

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



July/August 2020

Xplor



**FLOWER
POWER**

BEES STAY BUZZY GATHERING
POLLEN AND NECTAR

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Xplor

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We recycle.
You can, too! Share
Xplor with friends.

On a steamy summer day,
nothing beats a float trip
down a cool Ozark stream.

by Cliff White

ON THE COVER

Bicolored Striped Sweat Bee

by Noppadol Paothong

GET OUT!

FUN THINGS TO DO
AND GREAT PLACES
TO DISCOVER NATURE



Look up at the night sky.
THE PERSEID METEOR SHOWER peaks August 11–13, usually with 50–75 meteors an hour.



SHARPEN YOUR ARCHERY OR FIREARMS SHOOTING SKILLS at staffed and unstaffed shooting ranges around the state. Find one near you at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZF.

BABY COMMON SNAPPING TURTLES begin to hatch in August.



Look but don't touch. **THE WHEEL BUG** can give you a nasty bite if you pick it up.



Yuck — what's that?! **DOG VOMIT SLIME MOLD** appears on landscaping mulch in hot, humid weather.

PICK UP SOME PAWPAWS. These "Indiana bananas" ripen in late August.



WHAT IS IT?

DON'T KNOW?
Jump to Page 20 to find out.



- ① My eyes make me look like a snake.
- ② These spots are just some of my fakes.

- ③ I hide in plain sight with the greatest of ease.
- ④ Then I grow up to fly in the trees.



Into the WILD cave

Dark places hide wild faces. Shine a light inside a cave, and you'll see many fascinating creatures looking back at you.

Did You Know?

With more than 7,500 caves, Missouri is known as the "Cave State." Most caves are located in the Ozarks, but a few are found as far north as Hannibal.



Feel If you visit a cave in the summer, the air inside will feel cool. If you visit in the winter, it will feel warm. That's because the inside of a cave stays at the same temperature — about 56 degrees — nearly all of the time.



Long-tailed salamander

Jeffrey T. Briggler

LOOK

Several kinds of salamanders slip around in the twilight zone, the entrance to a cave that gets a little sunlight but stays mostly shady.



William R. Elliott

Groto salamander



Western slimy salamander



Cave salamander

LOOK

Many bats spend winter in caves, and some rest in caves during the summer. If you look closely, you might find a few of these furry, flying insect munchers.



Little brown myotis



Gray myotis



Indiana myotis



Big brown bat



Tricolored bat

William R. Elliott

Ron Colatskie

William R. Elliott

Listen

Drip. Drop. Drip. Drop. Over thousands of years, water trickling through limestone creates passageways and rock formations such as **stalactites** and **stalagmites**.

Where to Go

Some caves are closed to the public to protect rare and unique wildlife that lives inside them. The caves listed below are usually open for exploring. But beware: Due to COVID-19, they may be closed. Check before you go.

- 1 Onondaga Cave and Cathedral Cave at Onondaga Cave State Park
- 2 Fisher Cave at Meramec State Park
- 3 Ozark Caverns at Lake of the Ozarks State Park
- 4 Round Spring Cave



Heads Up!

Caves are dangerous places to explore on your own. Never, ever go into a cave without an adult.

Did You Know?

Ozark cavefish live in Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma — and nowhere else in the world. The 2-inch-long, ghostly white fish swim in total darkness, so eyes aren't helpful. Instead, cavefish find food by sensing movements in the water.



Find a Wetland Near you

Shorebirds love wetlands! These are marshy places where they can feed, rest, and take cover from predators. Find your nearest Missouri wetland at short.mdc.mo.gov/Z7X.

Black-necked Stilt

With long, pink legs and black-and-white plumage, this boldly marked shorebird is easy to recognize. Look for it wading in shallow water. Black-necked stilts are noisy, especially when disturbed, so listen for high-pitched yapping, which carries a long way.

Where to Spot It

For a late-summer shorebirding adventure, camp at Lake Wappapello State Park and visit nearby Duck Creek Conservation Area or Mingo National Wildlife Refuge early in the morning.

SHOW-ME Shorebirds

by Bonnie Chasteen

These summer showoffs fuel up for fall migration in August.

When you're at the lake or along a river this summer, keep your eyes peeled for leggy, beaky birds poking at the shoreline, especially in August. That's when Missouri's fall shorebird migration gets into full swing. Every year, some shorebirds like the pectoral sandpiper fly thousands of miles to reach their southern wintering grounds. While they're in Missouri, they'll be wading in shallow water, skittering along mudflats, or probing wet fields for snails, bugs, and other tasty treats to feed their need for speed. The pectoral sandpiper, for example, can reach cruising speeds of 50 mph during migration.

The shorebird that migrates the farthest, however, is the American golden-plover. It nests in the Arctic tundra in northern Canada and Alaska. In fall, it flies over the Atlantic Ocean down to southern South America for the winter. Round-trip, it travels more than 20,000 miles nearly every year! The shorebird with the shortest commute to Missouri is probably the American woodcock. Its winter range reaches from southern Missouri down to the Gulf Coast. In the summer, it ranges farther up into Missouri and as far north as central Canada.

Black-necked stilt



Shorebirding Basics

Not all shorebirds seek food and friends at the beach. The killdeer, for example, is just as likely to feed in a wet field as a wetland. And the American woodcock hides in wet woods all day. Wherever you spot shorebirds, it helps to carry a good pair of binoculars and focus on these features:

- **Beaks.** Shorebird beaks tend to be long and pointed, the better to probe the silt or soil or swish the water for squishy, crunchy munchables.
- **Legs.** Except for the woodcock, most shorebirds' legs are on the long side. This helps with wading and chasing bugs.
- **Feet.** Not webbed, but with toes that are long and wide-set. This helps shorebirds stand in soft, wet mud but not sink into it.
- **Feeding behavior.** Regardless of their favorite kinds of "beaches," all shorebirds probe or dab for critters with their beaks.



Spring
and Fall
Visitor

Where to Spot It

Try any Missouri wetland like Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area in Boone County.

Pectoral Sandpiper

Look for this medium-sized shorebird feeding in grassy wetlands and wet pastures. If you flush one (that means scare it into flight, not what you were probably thinking), it may give a sharp, twittering *churt*. Like the American golden-plover, it nests on the Arctic tundra and winters in South America.



Where to Spot It

Try the hiking trails at Weldon Spring Hollow Natural Area within Weldon Spring Conservation Area in St. Charles County.

American Woodcock

This chunky, odd-looking shorebird is a cousin of the pectoral sandpiper. But instead of grassy wetlands, it prefers the deep cover of wet thickets, moist woods, and brushy swamps. There, it spends its days probing the wet soil for earthworms. It's active only at dawn and dusk, so you might never see it unless you're outside near wet woods in the evening.



Spring
and Fall
Visitor

Where to Spot It

Visit an easy-to-access wetland like Pershing State Park between Laclede and Meadville.

Wilson's Snipe

Like the woodcock, this member of the sandpiper family avoids mudflats. Instead, it prefers moist grassy areas, swamps, shallow marshes, or even drainage ditches. You seldom see these shy birds until you are nearly upon them, when they abruptly rocket into the sky and fly away in a zigzag pattern.

© Gale Verhague | Dreamstime.com



Spring
and Fall
Visitor

Where to Spot It

While most American golden-plovers take the Atlantic route south during fall migration, some come through Missouri. You might see them at B.K. Leach Conservation Area in Lincoln County.

American Golden-Plover

Compared to most shorebirds, this little plover's beak is kind of short and stout. It eats seeds and berries as well as tiny water critters. In Missouri, look for it on prairies, farms, mudflats, and shorelines.

© Agami Photo Agency | Shutterstock.com



Where to Spot It

Truman Reservoir Visitor Center in Benton County is a great place to see killdeer and many other kinds of shorebirds.

Killdeer

You've probably heard this loud-mouthed member of the plover family announce its return to Missouri in April. *Kill deer! Kill deer!* In August, look for its run-pause-peck feeding behavior on pastures, mudflats, and lake shores.



Spring
and Fall
Visitor

Where to Spot It

You're likely to see this shorebird at any Missouri wetland area in any part of the state.

Lesser Yellowlegs

This one's easy. It has long, yellow legs, a straight beak, and it's about 11 inches tall. Its cousin, the greater yellowlegs, is larger and has a slightly upturned beak. Look for lesser yellowlegs wading wetlands and flooded fields in belly-deep water. Rather than probing, the yellowlegs dabs at the water and swings its beak at small fish.

Pollination PARTNERS

by Matt Seek

Abh-choo!

The dusty yellow stuff that makes people sneeze is called pollen. Plants produce it so they can grow fruits and seeds. The pollen must move from one part of the plant, called the anther (*an-thur*), to a different part, called the stigma. Some plants use wind to move pollen. But many plants rely on bees, butterflies, and other animals to act as delivery pilots and transport pollen from flower to flower.

So what do the delivery pilots get for their services? Flowers offer them two kinds of food: nectar for a quick sugar rush and pollen for protein.



American bumblebee

TO KEEP THE WORLD GREEN, PLANTS AND ANIMALS MAKE A GOOD TEAM.

Common eastern bumblebee



Bicolored striped sweat bee



FUZZY and BUZZY

With most plants, the only thing an insect has to do is bump into a flower to get dusted with pollen. But some plants hide their pollen deep inside long, skinny anthers.

Luckily, bumblebees have the key to unlock this secret stash.

When a bumblebee lands on one of these stingy flowers, the bee uses its jaws to clamp down on an anther. (Biologists call the bite marks left behind “bee kisses.”)

Then the bee does something amazing. It flexes its flight muscles violently fast, which causes a loud, whining buzz. The buzz travels through the bee’s body and shakes pollen out of the anther like salt from a shaker.

Tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes are just a few of the plants that require buzz pollination to form their fruits. So the next time you dunk a french fry in some ketchup, be sure to thank the humble bumble.

FLYING Gemstones

Not all bees are yellow and black. This sweat bee gleams like an emerald in the sunlight. And even though it’s tiny — about the length of the word “tiny,” in fact — it’s a pollination pro. Just look at all of the pollen stuck to its fuzzy belly! Plants must love pollinators who are messy eaters.



Blue orchard bee

BERRY Good Bees

If you like apples, peaches, or blueberries, you should thank a blue orchard bee. In early spring, these beautiful, busy bees bustle about, searching for food and empty holes in which to build nests. Their favorite find is pollen from fruit trees and berry bushes. They mix it with spit and nectar to form a pollen loaf. Then they tuck the loaf into a hole, lay an egg on top, and seal the chamber with a wall of mud. When the egg hatches, the baby bee will have plenty to eat until it emerges as an adult the next spring.

Bryan Reynolds / Alamy Stock Photo



Pawpaw flower

FUNKY Flowers



Housefly

Many flowers give off odors to attract pollinators. But not all flowers smell sweet. Some smell downright stinky.

Pawpaw flowers, for example, smell like rotten meat. This odor, along with the plant's liver-colored blossoms, attracts flies and beetles that mistake the flower for a dead animal.

After pollination, pawpaw flowers produce large potato-shaped fruits that ripen in late summer. Many animals love to eat pawpaws, including people. The fruits taste like a cross between a banana and a mango.



Yellow and Black — STAY BACK!

Most people know that a bee's behind can pack a painful punch. The ability to sting protects the buzzy insects from birds and other predators. The yellow and black bands on bees act like warning signs to tell predators, "Back off!"

But here's a little secret: Only female bees can sting. Male bees don't have stingers and are completely harmless. Yet because of their yellow-and-black coloration, most predators leave them alone, too.

Boy bees aren't the only insects that use this trick. If you saw this insect buzzing around, would you give it lots of room? Of course you would. But there's no need. Even though it looks, sounds, and acts like a bee, it can't sting. It's a harmless fly.



Invisible TREASURE Maps

Some flowers have patterns on their petals to help guide hungry insects to their nectar. If you look closely at this iris, you can see how the dark "veins" and "ribs" on the light-colored petals point to the center of the flower where the nectar is pooled.

On other flowers, these petal patterns, which biologists call "nectar guides," are invisible — at least to people. But bees and other insects can see colors that humans can't see. To a buzzing bee, the nectar guides aren't invisible at all. Like a map painted on the petals, they guide the bee right to the flower's sugar-filled treasure chest.



Ruby-throated hummingbird



Monarch

TOTALLY Tubular

A ruby-throated hummingbird's long beak is perfect for sipping nectar from deep, tubular flowers. And when the bird buries its beak in a blossom, its forehead gets dusted with pollen to drop off at the next flower it visits.

Hummingbirds flap their wings at blinding speeds — on average, about 50 times each second. This helps hummers hover precisely in place while they get a drink. But all that flapping comes at a cost.

The tiny birds burn energy faster than any warm-blooded animal. To keep their wings revved up, they must eat half their weight in sugar every day. (You'd have to drink more than 450 cans of soda to keep up.) In fact, from sunrise to sunset, a hummingbird may visit nearly 1,000 flowers. Now that's a lot of pollination!



A Moth in DISGUISE

It's easy to mistake this hummingbird moth for a bee or a hummingbird. After all, it has yellow and black bands on its abdomen like a bee. And, when it hovers in place, its wings buzz like a hummingbird's. Males even have flared hairs on their behinds that look like a bird's tail feathers.

To reach the flower's nectar, these day-flying moths are equipped with freakishly long tongues. In fact, some kinds of hummingbird moths have tongues that reach twice the length of the moth's body!

Snowberry clearwing moth





Flower POWER



In September, monarch butterflies migrate all the way to Mexico to escape winter weather. To make the 1,500-mile trip, the plucky orange butterflies need *lots* of energy. And to get it, they sip nectar from late-blooming flowers like asters, goldenrods, and thistles. Nectar is the perfect energy drink to fuel a butterfly's flutter. In fact, most monarchs actually gain weight during their exhausting journey. The flower fat they pack on is key to their survival. Once they reach their wintering grounds, they won't eat again for nearly five months.



Plan BEE

Throughout the world, pollinators are disappearing in alarming numbers. But you can do something right in your own backyard to bring back the buzz.

- Plant a variety of flowers so something is blooming from early spring through late fall.
- Many native wildflowers make attractive additions to your flower beds. Plus, they're better for pollinators. For ideas about which ones to plant, flutter over to grownative.org.
- Ask your parents to avoid using pesticides. Not only do these chemicals kill pests, but they also kill helpful bees and butterflies.
- Mow your lawn less often. A few flowering weeds in a desert of grass offer an oasis for thirsty pollinators.
- Leave small patches of bare dirt for ground-nesting bees. Or search the internet for plans and build a bee house.

THIS ISSUE:

STRIPED SKUNK VS. YELLOW JACKETS

Illustrated by David Besenger

Intruder Alert

When they sting, yellow jackets release odors called "alarm pheromones" that rally other members of the hive to attack.

Sneak Attack

Skunks search for snacks after dark when yellow jackets are resting in their nests.

Stun Gun Buns

A yellow jacket's business end is tipped with a stinger that the wasp can jab into an attacker over and over again.

Tough Toenails

Long, strong claws on a skunk's front paws help it dig into hard-packed dirt and rip apart hives.

AND THE WINNER IS...

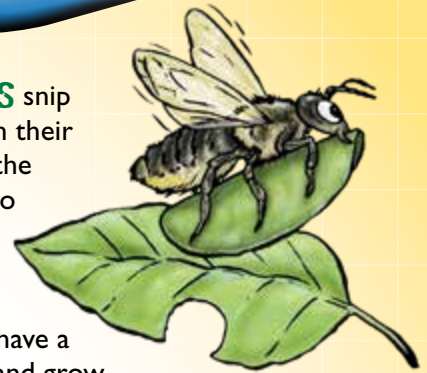
STRANGE but TRUE!

YOUR GUIDE TO ALL THE
UNUSUAL, UNIQUE,
AND **UNBELIEVABLE**
STUFF THAT GOES ON IN NATURE

FISH need oxygen just like people do. But while we use lungs to get oxygen from air, fish use gills to get oxygen from water. If oxygen in the water runs low, fish can suffocate.



LEAFCUTTER BEES snip circles from leaves with their sharp jaws. They stuff the cutouts in their nests to make “sleeping bags” and lay an egg inside each one. When the eggs hatch, the babies have a dry, cozy place to live and grow.



When startled, a **WESTERN RATSNAKE** (aka black snake) will often vibrate its tail in dry leaves. Biologists believe the harmless snake may be trying to sound like a venomous rattlesnake to scare away attackers.



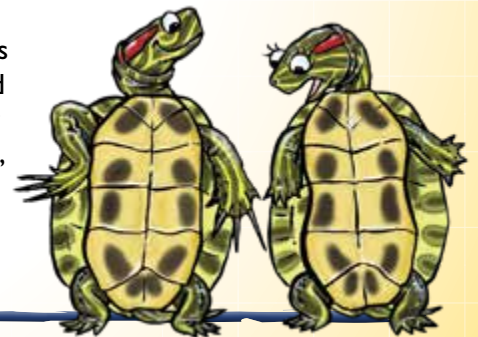
Because ants bite and sting, many predators prefer to eat spiders. To avoid snack attacks, some **JUMPING SPIDERS** pretend to be ants. Not only are the eight-legged imposters shaped like ants, they also raise their legs to imitate an ant’s antennae.



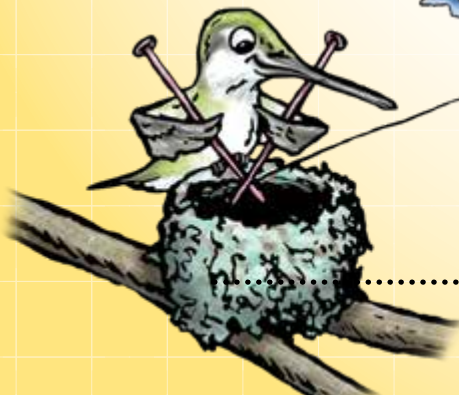
Many birds take a dip in a bird bath or splash in a puddle to wash off. **WHITE-EYED VIREOS** have a different way to stay clean. The shrub-loving birds rub their bodies against dew-soaked leaves in the morning.



One way to tell boy and girl **RED-EARED SLIDERS** apart is to look at their toenails. Boys usually have longer front claws than girls do. And when a slider guy wants a girlfriend, he waves his long claws in the female’s face.



RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS stitch spider silk into their nests. The webbing holds the nest together and anchors it to a branch. And when the pea-sized eggs hatch, the stretchy silk lets the nest expand as the baby hummers grow.



HOW TO

Catch a Frog with Your Bare Hands

Bullfrogs can be as jittery as your little brother after his third can of cola. Sneaking close enough to grab a jumpy frog takes skill and a little luck.

Few things are more fun than slopping around a muddy pond at night in hopes of catching America's largest frog. A bullfrog can weigh more than half a dozen cheeseburgers and grow larger than your dad's hand. They're fun to catch, and best of all, they grow meaty legs that when cooked to perfection give fried chicken a run for its money.

FIRST, A FEW RULES ...

Frogging season runs from sunset on June 30 to midnight on Halloween. Bullfrogs and their smaller cousins, green frogs, are both legal to catch. If you're 15 or younger, you don't need a permit to harvest frogs. If you're 16 or older, you do. You can take home eight frogs each night. The possession limit — how many you can keep in your freezer before having a frog fry — is 16.



A young boy with brown hair is wearing a red and black headlamp on his forehead. He is looking down at two green frogs he is holding in his hands. The background is dark, suggesting a night-time outdoor setting. The boy's hands and arms are covered in mud, indicating he has been actively frogging.

PREPARE TO GET GRUBBY

- You don't need fancy gear for frogging, but one item is essential: a bright flashlight. Headlamps are handier because they leave both of your paws free.
- Load your light with fresh batteries and bring extras in a zip-top bag.
- Pigs wallow in less mud than most frog hunters, so wear old clothes your parents can cut into rags when the froggin' is done.
- Some froggers wear rubber boots. If you don't mind wet feet, an old pair of sneakers works fine. Lace them up tight so mud doesn't suck them off your feet.
- Spray yourself with insect repellent to keep squadrons of mosquitoes away.
- Stuff your frogs in a mesh laundry bag or an old pillowcase. Tie the bag shut to keep the croakers contained.

BARE HANDS AND BRIGHT LIGHTS

1. During summer, frogs cool off at night in mud along the shore. Slowly circle the bank, sweeping your light all around. Look for white chests and glowing eyes.
2. When you spot a frog, keep the light tight on its face. The hypnotized hopper won't be able to see anything and will remain hunkered in place.
3. Creep toward the frog from the front. If it startles, it's liable to jump right toward you, offering a chance for a mad grab.
4. 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 tight — they're as slippery as a greased water balloon.
5. After you've bagged eight frogs, it's time to call it a night. Run yourself through a car wash, tiptoe up to bed, and sleep in so you can stay up late tomorrow night for another round of mud, fun, and frogs.

XPLOR MOOR

The Measure of a Meal



All mammals begin life drinking their mama's milk. But once they grow up, different beasts eat different feasts. And how much each critter eats might surprise you. Some of Missouri's tiniest mammals have ginormous appetites. A 3-inch-long least shrew, for example, can gobble down more than its weight in insects every day. To accomplish the same feat, you'd need to eat about 240 quarter pounders! On the other hoof, large mammals often consume less than you might think. A 700-pound bull elk nibbles only about 20 pounds of grass each day.

How good are you at measuring a mammal's meals? Let's find out. For each critter, check the choice that correctly completes its fact.



1 Better than a bug zapper: During peak feeding times, a little brown myotis (aka little brown bat) can swoop, snatch, and snarf down 1,200 mayflies, beetles, and other insects in one ____.

A. minute B. hour
 C. day



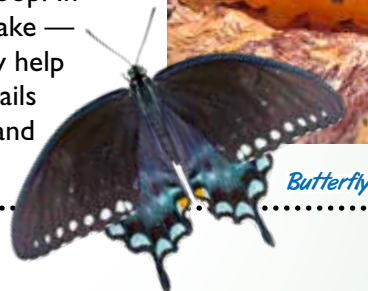
2 Put your ear to a molehill and you might just hear the tiny tunneler's tummy rumble. An eastern mole may eat half its weight in worms, grubs, and other underground creepy-crawlies each ____.

A. minute B. hour C. day

WHAT IS IT?

— FROM PAGE 3 —

first green then orange — with bold eyespots. These disguises may help protect it from predators. As adult butterflies, spicebush swallowtails live in the forest. They lay their eggs on the leaves of spicebushes and other shrubs and trees. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/field-guide.



F

3



In the fall, an eastern chipmunk has just one thought in its furry little head: storing enough food for winter. In oak- and hickory-rich habitats, a hard-working 'munk can gather more than 160 acorns in a single ____.

- A. hour B. day C. week

4



Super snoozer: During hibernation, a 400-pound black bear may not eat a single thing for nearly four ____.

- A. days
 B. weeks
 C. months

5



River otters waste little time digesting their dinners. When an otter munches and crunches a crayfish, the crayfish's remains turn up in the otter's droppings in about one ____.

- A. minute B. hour C. day

6



A gray squirrel, which weighs about as much as an NFL football, eats more than 100 pounds of acorns, hickory nuts, and other foods in one ____.

- A. week
 B. month
 C. year

7



Barely bigger than a bratwurst, least weasels are the world's smallest meat-eating mammals. But don't let their small size fool you. To fuel their ferocity, a least weasel eats half its weight in mice every ____.

- A. day B. week C. month

8



Beavers eat bark and use branches to build dens and dams. Using only its teeth, this furry chainsaw can gnaw down a willow tree that's thicker than your leg in under five ____.

- A. seconds
 B. minutes
 C. hours

9



After stuffing its belly with a big meal, a bobcat is purrfectly happy to skip eating for a few ____.

- A. hours
 B. days
 C. weeks

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FREE TO MISSOURI HOUSEHOLDS

CRITTER CORNER

Spothanded Crayfish



Chris Lukhaup

You might see this big crayfish in any Ozark stream or river except the Osage and Neosho. In the White River basin, it lives in the North Fork and Bryant Creek. A black spot on each pincer near the base of the moveable finger proves you've found the spothanded crayfish. It is a strong swimmer. At night, it grazes on algae, and it's known to feed on dead fish. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/field-guide.