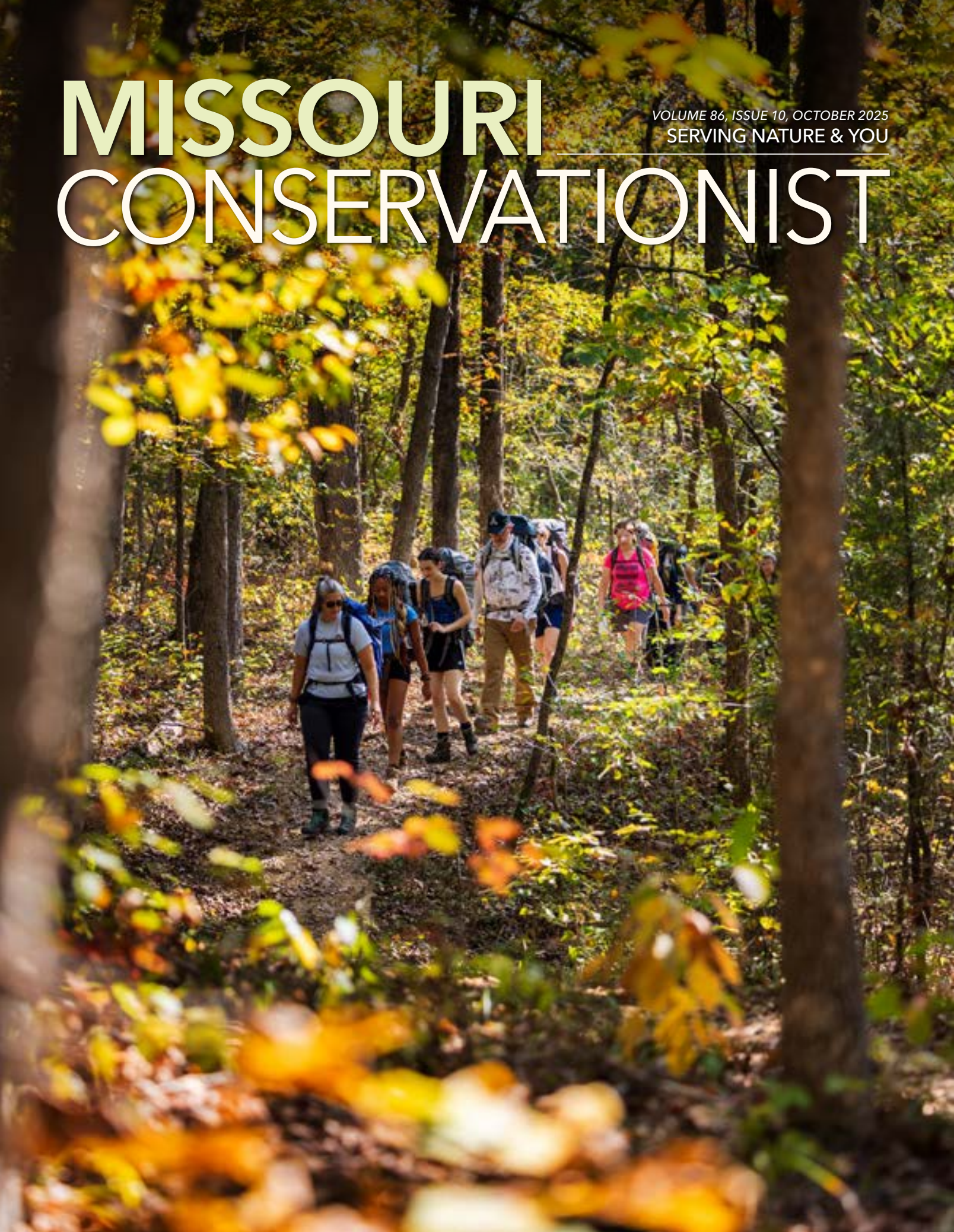


MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST

VOLUME 86, ISSUE 10, OCTOBER 2025
SERVING NATURE & YOU



Discover what's ON SALE NOW

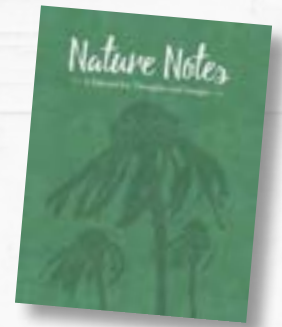


2026 NATURAL EVENTS CALENDAR

Keep in touch with the year's seasonal changes. Each month offers a reminder of the state's natural treasures, and daily notes keep you posted on what's blooming or nesting. **01-0369 — \$9**

NATURE NOTES CONEFLOWER JOURNAL

Whether you want to draw or write about nature, this spiral-bound notebook will get you started. Tips on keeping a nature journal from MDC naturalists and blank pages await you in this notebook. **01-0113 — \$8**



A PADDLER'S GUIDE TO MISSOURI/ 2023 EDITION

Missouri offers a diverse range of canoeing and kayaking opportunities. Whether you're a seasoned paddler seeking new challenges or a beginner in need of guidance, *A Paddler's Guide to Missouri* is the perfect resource for planning your next adventure.

This comprehensive 102-page, spiral-bound guide covers everything from trip planning and equipment to paddling tips and detailed maps of 54 Missouri streams and rivers. **01-0052 — \$9**



New! YOU DISCOVER MINI FIELD GUIDES FOR XPLORING OUTSIDE

Adapted from the pages of MDC's *Xplor* magazine, this engaging guide brings together a collection of 13 mini field guides, all in one handy volume. Designed

to spark curiosity and deepen your connection to nature, this collection is your go-to companion for discovering the incredible variety of plants and creatures that call Missouri home. Pick up a copy today — take it outside, explore the world around you, and see nature with new eyes.

01-0301 — \$8.95

STRANGE BUT TRUE

The creatures that inhabit Missouri are remarkable, diverse, and ... strange. It's a weird, wild world out there and you can learn all about it in MDC's book, *Strange but True*. Adapted from the pages of the award-winning children's magazine *Xplor*, *Strange but True* is a 136-page, full-color book that offers more than 350 fun facts about Missouri wildlife at its strangest. **01-0300 — \$8.95**



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ON THE COVER

Backpackers on the Ozark Trail.

DAVID STONNER

RF70-200mm lens, f/2.8
1/320 sec, ISO 100

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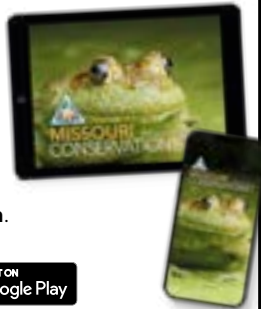
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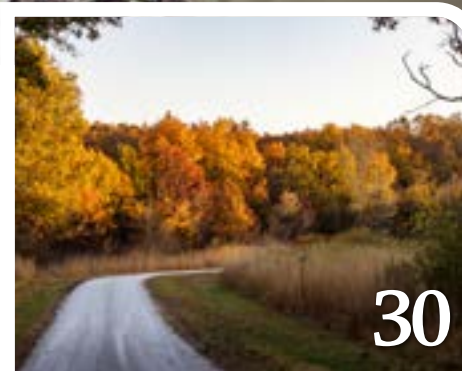


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Inbox



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2



3



4



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

Submit your photos online via [flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2025/](https://www.flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2025/), mdc.mo.gov/magazine-reader-photos or by emailing readerphoto@mdc.mo.gov

1 | American toad by [Kaitlyn Parsons](#), via email

2 | Monarch on asters by [Steve Ricketts](#), via Flickr

3 | Harmless spotted orbweaver lurks in web, waiting to catch insect prey by [Steve Edwards](#), via email

4 | Eastern bluebird by [Michael Layne](#), via Flickr

➔ In the December issue we plan to feature even more great reader photos. Send in your best year-round pictures of native Missouri wildlife, flora, natural scenery, and friends and family engaged in outdoor activities. Please include where the photo was taken and what it depicts.



Letters to the Editor

Submissions reflect readers' opinions and may be edited for length and clarity. Email Magazine@mdc.mo.gov or write to: MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST PO BOX 180 JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65102

SUMMER BIRDS

I am keeping author Matt Seek's excellent article for future reference [*Birds of Summer*, August, Page 22]. It had it all — fascinating results of scientific bird research, delightful writing, myth-busting, helpful photo identifications, and even philosophy.

Tom Hall Arrow Rock

MY FAVORITE

My grandson, **Charlie Spencer**, age 8, loves your magazine. He wrote the following letter:

Your magazine is my favorite. You always include inspiring pictures of animals in nature. With your bird pictures, I can sometimes spot them at my house. Your magazine helps me to identify the fish I catch. You also include a map with the location. That helps my family go there on our own. Thank you for your magazine.

Teresa Young Springfield

FAIR FUN

My family and I recently attended the Missouri State Fair for the first time. The first activity for us was a presentation by MDC agents Matt and Crystal and their dogs, Chuck and Cedar. Your whole team did a fantastic job. We found the information fascinating and engaging. Our family is not super outdoorsy, so we learned a lot about stuff we just had never taken time to consider, like police work on state operated land. Matt and Crystal and their canine colleagues made my day, and I've been telling my coworkers how it was the highlight of my fair experience.

Alan Toigo Boone County

Up Front



✳️ **As only the 10th director in the department's long history**, I often think about the pioneers and leaders who came before me — the legacy they've built, the contributions to conservation, and how they served the citizens. In August, we lost a great one when Jerry Presley, who served as the fifth director, died at the age of 94. He had a heart for people and for progress.

Jerry, director from 1988–1997, guided the department after the Design for Conservation. During his 39-year career, he served as a forester, state forester, assistant director, and then director. Under his leadership, the first long-range strategic plan was implemented, emphasizing access to public land and urban nature centers. He helped develop partnerships still in existence today.

Jerry also never forgot his humble beginnings. Raised by his grandmother, he was first in his family to attend college, and he supported education, both professionally and personally, for the rest of his life. He never led by his title, but always with his heart. That spirit extended to his community where he coached baseball and would often fry fish on Friday nights at the local legion hall. He knew a leader is only as good as the team they serve.

When I look at our conservation priorities today, there are some big challenges ahead. It will take hard work, perseverance, and grit to get them done. Jerry's legacy reminds me, there is no space for "us vs. them" in conservation. We must own this work together. It's the only way we'll be successful moving forward.

JASON SUMNERS, DIRECTOR
JASON.SUMNERS@MDC.MO.GOV

Our Mission

The Missouri Department of Conservation protects and manages the fish, forest, and wildlife of the state. We facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources.



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Have a Question for a Commissioner?

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

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WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Listen Before Sunrise

Fall covey calls help biologists estimate the density of bobwhite populations

by Dianne Van Dien

✳ Although best known for its iconic *bob-white* call, the northern bobwhite has a much more extensive vocabulary. Vocalizations include parental calls to chicks, alarm calls that differentiate between aerial and ground predators, and calls between coveys. The latter type — covey calls — can be used to estimate population densities.

“Quail get together in groups in the evening and roost together,” explains MDC Quail and Upland Game Biologist Beth Emmerich. “They roost in a circle with their heads facing outward and their tails pointing inward. Then in the morning before sunrise, they call.”

No one knows exactly why they call at this time, Emmerich says, but it seems to be a way for groups to figure out where other groups are on the landscape as they get up and start foraging.

Described as *koi-lee*, the covey call sounds nothing like the standard *bob-white* whistle. The birds may call for just a minute or two or possibly 10 to 15 minutes. To listen to their call, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/4tM.



Northern bobwhites gather in groups, called coveys, during the nonbreeding season. Their coveys can range up to 20 or more birds. The average covey size in Missouri is 10 to 12.

Studies have shown that covey calls are given most in the fall, and in Missouri the peak time is October. During this month, MDC staff rise early and head out to key locations on our quail restoration landscapes (see below), arriving about 45 minutes before sunrise to listen. This early start is critical because later the coveys will be on the move and no longer calling.

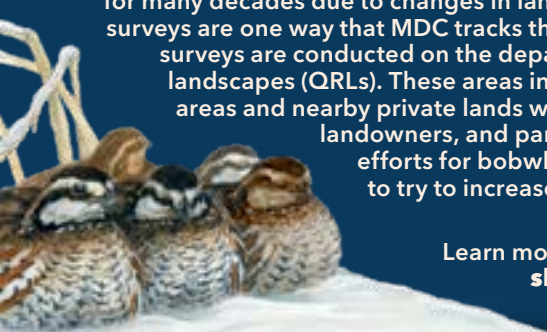
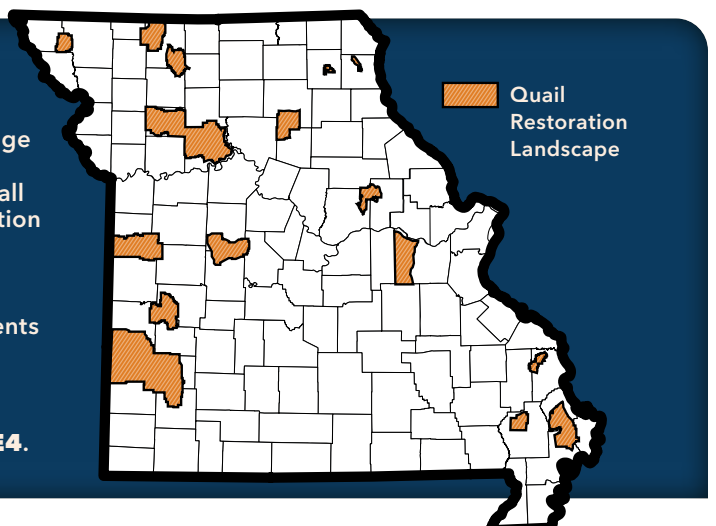
The best mornings to hear the calls have few clouds and little wind. If the listening spot is open (not surrounded by trees or close hills), one can hear quail up to 500 meters (or 550 yards) away, which covers about 200 acres. For each covey heard, staff mark the approximate location on a map.

“The fall counts give you an idea of population size after the breeding season because all the chicks born in the summer are nearly full-grown by the time winter rolls around,” says Emmerich. “So that gives us an indication of how production went for the year, before the hunting season starts in November.”

At a Glance

Northern bobwhites have been declining throughout their range for many decades due to changes in land use. Fall covey call surveys are one way that MDC tracks these populations. The fall surveys are conducted on the department’s quail restoration landscapes (QRLs). These areas include conservation areas and nearby private lands where the department, landowners, and partners have focused efforts for bobwhite habitat improvements to try to increase the population.

Learn more about QRLs at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZE4.



In Brief

News and updates from MDC

GO NATIVE!

BUY NATIVE TREE AND SHRUB SEEDLINGS FROM MDC'S GEORGE O. WHITE STATE FOREST NURSERY

➔ Need trees and shrubs for your landscape? Go native with tree and shrub seedlings from MDC's George O. White State Forest Nursery. 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 state nursery 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, hazelnut, redbud, ninebark, elderberry, sumac, wild plum, witch hazel, and others. MDC recommends ordering early for the best selection.

Seedlings are available in bundles of 10 or increments of 25 per species. Prices range from 40 cents to \$1.17 per seedling. Sales tax will be added to orders unless tax exempt. There is a shipping fee and a \$9 handling charge for each order. Receive a 15 percent discount up to \$20 off seedling orders with a Conservation ID number. Orders will be shipped or can be picked up at the nursery, located near Licking, from February through May.

New this year, MDC is offering four different types of seedling bundles: pollinator, wildlife, edible, and nut bundles. Each customer is limited to only two of each bundle.

- Pollinator bundles include five each of the following: false indigo, buttonbush, elderberry (cook before eating), witch-hazel, and redbud. These provide much-needed nectar for bees, butterflies, moths, and other pollinators.
- Wildlife bundles include five of each of the following: false indigo, blackberry, smooth sumac, white oak, and Nuttall oak. These provide food and cover for a wide variety of insects and other wildlife.
- Edible bundles include five of each of the following: blackberry, elderberry (cook before eating), American plum, hazelnut, and black walnut. These provide food for both humans and wildlife.
- Nut bundles include five of each of the following: black walnut, pecan, and shellbark hickory. These species are edible for humans and are a great source of protein.



Find the **2025-2026 Seedling Order Form** in the September issue of the *Missouri Conservationist*. You can also get a copy at MDC regional offices and nature centers or by contacting the State Forest Nursery at 573-674-3229 or StateForestNursery@mdc.mo.gov.

Orders can be placed through April 15, 2026, online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZNZ.



FIND FALL COLOR WITH MDC

The peak of fall color in Missouri is usually around mid-October. This is when maples, ashes, oaks, and hickories are at the height of their fall display. By late October, the colors are normally fading, and the leaves are beginning to drop from the trees. Fall color is typically finished by the middle of November.

The progression of color change usually starts earliest in northern and western Missouri and moves southward and eastward across the state. Generally, the color change is predictable, but it can vary from year to year, much of it depending on the weather.

Find some of the best places to view fall color, related events, and a weekly update on how colors are looking throughout the state at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZVf.

JOIN US FOR DEER MANAGEMENT OPEN HOUSES AROUND THE STATE

Enjoy hunting deer or watching them? Want help managing private land for deer? Want to know more about our efforts to keep deer healthy? MDC invites deer hunters, landowners and managers, wildlife watchers, and others interested in Missouri's white-tailed deer to a series of community open houses around the state.

Attendees can talk with MDC staff about deer management and regulations, impacts of chronic wasting disease (CWD) and epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) on deer populations, managing private land for deer, and MDC's Deer Management Assistance Program. In addition, MDC staff will share new information on CWD and how MDC is working with hunters, landowners, and other partners to minimize the threat of CWD and keep Missouri deer healthy.

"For generations, Missourians have worked together to protect deer and deer hunting," said MDC Director Jason Summers. "Fueled by a shared passion for white-tailed deer, hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts inside and outside MDC have built a healthy, abundant herd. These open houses offer a chance to build on that foundation."

MDC staff will share information on the previously mentioned topics and welcome questions and comments from attendees.

MDC invites the public to stop by the community open houses anytime between 4–8 p.m. No registration is required. They will be:

- Sept. 30 in St. Joseph at the Stoney Creek Conference Center, 1201 N. Woodbine Road
- Oct. 1 in Chillicothe at the Litton Agri-Science Learning Center, 10780 Liv 235
- Oct. 2 in Lone Jack at the Civic Center, 509 S. Bynum Road
- Oct. 6 in Palmyra at the American Legion Hall, 600 Short St.
- Oct. 7 in Macon at the Expo Center, 1303 S. Missouri St.
- Oct. 8 in Eugene at the Cole County R-V School, 14803 Hwy. 17
- Oct. 9 in Eureka at the Eureka Community Center, 333 Bald Hill Road
- Oct. 14 in Poplar Bluff at the Three Rivers College Tinnin Fine Arts Center, 2080 Three Rivers Blvd.
- Oct. 15 in West Plains at the Civic Center, 110 St. Louis St.
- Oct. 16 in Mount Vernon at the University of Missouri Southwest Research Center Educational Building, 14548 State Road H

In addition to welcoming public comments at the community open houses, MDC is also accepting public comments on the related topics online through Oct. 17 at short.mdc.mo.gov/4yd.

Ask MDC

Got a Question for Ask MDC?

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

Q: This beautiful creature hung around for a couple days, but we weren't sure if it was a butterfly or a moth. Can you tell us?

➔ This nocturnal moth is known as a black witch (*Ascalapha odorata*). Although these moths exhibit quite a lot of color variation among individuals — and can even exhibit some iridescent qualities — they do appear blackish and brownish often enough to earn their menacing moniker. Interesting superstitions surround these moths; they have been considered harbingers of death and misfortune in various folklore.

They are rare in Missouri. Generally, they breed much further south and occasionally find their way here by accident. Individuals can migrate north as far as Newfoundland and Minnesota, usually between July and October.

Black witches are notable for their large size — adults' wingspans are 4–6 inches wide. As caterpillars, they eat cassia, a tropical tree, and catclaw, a woody vine. As adults they are attracted to tree sap and overripe fruit.



Black witch moth

MOTH: OGBRA SHAW; SNAKE: ERIK SCHLEGEL



Prairie massasauga

Q: Tell me more about this massasauga rattlesnake. Are they common?

➔ The prairie massasauga (*Sistrurus tergeminus tergeminus*) is a species of conservation concern. It's listed as state-endangered in Missouri due to few populations, low numbers, and greatly reduced natural bottomland prairie habitat. These rattlesnakes once occurred in large numbers across much of north-central and northwestern Missouri. Today, five isolated populations are currently known in the state.

This medium-sized, venomous rattlesnake spends considerable

time basking during sunny, warm days, coiled on top of a crayfish burrow or ant mound, where they often overwinter beneath the soil. They mostly eat voles, mice, and smaller, nonvenomous snakes.

Massasauga is a Native American word that means "great river mouth" — a reference to the wet, lowland habitats this species prefers. If an individual massasauga is located, photograph and report it to the Missouri Department of Conservation. Because of its rare status, it's the most-studied snake species in Missouri.



Corporal Kaleb Neece

REYNOLDS COUNTY
CONSERVATION AGENT

offers this month's

**AGENT
ADVICE**

October is a great time to hike in Missouri. The mornings are cool, and the trees are in prime fall color. It's also the peak of the elk rut, so if you're hiking in the Ozarks, you may hear their distinctive bugle. Before you lace up your hiking shoes and head out, consider a few things. Dress in layers and carry plenty of water. Though the mornings may be cool, it can still get warm by afternoon. Know your route and tell someone where you will be and when you plan to return. Have a map or a GPS system that doesn't require Wi-Fi. Some trails are remote, and it's easy to get turned around. A little pre-planning can make a fun, safe, enjoyable day.

What IS it?

Can you guess this month's natural wonder?

The answer is on Page 8.



INVASIVE SPECIES

MISSOURI'S LEAST WANTED

Invasive nonnative species destroy habitat and compete with native plants and animals. Please do what you can to control invasive species when you landscape, farm, hunt, fish, camp, or explore nature.

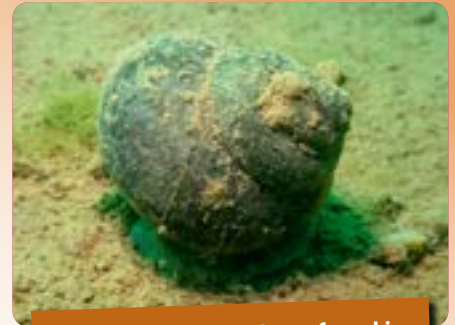
Chinese Mysterysnail

by Angela Sokolowski

Chinese mysterysnails (*Cipangopaludina chinensis*) are freshwater snails that were imported to the U.S. for aquariums and international food markets.

Their shells are round, smooth, strong, olive green or brown, up to 2.5 inches long with 6-7 whorls, and an operculum or "trap door" that can be closed to seal the shell for protection. They feed on algae and plankton. Females do not lay eggs, but instead birth live young, which "mysteriously" appear.

Mysterysnails can live in lakes, ponds, rice fields, irrigation and roadside ditches, and rivers.



Mysterysnails have been found in some parts of our state, but with care we can prevent further spread.

Why It's Bad

These snails can host parasites that pose health risks to humans and wildlife. They out-compete native freshwater snails and mollusks, which are natural prey for otters, muskrats, waterfowl, and fish. With their large size, strong shell and operculum, mysterysnails are not as easy to prey upon, which alters aquatic food chains. Large populations can clog water intake pipes and alter the nutrient cycle, causing algal blooms.

What You Can Do

Controlling invasive mysterysnails in natural habitats is very difficult, so preventing their spread is most important. Never release aquarium species or aquarium water into natural aquatic habitats. State regulations prohibit the possession of mysterysnails. Report potential sighting to local MDC offices with photos. Notably, there are native snail species that look similar.



For more information, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/4v3.

WHAT IS IT? WOLF SPIDER BABIES

Female wolf spiders carry their babies in a unique way, both during incubation and after birth. The female attaches a pea-sized egg sac to her spinnerets, which are silk-spinning organs found on the underside of her abdomen, near the rear, and carries on with normal life. Once the babies — known as spiderlings — emerge, they climb on their mother's back and remain there for two weeks or more.



WOLF SPIDER: NOPPADOL PAOTHONG; MYSTERYSNAIL IN HAND: PAIGE KUCZMARESKI; ALBERTA INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL; BUGWOOD.ORG; MYSTERYSNAIL UNDERWATER© NEL DEWASTER - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

CWD

Info to Know for the 2025–2026 Deer Season



Help Keep Missouri's Deer Healthy!

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) threatens Missouri's deer and our hunting culture. This deadly disease kills all deer and other members of the deer family (cervids) that it infects. There is no vaccine or cure. MDC needs help to keep Missouri's deer healthy and is working with hunters and others to limit its spread by finding new cases early and managing the disease.

Learn More About CWD

Go online to mdc.mo.gov/cwd.

CWD Management Zone

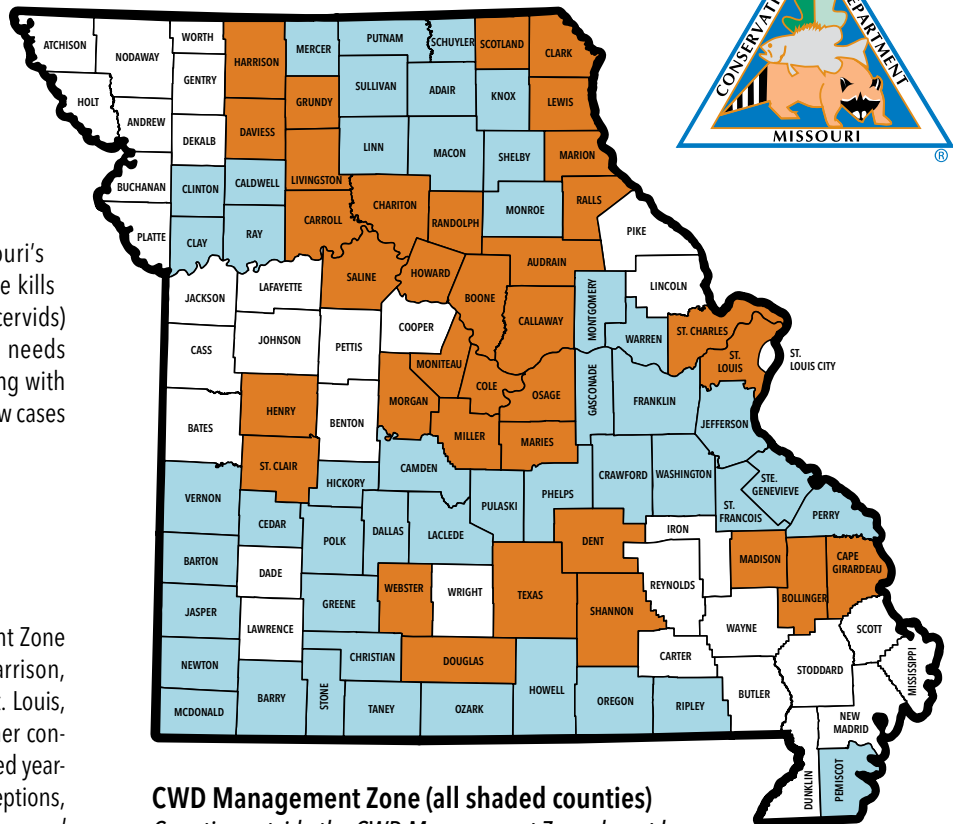
Twelve counties are new to the CWD Management Zone this year: Callaway, Cape Girardeau, Daviess, Harrison, Henry, Marion, Miller, Moniteau, Morgan, Ralls, St. Louis, and Texas. Grain, salt products, minerals, and other consumable products used to attract deer are prohibited year-round within the CWD Management Zone. For exceptions, see the *2025 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZXv.

Mandatory CWD Sampling Nov. 15 and 16

Hunters who harvest a deer in designated CWD Management Zone counties during Nov. 15–16 must take their deer, or the head, on the day of harvest to one of MDC's CWD mandatory sampling stations located in the zone. Sampling and test results are free (see *CWD Test Results*). Find sampling locations online at mdc.mo.gov/cwd or from MDC's *2025 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet.

Voluntary CWD Sampling All Season Statewide

MDC will again offer statewide voluntary CWD testing of harvested deer free of charge during the entire deer season at select locations throughout the state. Find locations and more information online at mdc.mo.gov/cwd or by contacting an MDC regional office.



CWD Management Zone (all shaded counties)

Counties outside the CWD Management Zone do not have mandatory CWD sampling.

- In these counties, if you harvest a deer during Nov. 15–16, 2025, you must take it (or the head) on the day of harvest to a mandatory CWD sampling station.
- CWD sampling is not mandatory in these counties.

CWD Test Results

Test results for CWD-sampled deer are free and will be available within six weeks after the sampling date. Get test results online at mdc.mo.gov/CWDTestResults.

CWD Portion of Firearms Deer Season

To allow more hunting opportunity to help manage CWD, the CWD portion of firearms deer season (Nov. 26–30) will be open in CWD Management Zone counties. For permits, limits, and other details, see MDC's *2025 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet.

Carcass Disposal Restrictions

For hunters:

- Parts of a deer carcass that are not kept or provided to a taxidermist, processor, or tanner must be disposed of in trash that is dumped in a sanitary landfill or left on the property where the deer was harvested. You must Telecheck your deer before transporting it (or its parts) out of the county where it was harvested or by 10 p.m. on the day of harvest, whichever comes first.

For taxidermists and meat processors:

- Taxidermists and meat processors are required to dispose of deer, elk, and other cervid parts not returned to customers in a permitted sanitary landfill or transfer station. This requirement does not apply to hides from which all excess tissue has been removed.
- Proof of disposal must be retained for 12 months for meat processors and for three years for taxidermists.

Carcass Movement Restrictions

For hunters bringing deer and other cervids into Missouri from another state:

- Hunters may not transport whole cervid (deer, elk, moose, caribou) carcasses into the state.
- Heads from cervids with the cape attached and no more than 6 inches of neck attached may be brought into Missouri only if they are delivered to a licensed taxidermist within 48 hours of entering Missouri.
- The following cervid parts can be transported into Missouri without restriction:
 - ▶ Meat that is cut and wrapped or that has been boned out
 - ▶ Quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached
 - ▶ Hides from which all excess tissue has been removed
 - ▶ Antlers or antlers attached to skull plates or skulls cleaned of all muscle and brain tissue
 - ▶ Upper canine teeth
 - ▶ Finished taxidermy products

Share the Harvest

Missouri's Share the Harvest program helps deer hunters donate venison to those in need. To participate, take harvested deer to an approved meat processor and let the processor know how much venison is to be donated. If you are donating a deer to Share the Harvest, it must be tested for CWD if it was harvested within the CWD Management Zone. However, if the deer was harvested outside the CWD Management Zone, testing for CWD is not required. Learn more online at mdc.mo.gov/share or from MDC's *2025 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet.

More Information

Get more information on CWD regulations and other CWD information online at mdc.mo.gov/cwd or from MDC's *2025 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet, available where permits are sold and online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZXv.

Help Keep Missouri's Deer Healthy!

MDC's goal is to have a healthy, sustainable deer population. Managing CWD is essential to keeping deer healthy and preserving our hunting culture. We continue to work with hunters, landowners, and other partners to ensure deer continue to thrive, now and in the future. Hunters are critical partners and can assist in keeping the herd healthy by harvesting additional deer in areas with CWD, participating in CWD sampling, following the carcass-disposal regulations, remembering that placing feed and minerals for deer is prohibited in the CWD Management Zone, and educating others about the importance of CWD management. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/cwd.





MANAGED HUNTS,
MENTORING PROVIDE A
WAY INTO THE SPORT

by Brent Frazee
photographs by David Stonner

As a long-time employee of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), Claudine Lamb was fully aware of the excitement deer season creates.

But she was always on the outside looking in. Brought up in an urban setting, she had never been introduced to hunting herself.

And though her adult son, Desmond, expressed an interest in going on a deer hunt, Claudine didn't know where to start.

That's where an MDC program to introduce beginners to deer hunting came in.

It was a perfect fit for the Lambs. Held at the Burr Oak Woods Conservation Area and Nature Center in Blue Springs, the program featured a classroom session in which everything from regulations to deer behavior to hunting tactics were covered. Then a week later, the participants took part in a special managed hunt with mentors at their side.

Claudine and Desmond were among the 11 hunters chosen in a statewide drawing for spots in the hunt. Claudine received no preferential treatment because of her association with the department.

They were lucky enough to be drawn and so began an unforgettable journey into becoming deer hunters.

"My dad died when I was 17," said Claudine, 55, who is an education regional supervisor for MDC. "But I did some research and found out that he loved to deer hunt. I never knew that growing up.

"I wanted to follow in his footsteps, but I didn't know where to start. This program gave me the chance."

Recruiting Hunters

The managed hunt, one of several across the state, had a simple goal — to introduce wannabe deer hunters to the sport in a non-intimidating setting. It was part of the R3 national initiative — recruit, retain, and reactivate — to counter a trend of waning hunter numbers.



"I wanted to follow in his footsteps, but I didn't know where to start. This program gave me the chance."

— Claudine Lamb





Burr Oak Woods offered a perfect setting. The 1,071-acre conservation area looks like something out of the Ozarks, with rugged hillsides, thick timber, rocky outcroppings, fields, and restored prairies.

It isn't normally open to public hunting, but managed hunts are used to keep a thriving deer population in check.

Burr Oak Woods was closed to other activities, such as hiking, during the hunt, which took place in mid-October 2024.

Even then, the hunt was closely regulated to promote safety. Hunters and their mentors were confined to specific ground blinds that were put out before the hunt. And .20-gauge slug shotguns were the only permitted firearms, encouraging shots of less than 100 yards.

In an orientation, new hunters practiced with the guns they would use during the hunt, then got together with their mentors to help brush the blinds.

During that pre-hunt outing, Claudine was further encouraged by seeing deer signs that her mentor, Andy Carmack, pointed out.

"We saw some tracks, a scrape, and some licking branches," Claudine said. "We knew there were deer around where we would be hunting."

Carmack also went over what to expect.

"We discussed how we would walk into the blind in the dark, the importance of being quiet, what part wind direction played, and where the deer would probably come in," said Carmack, a private lands conservationist for MDC and an avid deer hunter himself. "She was ready."

"I saw no nervousness or hesitation. She was motivated and excited for this hunt."

As Desmond hunted with a different mentor at a different spot on the conservation area, mom was ready to pull the trigger.



Claudine Lamb field dresses her harvest.

I WAS SO EXCITED.
I FINALLY GOT MY FIRST DEER.

— Claudine Lamb

Kellie Bradfield, manager of MDC's Lake City Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center, teaches the managed hunt participants how to process their harvest.



Success

In the gray pre-dawn hours before shooting hours, the deer teased Claudine and Carmack.

"Five minutes before shooting time, we had four deer standing broadside 40 yards from our blind," Carmack said. "I told Claudine, 'If they'll stay there for another five minutes, you can take a shot at one of them.'"

The deer ambled off to the opposite side of the field, far from gun range. But it didn't take Claudine long to get over her disappointment.

A half-hour later, Claudine and Carmack watched a button buck tiptoe out of the

timber and into the field. When it walked within range, Claudine squeezed the trigger and hit her target.

The deer didn't drop immediately, and the two hunters had to follow a blood trail. But they finally found the deer and Lamb was able to exhale.

"I was so excited," she said. "I finally got my first deer."

Claudine wanted to be involved in all aspects of the hunt, so she field-dressed the deer and later butchered her harvest, readying it for the table. She already has feasted on chunks of the venison in stir-fry, and looks forward to the burgers, sausage, and roasts from the deer.

But that wasn't the end of her memorable day. She was able to hunt again in the evening in an attempt

to fill her second tag, a provision of the managed hunt.

As dusk approached, she shot a second button buck and celebrated repeat success.

Though Desmond didn't shoot a deer, others on the hunt did.

Tristan Eve of Smithville was among the first-time deer hunters who came away from the managed hunt with plenty of memories.

He hunted waterfowl and turkeys while he lived in Denver, but he never tried deer. This hunt gave him the chance, and he made the most of it. He shot a big doe and expressed pride that he became a deer hunter.

"I didn't have someone who could introduce me to deer hunting," said Eve, who is 28. "I always wanted to try it, but I was intimidated.

"This program was fantastic. I am confident that I could grab my gun and go hunting on my own now."

The Joy of Mentoring

Sam McCloskey, who manages Burr Oak Woods and was the hunt coordinator, loves to hear stories like that.

"We've had this managed hunt for several years now and we've even had people who started off as beginners come back to serve as mentors now," he said.

Mentors, such as Carmack, get as much out of the program as the hunters themselves.

"I love to hunt, but I spend most of my time mentoring now," he said. "It's what I live for — being the person involved in the 'firsts' and introducing people to deer hunting.

"It's more exciting for me to watch someone else take their first deer than it is for me to pull the trigger myself." ▲

Brent Frazee was the outdoors editor of The Kansas City Star for 36 years before retiring in 2016. He continues to freelance for magazines, websites, newspapers, and tourism outlets. He lives on a private lake in a suburb of Kansas City with his wife, Jana, and two yellow labs, Millie and Maggie.



Joshua Bennett shows off his harvest with mentor Joe O'Donnell.



OUTDOORSY

PROGRAM GETS NEW BACKPACKERS OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT



THINGS

by Larry Archer | photographs by David Stonner

On a slightly warmer than normal early October weekend, MDC Curriculum Coordinator Mary Beth Factor walks point on a line of nearly 20 other backpackers along an ever-changing 4-mile stretch of the Ozark Trail connecting the National Park Service campground at Round Spring to Echo Bluff State Park (SP).

Through the inclines and declines and over the roots and rocks that characterize hiking in the Ozarks, Factor shares more than insights on backpacking — she leads a walking class on nature, pointing out a variety of trees, signs of wildlife, and geological features.

At the back of the line, Texas County Conservation Agent Chris Ely gives his own outdoor lesson, only his topic is black bears, and his goal is to allay the fears of another participant. Stationed in the middle, MDC Ozark Region Conservation Educator Sam Stewart discusses backpacking gear, tips, and tricks.

In between are 17 participants of MDC's fall Introduction to Backpacking, a biennial course aimed at teaching the basics of not only hitting the trail but preparing oneself for an overnight stay in the wilderness with just what you can carry on your back.

CURRENT RIVER CHALLENGE

This weekend, the plan is to complete the Current River Challenge — a hiking and floating route developed by the National Park Service, Missouri State Parks, and the Ozark Trail Association that has participants hiking more than 8 miles from Round Spring to Current River SP and then floating the Current River back to Round Spring. In this version, participants camp midway through the hike at Echo Bluff SP. While still challenging, the route's access to the state parks and their facilities makes this event more beginner friendly than its spring counterpart on the Paddy Creek Wilderness Trail in the Mark Twain National Forest, Factor says.

"It's a bougie trip," she says. "It's a nice introductory trip. I mean, most of the time when you backpack, you're not going to come across flushing toilets. You're not going to come across the option to go get yourself a hot cocoa."



And while not as demanding as the spring route, "bougie" by no means equates to "easy," and the event still challenges backpackers enough to determine if the sport is for them, she says.

"This backpacking is a challenge," she says. "It's not something that's taken lightly, and I feel like once you can work past your mental obstacles — because everybody runs into them — then you get to have that joy of saying, 'I did it.' And my hope in the end is that people will take inspiration and continue their backpacking adventures without being with MDC to do that, that they feel like, 'I have the skills to continue this.'"

REMOVING THE BARRIERS

While participants are carrying their own gear, including tents, sleeping bags and pads, food, water, and other personal

essentials, it is the program staff, like Factor, Ely, and Stewart, who are doing the heavy lifting of logistics and, in some cases, equipping participants.

For 15-year-old Haileigh Schroeger, it is the handling of the logistics — identifying which trails to take, coordinating equipment transfers, arranging campsites and programming with state parks, and more — that makes the backpacking program, as well as other outdoor pursuits, possible.

"I really like doing anything outdoors," Haileigh says. "The problem is that we had only moved out here not too long ago, so we didn't know the places to go. That's whenever we started getting in with the Conservation Department. Basically, anything I do outdoors is with the Conservation Department and with the programs that they have."

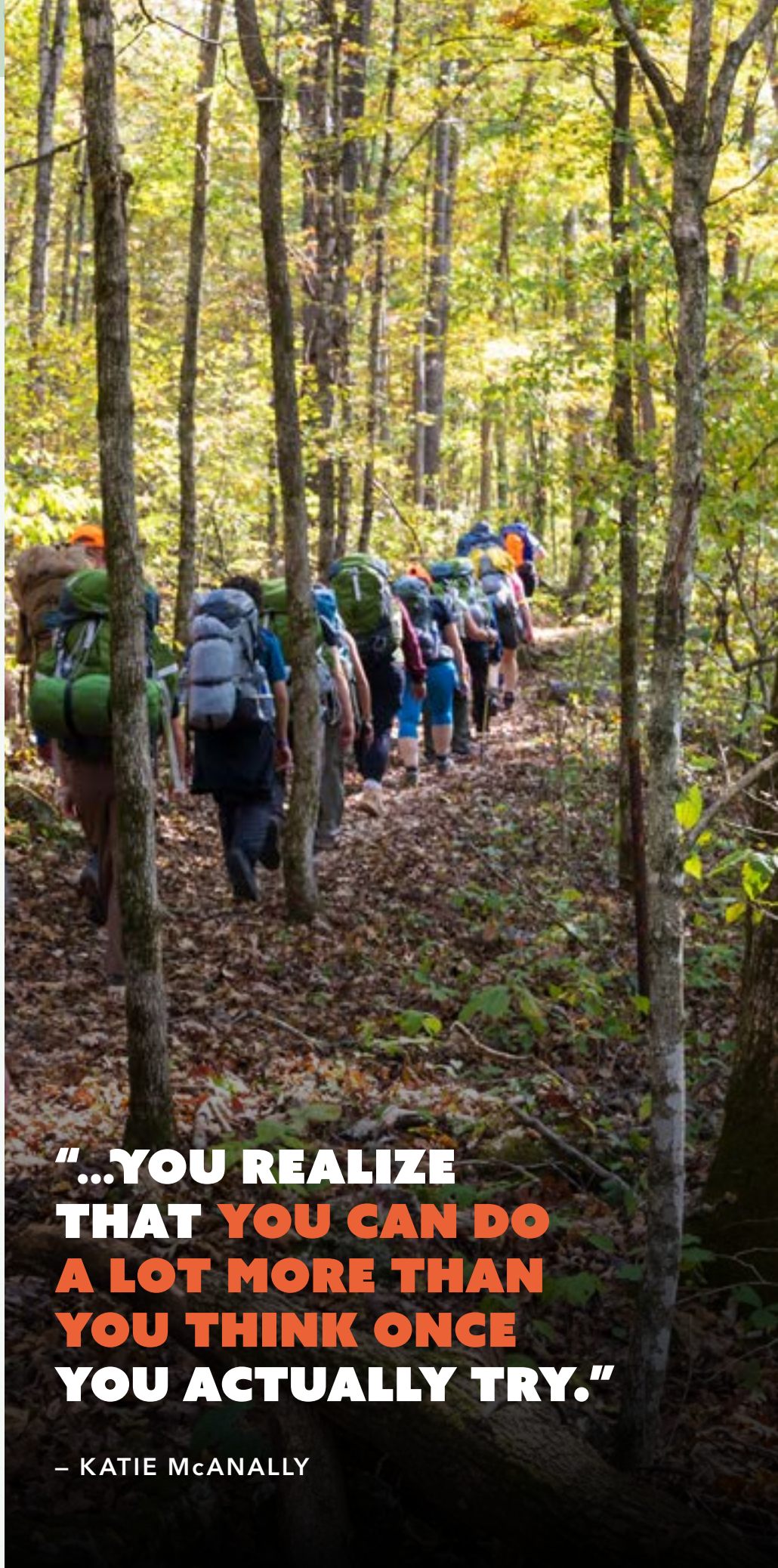


Although some participants arrive on Saturday morning with their own gear, most are assigned equipment from MDC's inventory, which was upgraded thanks to a grant Ely secured from the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation.

"I believe we had done at least two of these overnight backpacking programs with kind of a hodgepodge of equipment, some from Twin Pines (Conservation Education Center), some from other places in the Education Branch," he says.

By removing the barriers and giving participants an easier entry to the sport, the organizers hope the backpackers will be able to focus on the activity, Factor says.

"We take away that barrier of costs and expense," she says. "And so, it's like, let's see if you actually enjoy doing this.



**"...YOU REALIZE
THAT YOU CAN DO
A LOT MORE THAN
YOU THINK ONCE
YOU ACTUALLY TRY."**

– KATIE McANALLY



Let's see if this is something that you feel like would be really neat to do. So, I think the reason why it's so successful is because we just remove those two barriers."

Ely hopes the students will in turn become teachers.

"What we really want to do is give the backpackers the knowledge and the skills to not only go out and be comfortable backpacking, but to be able to put their own program together for themselves, or if it's a mother, for her kids, or father, if he wants to, for his family," he says. "Whoever is interested in it, the bottom line is to be able to have that knowledge and skill and ability to plan a backpacking trip and to feel comfortable doing it."

A GOOD REMINDER

Establishing that comfort level begins well before anyone arrives at Round Spring. Nearly a month before the event, staff meet with participants online. Topics include food, personal gear, what to wear, and — perhaps most importantly — making sure you're physically fit for the trek.

"I would suggest that if you're not sure if you're physically capable, start doing that 1 to 2 miles a day, and that'll tell you pretty quick," says Stewart. "And as you get better and better at that, then you can start adding. If you have a backpack with some stuff in it, you can put that on your back to understand what it feels like to have weight."

The morning begins on Saturday at the Round Spring pavilion with Stewart's demonstration on how to pack a backpack and an inventory of what he carries in his. Each participant then packs their own pack and submits it for weighing, with a goal of not exceeding 20 percent of the backpacker's body weight. Managing that weight can mean the difference between comfort and agony on the trail, Stewart says.

"You can carry everything that you need," he says. "It heightens our awareness of what we need and what we don't. You find that first timers often bring way too much stuff, things that they don't necessarily need, and then they find out, 'Well, I could really do with a whole



Backpacking with Nature Boost

In April, Nature Boost podcast host Jill Pritchard joined the spring Introduction to Backpacking program on the Paddy Creek Wilderness Trail within the Mark Twain National Forest. Her two-part podcast released in June and July covers her preparation for the trek, as well as how her and other participants handled the ups and downs of their 11-mile, two-day excursion, including the ascent of "murder mountain."

Nature Boost Episodes 65 and 66 can be found online at mdc.mo.gov/natureboost.



lot less.' And that's a good reminder for backpacking, but maybe a good reminder in life, too."

A FAMILY AFFAIR

For Waynesville resident Irene Muir, the program is already an extended family affair. Along with her daughter, Calleigh, 17, Muir is providing the experience to the family's two foreign exchange students, Chihoro Yoshida of Japan and Joao Marques of Brazil.

"We do glamping, but this is the first time like this, setting up your own tent and everything," Muir says. "My daughter, she said, 'I wanna try camping.' I've never done camping, so I'll join her. So, we'll try; we'll learn together."

And while technically an introductory program, not all participants are true beginners. Springfield residents Danielle Buzbee and Amy McIntosh bring with them the experience of the spring's Paddy Creek Trail event.

"I didn't know anything going into it," Buzbee says. "So, it was very helpful, just knowing where to camp, knowing not to camp under dead branches, just things you would not think about, like learning how to do the bear bag."

The last item is of particular importance to McIntosh.

"I've already learned a whole lot talking to Chris," she says. "I learned a lot talking to Beth. I had a fear of bears that was not rational. The more knowledge helped put my mind at ease, which is really, really helpful."

A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

Come mid-afternoon, the group arrives at the Echo Bluff SP campground, ahead of schedule and apparently none the worse for wear. After a tutorial on choosing a site for pitching one's tent, participants set up their tents, stow their gear, and either relax in their tents or head down to Sinking Creek to soak their tired feet in the cool, spring-fed water.

Among those are Marta Howard, Jaslyn Johnson, and Katie McAnally, all students of Missouri State University in Springfield and members of the university's Wildlife Society. Each has outdoor experience growing up, but the backpacking program allows them to



Find out more about the Current River Challenge online at short.mdc.mo.gov/4t9.

expand on their experience. They hope to use that experience to encourage more young women to head outdoors.

"I actually tried it because I like being outdoors and I was like, 'Hey, let's go do outdoorsy things,'" says McAnally, a Colorado resident. "Then you realize that you can do a lot more than you think once you actually try."

For Howard, a Jefferson City resident, backpacking offers a unique experience, but getting others outdoors may begin with something simpler.

"I would recommend bringing a friend along and going out for an hour or so around the park," she said. "It doesn't have to be like camping in the woods, just something we can go outside in nature and really just take time to look at the world and see how pretty it is. It'll change your perspective."

STRONGER THAN YOU THINK

After dawn on the second day, the campsite slowly awakens. Campers eat breakfast, strike tents, and reload backpacks before setting out on a day similar to the previous in distance and terrain but with a very different ending. Instead of setting up camp, the hike ends with lunch at Current River SP, followed by loading gear into a trailer, and launching kayaks onto the Current River for the challenge's last leg.

Once again, Stewart provides instruction for those new to kayaking and reminders for those with experience. As

on the trail, staff position themselves at the front, middle, and back of the group to ensure anyone having trouble receives prompt assistance.

Finally off their feet, the group enjoys a relatively mild, 4-mile float on the popular river, which by October is void of the crowds found during hot summer weekends.

After the kayaks are pulled from the water and loaded onto trailers, Factor circles up the group for reflection. For most, the takeaway from the weekend is the realization that achievements once thought impossible are reachable with preparation, effort, and persistence.

"My favorite part of the trip is truly at the very end when we reflect," Factor says. "Because that is when I get to hear the genuine feedback from everyone, and 95 percent of the time people are so appreciative of the experience, and they truly walk away with the idea of, 'I really am stronger than what I think.'" ▲

At 62, Associate Editor Larry Archer was the oldest participant in last October's Introduction to Backpacking event. His most recent previous overnight backpacking outing was in 1980.

RECOLONIZING THE STATE

RESURGENT BLACK BEAR POPULATION RESTORES BEARS
FROM NEARLY GONE TO ELUSIVE GAME



NOIPADOL PAOTHONG

For a two-week span in May, multiple Missouri news outlets were abuzz with the same stories — black bears in urban areas. From door-cam footage in Kansas City to reports from a Walmart parking lot in St. Charles County near St. Louis, black bears were making their way out of the woods and into neighborhoods.

The story of a country bear in the big city is not unprecedented in Missouri, but as the bear population continues to grow, it is a story that's becoming more common. And the population is continuing to grow.

Once abundant throughout the state, the black bear saw a steady decline — due to heavy logging practices, which negatively affected bear habitat, and unregulated hunting — throughout the 1800s and early 1900s until, by the 1940s, they were considered all but gone from the Missouri landscape.

Now bears are back, and according to MDC's 2023 Missouri Black Bear Program Annual Report, they are "successfully recolonizing the state." Unlike the resurgence of the white-tailed deer, turkey, or elk, where MDC actively restored wildlife populations by moving animals about the state or from other states, the return of the black bear was not the product of direct MDC efforts, although habitat improvement, species protection, and public education facilitated the rate of recovery. The more direct factor was an Arkansas Game and Fish Commission restoration program undertaken in the late 1950s through the 1960s to return the bear — using stock captured in Minnesota and Canada — to the mountains of northwest Arkansas.

Once settled, those bears, as their descendants continue to do today, began expanding their territory, eventually ending up in southwest Missouri. By 2012, Missouri's bear population was estimated at 300. Today it is estimated at more than 1,000 animals, with the bulk remaining south of Interstate 44 and expanding into areas predominately south of Interstate 70. Rare individuals have been reported as far north as the Iowa border.

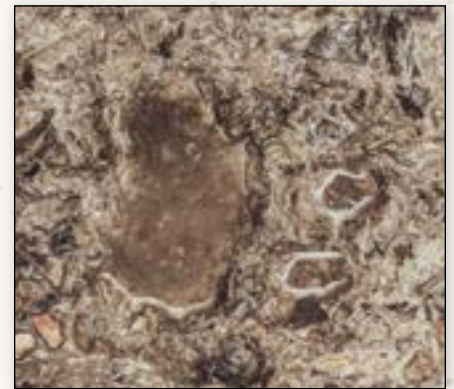


Once the population became established, the Missouri Conservation Commission approved a limited and regulated bear hunting season in 2021.

This month marks the fifth black bear hunting season, with up to 600 Missouri hunters being given the opportunity to purchase permits to hunt during the season, Oct. 18–31. Although the number of permits being issued has increased, the total number of bears that are allowed to be taken remains at 40, as it has been since the first season.

Even as the bear population increases, being drawn for a permit is not a guarantee of a harvest. In the first four seasons, a total of 47 black bears were harvested, with last year topping the list at 15.

What follows are the stories of two hunters — both of whom received permits for the 2023 season — and their experiences hunting black bears in Missouri.



Now bears are back, and according to MDC's 2023 Missouri Black Bear Program Annual Report, they are "successfully recolonizing the state."

Unbelievable Feeling

KANSAS CITY MAN, 85, HARVESTS FIRST BEAR

by Bill Graham

When Lane Morris first went afield hunting, his quarry weighed only a pound or two and scampered about in trees. At age 85, he harvested another tree climber, this one weighing 420 pounds. Squirrel hunting as a boy led to decades of deer hunting on his family's farm in Douglas County. Then after drawing a bear hunting permit, he killed a male black bear on the same farm on Oct. 23, 2023.

"The feeling was unbelievable," Morris said. "I could not believe it. I'd almost given up hope of getting one."

Nor would he have imagined as a boy in the 1950s that someday he would hunt for black bear on his family's farm. But decades of conservation work by MDC and private landowners brought once-scarce wildlife and hunting opportunities back. That includes the 133-acre timbered Ozark farm near Ava that has been in the Morris family since 1903. Besides the bear, Morris also harvested two turkeys on the farm during the 2023 spring season and a button buck deer that autumn.

"I had a good year," he said.

When he graduated from high school in 1956, "the only thing was squirrel hunting. We didn't have any deer or turkey then. We did kill a few rabbits, but they were not plentiful there."

Morris moved to the Kansas City area and worked in the air conditioning and heating business. But the family kept the farm. When white-tailed deer made a comeback in Missouri thanks to conservation, he and his father hunted deer starting in the 1970s. In the 1980s, wild turkeys had rebounded, and he began hunting them on the farm with family and friends.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BEN AND ROCHELLE NEWELL AND HEATH CARNELL

Opportunity Presents Itself

An opportunity to hunt bears came when he drew a permit for the 2023 bear season. Along with help from friends, he began watching for bear sign, and they set out some trail cameras.

"I saw the same bear two days before the season," Morris said. "We'd been seeing a few in the area."

When the season opened, he began watching for bears from a permanent hunting blind built on the edge of a power line right of way. A young friend accompanied him on the hunts to help if he got a bear.

"I hunted six to eight hours every day for eight days," Morris said. "I usually went out in the morning and hunted from 6 to 10:30 or so, then I'd go back out at 2 in the afternoon and stay until dark."

Then one evening a big bear appeared about 225 yards out and began moving in the hunter's direction. When the bear was close, Morris squeezed the trigger. One shot from a .30-06 Remington rang out and the bear dropped, then moved no more.

"I shot him at 60 yards, right through the heart," he said.

His young friend, Heith Carnall, was there to help. Others in the area who heard the shot also came to help. The bear was field dressed and taken to scales and weighed, and the offal was also weighed. They then took the bear to an Amish butcher shop to process the meat and tallow. The head is being mounted by a taxidermist and the pelt is being made into a rug.

Enjoying His Harvest

Bear meat tastes good, Morris said.

"We've had chili," he said. "My sister fixed meatballs. We've had meat loaf and sausage. It's all been good. Bear is a dark meat, with a taste that's kind of a combination of beef, pork, and deer. It's not as fat as pork and not as lean as deer. There's no strong taste; it is milder than deer. It does have an odor when you cook it."

The Amish butcher took 25 one-gallon buckets of fat off the carcass to render into lard for cooking.

"He said bear fat is good for frying things in," Morris said.

Despite his senior years, he's not done hunting. When spring turkeys are gobbling and buck deer are chasing does in autumn, Morris plans to be afield.

"I'm going to go turkey hunting," he said. "I'll bow hunt for deer with a crossbow. I just enjoy being outdoors, and the camaraderie of being out with the guys. And we've always processed our own meat, but this is our first bear." ▲

Bill Graham is a retired MDC communications specialist who has enjoyed a lifetime of Missouri's wonderful outdoors and conservation programs.

"The feeling was unbelievable. I could not believe it. I'd almost given up hope of getting one."

— Lane Morris



A Different Success

EVEN WITHOUT A HARVEST, HUNTER FINDS SATISFACTION
— AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE — IN THE EFFORT

by Will Rechkemmer

This isn't a story of a successful bear hunt, if notched tags and meat in the freezer are the gauges. However, if one considers respect for bears, the unique places they live, and a new perspective for the outdoors, it was as successful as it gets.

When I found out I had been drawn for the third modern Missouri black bear season in 2023, feelings of both excitement and apprehension came over me. I grew up hunting and fishing. Ducks, deer, turkeys, bass, catfish, and crappie are all familiar to me. But bears? This was new to me, and given the low-density bear population in Missouri, I knew it'd be the hardest hunt I had been on. As a wildlife biologist, I spend an immense amount of time in the woods, and I have yet to lay eyes on a Missouri bear. After 25 years of hunting and fishing, an opportunity to hunt a new animal, or experience something for the first time, doesn't come up as often as it once did.

A Place a Bear Might Frequent

I spent the summer scouting, with relatively little success other than some old sign to go on for opening day. Over the course of the past few deer and turkey hunting seasons, I had taken note of areas where I found bear sign, but very little of it was fresh. The freshest sign I had found was several years prior during spring turkey season. After striking out on the roost hunt, I decided to explore areas a bear might frequent, like a ridge top. On the topo maps, there was an interesting area that looked like it may be a large sinkhole. I found a recently torn up log on the opposite side of the sink hole and fresh bear scat right next to it.



Missouri's regulations do not allow bait or hound hunting, so my strategy was simple — cover ground until I find them. My one goal for the season wasn't a notched tag; I just wanted to see a bear. I drew a tag for Bear Management Zone 1, located in southwest and south Missouri along the Arkansas border. Although the smallest of the three bear management zones, it has the highest density of bears in the state, so I thought that if I covered enough territory, I would eventually find a bear.

As the season drew closer, I noticed that the acorn crop was going to be spotty across the Ozarks due to a couple late frosts. This should have been to my benefit because bears would be concentrated in areas that actually had acorns, so I just had to find where that was. My approach on opening day was to hike areas where I had found bear sign in



the past and cover different elevations and slope aspects trying to find acorns — and hopefully bear sign. The first day and a half I turned up some areas with acorns, but no bear sign fresher than a few weeks old.

Return to the Sinkhole

On the afternoon of the second day, I decided to hike back to that area of the big sinkhole that showed promise a couple years prior. As soon as I left the truck on an old four-wheeler path, I found the ground was littered with white oak acorns. As I cut down through a drainage and started to break the top of the ridge into a nice stand of big oaks, I couldn't believe what I saw — scat so fresh it didn't have a crust on it.

"This is actually turning into a bear hunt," I said.

From this moment forward, my mindset changed — I really did have a chance at achieving my goal.

Over the course of the next several days I chased that fresh sign. What appeared to be a lone bear and a sow with a couple cubs had followed an elevation band of acorns, through steep, rocky, south facing slopes. Following their sign, it appeared they were traveling and hadn't stayed in one area long. Finally, I caught up with them — or so I thought — at an oak flat with fresh scat scattered all across it. I spent several days sitting in this area, but they never showed. Maybe they caught my wind, or maybe the 85-degree weather had them moving after dark.

A Mud Track

After never finding where those bears went, I decided on the ninth day of the season to hike into a wilderness area where I had heard rumors of bears from deer hunters. It had been dry, but I could see several small ponds on the map and decided to start there. As I crested the berm of the first pond, I could see that it had dried up, but the mud was still tacky and covered in wildlife tracks needing investigation, including one large track. My heart began to beat faster as I approached. I could tell it was a bear



Rechkemmer uses his GPS to mark a spring, one of the few fresh water sources found during the hunt.

track — and a big one at that. The edges of the claws and pad were still clear as day, about as fresh as it gets. I spent the rest of that day and the next looking for sign of where it was feeding or heading. Unfortunately, a few tracks in the dried-up pond were all the sign I ever found. I sat until dark in the area on the final day, with only a few deer and squirrels showing up on the oak flat. Ultimately, over the 10-day season, I hiked 75 off-trail miles in the Missouri Ozarks and was on fresh bear sign for a lot of those miles, but I never laid eyes on a bear.

Reinvigorated Love

This is where my perspective began to change. A first hunt really isn't about harvesting an animal; it's about learning. Was this a successful hunt even though I didn't achieve my goal? I got out into the woods, stuck to my strategy, and I did find bears. From my perspective, learning to be hyper-observant and looking for things that most folks would walk past is what made this hunt successful. Over those 10 days I learned to notice the little things: freshly rolled rocks, tips of oak twigs on the ground from bears feeding in the canopy and dug out yellow jacket nests. These small clues were what made

this a hunt instead of an ordinary hike through the woods. With each bit of sign, I felt like I was putting together a giant puzzle. Each piece of sign brought excitement and anticipation. I knew I was close, and any second the hunt could take a 180-degree turn to a notched tag.

This hunt reinvigorated my love of the outdoors. It brought something out of me that I hadn't had since I was young: excitement over the little things, like a child exploring the outdoors for the first time. Most of us need to appreciate the little things in life. Bear hunting does just that; you're not likely to see a lot of them, so measuring success looks different. The little things are what made this hunt successful to me and reminded me I can apply that to all aspects of life.

Missouri black bear tags are a lottery system, and there is no telling when — or if — I'll get a second chance. The lessons, experiences, and memories made will have to hold me over until then. ▲

Will Rechkemmer is a wildlife biologist and outdoorsman. He enjoys spending his free time hunting, camping, and fishing with his wife, Danita, and dog, Rye.



Get Outside

in OCTOBER

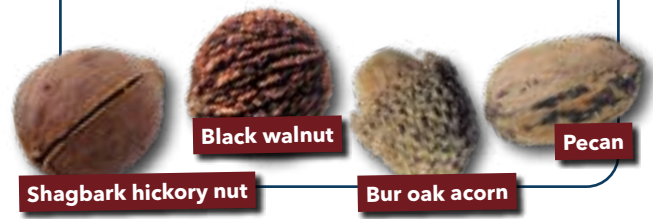


Fox squirrel munching a pecan

Ways to connect with nature

Nod to Nuts

Fall gets pretty nutty in Missouri. It's time for all kinds of nuts — from black walnuts to pecans — to ripen. Get out there and get them while you can. Whereas Missouri nuts are a great addition to any recipe, from sweet to savory and even salads, humans aren't the only ones out foraging for these natural goodies. Squirrels, deer, and many other animals are also nutty for Missouri's bounty.



Mushrooms of a Different Color

While you're out admiring the beautiful fall colors of Missouri's woods, don't overlook the mushrooms.

Large numbers of **purple-gilled laccaria** can often be found in the fall. Their purple color is beautiful to behold. They aren't considered a choice edible and are better when combined with other mushrooms or strong flavors.

And you can't let the Halloween season pass without looking for the orange clusters of **Jack-o'-lantern mushrooms**.

These showy fungi form at the base of trees and should be enjoyed only for their looks. They are poisonous and should never be consumed.



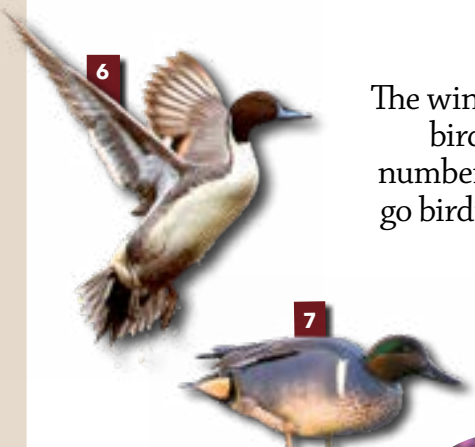
Purple-gilled laccaria

Jack-o'-lantern mushrooms

Binocular Bonanza

The winter resident birds are arriving and fall transient birds, or migrants, are passing through at peak numbers. Dust off those binoculars! It's a great time to go birding. Here are just a few birds to get you started:

1. Sparrows
2. Dark-eyed juncos
3. Gadwall
4. American wigeon
5. Greater scaup
6. Northern pintail
7. Green-winged teal



Natural Events to See This Month

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



Mist flowers bloom.



Field and house crickets chirp.



Dekay's brown snakes cross trails and roads.

VIRTUAL

VIRTUAL HUNTING SERIES: After You Harvest a Deer

Thursday • Oct. 16 • 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Online only

Registration required by Oct. 15. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/4th.

All ages

Find out how to skin and process the deer you harvest this year. We will use our video to demonstrate techniques. We will also show examples of equipment and tools used and provide answers to any questions you may have about do-it-yourself processing.

VIRTUAL REGION

LEARN TO FISH: Virtual Fly Tying with T.J. and Mike

Thursday • Oct. 16 • 6-7 p.m.

Online only

Registration required by Oct. 15. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/4te.

All ages

Come and tie flies with T.J. and Mike. The theme is waterfowl. Learn to incorporate waterfowl feathers into your home tying.

A Spider Worthy of the Season

Who needs fake spiders to decorate for Halloween when you have the real thing? **Marbled orb weavers**, also known as pumpkin spiders, are ready for the season. By October, they are as large as they will get, and they weave conspicuous webs where they catch and subdue the largest prey they can get. Quite a stunning sight! And sure to fit in with any Halloween décor.



Woolly worm caterpillars look for overwintering spots.



Beavers are busy during the day.

Looking for new places for **youth hunting**, fishing, and outdoor fun?



Check out **Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program (MRAP)** properties offering hunting and fishing opportunities just for youth 16 and younger. The MRAP Youth-Only properties are located on private land and are dedicated to providing outdoor experiences for kids under the age of 16.

To learn more about MRAP, including the rules and regulations, locations of MRAP properties, and to download property maps, visit mdc.mo.gov/mrap.

Places to Go

SAINT LOUIS REGION

William R. Logan Conservation Area

Lots of activities — and deer hunting

by Larry Archer

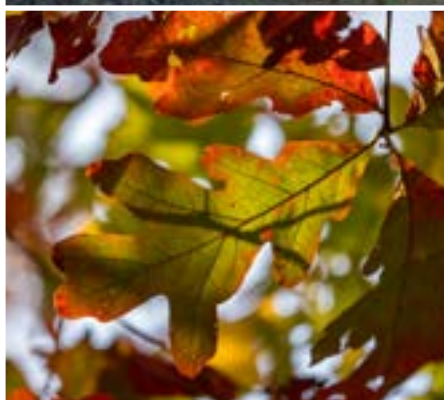
✳ Even with multiple opportunities for fishing, hiking, biking, and more, October at William R. Logan Conservation Area (CA) — like many areas throughout the state — is about one thing: deer hunting.

Located on nearly 1,800 acres in Lincoln County northwest of St. Louis, Logan CA boasts seven fishing lakes and ponds totaling 29 acres, a 4-mile hiking and biking multiuse trail, and an additional 4 miles of access trails and other roads open to bicycling, but what draws visitors in October are the white-tailed deer, said District Supervisor Tim Brown.

“For October, this area will start seeing an increase in archery hunters,” Brown said. “The white-tail rut will be approaching soon, and that’s when we do see an increase in hunters. With an increase in hunters, we will see some of them utilizing the campground for a week or so at a time.”

And while deer hunting is the predominate activity, it isn’t the only thing that draws people to the area, he said.

“With the cooler temps approaching, we will see some folks trying to get a few last-minute hikes in and observe the woodlands changing colors along with some fishing.”



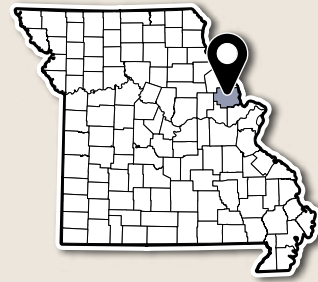
“With the area also having a shooting range, we see an increase in use from folks getting ready for the November portion of firearms season. We see a lot of the last-minute shooters, especially towards the end of the month.”

— District Supervisor Tim Brown

DAVID STONNER



Roads and trails offer access to much of William R. Logan CA, but check if planning to visit after Oct. 1, as some roads are closed to traffic from the start of deer season through spring turkey season.









WILLIAM R. LOGAN CONSERVATION AREA

consists of 1,797.7 acres in Lincoln County. From Troy, take Highway 61 north 10 miles, then Route E west 0.25 mile, and Route RA north 3 miles to the largest tract. The smaller western tract is north of Silex on Route UU, then west on County Road 248.

39.1463, -91.0257

short.mdc.mo.gov/4ta 636-441-4554

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT

-  **Bicycling** Area includes 4.6 miles of improved, service, and unimproved roads open to bicycling as well as 4 miles of bicycle-specific trails.
-  **Birdwatching** The eBird list of birds recorded at William R. Logan CA is available at short.mdc.mo.gov/4tb.
-  **Camping** Two primitive campsites and two privies.
-  **Fishing** Seven fishing lakes and ponds totaling 29 acres with black bass, catfish, sunfish, white bass.
-  **Hunting Deer and turkey.** Regulations are subject to annual changes. Refer to MDC's regulation page online at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zjw.
Also **dove, quail, rabbit, and squirrel.**
-  **Shooting Range** Unstaffed rifle and pistol range (25- and 50-yard targets); shotgun range, clay targets only. Shooters must provide their own targets and throwers. Closed on Mondays for maintenance.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU VISIT



Bobcat



Cooper's hawk



Common five-lined skink



Eastern towhee



American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos

Status
Common

Size
17½ inches

Distribution
Statewide



American crows are entirely black with a long, heavy bill. Their call is a well-known *caw, caw*. They are often found in a variety of habitats with trees, foraging for seeds, acorns, corn, fruit, insects, carrion, nestling birds, and small mammals and reptiles. During the winter, they seek out agricultural areas. Crows are among the most intelligent animals on Earth. They follow other birds to locate food, use tools such as sticks to probe in holes for food, steal from other birds, and snatch food from dog dishes.



ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

Crows are omnivorous and play a variety of roles in nature. They forage on carrion, helping to control diseases. Since they cannot tear open the skin of dead animals, they wait for something else to open the carcass or for decomposition to begin.

Crows are also known to eat many harmful agricultural pests, but they also feast on corn and other crops, thus the need for scarecrows.

They help other creatures escape predation by mobbing would-be predators with their noisy squawks.



LIFE CYCLE

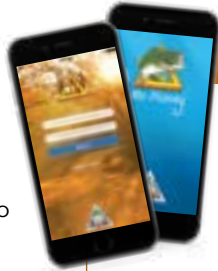
Crows typically begin breeding at 2 to 4 years old and usually have three to nine eggs at a time, which hatch in 16–18 days. The young fledge in 20–40 days. Sometimes the young remain with the parents, helping raise subsequent broods for the next year. Crows are long-lived birds. They have been known to live 16 years in the wild.

Outdoor Calendar

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Free MO Hunting and MO Fishing Apps

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



FISHING

Black Bass

Impounded waters and non-Ozark streams:
Open all year

Most streams south of the Missouri River:

- ▶ Catch-and-Keep:
May 24, 2025–Feb. 28, 2026

Bullfrog, Green Frog

June 30 at sunset–Oct. 31, 2025

Nongame Fish Gigging

Streams and impounded waters,
sunrise to midnight:
Sept. 15, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Paddlefish

On the Mississippi River:
Sept. 15–Dec. 15, 2025

Trout Parks

State trout parks are open seven days a week
March 1 through Oct. 31.

Catch-and-Keep:
March 1–Oct. 31, 2025

Catch-and-Release:
Nov. 14, 2025–Feb. 9, 2026

TRAPPING

Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk

Only foot-enclosing traps and
cage-type traps may be used.

Aug. 1–Oct. 15, 2025

**Only hunters selected through a random drawing may participate in these hunting seasons.*

For complete information about seasons, limits, methods, and restrictions, consult the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zib. Current hunting, trapping, and fishing regulation booklets are available from local permit vendors or online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZf.

HUNTING

Black Bear*

Oct. 18–31, 2025

Bullfrog, Green Frog

June 30 at sunset–Oct. 31, 2025

Coyote

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

Open all year

Crows

Nov. 1, 2025–March 3, 2026

Deer

Archery:

Sept. 15–Nov. 14, 2025
Nov. 26, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Firearms:

- ▶ Early Antlerless Portion (open areas only):
Oct. 10–12, 2025
- ▶ Early Youth Portion (ages 6–15):
Nov. 1–2, 2025
- ▶ November Portion:
Nov. 15–25, 2025
- ▶ CWD Portion (open areas only):
Nov. 26–30, 2025
- ▶ Late Youth Portion (ages 6–15):
Nov. 28–30, 2025
- ▶ Late Antlerless Portion (open areas only):
Dec. 6–14, 2025
- ▶ Alternative Methods Portion:
Dec. 27, 2025–Jan. 6, 2026

Doves

Sept. 1–Nov. 29, 2025

Elk*

Archery:
Oct. 18–26, 2025

Firearms:
Dec. 13–21, 2025

Groundhog (Woodchuck)

May 12–Dec. 15, 2025

Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk

Aug. 1–Oct. 15, 2025

Pheasant

Youth (ages 6–15):
Oct. 25–26, 2025

Regular:
Nov. 1, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Quail

Youth (ages 6–15):
Oct. 25–26, 2025

Regular:
Nov. 1, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Rabbits

Oct. 1, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Sora, Virginia Rail

Sept. 1–Nov. 9, 2025

Squirrels

May 24, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Turkey

Fall:

- ▶ Archery Portion:
Sept. 15–Nov. 14, 2025
Nov. 26, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026
- ▶ Firearms Portion:
Oct. 1–31, 2025

Waterfowl

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

Wilson's (Common) Snipe

Sept. 1–Dec. 16, 2025

Woodcock

Oct. 18–Dec. 1, 2025



ILLUSTRATION: MARK BATHTEL



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@moconservation

Missouri is a great place to fish, and trout is a favorite among anglers. With four trout parks, several winter trout lakes located across the state, and approximately 120 miles of Ozark streams designated as blue, red, and white ribbon trout areas, the trout angling opportunities abound. Get out there! What will you discover?

📷 by **Noppadol Paothong**

Free to Missouri households

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