

MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST

VOLUME 80, ISSUE 11, NOVEMBER 2019
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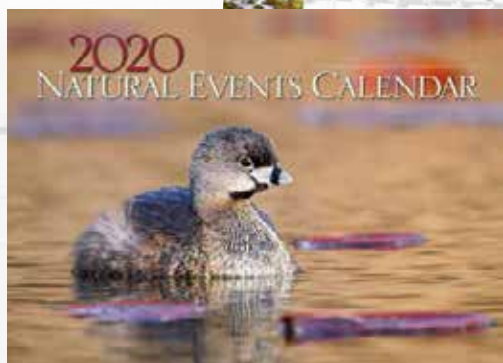
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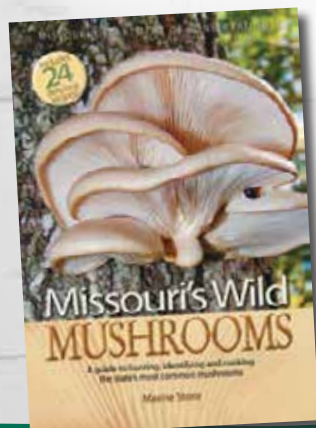
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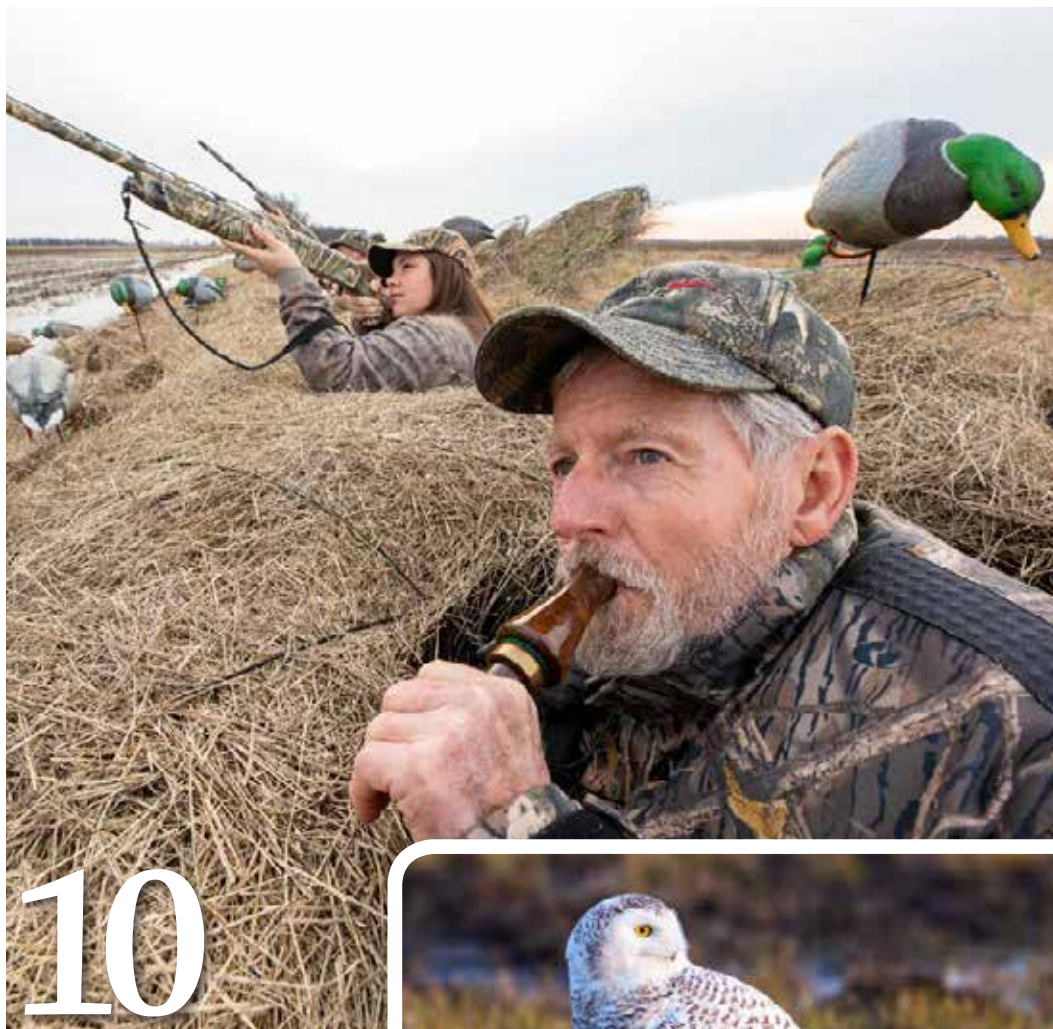
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Coyote

MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST



ON THE COVER

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by JIM RATHERT

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Bonnie Chasteen, Heather Feeler,
Kristie Hilgedick, Joe Jerek

ART DIRECTOR

Cliff White

DESIGNERS

Les Fortenberry, Marci Porter

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Noppadol Paothong, David Stonner

CIRCULATION MANAGER

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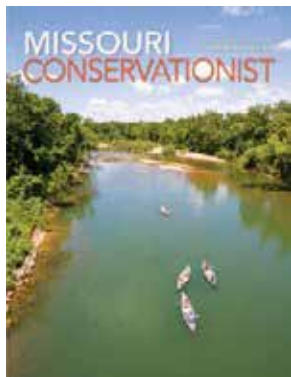
Inbox



Letters to the Editor

Submissions reflect readers' opinions and may be edited for length and clarity. Email Magazine@mdc.mo.gov or write to us:

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PO BOX 180
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65102



BEAUTY IN NATURE

Thank you for your beautiful magazine. My family just loves it. The information and pictures are just great. The color is so beautiful.

Margie Lynn
Goodman



FAITH, FAMILY, AND FOWL

I enjoyed reading *Faith, Family, and Fowl* [September, Page 10]. I always say — the best times are spent with family. The Malmstroms seem to have it in mind when, as a family, they enjoy hunting and fishing together. Kudos. I enjoyed the read. And I enjoy the *Conservationist* magazine.

Shirley Lockhart Fulton

CONSERVATION UP FRONT

I love the magazine. There is so much information in such a small publication. The *Up Front* section is one of my favorites. I look forward to Director Pauley's insight and how she brings the reader full circle with her writing. The volunteers and staff work so very hard in keeping Missouri wildlife preservation first in so many ways. I read the articles and remember days hunting with my dad or just walking through the woods. Thanks for the memories.

Bob Jewson St. Charles

MORE PRAISE FOR OPOSSUMS

We love the *Missouri Conservationist* magazine. In particular, the article *Awesome Opossums* [August, Page 22] was so informative. We learned so much about their life span, how they raise their babies, and love the fact that they kill snakes and ticks. We wish everyone would read this article then, maybe, these animals would finally get the respect they are due.

Dan and Sandy McKay Lee's Summit

Received my August edition. Great reading! Nice article about opossums. I'm 72 now and learned new things about our Missouri friends, even though I am not fond of them. Keep up the great articles.

W. Marshall O'Fallon

KUDOS TO THE CONSERVATIONIST

The *Missouri Conservationist* magazine is beautifully done. Every single issue is interesting. Thank you.

Laura Anderson Bucklin

The Missouri Conservation Commission is really blessed to have such professional artists and authors. I love your magazine and received several handouts at the state fair. Congratulations on the best conservation department in the U.S. Love you guys, loved growing up with you and my dad teaching me conservation.

Name Withheld via email

SPIDERS? OH MY!

I love your magazine, but please don't put spiders or tarantulas on the cover [October 2019]. It must be good information, but I have a fear of them and don't like to see them on my dining room or reading table. Thank you.

Doris Foley via Facebook

I hope there wasn't something that I really wanted to read in October's *Missouri Conservationist*. I saw the spider on the cover and quickly put it in the recycling bin. Spiders are my weak link. I truly love nature, except for spiders. I'll be patiently waiting on November's edition.

Anita Heckenback via email

Spiders are one of the most polarizing creatures of the natural world. But they do serve an important role. They consume thousands of insects each year and, in turn, serve as food for birds, small mammals, reptiles, and more. If you don't want to miss out on the October issue, check out the online edition at mdc.mo.gov/conmag/2019-10. You can select which parts you want to read, and which ones you want to avoid. —THE EDITORS

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



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1

1 | Lake
Springfield
by **wasorenson**,
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3 | Frost flower
by **Peter
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2



3

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LLOYD GROTJAN OF FULL SPECTRUM PHOTO



Up Front

with Sara Parker Pauley

✱ **November is a month of giving thanks. Recently, I participated in the graduation ceremony of our newest conservation agent class and administered their oath of office. Fresh out of the academy with months of rigorous training, they've been tested on everything from the *Wildlife Code* to swift-water rescue. For nearly all, this is their dream job, and yet I know there are many new life lessons ahead as they begin their first assignment.**

Several people offered words of wisdom for the new agents during the ceremony. Missouri Department of Public Safety Director Sandy Karsten shared inspiring insights from her years with the Missouri State Highway Patrol. A common theme was the role conservation agents play as ambassadors for the department and the state with every interaction they have with the public.

I shared the example of retired Conservation Agent Russ Shiflett, who once came across a father and son hunting on a conservation area. Both were disabled, and the son had just shot a deer. Without hesitation, Russ jumped in to help. He carried the son on his back, and together they tracked, located, and tagged the deer. He made the experience meaningful for this young man. Russ lived the definition of what it means to be a true ambassador.

As we ended the ceremony, I silently gave thanks for this new class, and wished for each of them a Russ Shiflett in their lives — a mentor and guide to share a few of those important life lessons along the way

Sara Parker Pauley

SARA PARKER PAULEY, DIRECTOR
SARA.PAULEY@MDC.MO.GOV

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Nature LAB

by Bonnie Chasteen

Each month, we highlight research MDC uses to improve fish, forest, and wildlife management.

PROTECTION

Digital Tools

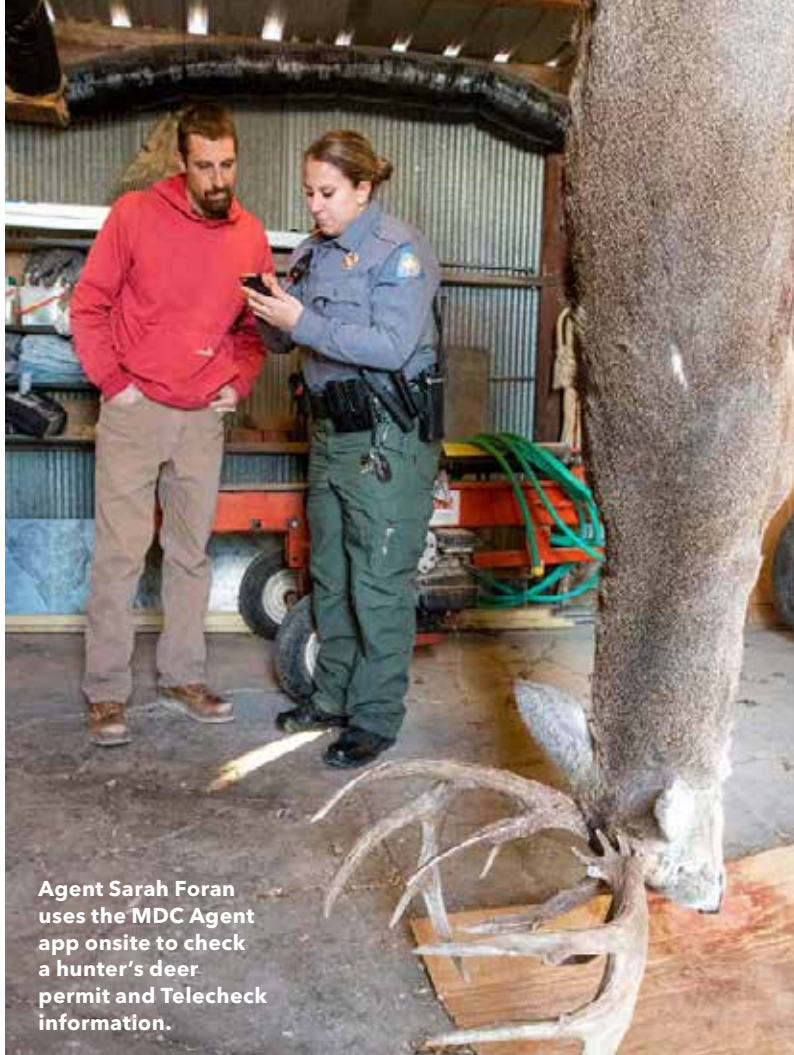
✳ When Agent Sarah Foran needs to check a hunter's permit, all she has to do is scan it with her smartphone.

"Conservation agents across Missouri have embraced technology that allows us to gather information at our fingertips," she said.

Laptop computers and smartphones have replaced the desktop computers and home office phones of old. Gone are the days of agents returning home after patrolling to listen to and return messages and check emails. Now they can pull up-to-date Telecheck history for their county, receive text messages directly from citizens, and receive email notifications detailing resource crimes from Operation Game Thief.

With smartphones and laptops as standard equipment, conservation agents and information technology specialists have been able to research and develop two new apps for assisting and improving resource law enforcement.

For the smartphone, MDC Agent was developed and downloaded on all agents' phones, giving them instant access to Telecheck history, landowner acreage, and permits purchased. Agents can populate data-search fields either by hand or by scanning a barcode located on the permit holder's license, which they are required to carry.



Agent Sarah Foran uses the MDC Agent app onsite to check a hunter's deer permit and Telecheck information.

New apps give agents instant access to data and communications in the field

For the laptop, the newly formed Commercial Wildlife Unit developed MDC Inspect. Agents can add each captive animal held into this database by official identification, passive integrated transponder numbers, or any other unique identification the animal may have. MDC Inspect validates the location of captive wildlife held in Missouri along with any captive wildlife movement between permit holders. This application also allows agents to fill out, sign, and print inspection forms in the field.

Digital Tools at a Glance



How agents use smartphone app

- ✓ Check Telecheck history
- ✓ Check landowner acreage
- ✓ Check permits purchased



How agents use laptop app

- ✓ Validate Commercial and Confined Wildlife permit holders
- ✓ Validate captive wildlife location and movement
- ✓ Create instant inspection forms

In Brief

News and updates from MDC



BUY NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS FROM STATE FOREST NURSERY

ORDER EARLY!
STOCK IS LIMITED.



➔ Need trees and shrubs for your landscape? Go native with MDC! Native trees and shrubs can help improve wildlife habitat and soil and water conservation while also improving the appearance and value of private property.

The George O. White State Forest Nursery near Licking offers a variety of low-cost native tree and shrub seedlings for reforestation, windbreaks, erosion control, wildlife food and cover, and other purposes. The nursery provides mainly 1-year-old, bare-root seedlings with sizes varying by species. Seedling varieties include: pine, bald cypress, cottonwood, black walnut, hickory, oak, pecan, persimmon, river birch, maple, willow, sycamore, blackberry, buttonbush, deciduous holly, redbud, ninebark, spicebush, elderberry, sumac, wild plum, and others.

Seedlings are available in bundles of 10 or increments of 25 per species. Prices range from 22-90 cents per seedling. Sales tax of 6.1 percent will be added to orders unless tax exempt. There is an \$8 handling charge for each order. Receive a 15 percent discount up to \$20 off seedling orders with a Heritage Card, Permit Card, or Conservation ID number.

Learn more and place orders through the *2019-2020 Seedling Order Form*. Find it at MDC regional offices and nature centers, online at mdc.mo.gov/seedlings, or by contacting the State Forest Nursery at 573-674-3229 or StateForestNursery@mdc.mo.gov. Place orders now through April 15, 2020. Orders will be shipped or can be picked up at the nursery near Licking from February through May.

Ask MDC

Got a Question for Ask MDC?

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

Q: Twice in a week's time, I have found bats in my driveway, which is shaded by huge maples. When I touched a stick to the bat, it grabbed on ever so slightly. I placed it in a tree, but I found it on the ground again the next day. Could these bats be leaf-dwellers, knocked out of the trees by high winds?

→ The species you've encountered are likely to be eastern red bats (*Lasiurus borealis*), a common "tree bat" species. Other tree bats include the hoary bat and the silver-haired bat. Tree bats roost in trees year-round, in contrast to other North American bats, which use caves in winter.

Tree bats are also known to migrate between winter and summer locations. Even though these species are migrating, they hibernate in winter to save energy during cold, wet conditions. They

cannot move quickly, defend themselves, or fly when hibernating. They'll appear close to dead, will be cool to the touch, and their movements will be very slow and weak. It often takes them 5 to 10 minutes to become active.

It is likely these individuals were knocked or blown from their roosts and may have been injured in the process. After being grounded, they may not have been able to make their way back to the roost. You did all you could in placing it on a tree trunk where it might safely recover. It was likely a natural death and nothing to be concerned about.

This species is camouflaged to blend in with fall leaves. It is likely that, if the death occurred anywhere other than your driveway, you might not have noticed, as they blend in well with fallen leaves. It should be noted that live red bats also may be encountered in leaf litter during cold



Eastern red bat

spells and can be seen flying out of leaf litter during early spring burns.

Q: I planted milkweed seedlings last year, but none of them bloomed. I've purchased seeds for the upcoming season, but I need advice before I plant them?

→ Planting these seeds directly into bare soil is a good option. Site preparation — to ensure the area is weed-free — is imperative. If you plan to sow the seeds into an existing flower bed, make sure that



Possum haw, or deciduous holly

Q: Could you identify these berries?

→ This is possum haw, also known as deciduous holly (*Ilex decidua*). Usually this Missouri native is a shrub with a spreading, open crown, but it also can be a small tree.

With its bright, red berries, possum haw is eye-catching in autumn and winter. The berries appear in September and October and tend to be about ¼ inch in size — either solitary or three together. Possum haw is "dioecious," which means there are separate male and female plants. For the best

show of berries, plant female specimens, with at least one male to ensure pollination takes place. Though the berries are considered poisonous to humans, many birds and mammals eat them, and deer browse the twigs.

You can find these trees scattered south of the Missouri River and in the counties along the Mississippi River. Possum haw prefers moist, acidic, organic soils and grows in a variety of habitats, including dolomite glades, rocky upland open woods, and low, wet woods along streams. You can plant them near your rain garden for winter interest and to attract birds.



Purple milkweed

all tough, perennial vegetation is eradicated and treat the area with extensive weeding and raking so the seeds have a chance to germinate. Broadcast the seeds onto the soil surface during the winter — January and February are prime months. Aim for 24 seeds per square foot. Tossing the seed on top of the snow is also a good technique. To ensure germination, press the seed into the soil. You can do this with your feet. Select your location carefully to allow young plants at least 6 hours of sunlight each day. During the first growing season, young plants need full sunlight to grow strong. Learn to identify the seedlings and keep the beds weeded to allow the seedlings to grow.

Patience will be your watchword. Remember, these plants are investing in long-term survival, not a rapid flush of growth and flowering just to make seed and die like annuals. It's not unusual for native forb seedlings to grow a few inches above ground, as well as more than a foot below ground, in their first year. It takes a couple of years for seedlings to bloom.

Once established, these milkweeds will provide flowers for you and our native pollinators for decades to come. For more information on homegrown milkweeds, including how to germinate them in pots, visit mdc.mo.gov/conmag/2016/01/homegrown-milkweeds.



Derek Cole

JACKSON COUNTY
CONSERVATION AGENT

offers this month's

AGENT ADVICE

As you prepare for opening day of firearms deer season — Nov. 16 — make yourself familiar with this year's changes. Here are just a few. First, again this season, MDC has established a chronic wasting disease management zone. If you harvest a deer in the zone opening weekend, you must present your deer at a sampling station. Second, the antler-point restriction has been reinstated in designated counties. Under this restriction, only bucks with at least four points on one side may be harvested. Third, an adult no longer needs a permit when accompanying a youth hunter (ages 6–15) Nov. 2–3. For more information on these and other changes for the 2019–2020 deer season, check out the *2019 Fall Deer & Turkey* booklet, available where permits are sold or online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZMP.

What IS it?

Can you
guess this
month's
natural
wonder?

*The answer is on
Page 9.*



WE ARE CONSERVATION

Spotlight on
people and partners

by Larry Archer

David and Lance Williams

➔ Like many farmers in north-central Missouri, David Williams and his son, Lance, grow corn, beans, and wheat on their 11,000 acres in southeast Livingston County. What sets the third- and fourth-generation farmers apart is the approximately 250 acres of wetlands that they also maintain, providing habitat not only for migrating waterfowl, but numerous other species that rely on wetlands for survival. Over the years, they have installed 16 water-control structures that aid in flooding and draining fields to maintain wetlands.

Meticulous wetland management

"They've always had a real strong interest in waterfowl hunting and wetlands," said Private Lands Conservationist Scott Roy. "What makes David kind of unique from your typical farmer is that he understands the value of wetlands not only from the wildlife perspective, but from what they can do from the land management aspect as well. He's very meticulous with his wetland management." In addition to working with MDC, the Williamses work with other government agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and not-for-profit organizations such as Ducks Unlimited for financial and technical assistance.

In their own words

Not only do David and Lance manage the water on their wetlands, but they also take on additional projects to make their property more attractive to waterfowl. "We also do things like put up wood duck nests and goose tubs for them to hatch in," David said. "I think last spring we had 21 tubs out for the geese. I don't know how many young ones we raised, but I know it was probably 70 or 80."

by Cliff White



What's **your** conservation superpower?

NOMINATE CITIZEN CONSERVATIONISTS FOR AWARDS

The Missouri Conservation Commission recognizes citizens who make outstanding contributions to Missouri conservation and is seeking nominations for its Master Conservationist Award and the Missouri Conservation Hall of Fame.

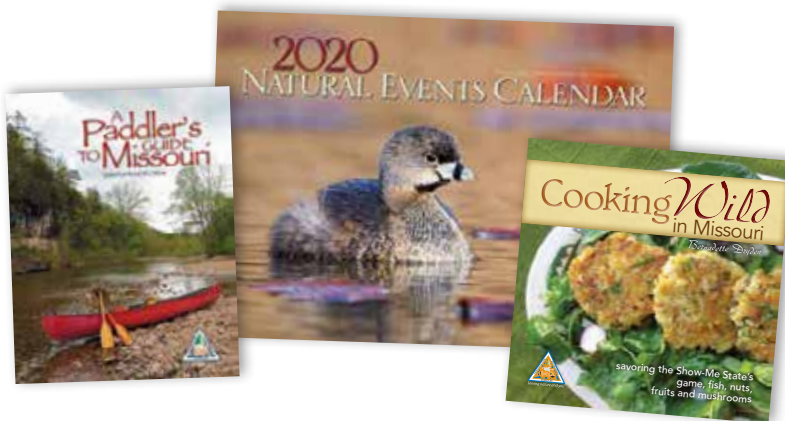
The Master Conservationist Award honors living or deceased citizens while the Missouri Conservation Hall of Fame recognizes deceased individuals. Those who can be considered for either honor must be:

- A citizen who performed an outstanding act or developed an innovative idea or technique that contributed to major progress in conservation in Missouri.
- An employee of the Missouri Department of Conservation, other conservation-related government agencies, universities, or organizations who performed an outstanding act or developed an innovative idea or technique that contributed to major progress in conservation in Missouri.

The nomination form deadline for both is Monday, Dec. 9. Anyone can submit nominations and should include a statement describing the nominee's accomplishments and a brief biography. A screening committee meets annually to consider nominees, with the Conservation Commission providing final approval.

Learn more about the Master Conservationist Award and get the nomination form at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZAK.

Learn more about the Missouri Conservation Hall of Fame and get the nomination form at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZAZ.



NEED HOLIDAY GIFTS?

MDC's online Nature Shop makes holiday shopping a breeze for anyone interested in nature-themed gifts. Offerings include the ever-popular Natural Events Calendar, a variety of books, and more for all ages. For more information, visit mdcnatureshop.com.

Holiday shoppers can also skip retail stores and visit one of MDC's nature centers around the state, located in Kirkwood, Cape Girardeau, Springfield, Kansas City, Blue Springs, and Jefferson City, for an array of reasonably priced, nature-themed holiday gifts.

Conservation makes Missouri a great place to hunt and fish, so give the gift of hunting and fishing permits. Buy them from vendors around the state, online at mdc.mo.gov/buypermits, or through our free mobile apps, MO Hunting and MO Fishing, available for download through Google Play for Android devices or the App Store for Apple devices.

WHAT IS IT? SHORTLEAF PINE TREE BARK

The shortleaf pine tree (*Pinus echinata*) is the only pine species native to Missouri. It's common in the Ozarks but can be planted elsewhere. The shortleaf pine's bark is thick, reddish-brown to nearly black, and broken into large, irregular, scaly plates. In the early 20th century, these trees provided numerous railroad ties to the nation's growing transportation network. Today, the wood is used for exterior and interior finishing as well as pulpwood.



Sharing

A man in a plaid shirt and orange cap is shown in profile, holding a shotgun and looking towards the right. He is standing in a field of tall, golden grass. In the background, another person is visible, also in a field of tall grass. The sky is blue with some clouds.

Quail hunting includes walks in autumn's golden fields that are shared with family and friends.

Hunting's Adventures

HARVESTING NATURE'S BOUNTY WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

by Bill Graham | photographs by Noppadol Paothong

Hunting is a woven tradition. People seek food, adventure, and freedom in nature's wild places. Along the way, they gather cherished memories shared with family and friends. Sunrises and sunsets blend with clouds, rains, and blue skies remembered along with good shots and misses.

The people who go afield in the harvest season to hunt are varied, as is the wild game they pursue.

Bryan and Beth Lukehart are building memories with their two young sons while deer hunting in northwest Missouri. In November, a wood-heated, one-room homemade cabin becomes the center of their family life. They spend mornings watching fields for white-tailed deer. Midday may find them scouting for tracks and signs in the woods and field edges. Venison graces their dinner table in the months that follow.

Frank Loncarich is teaching his son about bobwhite quail hunting, in company with the father who taught him. They hunt the prairies and weedy crop field borders of southwest Missouri. The safety and sportsmanship lessons are matched with learning wing shooting skills and a naturalist's eye for good habitat for grassland birds, such as quail.

Neely "Butch" Mitchell Jr. of Hayti is a self-taught duck and goose hunter on the Mississippi River backwaters and the flooded rice fields of southeast Missouri. He passed what he learned in his youth along to his children, and now he's helping his son and daughter give his grandchildren a hunting tradition.

They all share a passion for an immersion in nature that hunters feel amid forests, meadows, and marshes. Game is killed on some hunts, while on others, none may be seen or shot. Always though, the surroundings and companions are remembered. Butch Mitchell sharpened his duck calling skills by visiting marshes in spring, when hunting season is closed, and listening to waterfowl on a stopover while migrating to northern nesting grounds.

"Sometimes I would just roll over on my back and listen to them, hear the tempo and the sounds," he said. "That taught me."

A Family Deer Camp

Before sunrise, the Lukehart family stirs in the cabin Bryan Lukehart built on his family's farm northwest of Jamesport. November chill during the regular firearms deer season often puts white frost on crop fields and wooded draws surrounding the cabin. They ready four rifles, don warm clothes and blaze orange.

"We're up early getting the kids out of bed and going," Beth Lukehart said. "We decide which hunting stands we'll be at. We usually hunt with one kid per parent."

Tucker, 7, shot his first deer during the 2018 youth season. Austin, 12, has killed a half-dozen deer in his young career. The land and the family's hunting tradition are intertwined.

"My grandpa took me deer hunting when I was Austin's age," Bryan said. "He took me and my brother, and my hunting just kind of went on from there."

Bryan and Beth met and married in Kearney, but they now live near St. Joseph. He is a welder; she is a dental hygienist. Hunting was a shared interest when they met in high school. Later, amid an icy wind, he proposed marriage as they sat together deer hunting from an archery tree stand. She said yes.

"It's worked out, here we are," Beth said, as the family watched for deer in fields last autumn from an elevated wood hunting blind Bryan built. "My grandpa took us to get our hunter education certification when we all turned 11," she said. "I grew up hunting, too."

The family celebrates when a hunter among them kills a deer. But they also enjoy time together watching nature from the hunting blinds or exploring. Sometimes they just watch deer pass by.

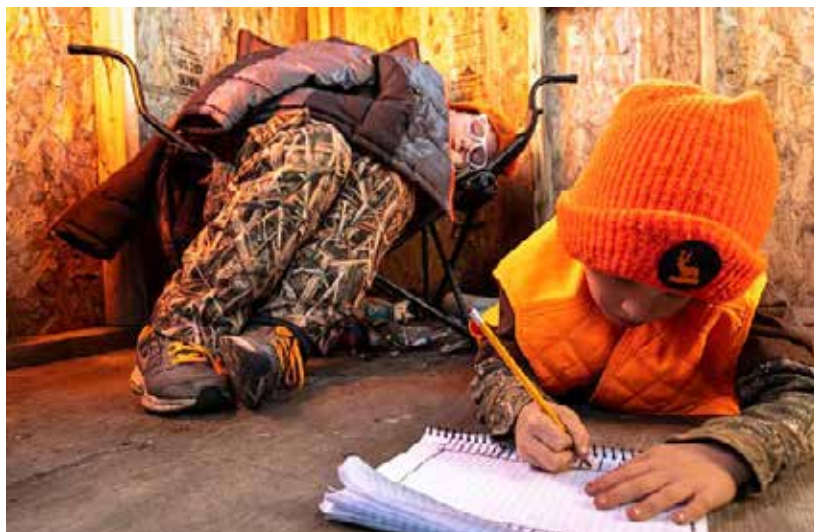
"I just like being out in nature," Bryan said. "I love being out here and feeling like you're in your own world."

The Lukehart family harvests several deer annually to put meat in the freezer and stretch the family's food budget.

"We don't buy much red meat," Beth said. "We try to fill up our freezer with venison, and that's what we eat on all year."

Hunting also provides life lessons for their sons.

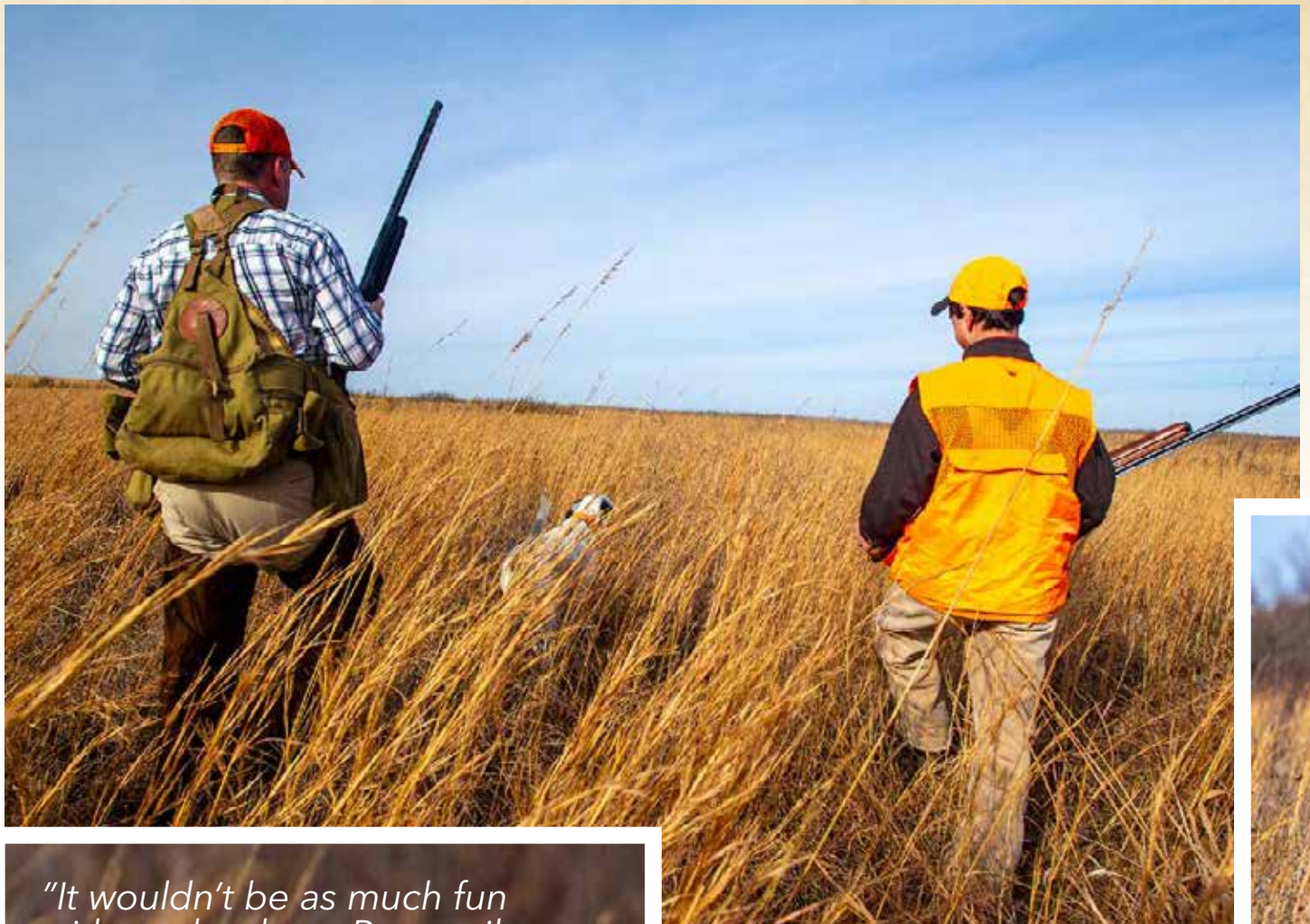
"The boys know where their food comes from," she said. "I think it's nice that they have this legacy that can be passed down and they have this contact with conservation."



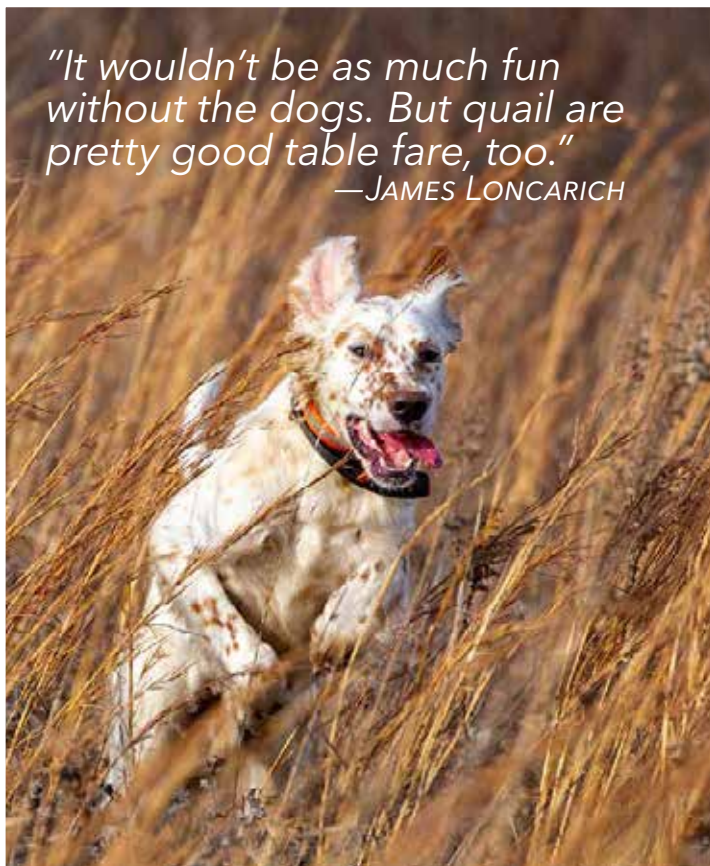


Bryan and Beth Lukehart are building memories with their two young sons while deer hunting in northwest Missouri.





*"It wouldn't be as much fun
without the dogs. But quail are
pretty good table fare, too."*
—JAMES LONCARICH





A Bobwhite Legacy

Stella and Ace, English setter bird dogs, ran last autumn among golden grasses at MDC's Providence Prairie Conservation Area (CA), west of Springfield. Three generations of quail hunters followed. Quail hunting is an athletic endeavor. Bird dogs run back and forth amid the grasses and wildflowers made dormant by frost. Hunters walk behind, grasses and briars swishing against their legs. They walk and then walk some more, noting summer's leftover seeds and flower stalks, or the tangled blackberry and sumac patches that need to be kicked to make sure they do not hide a covey of quail the dogs have not scented.

"Dad, she's birdy over here," said Frank Loncarich. His dog, Stella, was moving slowly among grasses on the other side of a cattle fence, her nose close to the ground. "That's where I got a covey up last time. If birds flush wild, we won't shoot."

The hunters paused, but no quail flushed. Both bird dogs trotted back to the prairie and headed west with the hunters trailing.

Frank Loncarich grew up quail hunting, which led to his career as a MDC wildlife management biologist. His father, James Loncarich, was raised in a quail hunting family, too. Ace is his newest bird dog. Together they are passing the bobwhite tradition along to Frank's son, Caleb Loncarich, 14. They live in Goodman.

"I grew up in McDonald County, and we had bird dogs ever since I was a child," James said. "If there was any light left after school, I'd unchain the pointer, and we'd go hunting. I've been around bird dogs all my life."

The hunters turned north, following a shallow swale with cover thick enough to hide quail from predators but with running room at ground level. Prairies, particularly grazed prairies, have a grass and forb mix that give quail and other grassland birds good habitat for nesting, feeding, and roosting.

Autumn frosts drop leaves and thin grasses, revealing things hidden in summer, like an intricately woven bird nest on sumac limbs.

"I like to be outside," said Caleb, in his first year of hunting. "That bird nest, I wasn't expecting to see things like that."

His father reinforced safe gun handling skills before the hunting season began, things young hunters also learn in MDC's hunter education program. They practiced wing shooting with clay pigeons.

On this day, they walked some yards apart, carrying shotguns and wearing blaze orange caps and hunting gear. The dogs ran ahead, into the breeze, better for them to smell quail and freeze on point to alert hunters. If quail are shot and downed, a good bird dog helps find and retrieve them. Hunters hold a reverence for nature's life and death cycles, and their brief role in that cycle. They respect the soil, water, and ancient natural processes that produce the quail and all life. They enjoy the interactions.

"I like to watch the dogs work, mainly," James said. "I like it when they hit scent. You can see them tense up. They get down low. Their eyes are trained on the source. If quail flush when you step in, it's a pretty wild event."

No burst of fluttering, whirring wings from quail taking flight were heard on this hunt, despite good habitat. Sometimes quail are in other fields, or they move quickly upon hearing hunters entering a field.

"I just enjoy getting out and watching the dogs," James said. "It wouldn't be as much fun without the dogs. But quail are pretty good table fare, too."

Passing Along Waterfowl Lore

Some hunters start traditions. A flash of nature's beauty makes them want to understand the wild things, and that becomes the challenge. Neely "Butch" Mitchell's duck and goose hunting career began that way in the Mississippi River lowlands. A retired high school English, speech, and drama teacher, he's also passing hunting skills to new generations.

Butch's father hunted rabbits that were chased by baying beagles. He remembers when as a little boy he first got to walk behind his father in a field on a hunt. Cotton stalks whacked him in the face. His father shot a rabbit, and his mom took a photograph of a beaming father and son with the rabbit outside their house.

But waterfowl hunting became Butch's passion. As a youth, he and his father were rabbit hunting in an area of what is now MDC's Black Island CA in Missouri's Bootheel.

"There was a slough holding water, a place adjacent to Robinson Lake that was heavily timbered," Butch said. "We were approaching to get closer to the lake when mallards flushed. It was a brilliant sunny morning. I can still see those iridescent green heads as they lifted, and hear the hens quacking. That was just the most remarkable experience. I marveled at how beautiful they were."

As a teen, he would stand amid willows on Mississippi River sandbars at sunrise, hoping to get a shot at ducks. He progressed to using decoys and store-bought duck calls.

"From then on, duck hunting became my main objective," Butch said. "One individual took an interest in me. He was a well-known duck caller. He'd blow his call and I'd replicate. I was pretty much self-taught by trial and error. But regarding when to call and when not to call, the ducks taught me that."

When his son, Neely Mitchell III, got old enough to hunt, Butch built two pit blinds near the Mississippi, "one for him and one for me. We were sort of a team. He became a good goose hunter. Sometimes I'd just sit in the tree line and watch him and his friends hunt, that was enough for me."

Over the decades, Butch began crafting high-quality duck calls of his own designs. He and his son hunted ducks, deer, geese, and turkeys together. Now, he's helping to teach his grandkids the art of duck calling and skills, such as proper decoy placement.

"My grandson is blowing on a little duck call I made for him," Butch said. "And my daughter, Tonya Boyd, her daughter has hunted with us as well."

Waterfowl hunting has changed over time in the Bootheel. Duck blinds for hunters now line flooded rice fields that replaced soybean fields as farming adapted to markets. But when the water levels are right, Butch prefers the old ways of hunting in flooded backwaters along the Mississippi River.

"The ducks are still beautiful," he said. "We keep calling them and working them. I like the anticipation and the camaraderie, especially with my family members. You're sharing a love that means a great deal to everyone involved. Many times, we don't even fire a shot. But we're always grateful for being together, and we know the time will come when the ducks will show up, the dogs will work well, and things are as they should be." ▲

Bill Graham is an MDC media specialist for the Kansas City and Northwest regions. He's a lifelong hunter, angler, and camper. He also enjoys hiking and photographing Missouri's best wild places.



"We keep calling them and working them. I like the anticipation and the camaraderie, especially with my family members." —BUTCH MITCHELL



ST. LOUIS: WHERE *Birds of Prey* ABOUND

CITY PARKS AND NEIGHBORHOODS
PROVIDE GREAT OPPORTUNITIES
FOR OBSERVING BIRDS OF PREY

story and photographs by Danny Brown





A recently fledged great horned owl with its parent close by in Forest Park. Taken in 2010, this was my first image of one of the city owls of St. Louis.

When I first saw Mark Glenshaw, he was already watching me. I was trudging up a steep hill toward my truck in St. Louis' Forest Park after discovering a great horned owl's nest with three fluffy nestlings, all alert and curious. As I reached the parking lot near the World's Fair Pavilion, Mark approached me in the manner of a park ranger and introduced himself as an amateur naturalist who monitored the great horned owls of Forest Park. He further informed me with utmost courtesy that I had already been a bit too close to the nest.

Although it has been almost 10 years since we met, Mark and I remain close friends. He continues to monitor the owls of Forest Park and educate park visitors about their life histories. I love how he engages people, especially children, with lively owl stories, and conducts field dissections of regurgitated pellets to

reveal what owls had eaten. If the subject turns toward nesting, Mark often carries an artificial great horned owl egg to the delight of his audience.

My encounter with Mark and the great horned owl's nest that afternoon in Forest Park began a decade of observing and photographing birds of prey (owls, hawks, eagles, falcons, kites, and ospreys) in the urban landscape of St. Louis and its surrounding communities. The next morning, I returned with my camera to discover one of the nestlings sitting on a branch with its parent. It had fledged overnight and I was thrilled to capture its image, finally free from the confines of its nest of the past six weeks. Yep, I was hooked!

So why are birds of prey attracted to St. Louis and other big cities? St. Louis is rich with historic parks, including its crown jewel, Forest Park. These parks have an abundance of mature trees, perfect for large, stick-built nests of red-tailed hawks



Mark Glenshaw points out a great horned owl, hidden among the tree branches in Forest Park. Glenshaw always carries a large pack filled with extra binoculars, snacks, field guides, park maps, water, and everything else he might need while educating both children and adults about the owls of Forest Park.

and Cooper's hawks, as well as the smaller nests of Mississippi kites. As they age, many of those same trees provide nesting cavities for American kestrels, barred owls, screech owls, and often great horned owls. Another attraction is the prevalence of tall pine trees and other conifers where birds of prey, particularly great horned owls, can rest securely among sheltering branches, especially in winter.

The towering trees of St. Louis' parks and neighborhoods are only part of the story. The other part is easy access to food. Often beneath those inviting trees is open ground, typically mowed, which abounds with squirrels, rabbits, and other prey. Few creatures are completely safe from the talons of a great horned owl.

I'm often asked if owls and hawks stay in the city after they fledge and go out on their own. My reply, often prefaced by, "I'm not an expert," is that some of them stay around the city for

another year or more while others expand their range to new locations farther away. I'm confident that many city birds later become country birds as they explore their new world.

During my years photographing birds of prey in St. Louis, I have been impressed with the way they bring people together. Everywhere I go, especially when I'm toting my 500 mm lens and tripod, people approach me, ascertain what I'm looking for, and begin sharing stories about their own encounters with urban birds of prey. Others join in and camaraderie ensues, regardless of background. I consider this one of the many benefits we receive from these charismatic birds of the city.

Here you will find a photographic sample of the birds of prey I have encountered in and around St. Louis. It is not an exhaustive list, but more of a highlight reel from my time spent in this compelling landscape. ▲



A *barred owl* with its young in a backyard in Chesterfield. This image was captured in 2011 when we had an exceptional emergence of cicadas. I watched this barred owl family gorge on the noisy insects each day. Like most birds of prey, barred owls are opportunistic feeders. Barred owls are typically found in densely forested areas with a stream nearby, so they are not commonly spotted in manicured parks.



Ospreys visit St. Louis during their spring and fall migrations. They are sometimes observed fishing at Forest Park's Grand Basin. I photographed this individual over the Meramec River in St. Louis County.

This *bald eagle* spent several days in Forest Park one winter, snatching ducks and fish from the waterway beneath its favorite perch.



A very young *great horned owl* sits at the base of a cypress tree in Tower Grove Park following an all-night rain. The owl's camouflage reduced its exposure to predators, but I couldn't resist returning that afternoon to check on it. I was relieved to find it high overhead on a tree branch next to one of its parents.

A *Cooper's hawk* consumes a bird for breakfast in Lafayette Park. Street lights not only provide an excellent perch for scouting but also a great platform for eating.



A *red-tailed hawk* surveys its habitat from the clock tower above the Forest Park Visitor and Education Center. Man-made structures often provide an unrestricted view of prey below.





A *red-tailed hawk* with one of its nestlings high in a pine tree in Tower Grove Park. Shortly after I made this image, the other parent arrived with breakfast for the nestlings, a baby robin that it had snatched from a nest.

Mississippi kites can be found all around the city of St. Louis in both neighborhoods and parks. The easiest time to spot them is when they congregate in late summer in roosting trees. Kites often nest high in neighborhood trees where they are imperceptible to most residents. Small in stature, kites can pluck a dragonfly out of mid-air. I photographed this one in Tower Grove Park.





I photographed this pair of *great horned owl* nestlings in Tower Grove Park the day before they fledged. On the evening after they left the nest, their nest tree was knocked down in a powerful storm. Concerned for their health, I searched the park the next day and found them on a branch of a nearby tree, their parents watching from afar.



Short-eared owls are not considered city birds, but they are sometimes found hunting wide open areas around St. Louis in winter. I received a tip one year that several of them were perching on dumpsters during the day at a production facility near the airport. They are often observed in winter just outside the city at Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary and a bit farther away at B.K. Leach Memorial Conservation Area (CA) in Lincoln County, where I photographed this individual.



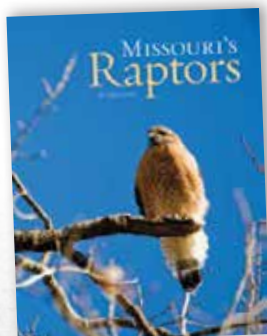
In winter, *eastern screech owls* are often found in south-facing tree cavities so they can soak up the sun's warmth. Although screech owls are common in parts of St. Louis, I photographed this one at nearby Shaw Nature Reserve in a south-facing sycamore cavity.



Red-shouldered hawks are not as citified as red-tailed hawks. They tend to be in more wild areas where barred owls are found, usually with a stream nearby where they can hunt for frogs and salamanders, their preferred prey. I caught this red-shouldered hawk feeding on spring peepers at Shaw Nature Reserve near St. Louis.



Winter is a great time to watch for urban birds of prey because they are easier to find in the trees. This *red-tailed hawk* was hunkered down during a snowstorm in Forest Park.



To learn more about Missouri's birds of prey, get a copy of *Missouri Raptors* by emailing pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov or calling 573-522-0108.

Snowy owls are often found in open areas such as airports in northern cities. Occasionally a few drop south to Missouri in late winter, so there is always a chance you could see one in or near St. Louis. I photographed this one last winter at B.K. Leach Memorial CA, about an hour from St. Louis.





Missouri's tiny falcon, the *American kestrel*, perched along a popular hiking/biking trail in Forest Park. I was surprised that this male maintained its position while I retrieved my camera from my car several hundred yards away on the other side of a creek.

Danny Brown is a freelance wildlife photographer and writer. He and his wife, Joyce, live on a farm in Union.

Get Outside

→ Ways to connect with nature

in NOVEMBER



American kestrel

Sky Watching

Get your telescopes trained toward the night's sky on Nov. 17. The **Leonid meteor shower** peaks on that day, beginning at midnight.

Try Trout

Winter may be fast approaching, but that's no reason to hang up your fishing poles. Missouri's trout parks open to **catch-and-release** on Nov. 8. The season runs through Feb. 10, 2020, at Roaring River State Park, Bennett Spring State Park, Montauk State Park, and Maramec Spring Park. For more information, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZAd.



- 1 Roaring River State Park
- 2 Bennett Spring State Park
- 3 Montauk State Park
- 4 Maramec Spring Park

CENTRAL REGION

Beginners Fly Fishing

Saturday, Nov. 9 • 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Cosmo-Bethel Lake • 4500 Bethel St., Columbia, MO 65203
Registration required. Call 888-283-0364 or register online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZQp before Nov. 9.

Come out to Cosmo-Bethel Lake and join us for some fly-fishing! In this clinic, we will teach the basics of fly-fishing. There will be an intro to fly-fish portion where we will go over some of the history behind it, then go into what you need to get started. We will also be going over the difference between using flies and using lures. You will learn how to cast and then get to do some fishing. If you are 16 or older, you must have a fishing license. This will be catch and release only.



Rainbow trout

Natural Events to See This Month

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



Look for scaup, **mallards**, and ring-necked ducks



Pecans begin to ripen



Woodchucks and eastern chipmunks are asleep in underground nests

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

Is That a Leaf or a Bat?

Rather than migrating during the winter, **red bats** choose to stick around during Missouri's coldest months. And unlike other species of bats that roost in caves, red bats will tough it out amongst the trees, tree hollows, underneath shaggy bark, or even on the ground beneath fallen leaf litter. Their reddish coat helps them blend into their chosen hibernation spot.



Milkweed Mania

Milkweed pods burst in November, releasing hundreds of seeds attached to parachutes of white, silky hairs that carry them on the breeze. Collect the fluffy seeds and spread them wherever you'd like to see monarch butterflies next summer.



ST. LOUIS REGION

Winter Hound Hike

Saturday, Nov. 16 • 10-11:30 a.m.

Rockwoods Reservation

2751 Glencoe Rd., Wildwood, MO 63038

Registration required. Call 888-283-0364

or register online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZQG.

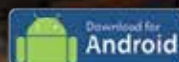
All ages (must be able to hike 1.8 miles)

Hike the Trail Among the Trees with your canine best friend! This is a 1.8-mile guided hike. We ask that your dog companions be (typically) friendly with other dogs and vaccinated. Please bring proof of vaccinations with you to the hike. This can be in the form of paper print out, email, etc. Please be prepared and dressed for the weather. This trail is moderate in difficulty.



EXPLORE MISSOURI

DISCOVER
NATURE
ANYWHERE



Places to Go

NORTHEAST REGION

Mineral Hills Conservation Area

Wooded hills hide coal mining past

by Larry Archer

✳ **Hidden within the forested hills of Mineral Hills Conservation Area (CA) is evidence of the area's coal mining past.**

But finding the remains of the early 20th century strip- and shaft-mining operations, including tailings piles and collapsed tunnels, on this 1,979-acre conservation area located northwest of Kirksville is beyond the skills of the average observer, said former Mineral Hills CA Manager Richard Nesslar.

"It's grown over; you'd really have to look for it," Nesslar said. "You'd basically have to know the area like the back of your hand to be able to find any residual old mining stuff."

The area is 75 percent forested, but when the forest gives way, visitors get a different sense of what the area offers.

"We've got some hilltop prairies out there that are really cool," he said. "They're just areas void of trees on these hilltops, and they usually provide some really nice views."

A popular deer hunting destination, Mineral Hills CA also offers seven designated areas for hunters with limited mobility.

"Those are areas from some of our parking lots and roads that are easily open to disabled hunters who have mobility issues," Nesslar said. "A lot of times we'll plant food plots and there will be open areas for them to hunt."



DAVID STONNER



A light dusting of early snow highlights the ruggedness of the terrain at Mineral Hills CA. A wildlife trail (inset) leads to a watering hole that supports a diverse natural population.



MINERAL HILLS CONSERVATION AREA

consists of 1,979 acres in Putnam County.
From Unionville, take Highway 5 south 3 miles,
then Route F east 2.5 miles.

N40° 24' 50.16" | W92° 57' 34.99"

short.mdc.mo.gov/ZMz 660-947-3272

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT



Bird-Watching The eBird list of birds recorded at Mineral Hills CA is available at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZMQ.



Camping Designated camping areas available. Backpacking or float-in open camping allowed.



Fishing Black bass, catfish, sunfish



Hunting Deer and turkey Deer and turkey regulations are subject to annual changes. Please refer to the *Spring Turkey* or *Fall Deer and Turkey* booklets for current regulations.

Also **quail**, **rabbit**, and **squirrel**

"It once was a mine;
it's kind of crazy how well
it recovered."

—former Mineral Hills CA
Manager Richard Nessler

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU VISIT



White-tailed deer



Coyote



American kestrel



Sharp-shinned hawk



American Wigeon

Anas americana

| Status | Size | Distribution |
|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Common migrant | 20 inches | Statewide |

American wigeons have large wings, compared to their body weight, which allows them to take flight directly from the water. These ducks, known as dabblers, don't dive below the surface of the water. Rather, they rock forward, poking their head underwater with their tail toward the sky. The American wigeon is also called a baldpate because its white stripe resembles a man's bald head.



Did You Know?

Missouri has several wetland areas managed for public waterfowl hunting. Our state and federal hunting regulations, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and programs like the federal duck stamp help ensure healthy waterfowl populations.



LIFE CYCLE

American wigeons breed in central and western Canada and Alaska. They are ground nesters and their young are born with down feathers, ready to walk and swim soon after hatching. They can be seen in Missouri from September through April.



FOODS

As dabbling ducks, American wigeons forage on aquatic vegetation and invertebrates in shallow water. Wigeons often stick close to diving ducks, taking advantage of aquatic plants they've foraged and dislodged below the water's surface. In addition, wigeons have been known to snatch plants out of a diver's bill as they reappear above the water. For this, the American wigeon is sometimes called a "poacher."



ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

The wigeon's diet of aquatic plants and invertebrates helps to control those populations. In turn, wigeons and their eggs serve as prey to many predators.

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:
May 25, 2019–Feb. 29, 2020

Nongame Fish Giggling

Streams and Impounded Waters,
sunrise to midnight:
Sept. 15, 2019–Feb. 15, 2020

Paddlefish

On the Mississippi River:
Sept. 15–Dec. 15, 2019

Trout Parks

Catch-and-Release:
Nov. 8, 2019–Feb. 10, 2020

TRAPPING

Beaver, Nutria

Nov. 15, 2019–March 31, 2020

Other Furbearers

Nov. 15, 2019–Jan. 31, 2020

Otters, Muskrats

Nov. 15, 2019–Feb. 20, 2020

Rabbits

Nov. 15, 2019–Jan. 31, 2020

Free MO Hunting and MO Fishing Apps

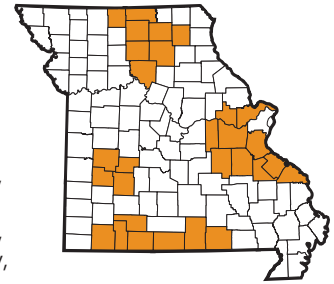
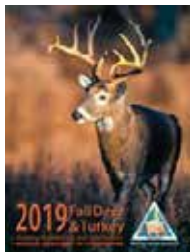
MO Hunting makes it easy to buy permits, electronically notch them, and Telecheck your harvest. MO Fishing lets you buy permits, find great places to fish, and ID your catch. Get both in Android or iPhone platforms at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zi2.



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.

Reminder to Deer Hunters

MDC is conducting mandatory CWD sampling of harvested deer in 29 select counties opening weekend of the fall firearms deer season, Nov. 16 and 17. Hunters must take deer to a sampling station if harvested in the following counties: Adair, Barry, Cedar, Chariton, Christian, Crawford, Franklin, Gasconade, Hickory, Howell, Jefferson, Knox, Linn, Macon, Mercer, Oregon, Ozark, Perry, Polk, Putnam, St. Charles, St. Clair, St. Francois, Ste. Genevieve, Stone, Sullivan, Taney, Warren, and Washington.



Find mandatory CWD sampling stations and other related information online at mdc.mo.gov/cwd and in our *2019 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet, available where permits are sold and online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZf.

HUNTING

Coyote

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

Crow

Nov. 1, 2019–March 3, 2020

Deer

Archery:
Sept. 15–Nov. 15, 2019
Nov. 27, 2019–Jan. 15, 2020

Firearms:

- ▶ Early Youth Portion (ages 6–15):
Nov. 2–3, 2019
- ▶ November Portion:
Nov. 16–26, 2019
- ▶ Late Youth Portion (ages 6–15):
Nov. 29–Dec. 1, 2019
- ▶ Antlerless Portion (open areas only):
Dec. 6–8, 2019
- ▶ Alternative Methods Portion:
Dec. 28, 2019–Jan. 7, 2020

Dove

Sept. 1–Nov. 29, 2019

Groundhog (woodchuck)

May 6–Dec. 15, 2019

Other Furbearers

Nov. 15, 2019–Jan. 31, 2020

Pheasant

Regular:
Nov. 1, 2019–Jan. 15, 2020

Quail

Regular:
Nov. 1, 2019–Jan. 15, 2020

Rabbit

Oct. 1, 2019–Feb. 15, 2020

Sora, Virginia Rails

Sept. 1–Nov. 9, 2019

Squirrel

May 25, 2019–Feb. 15, 2020

Turkey

Archery:
Sept. 15–Nov. 15, 2019
Nov. 27, 2019–Jan. 15, 2020

Waterfowl

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

Wilson's (Common) Snipe

Sept. 1–Dec. 16, 2019

Woodcock

Oct. 15–Nov. 28, 2019



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on Instagram**

@moconservation

Sandhill cranes, rare migrants in Missouri, occasionally stop in this fly-over state to forage in agriculture crop fields, open grassy areas, and marshes. Most winter in Texas, Mexico, and southern Florida. As their population continues to grow in the upper Midwest, we may see more of this species of conservation concern. To discover more about sandhill cranes, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZQt.

by **David Stonner**

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