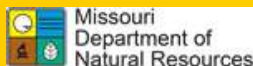


Fall 2011



ST. FRANCOIS STATE PARK

Nature Notes

From the Naturalist



As the long hot days of summer come to an end, we can look forward to the cooler days and nights of autumn. Fall is always a busy time at the park, and this year will probably be no exception.

If you are anything like me, you are feeling a bit of "cabin fever." The high temperatures have kept many of us from going outside and enjoying our favorite outdoor activities. Take advantage of the nice weather this fall to take a hike or spend the weekend camping. My favorite fall hike at St. Francois is the Mooner's Hollow trail. At 2.6 miles long, it's just the right length for a nice afternoon stroll. It is moderately difficult and in-

cludes a creek crossing, so make sure you come prepared. The fall colors are always nice, especially as the leaves float down and land in the creek.

We have a couple of special events planned for September that we are really looking forward to. Mark your calendars for Saturday, Sept. 17 at 6 p.m. for "Bushwhacked." This program highlights the life of Civil War bushwhacker Sam Hildebrand, who hid

out in a cave in the park. Costumed interpreters will take you back in time as the Vigilante Committee sets out to find the elusive Hildebrand.

On Saturday, Sept. 24, the park will host its 3rd Annual Family Play Day event. Held in the park's ball field day-use area, the event features more than 20 different activities to give families ideas of things they can do outdoors together. Learning to geocache, exploring a creek, building a fort, flying kites and creating some nature crafts are just a few of the things we have in store! See you there!



Halloween Event To Be Held at Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park

It was our hope that the Halloween Happenings event would travel back to St. Francois State Park this year after it's triumphant return to the event's home park at Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park in 2010.

However, we will be un-

able to hold the event at St. Francois State Park. Hopefully we will be able to have the event again here next year. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused. The event will take place Saturday, Oct. 22, 2011 at John-

son's Shut-Ins State Park so be sure to attend there.

Famous for the themed Vaudeville on stage and the "Creatures of the Night" walk after, this large event will celebrate its 16th year this year.

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Missouri State Park Mission

- To preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's natural landscapes
- To preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's cultural landmarks.
- To provide healthy and enjoyable outdoor recreation experiences to Missourians and visitors to the state.

The Amazing Journey of the Neotropical Migrant

When you think of autumn, you probably think of fall colors, cooler temperatures, and the birds flying south. Any bird that leaves the United States or Canada and spends its winter in Mexico, Central America, South America or the Caribbean is called a neotropical migrant. There are 200 species of neotropical migrants, some of which travel thousands of



The red-eyed vireo, a common Missouri resident in summer, travels over the Gulf of Mexico to the Amazon basin in South America for the winter.

miles each fall.

Some of the distances traveled by migrants are astounding. Cliff swallows, purple martins and scarlet tanagers migrate all the way to South America, a round trip that could take them 13,600 miles!

Why do they do that? Simple — they follow the food. Most neotropical migrants eat insects, fruit and nectar, foods that are not available in Missouri in the winter. Their journey could take several days to several months, depending on where they go. What is amazing is how they will fly over the ocean for thousands of miles without stopping. We often don't notice this mass exodus because the birds will fly at night. How is it a small bird can travel



thousands of miles at night?

The indigo bunting (left) uses the stars. In a study, when the bunting was unable to see the night sky during a critical stage in their development, they were unable to migrate.

Genetics also plays an important role. It has been found that the first migration is genetically programmed. They just "know."

Through experience, they will fine tune their journey each year.

There are other tools neotropical migrants can use to help on their journey like the sun, magnetic fields and topography.

The king of all the migrants is the black-poll warbler. It travels 2,000 miles in just three days. That degree of exertion is the same as a human running four-minute miles for 80 consecutive hours!

Where Do All the Robins Go?

Many of the birds we are so used to seeing in the summer head for warmer climates in the winter. If you ask almost anyone, they will tell you the American robin, that well-known worm eater of our backyards, is one of them. In fact, it is commonly believed that the "return" of the robins is the first sign of spring.



But do they really migrate?

Yes and no. American robins are very hardy birds. They feed on insects and worms during the summer, but during the winter they change their diet to berries and fruits. They will migrate only when those berries and fruits become unavailable (as in buried under snow or ice).

Missouri winters are usually mild enough

that the robins don't have to leave. So why do we see less robins in the winter?

The robin's main food source, berries and seeds, are most often found in the woods. The robins will move to that habitat to be close to their food source. If you take a nice walk in the woods in the late fall or early winter, there's a good chance you will run across an American robin while you are there.

No Habitat, No Birds

Sadly, a quarter of all U.S. birds are in decline, including neotropical migrants. Some species have seen their populations tumble by 80 percent. Issues such as habitat fragmentation and destruction, human development, exotic species and climate changes all have taken their toll on birds. These declines have mainly taken place just in the last 40-50 years, making these sharp declines even more alarming. They could be a signal to us

that there is a larger program. Here are some of the alarming statistics:



Cerulean Warbler

80% decline



Field Sparrow

62% decline



Whippoorwill

57% decline



Bobwhite Quail

80% decline



Painted bunting

50% decline

September Interpretive Program Schedule

Date	Programs
Saturday, Sept. 3	2 p.m. Camper Trivia 8 p.m. Family Feud
Sunday, Sept. 4	2 p.m. Explorer Hour: Recycling Roundup 6 p.m. Trials of a Snake's Life
Saturday, Sept. 10	2 p.m. The Great Migration Challenge 8 p.m. Birds in My Backyard
Saturday, Sept. 17	3 p.m. Civil War Fashion Show 6 p.m. Bushwhacked!
Saturday, Sept. 24	2-4 p.m. St. Francois Family Play Day 8 p.m. Nature at Night: Night Hike

The Monarch-King of All Migrators

The Monarch is probably the most easily recognized of all the butterflies. Not only is this butterfly strikingly beautiful, but what this insect does to survive is absolutely remarkable.

The monarch butterfly starts its amazing life as a small egg, laid upon a milkweed plant. The



young caterpillar eats the leaves of the plant and grows at an astonishing rate—growing more than 30,000 times their size in a matter of a couple of weeks. If a human baby grew as fast as a caterpillar, a 6 pound baby would weight 8 tons in two weeks!

Many people have asked me how long Monarch butterflies live. The answer is well, it depends.

Most monarchs live only six-eight weeks. That is from egg until the adult butterfly dies. The monarchs you see all throughout the summer are from several generations.

The first generation of monarchs are hatched around late April-early May. There will be two more generations before the end of the summer. It is the *fourth* generation that is the most remarkable. They don't die. They are the great migrators.

That fourth generation transform to adults around late September. They migrate south, all the way to Mexico. How could they possibly know the way? It would be their great grandparents that last made that journey. Somehow, they just know.

Using instinct alone, they make their amazing journey and overwinter on one of 12 mountains in central Mexico. Millions of monarchs cling to the trees—so



many that they actually weigh the tree branches down.

As spring approaches and the days lengthen, the monarchs take off from their winter retreat and make the long journey home; just in time to mate and lay eggs before the cycle begins anew.

This September, watch the sky as the monarchs set off on their journey, and know that you have witnessed one of nature's greatest miracles.

October Interpretive Program Schedule

Date	Programs
Saturday, Oct. 1	2 p.m. Camper Trivia 8 p.m. Baths: Myth and Reality
Sunday, Oct. 8	2 p.m. Reptiles in Focus: Turtles 8 p.m. Missouri's Comeback Kids: Bears, Mountain Lions and more!
Saturday, Oct. 15	2 p.m. What Scat Is That? 8 p.m. Home is Where the Dung Is -The Life of a Dung Beetle
Saturday, Oct. 22	2 p.m. Reptiles in Focus: Snakes 8 p.m. Guest Speaker, To be announced
Saturday, Oct. 29	2 p.m. Explorer Hour 8 p.m. Halloween Campfire Jam

- The Halloween Campfire Jam will take a short hike to a large fire ring in the scout area for s'mores and stories around the fire. Bring a flashlight!

Signs of Fall

September

- During the first week: Monarch butterflies begin migration. Freshwater jellyfish are abundant in reservoirs.
- During the second week: White-tailed deer breed now through November. Sassafras, sumac and Virginia creeper start to show their fall colors.
- During the third week: Salamanders move to breeding ponds; listen for migrating birds at night. Hickory nuts ripen and begin to fall.
- During the fourth week: Persimmons and pawpaws start to ripen. Snakes begin their winter dormancy.

October

- During the first week: Most hummingbirds leave Missouri. Brown bats gather at caves for hibernation. Peak of fall color begins.
- During the second week: Watch for flocks of low-flying blue jays. Hellbender breeding is at its peak.
- During the third week: Early wintering sparrows arrive. Look for spiders ballooning on clear, windy days. Peak color in maples, oaks and hickories.
- During the fourth week: Dark-eyed juncos arrive from Canada. Lady beetles congregate on sunny side of houses. Bullfrogs begin hibernation.

November

- During the first week: Put up winter bird feeders. Groundhogs are sleeping in their underground burrows. Listen for last cricket calls.
- During the second week: Look for wintering ducks -mallards, scaup and ringneck ducks. Daylight savings time ends.
- During the third week: Look for frost flowers with first hard frost. Leonid meteor shower peaks. Trees have lost all their leaves.
- During the fourth week: Collect pecans as they drop from the trees. Mammals that haven't already done so head for their winter dens. Milkweed pods open.

ST. FRANCOIS STATE PARK

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GET OUT AND PLAY
IN MISSOURI STATE PARKS!



Facebook Photo Contest

Are you a fan of the park on Facebook? If so, you can participate in an exciting fall photo scavenger hunt!

Around mid-September, the scavenger hunt will be posted on the park's Facebook page. Fans of the park are urged to spend some time outside as a family this fall and capture those magical fall moments. As you capture them, post them to the park's page. At the end of the contest period, fans of the page will have a week to "like" their favorite photos. The winners of each category will be highlighted in the Winter Nature Notes Newsletter. Good luck and have fun this fall!



New Camping Rates for the 2011

Camping Season (On Season Rates)

Basic Campsite- \$13.00

Electric Campsite- \$21.00

Electric/Water- \$23.00

Sewer/Electric/Water- \$26.00

\$2 discount for seniors and persons with disabilities.

*Note that at St. Francois State Park, we only have BASIC and ELECTRIC campsites. To make a reservation, call

1-877-422-6766.



Creature Feature

Hover Fly

(*Milesia virginiensis*)



An almost perfect mimic of a yellowjacket, this insect is actually a type of fly that is an important flower pollinator.

Did you know...

- They are seen from mid-summer to early fall, and are often mistaken for a bee or yellowjacket.
- They do not bite or sting.
- They are an important predator of aphids that can be destructive to garden plants and crops.
- They are an important flower pollinator. They are easy to photograph because they will actually sit on a flower long enough to get a shot.