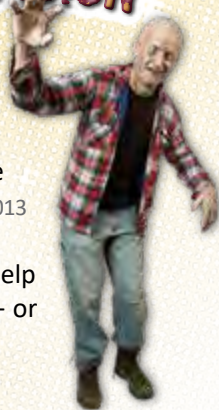
In an Ozark forest no bigger than two football fields, trees drop about 10,000 pounds of leaves every autumn. This layer of discarded tree parts is called leaf litter — but there's nothing trashy about it! Tucked beneath the crunchy brown blanket is a hidden world of centipedes, shrews, and skinks. Rake through some litter to see what you might find.

MARCH/APRIL 2026



11 SURVIVE A ZOMBIE INVASION

Zombies aren't real. Right? Who believes in them, anyway? *Not us.* But still ... it pays to be prepared. In our OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2013 issue we offered tips for lighting a fire, finding shelter, and gathering food to help you survive getting lost in the woods — or evade brain-munching monsters.



13 Go Nuts with Nature

Leaves aren't the only things that fall off of trees in the fall. Oak trees also drop acorns. This creates a forest feeding frenzy as everything from blue jays to black bears gobble up the snack-sized nuts.



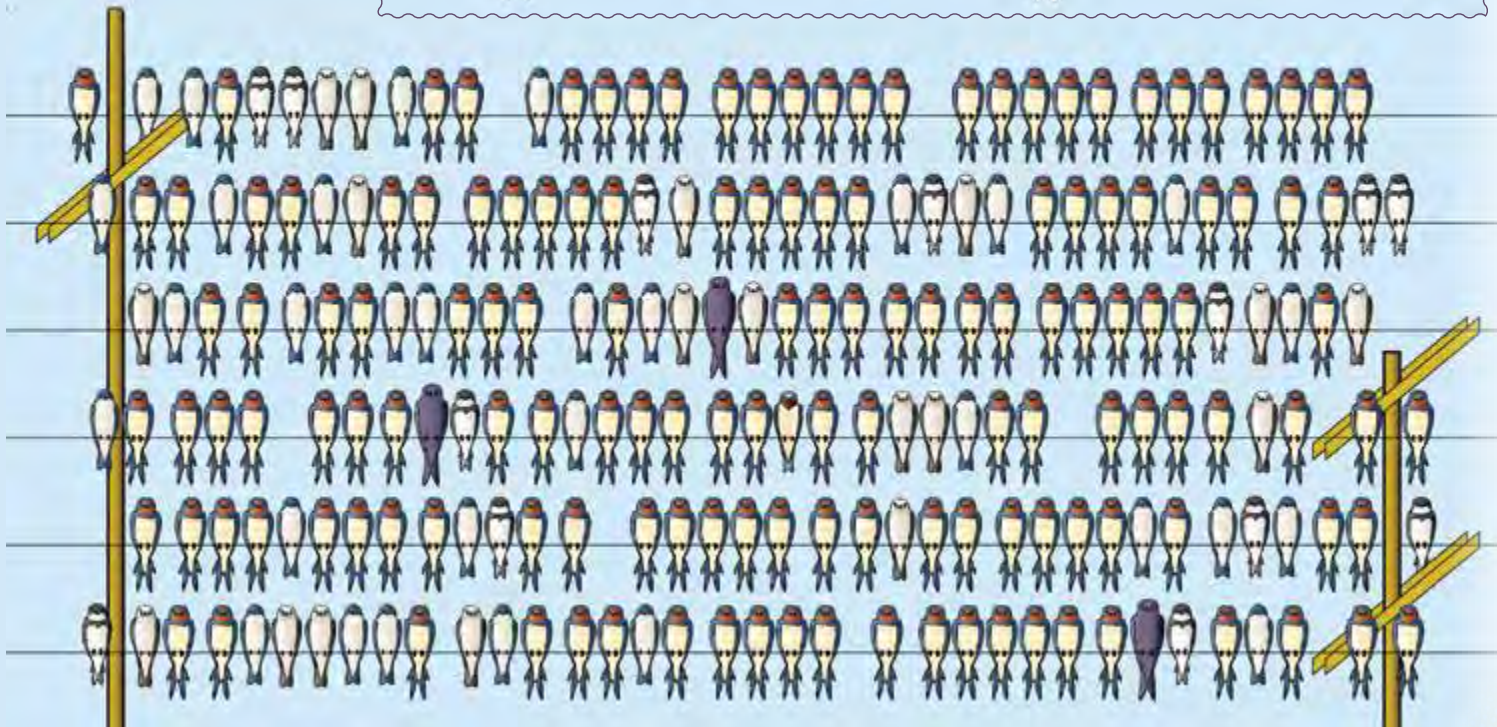
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019

12 SEE A SWARM OF SWALLOWS

Swallows swallow insects — and not much else. So when bugs bug out in the fall, swallows fly south. Before they leave, they gather in enormous flocks on power lines and near wetlands. Practice your swallow ID on this puzzle, then grab binoculars and get out to see the real thing!

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2011

It's a swallow bon voyage party! How many of each kind can you find in the flock below? (Hint: there are 210 total.)



Answers from left to right: 144, 13, 1, 3, 18, 31



15

Make Some Suet

When winter arrives, birds need lots of energy. Whip up some suet to keep woodpeckers, chickadees, and other birds happy and flappy.

- 1 In a large bowl, mix together 2½ cups of birdseed, ½ cup of oats, and ¼ cup of cornmeal.
- 2 In a different bowl, combine 1 cup of vegetable shortening and ½ cup of peanut butter. Microwave the mixture until it melts.
- 3 Pour the melted mixture into the dry ingredients and stir well.
- 4 Spoon the suet into a small, shallow bowl and place it in a freezer overnight.
- 5 Remove the suet from the bowl. If it's stuck, set the bowl in warm water until the edges of the suet soften. Then, use a butter knife to pry it out.
- 6 Put the suet in a suet cage, and hang it in a shady spot you can see from your house.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020

16 SPROUT YOUR SOCKS

Slip an old pair of socks over your shoes and go for a stroll in the weediest place you can find. Soon, the socks will be covered with seeds. Stuff soil inside the socks, stick them in a baking pan, and soak them with water. Keep them damp, and in a week or so, your socks will sprout!

JULY/AUGUST 2023



17 Go to Bat for Bats

Bats need help! Many species are losing numbers, and some may disappear completely. To help bats, stay out of caves that don't allow visitors. Avoid using pesticides, which kill insects bats eat. And don't cut down dead trees — bats raise their babies inside. To learn more about the only mammals that can truly fly, flutter over to the SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022 issue.



18

GO TEAL HUNTING

If icy weather, frozen toes, and snotsicles hanging from your nose make you think twice about duck hunting in winter, give September's teal season a try. For a beginner's guide to hunting these early-migrating, fast-flying ducks, check out the SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020 issue.

19

Predict Winter Weather with a Persimmon



Spoon

Fork

Knife

At the end of September, purplish-orange persimmons drop out of their knobby-barked trees. Some people claim you can forecast winter's weather by splitting open a persimmon seed. If the inside looks like a spoon there will be lots of snow. If it looks like a fork, winter will be mild. And if it looks like a knife, icy wind will slice through your coat like a blade.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015

20 Cook Over a Campfire

Place a hamburger patty in the center of a 2-foot-long piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Sprinkle salt and pepper on the burger. Put potato slices and a handful of carrots, onions, celery, and bell peppers over the beef. Drop a tablespoon of butter over the veggies and sprinkle seasoning salt on everything. Fold the foil into a leakproof packet and place the packet on a bed of hot coals. Cook for 30 to 60 minutes until the burger is brown and the veggies are soft.

For more campfire recipes, check out the AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2014 issue.



22 Carve a SNACK-O'-LANTERN

Wondering what to do with your pumpkin after Halloween? Put it near a window and fill it full of birdseed. In no time, flocks of feathered foragers — and a few squirrels — will drop by for tricks and tweets.



© PRYZMAT DREAMTIME.COM

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2014

21 SEE THE SHOW-ME STATE IN ITS WILDEST STATE

Missouri may not have palm-lined beaches, snowcapped mountains, or a Grand Canyon. But we certainly have our share of jaw-dropping

scenery. From deep blue springs where water magically bubbles out of the bedrock to waterfalls that crash down the side of Ozark cliffs, Missouri's wildest nooks and crannies will make you wonder if you're really in the Midwest. For a guide to the Show-Me State's most spectacular scenery, check out the SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025 issue.



23 Celebrate International Jumping Spider Day

October 10 is International Jumping Spider Day. Why celebrate a spooky spider? Because these eight-legged athletes are super smart, have amazing eyesight, are good dancers, and leap long distances. Some people even think they're cute! Autumn is a great time to look for these adorable arachnids (that's a fancy word for spiders) on windowsills, deck railings, and tree trunks.



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018

24 Explore a Prairie

Early fall is the perfect time to visit a prairie. The muggy heat of summer has passed, yet there are still plenty of flowers abloom and interesting critters afoot. For a guide to these amazing grasslands, take a look at the SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023 issue.



27 BUILD A BLUEBIRD HOUSE



What's red, white, and blue,
eats bugs, and lives in a box?

It's Missouri's state bird, the
eastern bluebird. Build a nestbox this winter
so it will be ready when bluebirds look for a place
to raise their babies in the spring. For building plans,
visit audubon.org/news/how-build-bluebird-nest-box.

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2011



It's *snow* much fun to sleep outside in the
wintertime! You just need the right gear
and a little know-how. For tips on turning
a snow day into a snowy sleepover, check
out the JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020 issue.

28 WHAT IS IT?



- 1 Whiskers cover
my lip.
- 2 To eat, I go for a
dip.
- 3 I chase fish at
quite a fast clip.
- 4 I shake off after
each trip.

For the answer, go to No. 48.

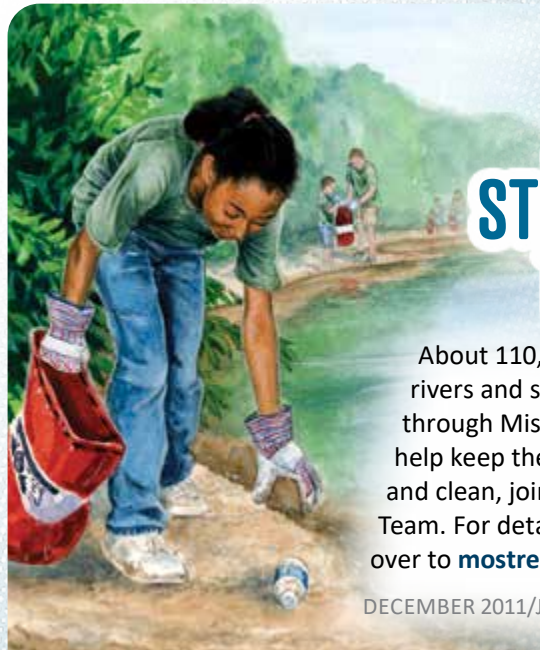
DECEMBER 2010/
JANUARY 2011



26 LISTEN FOR Coyotes

Winter nights are a great
time to listen for coyotes
calling to each other. The
yippling, yapping, and
howling usually starts
around sunset. Although
it sounds spooky, there's
nothing to fear. A coyote
howls to tell other coyotes,
"I'm lonely," "Stay away," or
"Let's find some rabbits to eat."

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019



29 JOIN A STREAM TEAM

About 110,000 miles of
rivers and streams flow
through Missouri. To
help keep them healthy
and clean, join a Stream
Team. For details, flow
over to mostreamteam.org.

DECEMBER 2011/JANUARY 2012



30 See How You Size Up

Missouri's smallest mammal — the least shrew — is only 3 inches long and weighs about as much as a penny. To see how you stack up against everything from burly bears to itty-bitty birds, check out the MARCH/APRIL 2016 issue.



31 ENCOUNTER AN EAGLE

Every winter, thousands of bald eagles follow migrating flocks of waterfowl to Missouri. With binoculars and some searching, you can find eagles perched in trees along rivers, lakes, and wetlands. Most return north in the spring, but several hundred live in Missouri year-round.

DECEMBER 2012/JANUARY 2013

Help a Choosy Chipmunk

32

This chipmunk is a picky eater! It only eats acorns that have a stem, a cap, and no holes. How many acorns can you find that satisfy all three of these requirements?

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022



33

STRANGE BUT TRUE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

Super snoozer: To conserve energy during winter hibernation, a **WOODCHUCK** takes a breath once every four minutes, and its heart beats only four or five times a minute.



34

PLAY ROAD TRIP BINGO

Visiting family during the holidays is tons of fun. But spending hours in the car can be boring. *Road Trip Bingo* to the rescue! When you spot an item on your bingo card, put an "X" in the box. When you get five in a row, you win! Print bingo cards from the NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017 issue.



35

Prowl for Owls

In winter, owls call to attract a mate. Barred owls hoot, *Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?* Great horned owls call, *Hoo, hoo-oo, hoo-oo*. And eastern screech-owls make a high-pitched, horselike whinny. The nocturnal hunters get especially chatty during full moons and before stormy weather.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021



In late winter, listen for head-banging birds rocking out in woods and backyards across Missouri. Woodpeckers pick something hollow — such as a dead branch, stove pipe, or rain gutter — and peck loudly and rapidly. The drumming tells other woodpeckers someone is looking for a mate or claiming a patch of trees for a home.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

38 Build a Fort in the Woods

Everyone needs a secret hideout. It's easy to build one in the woods or your backyard. Just gather dead branches and lay them over a fallen log. Or weave limbs through upright trees to form walls. Your new hideout will offer peace from pesky little brothers, and animals will soon get used to the structure, allowing you to sit quietly inside and watch them up close.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017



39 Explore an Ozark spring

If winter has you dreaming of spring, maybe it's time to visit one. Some of the most beautiful springs in the world bubble up in the Ozark hills. Since spring water comes from deep underground, it stays about 58 degrees year-round. This makes it feel warm in the winter and cool in the summer. For a guide to Missouri's showiest springs and the animals that live there, check out the NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016 issue.



37 Take a Liking to LICHENS



Part plant-like creature, part mushroom-like fungus, over 500 kinds of lichens grow on trees, rocks, and soils throughout Missouri. Grab a magnifying glass and take a micro-hike through your backyard to see how many different kinds you can find.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2018

40 MEET A Marsupial

Marsupials (*mar-soo-pee-uhs*) are mammals that raise their babies in a pouch, like kangaroos and koalas. In America, the only mammal packing a pouch is the opossum. To learn more about how opossums raise their pouch potatoes and their habit of "playing dead" when predators approach, check out the FEBRUARY/MARCH 2013 issue.





41 RAPTORS

Spot
Some

On your next holiday road trip, be sure to pack a pair of binoculars. Weedy roadsides offer birds of prey ideal hunting grounds. If you can't tell a red-tailed hawk from a red-shouldered hawk, don't despair. Flap over to the JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024 issue and check out our mini field guide.

42

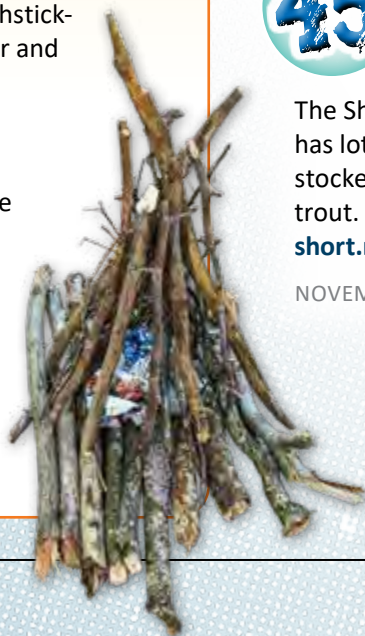
Start a One-Match Fire

Lighting a fire with a single match is a good survival skill to learn. The secret is to collect everything you'll need before you strike the match.

- **Tinder** is dry, fluffy material that lights easily, like paper, pine needles, or dead grass.
- **Kindling** is bone-dry twigs that burn long enough to catch bigger branches on fire.
- **Fuel** is bigger branches that burn for several minutes or several hours.

- 1 Place a fist-sized wad of tinder on dry ground.
- 2 Stack kindling around the tinder to form an upside-down cone. Place matchstick-sized twigs closest to the tinder and pencil-sized twigs farther out.
- 3 Carefully strike the match and use it to light the tinder. You may need to blow gently on the tinder to coax up a flame.
- 4 When the kindling is burning brightly, add bigger sticks. Once those catch on fire, add larger logs until the fire is as large as you need it to be.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015



43

Avoid a Fabulously Funky Furbearer



Late winter is the most likely time to catch a whiff of skunk funk. This is when striped skunks wake from long winter naps hungry for food and love. Mate-crazed males wander widely to find females, and many waddle across roads. Help your parents keep an eye out for them when driving at night.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019

44

Feed Your Feathered Friends

Tie yarn around a pine cone to make a loop. Spread peanut butter over the cone, making sure to fill all the nooks and crannies. Pour birdseed into a cake pan and roll the cone through the seed until the cone is covered. Hang the cone on a branch where you can watch it. In no time, hungry birds will arrive for a feast!

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2016



45

Hook a Rainbow

The Show-Me State has lots of lakes that are stocked in winter with rainbow trout. To find one nearby, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/Zd5.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018





46

Take a walk in the WINTER WOODS

Nature in winter may seem silent and still. But take a hike in the woods and you'll be amazed at all the life you'll find. For a guide on what to look for, check out the JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022 issue.

47

EXERCISE LIKE AN ANIMAL

Wild animals are the world's best athletes. They have to be strong, fast, and flexible to survive. If you've spent the holidays hibernating, maybe it's time to get fit by hovering like a hummingbird.

Hold your arms straight out at your sides. Quickly rotate your arms, making little circles in the air with your hands. Flap as fast as you can for a full minute. Rest, then do circles in reverse for another minute.

For more animal-inspired exercises, check out the JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023 issue.



48

Meet a Mama OTTER

Baby river otters can't swim. So when they're about 12 weeks old, mom starts swimming lessons. The pups aren't enthusiastic students — they're often scared of water — so mom has to drag them in and teach them how to float, paddle, and dive. To read about a mama otter's misadventures in raising a round of rowdy pups, dive into the DECEMBER 2013/JANUARY 2014 issue.



GLENN CHAMBERS

49

PLAY Xplor THE GAME!

In our NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2024 issue we offered a wild, nature-based take on a fun family board game.



SPRING



50 MUNCH ON MORELS

There's a fungus among us and, wow, does it taste good. In April, mouthwatering morel mushrooms begin popping up on forest floors across Missouri. For tips on where to find morels and how to cook them, check out the [APRIL/MAY 2014](#) issue.



Eastern screech-owl

53 Survey a Snag

Even after death, trees provide homes and food for lots of life. Beetles and mushrooms eat dead trees from the inside out. Woodpeckers hammer holes to find food and make nests. And lots of animals — from bears to butterflies — use hollow cavities inside dead trees for shelter.

[MARCH/APRIL 2021](#)

54 Plant a TREE

Arbor Day, which Missourians celebrate on the first Friday in April, is about appreciating trees. And why not? Trees clean the air, keep soil from washing into rivers, provide homes for animals, and offer shade to people. So what's the best way to celebrate this leafy green holiday? Plant a tree, of course! For tree-planting tips, check out the [APRIL/MAY 2013](#) issue.



51 Go Fly-Fishing!

Trout and many other fish gobble down insects that live in or land on the water. Anglers use special gear to cast nearly weightless lures — called “flies” — that look like insects. For a beginner's guide to fly-fishing, reel in the [MARCH/APRIL 2020](#) issue.



52 STRANGE BUT TRUE

[NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023](#)

Before going number two, a **RIVER OTTER** often shuffles from one back foot to another, shaking its furry bottom in what some biologists call a “poop dance.”



55 MEET SOME ANIMAL ARCHITECTS

No hammer? No nails? No problem. Even without boards or blueprints, animals like beavers, orioles, and mud daubers build impressive homes. Spring is a great time to take a walk and look for animal architects at work.

[MARCH/APRIL 2023](#)



Baltimore oriole

© NANCY MCRAINE | DREAMSTIME.COM

56 Snag a Prehistoric PADDLEFISH

Paddlefish, also known as spoonbill, are unlike anything else you'll see on the end of your fishing line. Few of Missouri's fish grow as large, and none of them have a paddle for a snout! Paddlefish season starts on March 15. Find out more at short.mdc.mo.gov/opU.

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2014



59

ATTEND A SPRING SYMPHONY

Nature puts on a concert every spring, and you don't need tickets to attend. Just head outside at sunset and explore marshes, ponds, and flooded ditches. As the sun sinks, the show kicks into full swing when each puddle and pool overflows with a chorus of singing frogs and toads. For a guide to crooning croakers, check out the MARCH/APRIL 2025 issue.



60

Keep Little Critters Safe

If you find a fawn on your lawn or a baby bird in a bush or a nest of tiny rabbits, the best thing you can do is leave them alone. They may look abandoned, but their moms are likely hiding nearby, waiting for you to leave so they can check on their little critters.

APRIL/MAY 2010

57 WHAT IS IT?



For the answer, go to No. 72.

- 1 I spend my days on rocky glades.
- 2 Soaking up sun or hiding in shade.
- 3 Colorful scales I've got in spades.
- 4 I run real fast when I'm afraid.

MAY/JUNE 2023

58 Spot Some Wandering Warblers

Over 30 kinds of warblers wander through Missouri in May. Some stay here to nest. Others grab a quick bite to eat and keep flying north. Woodlands throughout the state serve as "gas stations" where these colorful, insect-eating birds refuel for their long, nighttime flights. Learn what a few of Missouri's warblers look like by matching the bird's name from the list to the branch where it's perched. The first letter of each name will be in the space directly below the bird. Spaces between words have been removed, so "Cape May" will be written "CapeMay."

American redstart
Bay-breasted
Blackburnian
Black-and-white
Cape May
Cerulean
Kentucky
Magnolia
Prairie



MAY/JUNE 2015

61

Whittle a Hickory Whistle



1 Saw off a hickory branch that's about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick and 8 to 12 inches long. Examine the branch closely before you cut. If it has lots of knots or scars, choose another. Trim one end of the stick so it's flat.

2 Make a notch. One inch from the trimmed end, cut straight down into the stick about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way through. Move half an inch farther down and shave a sloping cut that meets the straight-down cut you just made.



3 An inch down from the notch, cut a ring completely around the stick. Cut through the bark but not all the way through the stick.



4 Use another stick to gently pound the bark between the ring cut and the flat end until sap leaks out of the cuts. Twist and pull the loosened bark off the wood in a single, unbroken tube. This is the mouthpiece. Set it aside.



5 Saw off the section of the stick from the end to the notch. Turn this section on its end. Use your knife to cut down and take off a thin sliver from the entire section. This is the plug. Set it aside.



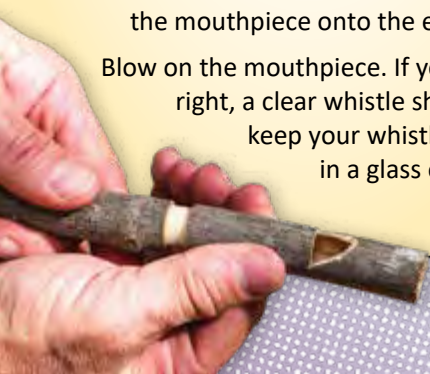
6 Whittle the exposed wood that's left on the stick so that it tapers gently. This is the endpiece.

7 Slide the plug into the mouthpiece. Make sure the flat part of the plug faces upward toward the notch on the mouthpiece. Slide the mouthpiece onto the endpiece.



Blow on the mouthpiece. If you did everything right, a clear whistle should ring out. To keep your whistle working, keep it in a glass of water.

MAY/JUNE 2016



GO ON A

62

Wildflower WALK



Spring beauty

In early March, Missouri looks gray and bare. But if you take a walk in the woods, you might find colorful signs of spring poking up through the leaf litter. Every week in March and April, take a wildflower walk to see which new flowers have unfurled. For a guide to the blooming beauties you might behold, check out the [MARCH/APRIL 2017](#) issue.

Go on a

63 TURTLE Safari



Three-toed box turtle

Every spring, turtles awake from their winter sleep and plod or paddle across Missouri's hills and waterways to search for warm places to bask. This makes April the perfect month for a turtle safari. Watch for box turtles trudging across roads, check each log in a lake for painted turtles, and search streams for river cooters. For a mini field guide to 10 terrific turtles, crawl over to the [MAY/JUNE 2017](#) issue.

64 PLAY IN THE MUD

Wild critters don't mind a mess. In fact, they use oozy, gooey, sticky, squishy mud to build homes, keep cool, and find food. Visit a mud hole this spring, and you might be surprised at who else stops by.

MARCH/APRIL 2018





65

Hunt Creepy-Crawly Creek Critters

Biologists call the squiggly, little creepy-crawlies living in a stream “benthic macroinvertebrates.” Though that may be a mouthful to say, they’re fun to catch, and they offer clues about the health of a stream.

- 1 Find a riffle where shallow water tumbles over rocks.
- 2 Anchor a dip net in the riffle and stand upstream.
- 3 Do the benthic boogie: Shuffle your feet in the stream gravel and scrub rocks with your hands. This will dislodge creatures clinging to the rocks, and some of them will flow into your net.
- 4 Use tweezers to gently pick macroinvertebrates out of your net. Place them in a white ice cube tray filled with water from the stream.
- 5 When you’re done observing your catch, return the creatures to the place where you collected them.

MARCH/APRIL 2019

66

Meet the Beetles



Some are mighty. Some are tiny. Some are dull. Some are shiny. Biologists have named 250,000 to 400,000 kinds of beetles, and they come in more sizes, shapes, and colors than any other animal on Earth. To see a few of Missouri’s most bodacious beetles, crawl over to the MAY/JUNE 2020 issue.

SDBOWER | DREAMSTIME.COM

67

Eat a TREE

Did you know you can eat a tree? The pink flowers on a redbud tree taste nutty and sweet. The best way to sample them is to bury your face in a branch and nibble away like you’re eating corn on the cob. Just watch out for bees — they like redbuds, too.

MARCH/APRIL 2015

68 Celebrate a Wild Mother’s Day

Wild mamas like bears spend months raising their babies, and others like turtles just look for the best place to lay their eggs. Either way, animal moms spend tons of energy bringing young critters into the world. Spotting wild families in Missouri’s woods, prairies, and streams is one of the best things about spring. Thanks, Mom!

MAY/JUNE 2019



American black bears

31919236 © DSSIMAGES | DREAMSTIME.COM

Go on a Salamander SAFARI

69

On warm, rainy nights in late February, head outside with a flashlight and search the shores of shallow, fish-free ponds. You might find dozens of salamanders marching toward the water, hoping to find a mate and lay eggs.

MARCH/APRIL 2022



Spotted salamander

70

Make Butterfly BOMBS



- 1 In a mixing bowl, combine 5 parts powdered clay, 5 parts potting soil, and 1 part wildflower seeds.
- 2 Add a tiny bit of water. You'll need just enough to make a thick, clay-like dough.
- 3 Use your hands to roll the mixture into balls the size of large gum balls.
- 4 Put your butterfly bombs on an old newspaper and let them harden in a cool, dry place for at least three days.
- 5 Toss your butterfly bombs wherever you want flowers to grow.



FEBRUARY/MARCH 2012

71

Catch a Courtship

Cute and cuddly doesn't cut it for female cottontails. They want brawny boyfriends. To show how tough they are, male rabbits punch and bite each other. Sometimes, one of the flop-eared fighters will leap high into the air and try to kick his opponent as he sails overhead. The rabbit that loses stays lonesome. The winner gets the girl. For more examples of the weird, wacky, and wild ways animals woo a mate, hop over to the FEBRUARY/MARCH 2010 issue.



72 Explore a Glade

Rocky, sun-scorched glades get toasty, but the animals that live there are super cool. Explore a glade in the spring to see grasshoppers that look like lichens, colorful collared lizards doing pushups to impress a mate, and maybe even a roadrunner running around looking for lunch.

MAY/JUNE 2025



*Eastern
collared
lizard*

73

CATCH A CRAYFISH



Crayfish can be found crawling around rocks at the bottom of shallow streams. You can scoop them up using an aquarium net, but it's more fun to catch them with your bare hands.

- 1 Crayfish escape predators with a quick flip of their tail, which causes them to rocket backward in the water. Because of this, approach a crayfish from behind.
- 2 Once you've spotted a crayfish, slowly lower your hand into the water. Be careful not to splash or make sudden movements.
- 3 When your hand is just an inch or two away, reach quickly but gently to grab the crayfish.
- 4 To keep from getting pinched, hold the crayfish by the hard, saddlelike shell just behind its claws. After you've gotten a good look, put the crayfish back where you found it.

MAY/JUNE 2026

GET MOTIVATED BY A BOX TURTLE

74

In the MARCH/APRIL 2024 issue, Doug Holey, a box turtle and motivational speaker, offered this advice:

You know what's worse than living in a van down by the river? Getting crushed trying to cross the street! Thousands of box turtles get hit by cars in April and May. You can help. Look both ways to make sure there aren't any cars coming, then carry turtles to the side of the road in the direction they were crawling.



SUMMER



Pipevine swallowtail

75

BEHOLD BACKYARD BUTTERFLIES

Lots of colorful butterflies flutter by in summer. For a mini field guide to 10 of the most common ones, check out the MAY/JUNE 2021 issue.



77
WHAT
IS
IT?



- 1 I arrive in the spring.
- 2 I'm covered in bling.
- 3 I eat on the wing.
- 4 I hum but don't sing.

APRIL/MAY 2011

For the answer, go to No. 98.

76

GRAB A BUDDY AND EXPLORE THE

Big Muddy



The Missouri River, nicknamed the "Big Muddy," prompted writer Mark Twain to say, "The water is too thick to drink and too thin to plow." Although he might be right, exploring one of the river's sandbars or islands is a fun way to spend a sunny summer day.

JUNE/JULY 2013



Whirligig beetle

78

Explore a POND

Pull on your rubber boots and grab a dip net. Summer's a great time to explore a pond. There you'll find insects that walk on water, beetles that dive with a bubble of air trapped against their bodies, and brightly colored newts that start life underwater, live on land for a few years, and then return to the water.

JULY/AUGUST 2015

79

Make Gourmet S'mores

The crunchy, gooey, yummy combination of graham crackers, chocolate, and roasted marshmallows — aka the s'more — has been satisfying hungry campers since before you were born. And though it's tough to improve on a campfire classic, darn if we didn't try. So if you want s'more ideas for ooey, gooey goodness, give "The Elvis" a try.

MAY/JUNE 2018

THE ELVIS



80 Watch Fireflies

Fireflies talk to each other with light. A male firefly's twinkling tush acts like a neon sign. "Here I am," it blinks. "Do you like me?" Female fireflies blink back when they spot a male they fancy. Why did the firefly dump her boyfriend? The answer is hidden in this series of blinks. Use the key to crack the code.

MAY/JUNE 2022



81



SNORKEL AN OZARK STREAM

You don't have to explore a coral reef or visit an aquarium to find flashy fish. Strap on a diving mask, peer into a clear Ozark stream, and you'll be amazed at the rainbow of life you'll find.

JULY/AUGUST 2022

83

Go on a Dragon Hunt



It's good that dragonflies aren't dragon-sized. The buzzy, bug-eyed predators might be the best hunters in the animal kingdom. Studies have shown they catch nearly 95 percent of the insects they pursue. You can find them patrolling ponds, marshes, and streams. For a guide to common dragonflies, buzz over to the JUNE/JULY 2014 issue.

82 Catch a Croaker

Bullfrogs can be as jittery as your little brother after his third can of cola. Sneaking close enough to grab one with your bare hands takes skill and luck.

- 1 At night, frogs cool off in mud along the shore. Slowly circle the bank, sweeping a flashlight all around. When you spot a frog, keep the light on its face.
- 2 Creep toward the frog from the front. If it startles, it might jump right toward you.
- 3 If it doesn't spook, move your hand s-l-o-w-l-y within striking range and GRAB IT! When you get your paws on a frog, hang on — they're slippery!

JUNE/JULY 2012



84

EXPLORE A CONSERVATION AREA



Mina Sauk Falls

Conservation areas are great places to fish, hike, hunt, camp, or simply watch wildlife. Test-drive an outdoor adventure by reading the JULY/AUGUST 2021 issue, then get out and have a real-life adventure at one of more than 1,000 conservation areas scattered across the state.

This key is based on International Morse Code, which uses dots and dashes (short and long sounds or flashes of light) to communicate a message. Here, yellow circles represent dots and black circles represent dashes. Real fireflies don't use such a complex code.

A ●●	H ●●●●	O ●●●	U ●●●
B ●●●●	I ●●	P ●●●●	V ●●●●
C ●●●●	J ●●●●	Q ●●●●	W ●●●
D ●●●	K ●●●	R ●●●	X ●●●●
E ●	L ●●●●	S ●●●	Y ●●●●
F ●●●●	M ●●	T ●	Z ●●●●
G ●●●	N ●●		

Answer: He was not very bright.

85

Master the Art of Letting Go

Sometimes, rules require you to release a fish because it's the wrong size. And sometimes, you'd rather fish for fun than for food. To avoid harming fish you free, follow these tips.

- Reel in your catch quickly. Fighting a fish longer than necessary weakens its ability to survive.
- Wet your hands before touching a fish and keep your fingers away from a fish's gills and eyes.
- Keep a fish in the water when removing the hook. Its odds of survival drop the longer it's out of water.

JULY/AUGUST 2025

86

Float your Boat



When summer's sizzle makes you fizzle, it's time to paddle a raft down a cool Ozark stream.

JULY/AUGUST 2024

87

Stomp around a Swamp

Some of Missouri's most interesting plants and animals live in swamps. To see them, take a trip to Mingo National Wildlife Refuge or Otter Slough Conservation Area. There you'll find bald cypress trees that breathe with their "knees," swamp rabbits that dive underwater to escape predators, and neon-green treefrogs that honk like geese.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2017



88

SEARCH FOR SILK MOTHS

To see a silk moth, you'll probably need to stay up late. Most don't come out until midnight. But it's worth it to find these fuzzy, colorful giants fluttering around your porch light. For a guide to Missouri's mega moths, check out the APRIL/MAY 2012 issue.



89

Cook Your Catch



The only thing better than catching fish is eating fish. In our JULY/AUGUST 2017 issue we offered an easy recipe to turn your catch into crispy, tasty, golden-fried goodness.

90 Read a River

Paddling a canoe down an Ozark stream is a great way to beat summer heat. If you learn to read the water, you'll get dunked only when you want to go swimming. One thing to watch for is an **upstream "V."** When a rock or stump is submerged just below the surface, water flowing around

it forms a "V" with the tip pointing upstream. If you see one, paddle around it! For more ways to read the water, check out the **AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2013** issue.



93 BAKE A BLACKBERRY COBBLER

What should you do with the bucket of blackberries you've picked? Make a cobbler, of course! With this recipe, you sprinkle the berries on top of the cobbler, and they somersault under the batter as it bakes. You'll flip, too, when you taste how yummy it is.

- 1** Preheat an oven to 400 degrees. In a mixing bowl, combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of shortening. Use a hand mixer to blend it until it's creamy.
- 2** Mix in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of milk, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of flour, 1 teaspoon of baking powder, and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt.
- 3** Grease a square 8-inch cake pan and pour in the batter.
- 4** Top the batter with 3 cups of blackberries. Drop flakes of butter (about 2 tablespoons) on top of the berries. Sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar over the whole thing.
- 5** Bring $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water to a boil and carefully pour it over the berries and batter.
- 6** Bake until the top of the cobbler turns golden-brown (about 30 minutes).

JUNE/JULY 2010

91 SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL Flower Farmers

Throughout the world, bees and other pollinators are disappearing in alarming numbers. You can help bring back the buzz in your own backyard.

- ✿ Plant a variety of native wildflowers so something is blooming from early spring through late fall.
- ✿ Ask your parents to avoid using pesticides. These chemicals don't kill just pests. They also kill bees and butterflies.
- ✿ Mow your lawn less often. A few flowering weeds in a desert of grass is an oasis for thirsty pollinators.

JULY/AUGUST 2020



Common eastern bumblebee

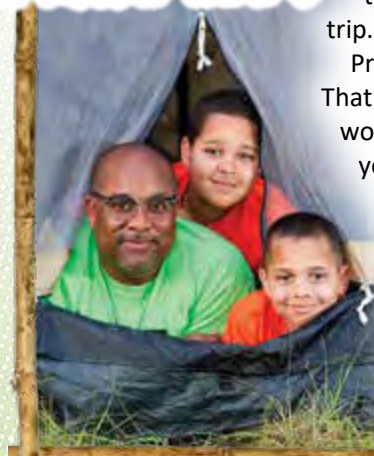
Common five-lined skink



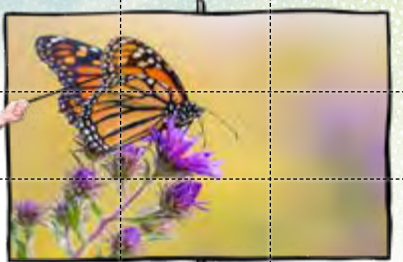
92 SEEK A SKINK

Six species of lizards called skinks slink under leaf litter and through rocky nooks and crannies across Missouri. For a guide to these colorful little lizards, check out the **JULY/AUGUST 2026** issue.

94 TAKE DAD CAMPING



In the **AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2012** issue, we tagged along with a group of kids who took their dad on his first-ever camping trip. Here's a bit of advice they offered: Practice setting up your tent at home. That way, you won't hike five miles into the woods — like Dad did — only to discover you're missing a tent pole. It also helps you learn to set your tent up quickly, in case you arrive at camp in the rain or after dark. If Dad had practiced beforehand, maybe we wouldn't have wasted an hour trying to untangle him from the tent poles. That's time a kid just can't get back.



95 Shoot a Fantastic PHOTO

In the JULY/AUGUST 2018 issue, one of *Xplor*'s photographers, Noppadol Paothong, offered tons of tips for taking great nature photos. Here's one:

How you place your subject in the frame can make or break a photo. If you don't know where to start, try the "rule of thirds." Pretend your camera frame is divided into thirds like a tic-tac-toe grid. Place your subject where the horizontal and vertical lines cross.



97 Take a HIKE

Hiking promises adventure — or at least something new to see — around every bend. Before you strike off for a walk in the woods, take this quiz to check your trail-trekking know-how.

The hiking trail zigzags down a steep hillside laced with ferns. Your buddy begins trudging down the path. You think it would be quicker to cut straight down the hill. What should you do?

- 1 Bellow "last one down's a gassy skunk!" and plunge off through the underbrush.
- 2 Follow your hiking partner.
- 3 Yell "watch this!" then tuck into a ball and somersault downhill.

Answer: 2. If every hiker veered off the trail, ferns and other plants would get trampled.

JUNE/JULY 2011

96

Interview a

Trash Panda

In the JULY/AUGUST 2019 issue, we interviewed Missouri's most mysterious masked mammal.

Xplor: Why are raccoons nicknamed "trash pandas"? **Raccoon:** If dumpster diving were an Olympic sport, I'd be on a cereal box. Nothing better than dumpster doughnuts, am I right?

X: That explains the first part of your nickname. What about the panda part?

R: Some people think raccoons are related to giant pandas.

X: Are you? **R:** All mammals are related, nature boy. But raccoons are more closely related to weasels than pandas. Personally, I don't like trash panda. It's rude. Call me raccoon or, if you want to sound smart, use my scientific name: *Procyon lotor*.

X: How do you spell that?

R: How should I know?

I'm a raccoon.



98

WATCH Brilliant Birds BATTLE

Ounce for ounce, ruby-throated hummingbirds might be Missouri's angriest animals. When two of the sparkly, gem-colored birds arrive at the same feeder, one of them will fly into a sputtering, squeaking, feather-ruffling rage and chase the other hummer away. To see these harmless battles, put a sugar-water feeder near a window.

JULY/AUGUST 2016



99

STRANGE BUT TRUE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

Super-sized snack attack: Although full-grown **BOBCATS** rarely weigh more than 40 pounds, the ferocious felines have, on rare occasions, been known to take down adult white-tailed deer, which can weigh over 100 pounds.



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100

KEEP ON *Xplor*ING!

Each issue of *Xplor*, on average, contains about 10 illustrations, 50 photos, and 4,000 words — all about nature. After 100 issues, you might wonder if we're running out of things to draw, photograph, and write about.

Not even close.

Nature is endlessly amazing. The closer you look, the more you find to explore.

We're already hard at work on the next issue. And we've got lots more to show you after that.

