



MAY/JUNE 2025

Explore

GO ON A
SAFARI
IN YOUR BACKYARD



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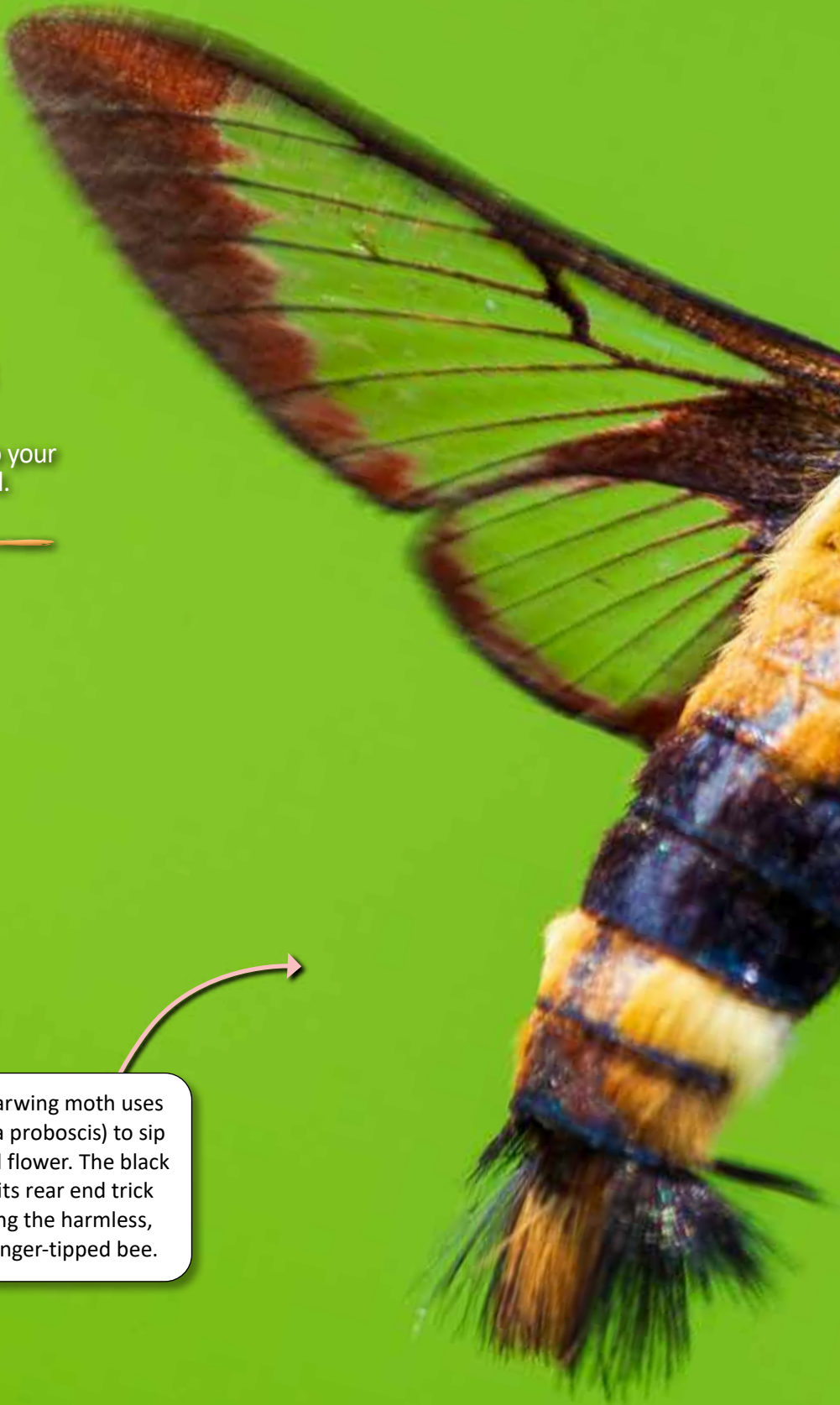
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Slurp! A snowberry clearwing moth uses its long tongue (called a proboscis) to sip nectar from a milkweed flower. The black and yellow stripes on its rear end trick predators into believing the harmless, day-flying moth is a stinger-tipped bee.



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ON THE COVER
Eastern Cottontail

STRANGE BUT TRUE

Your guide to all the
**UNUSUAL, UNIQUE,
AND UNBELIEVABLE**
stuff that goes on in nature

Shortly before hatching, baby **DUCKS** make peeping sounds inside their eggs, and mama ducks respond with soft clucking noises. Once the eggs hatch, the ducklings recognize mom's voice and follow her calls to leave the nest.



A **GREATER ROADRUNNER** charms his mate by bringing her a gift — just not flowers or chocolates. Instead, he snaps up a small lizard or snake and pounds it to a pulp against some rocks. Sometimes, love hurts.



CATERPILLARS have many ways to make would-be predators think twice about eating them. Some are covered in irritating hairs, some have bright colors to show they're poisonous, and some wield spikes that sting. Earthworms, alas, have none of these.



Johnny May-appleseed? May apples are poisonous to people, but critters love to eat their fruits. In fact, May apples often spread to new areas when **BOX TURTLES** eat the fruits and poop out the seeds in a different location.

An **EASTERN HERCULES BEETLE** changes color based on its environment. In a damp environment, the beetle's hard outer shell is dark-colored, almost black. As it dries, the shell changes to tan or gray, and spots become visible.



Baby **WHITE-TAILED DEER** don't have strong odors that would attract predators. To keep from soiling fawns with their stronger scents, mama deer leave their babies tucked away in a safe location and visit them just a few times a day.



Caviar or *cavi-aren't*? **ALLIGATOR GAR** eggs are extremely poisonous to most mammals, birds, and crayfish. Fish and some reptiles, however, find them quite tasty and eat them without harm.



WHAT IS IT?

DON'T KNOW? Jump to Page 21 to find out.

- 1 I wear a rainbow for a coat.
- 2 Seeds and bugs go down my throat.
- 3 I whistle songs, note for note.
- 4 Glades and thickets win my vote.



TWO TRUTHS ONE LIE

Which fascinating fact is actually a fib?

Answer on Page 21



- 1 Some jumping spiders can leap 50 body lengths. If a jumper were human-sized — *EEK!* — it could leap halfway across a football field.
- 2 To trap flies, beetles, and other small insects, jumping spiders weave a sticky, rectangular web that looks like a small fishing net.
- 3 To charm a mate, male jumping spiders dance by waving their legs in the air and shaking their back ends.

HOW TO



BUILD A TREEFROG TUBE

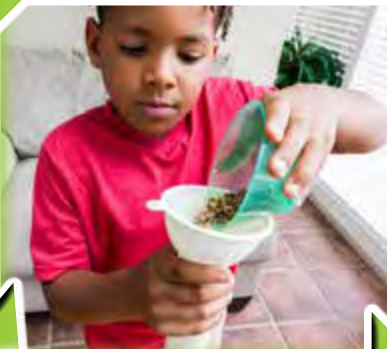
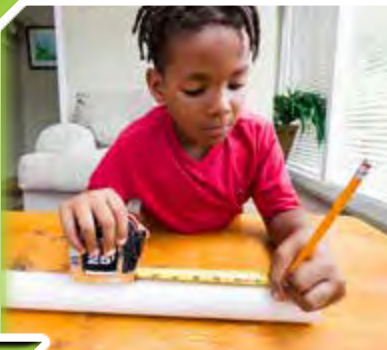
HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED

- PVC pipe, 1¼-inch diameter by 2 feet long
- PVC cap to fit the pipe
- PVC tee to fit the pipe
- Aquarium gravel or small pebbles
- Tape measure
- Hammer and nail
- Drill
- ⅛-inch drill bit
- ¼-inch drill bit
- Optional: Spray paint
- A grown-up to help



When they're not gobbling up bugs, gray treefrogs love to rest in woodpecker holes, cracks in trees, and other nooks and crannies. You can coax these interesting amphibians to live in your yard by building them a bedroom out of plumbing pipe.

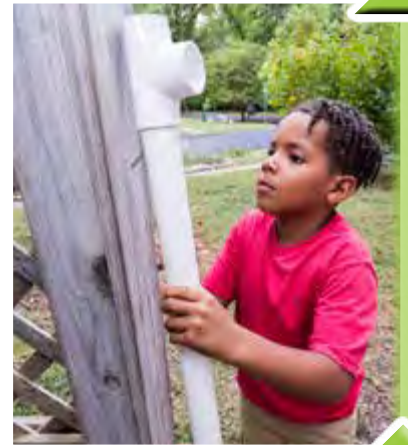
START



HERE'S WHAT YOU DO

- 1** Measure 5 inches from the bottom of the pipe and have a grown-up help you drill a hole in the pipe using a $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch drill bit. The hole will let water drain out of the tube.
- 2** Push the cap firmly onto the drain hole end of the pipe. The pipe will need to hold water — treefrogs need a damp home — so make sure the cap fits tightly. Don't glue it on, though. You may want to remove it later to clean out the tube.
- 3** Measure 2 inches from the uncapped end of the tube and have a grown-up help you drill a hole on the side of the pipe that's opposite the drain hole. Use a drill bit that's just a little wider than the head of a nail.
- 4** You can spray paint the tube to help it blend in with the scenery, but it isn't necessary. If you paint it, just paint the outside. Don't get paint inside the pipe.
- 5** Fill the pipe with aquarium gravel or small pebbles up to the level of the drain hole. This prevents mosquitoes from laying eggs in the water that pools inside the tube.
- 6** Push a tee fitting onto the top of the tube. This will give treefrogs a place to perch but also allow rain to fill the bottom of the tube.
- 7** To hang the tube, hammer a nail at a slight upward angle into a fence post or tree trunk about 5 feet off the ground. Pick a location that's near vegetation. Slip the top hole on the pipe over the nail and let the pipe hang vertically.
- 8** Use a garden hose or watering can to fill the tube with water until it starts streaming out of the drain hole. Check your tube often to see if any frogs have moved in.

ALL DONE!





BACKYARD

Safari

NATURE ABOUNDS
NEARLY EVERYWHERE
— IF YOU KNOW HOW
TO LOOK FOR IT.

You don't need to travel to some faraway place to find wildlife to watch. (Although visiting a conservation area is never a bad idea!) Lots of wonderful, watchable critters can be found in your own backyard or a tree-filled park. You just need to know where, when, and what to watch for.

Wildlife Viewing Tips

- ✓ **BE QUIET.** Animals will run and hide when they hear people. Being quiet also makes it easier for you to hear a bird's call or a squirrel scurrying through dry leaves.
- ✓ **LOOK FOR MOVEMENT.** Many animals blend in with their surroundings. Keep your eyes drifting around until you spot something moving. Then, zero in on the movement to find out what it is.
- ✓ **SEARCH FOR CLUES.** Animals leave signs that let us know where they've been. Search for footprints in the mud, chew marks on an acorn, fur snagged on a branch, and even scat — aka poop — on the ground.
- ✓ **BRING BINOCULARS.** Some critters, no matter how quiet and sneaky you might be, won't let you get near them. A pair of binoculars will help you get a close look even when they keep their distance.



EASTERN COTTONTAIL

Where Cottontails hang out along the edges of thickets and weedy areas. This way, they can escape into the brush if a predator comes calling.

When The best time to spot a cottontail is at dawn and in the early evening when they search for tender plants to nibble.

What One way to tell if a cottontail lives nearby is to look for its scat. Because they eat plants, cottontail poop looks like clusters of chocolate puffs.

Watch This!

» You eat what?! If you see a cottontail snacking on raisins, it's a good bet they aren't raisins. Like most rabbits, cottontails eat their own droppings. Digesting "food" twice helps them absorb extra nutrients.

» Freeze! To avoid being seen, cottontails often freeze in place and remain motionless for up to 15 minutes. If you watch one long enough, you might notice it shift *sloooooowly* from an outstretched pose to a more compact, hunched-up position.



GRAY SQUIRREL

Where Gray squirrels live anywhere there are oaks, hickories, and other nut-producing trees.

When Squirrels are early risers, searching for food from sunrise to mid-morning and then again in the late afternoon. Watching squirrels is easiest in the fall when they're busy gathering acorns for winter.

What Leafy nests in the tops of trees indicate a squirrel lives in your neighborhood. You might also find piles of walnut and hickory shells left behind by these messy eaters.

Watch This!

» Terrific tails: When scampering from branch to branch, a squirrel uses its long, bushy tail for balance. When it's sunny, it curls its tail overhead for shade. When rain falls, it uses its tail for an umbrella. And if a squirrel slips off a branch, the tail becomes a parachute to slow its fall.

» Hide and seek: If you approach a squirrel, it may climb to the opposite side of a tree so you can't see it. If you circle around the tree, the squirrel will scamper around and around the trunk to stay hidden.

BLUE JAY

Where Look for these colorful songbirds wherever there are oak trees. Jays love to creep through thick branches along the edges of forests and woods.

When Blue jays search for food throughout the day but are most active in mid-morning and late afternoon. In the fall, it's easy to observe blue jays while they're busy gathering acorns for winter.

What To find a jay, listen for its shrieking *Thief! Thief! Thief!* call. Putting up a feeder filled with sunflower seeds or peanuts will lure these wary birds into viewing range.

Watch This!

» You can guess a jay's mood by looking at the crest of feathers on top of its head. A happy jay keeps its crest low. An angry or worried jay raises its crest high.

» Jays have a flexible throat. (Biologists call it a "gular pouch.") If you watch a jay at a feeder, you may see it quickly gobble down seeds. Once it flies to a safe perch, it will spit up the seeds and eat them one by one.



RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

Where Nectar from flowers provides energy to keep hummingbirds humming. If you put out a feeder filled with sugar water, it won't take long for a hungry hummer to find it.

When Ruby-throated hummingbirds arrive in Missouri in April and stay through September. In August, newly hatched hummers and migrants cause numbers to swell at feeders.

What Missouri's tiniest bird contains a huge dose of courage. Try holding your hand near a feeder. With a little luck and lots of patience, you might coax a hummer to perch on your finger.

Watch This!

» On average, a hummingbird flaps its wings about 50 times a second. (That's what makes the humming sound.) Flapping fast allows a hummer to hover in place like a tiny helicopter, which is important if you're trying to stick your beak into a flower.

» Adult males have a patch of feathers on their throats. When they're in the shade, the feathers look black. But in bright sunlight, the feathers sparkle red like rubies. Females and youngsters don't have red throats.

THREE-TOED BOX TURTLE

Where If your yard borders a shady patch of woods, chances are you have a box turtle or two nearby.

When Box turtles are active during the day from April through October. During the winter, they dig shallow holes to hibernate in.

What Like other reptiles, box turtles are cold-blooded. When it's cool, look for them basking in the sun. When it's hot, look for them resting in the shade.

Watch This!

» If you approach a box turtle, it may pull in its head and legs and close up its shell. Box turtles are the only turtles in Missouri that can do this. They have a hinge on their lower shell that lets them fold it up like the flap of a box.

» Follow a box turtle at a distance, and you may get to watch it eat lunch. Insects, earthworms, berries, and mushrooms are all on the menu.



AMERICAN TOAD

Where Look for American toads in your vegetable and flower gardens, around the edges of landscaping stones, or along the shady foundations of houses and sheds.

When During the day, toads hide under rocks and logs or burrow into loose dirt and leaves. They emerge at night to hunt for insects to eat.

What Did that rock just blink? A toad's bumpy brown skin makes it all but invisible against rocks, leaves, or soil. You'll need sharp eyes and a little luck to spot one of these chubby amphibians.

Watch This!

» To get a girlfriend, male toads sing on warm nights from mid-March through July. Their call is a high-pitched, musical trill that sounds like steam whistling out of a tea kettle: *breeeeeeeee!*

» Toads hunt at night. If you find one gobbling bugs near a porch light, watch for a while. A toad has two methods for catching insects. Sometimes it uses its arms to push an insect into its cavernous mouth. Other times, it flicks out its long, sticky tongue to snatch up an unsuspecting bug.



COLLARED LIZARD

PUSHUPS AND HEAD BOBS

Males charm females and stake their claims to a glade's best rocky real estate by bobbing their heads and doing pushups.

RING AROUND THE COLLAR

The foot-long lizards get their name from two dark lines that circle their necks like the collar on a shirt.



GREEN STREAKS

Collared lizards use their speed to chase down dinner, like grasshoppers, and escape from predators, like roadrunners.

FLASHY FELLAS

Male collared lizards are more colorful than females. In May and June, males wear their brightest scales to charm a mate.

RAPID REPTILE

When a collared lizard needs to scurry in a hurry, it stands upright and runs on its hind legs. In this position, it can reach speeds of 15 miles per hour.

TIGHT TURN TAIL

A collared lizard steers with its rear, swinging its long tail out for balance when it tears around tight turns.



Painted bunting

Missouri's Mini Deserts

The Show-Me State doesn't have sandy, cactus-filled deserts, but it does have rocky, sun-scorched sites where plants and animals must be tough to survive. These hot spots are called glades. And while glades indeed get toasty, the plants and animals that live there are super cool.

Where to Go

You can find glades scattered throughout the Ozarks. Just look for rocky, treeless openings on the south or west sides of hills. Or, visit these public areas, which are known for their spectacular glades.

- 1 Danville Conservation Area
- 2 Valley View Glades Natural Area
- 3 Hughes Mountain Natural Area
- 4 Indian Trail Conservation Area
- 5 Taum Sauk Mountain State Park
- 6 Stegall Mountain at Peck Ranch Conservation Area
- 7 Caney Mountain Conservation Area
- 8 White River Balds at Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area
- 9 Wildcat Glade Natural Area



Know Before You Go . . .

- ✓ Glade plants and animals are adapted to hot, sunny habitats. Humans? Not so much. So slather on some sunscreen, wear a shady hat, and bring plenty of water.
- ✓ Ticks like glades, too. Keep the bloodsuckers at bay by wearing long pants and spraying yourself with insect repellent.
- ✓ Wildflowers abound in glades. Pack a field guide to help you learn what you're looking at.
- ✓ You may be tempted to turn over rocks to see what's hiding underneath or pick pretty wildflowers. Please don't! It harms the plants and animals that live in these unique habitats. Take photos instead.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Chances are, you'll look right at a **lichen grasshopper** and fail to see it. The inch-long insect's amazing camouflage makes it all but invisible while it rests on a lichen-covered rock. But when a hidden hopper takes flight, its orange wings give it away. Watch where it lands — it won't fly far — and approach slowly for a closer look.

Can you spot the lichen grasshopper in this photo?

Gobs of Glades

Missouri has five different kinds of glades. Each is named for the underlying rock that the glade forms on top of: limestone, dolomite, chert, igneous, and sandstone. Because each kind of rock contains slightly different nutrients, different kinds of plants are adapted to grow on each kind of glade.

Shiny Speed Demons

Keep your eyes peeled, and you may spot a tiny, shiny insect racing across the rocks. **Tiger beetles** are harmless to humans, but bugs better beware. The six-legged predators use powerful, pinching jaws to snatch and dispatch caterpillars, ants, beetles, and spiders. Thanks to their long, strong legs, some tiger beetles can cover 120 body lengths per second!

Flash of Feathers

Only cartoon roadrunners go *beep, beep*. Real **roadrunners** make a soft cooing call that sounds a bit like a dove or pigeon. The long-legged birds run better than they fly, sprinting across rocky terrain at nearly 20 miles per hour. They use their speed to run down prey, like collared lizards, small snakes, and scorpions.



Sunny Singer

Look for prairie warblers perched in shrubs at the edges of glades. The energetic little birds nervously flick their tails up and down. Males sing two types of songs. A buzzy zee-zee-zee-zee-zee-zeeeee is sung to attract a mate. Clear whistles with harsh notes at the end are sung to warn rival males to stay away.

Missouri's Most Colorful

You probably won't see an eastern milksnake when you visit a glade. The shy, secretive serpents spend most of their time hiding under rocks. They venture out occasionally to hunt for lizards, mice, and small snakes. Milksnakes are members of the kingsnake family, and like other kingsnakes, are immune to the venom of Missouri's copperheads, cottonmouths, and rattlesnakes.



Louning Lizards

If you come across a colorful collared lizard, stop and quietly watch what it's doing. How many of these behaviors can you spot?





Let's Chat

The yellow-breasted chat is well named. It does, indeed, have a sunshine-yellow breast. And it does, indeed, love to chat. In the spring, listen for it chattering away in brushy areas at the edges of glades. Males string together a nearly endless variety of whistles, squeaks, squawks, cackles, rattles, chuckles, burps, and even catlike meows.



FIRE Away!

You might see ashes or black soot when you visit a glade. This is likely the result of a fire that was set by biologists to keep the glade healthy. Without fire every few years, glades become overgrown with cedars and other trees and shrubs. Unlike trees, glade plants regrow quickly after a fire. And don't worry about the animals. They escape the flames by taking shelter deep under the rocks.

Spooky Spiders

If you want to see Missouri's hairiest — and some may say, scariest — spider, visit a glade after dark. Shine a flashlight on the rocky ground. If you're lucky, you might spy a Texas brown tarantula's eight eyes shining back at you. During the day, these large but harmless insect-hunters hide in silk-lined burrows.



Basking

Lizards are cold-blooded. That means their body temperature changes with the temperature of their environment. On cool mornings, they bask in the sun. When it's blazing hot, they hide under a cool, shady rock.

Pushups

Male collared lizards do pushups to show off for females and to let other males know that this part of the glade is already occupied.

Head Bobbing

From mid-May to early June, a male tries to get a girlfriend by bobbing his head up and down as he prances around.

Running Upright

At the first sign of danger, a collared lizard will streak away to hide under a rock. You might even see one stand up on its hind legs so it can run faster.



Bigger than Baltimore

From May through July, **Baltimore checkerspots** can be found sipping nectar on glade wildflowers. They're especially fond of yellow coneflowers. Most of these strikingly colored butterflies live north and east of Missouri. The ones found fluttering around our Ozarks tend to be darker and larger than those found elsewhere.



Rock pink

Tough but Beautiful

Plants that live on glades have adaptations to help them survive hot, dry conditions. Many bloom only in the spring and fall, when it's cooler and wetter, and go dormant during the sweltering heat of the summer.



Prairie dock has 10-foot-long roots that wind through cracks in the rock, seeking water deep in the ground. The plant's heart-shaped leaves are as big as elephant ears and feel as rough as sandpaper.



A **compass plant's** lower leaves grow with their edges pointing north and south. This way, less of the leaf is facing the hot, moisture-stealing sun.



Hoary puccoon blooms from March to June. The low-growing plant's leaves are covered with dense hairs that help prevent water from escaping.

Life on the Rocks

Brush your hand over a crusty **lichen** (*lie-kin*), and you'll be touching two kinds of living things at once. Lichens are made of a fungus and a plant living together in a tangled-up tango. The fungus absorbs water and nutrients and shares them with the plant. In return, the plant makes energy from the sun and shares it with the fungus.



Terrible Tails

If you explore a glade after dark, the beam of your flashlight might surprise a **striped bark scorpion** prowling around. To subdue prey or defend itself from predators, this inch-long hunter whips its stinger-tipped tail over its body to stab the victim. Although a scorpion's sting can be painful, their venom is almost never dangerous — unless you're an insect.



The blossoms of **Missouri evening primrose** last only a day. The flashy flowers unfurl in the late afternoon, bloom through the night, and wilt the next morning.

The yellow-and-orange flowers of **prickly pear** unfurl in June. Once they fade, egg-shaped red fruits appear. The fruits, called pears, are edible — if you can get past the prickles.

You can tell a **glade coneflower** from lookalike pale purple coneflowers by the color of its pollen. Glade coneflowers have yellow pollen; pale purple coneflowers have white pollen.

The showy flowers of **purple beardtongue** bloom from April to June. The dark stripes on the flowers help guide bumblebees and other pollinators to the sweet nectar inside.

XPLOR MORE

WHO lives



Animals make their homes in all sorts of places. Can you match each critter to the view it sees when it arrives home from work?



HERE?



Answers: Pileated woodpecker - 1; Bald-faced hornet - 2; Yellow garden spider - 3; Muskrat - 4; Eastern mole - 5; Throated hummingbird - 6; American beaver - 7; Gray squirrel - 8; Cliff swallow - 9; Grassland crayfish - 10; Ruby-

GET OUT!

FUN THINGS TO DO
AND GREAT PLACES
TO DISCOVER NATURE



In May, **EASTERN BLUEBIRDS** begin raising a second batch of babies. Watch for mom and pop visiting nestboxes and look for their first batch of youngsters hunting for insects. Young bluebirds have speckled brown bellies, not the red and white bellies of adults.



Ant lion



Tiger beetle



Woolly bear caterpillar

Back in the day, hunters dug deep pits to trap lions and tigers and bears. The unsuspecting animals would fall into the holes and couldn't climb out. You can **CATCH SMALLER BEASTS** — ant lions, tiger beetles, and woolly bear caterpillars — by burying a coffee can so it's flush with the soil's surface. Put rocks around the can and lay a small board on top. This will protect whatever you catch from sun and rain. Check your trap often, and release any insects you catch after you've taken a look.

At sundown, **LOOK FOR BATS** fluttering around your backyard and near street lights. There's no reason to be scared of these flying mammals. In fact, a single bat in a single night can eat hundreds of insect pests.



Some people see worms on a sidewalk after a storm and think, "Gross!" Others think, "**LET'S GO FISHING!**" If you're the second type, gather the stranded wigglers in an empty coffee can and stuff in some loose, wet leaves. Keep the worms in a cool, shady place for a few days until you can get to your favorite fishing hole.



Since school's out, why not move your bedroom outside? It isn't as hard as it sounds. Just **PITCH A TENT IN YOUR BACKYARD** and pretend it's your room for the summer. You can even run an extension cord to the tent for a fan or reading lamp. How many nights can you sleep outdoors?



Looking for more ways to have fun outside? Find out about Discover Nature programs in your area at mdc.mo.gov/events.

WHAT IS IT?

— FROM PAGE 3 —



PAINTED BUNTING

Male painted buntings are so colorful, you might mistake them for tiny parrots. But they're more closely related to cardinals, tanagers, and indigo buntings. Females wear fewer colors but are equally vibrant with lime-green feathers on their backs and bellies. While raising babies, painted buntings eat lots of insects. During the rest of the year, they eat seeds. Look for these brilliant birds in southern Missouri near glades and along the edges of woods.

GO FIND IT!



Cut out this critter card and take it with you outside. How many of the things on the card can you find?

EASTERN HERCULES BEETLE



ONE BIG BEETLE!

Hercules beetles are Missouri's biggest beetle. Adult males can grow up to 2½ inches long.

EXTRA LARGE LARVAE

Baby Hercules beetles are called grubs. The 3-inch-long larvae chew through rotten logs and are often found in mulch and compost heaps.

JUMBO JETS

Despite their size, Hercules beetles are strong flyers. They're attracted to lights at night, so search for them around porch lights.

BEETLE BATTLES

Males use their rhinoceros-like horns to fight other males. The strongest, pushiest beetle gets more girlfriends.

MISSOURI'S MIGHTIEST

A Hercules beetle can carry more than 100 times its weight. If you were that strong, you could easily pick up a pickup.

HERCULES BEETLE GRUB: © 2015 TAIRA/SHUTTERSTOCK

ONE LIE

— FROM PAGE 3 — Lie: 2 (Jumping spiders don't weave webs. They capture prey by jumping on it.)

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or update your address, visit
mdc.mo.gov/xplor.

FREE TO MISSOURI HOUSEHOLDS

GO FIND IT! ≡

Hercules beetles are found statewide in wooded areas but are most common in the Ozarks. For more on this brawny beetle, crawl over to mdc.mo.gov/field-guide.

EASTERN HERCULES BEETLE

