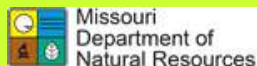


Spring 2011



## From the Naturalist



ST. FRANCOIS STATE PARK

# Nature Notes

In past issues of the *Nature Notes*, I have talked about the importance of getting kids “unplugged” and back out into nature. A nationwide movement started several years ago called “No Child Left Inside”, and it has really caught fire.

Communities, schools, states and even the federal government has taken notice of the growing disconnect between children and nature. Michelle Obama has the “Let’s Move” campaign and Missouri has Governor and First Lady Nixon’s “Children in Nature Challenge.” Many state agencies have similar campaigns such as Missouri State Park’s “Get Out and Play” campaign.

The Children in Nature Network, founded by Rich-



April is “Children in Nature Awareness” month

ard Louv (author of the book that started the movement, *Last Child in the Woods*) has declared April to be Children in Nature Awareness month. Throughout the month of April, agencies and communities will offer programs to encourage children to get outside and play in nature.

Here at St. Francois State Park, we will offer evening programs beginning on Saturday, April 16. Hikes and other outdoor activities will be offered as well-see the program schedule on page 2 for more information.

The city of Farmington has taken on the “Children in Nature Challenge”, and will have its first Children in Nature event on Saturday, April 30. The East Ozarks Audubon will host Farmington Family Day at Engler Park. Check out the Farmington Children in Nature Challenge page on Facebook for more information.

It’s April, spring is here-so get outside, get into nature and PLAY!

## Bluebell Bonanza

Every spring, parts of St. Francois State Park become awash in shades of blues and purples as the bluebells put on one of the most spectacular displays in the state.

A short walk down the Swimming Deer trail treats



you with a sea of bluish blooms as far as the eye

can see. It truly is a sight to behold, and it doesn’t last long.

The flowers began blooming early this year-around the first week of April. They will peak around April 10 and blooms will last about a week.

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### Volunteer Naturalists Needed!

*Do you enjoy working with people? Do you love nature and want to share it with others? Then we could use your help!*

- Park Interpreter (that means naturalist!) Jamie Hubert is looking for volunteers. We have several projects ongoing that we could use help with, such as: presenting programs, taking care of the wildflower garden, doing historical research or assisting with special events and surveys.
- Must be at least 18 years old. For more info, email Jamie at [Jamie.hubert@dnr.mo.gov](mailto:Jamie.hubert@dnr.mo.gov)

# Bats in Peril-Curse of the White Nose fungus

It sounds like the title from a cheesy B-movie, but this is the reality for one of nature's most important insect consumers. A recently discovered fungus called *Geomyces destructans*, or white-nose fungus, has ravaged bat colonies in 15 states-and is still spreading.

The fungus was discovered in a cave in New York in 2006. Since then, its rapid spread has been documented and frantically researched, but humans are so far powerless to stop it.

Like a scene from a horror movie, scientists visit caves in Pennsylvania once full of bats only to find that a cave that once had thousands of hibernating bats is now empty-the floor littered with the carcasses of these important insect predators.

The fungus attacks bats during hiberna-



tion when their metabolism is lowest. There are still studies ongoing to determine exactly what it does to the bats, but the most noticeable sign is a white powdery fungus on the nose and wings of infected bats. It causes them to behave erratically and wake up a lot. When a

hibernating bat wakes from its sleep, it uses a tremendous amount of energy. It reaches a point where the bat's fat stores are used up and they are literally starving to death by mid-winter. They emerge from their caves, desperate for food-but there is none. They fall to the snowy forest floor and starve to death.

More than a million bats have perished across the eastern United States, and it continues to spread. Researchers are frantically searching for a cure-but so far they haven't been successful. White nose was suspected in two locations in Missouri last April. Surveys are ongoing to determine if it has spread this year. Of our 12 species of bats in Missouri, 5 of them have been found with white nose in other states-a serious threat to nature's best insect predator.



## Where Would We Be Without Bats?

Some may think that losing bats would be no big deal-until you learn just how important these small mammals are to you.

In Missouri, our 12 species of bats are insectivorous-meaning they eat insects. Their diet consists of beetles, moths and a lot of mosquitoes. Bats can consume 1/3-1/2 of their body weight nightly, or 3,000-5,000 mosquitoes a *night*. That is a LOT of insects!

Missouri's 775,00 endangered grey bats

alone eat more than 223 **billion** bugs per year-or about 540 **TONS**.

Bat Conservation International, the leading research authority on bats based out of Austin, Texas, estimates that the more than one million bats already killed by white nose syndrome would have consumed just under 700,00 **tons** of insects each year. That equals the weight of about 175,000

elephants!

So what can we do? For now, many states have closed wild caves to reduce the potential spread of WNS from caver's clothes. If you do enter a cave, it is im-

portant to follow proper decontamination procedures for clothes and gear. For more information, visit <http://www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/>

*"The bats already killed by white nose syndrome would have consumed just under 700,000 insects per year..."*

## Year of the Bat

This year has been officially recognized as the "Year of the Bat" in an effort to spread awareness of their importance and the threats of white nose.

One of the most important things we can do to help bats is to educate ourselves and spread the word about how important they are. So for this program season, every first Saturday of the month will be "Bat Day" at St. Francois State Park. Bat

programs and activities will be the highlight of the day. Later in the summer, a special all-day event called "Bat Fest" will feature bat games, crafts and possibly even a visit by live bats! Keep an eye out on the park Facebook page and the summer edition of Nature Notes for more details as they emerge.



*This year is the "Year of the Bat" and St. Francois State Park is planning events to celebrate.*

St. Francois State Park is also excited to announce that the Halloween Happenings event will return this year! Mark your calendars for Saturday, October 22. In honor of the Year of the Bat, expect to see a bat-related theme for this year's Halloween event. (How appropriate, right?)

More details to come...

# April-May Interpretive Program Schedule

Date	Programs
Saturday, April 16	2 p.m. Hike to the Waterfall! (meet at Mooner's Hollow Trailhead) (Hike will be approximately 2 miles. Bring a camera for capturing wildflower photos!) 8 p.m. Owl Prowl
Saturday, April 23	2 p.m. Energy Olympics 8 p.m. Earth Day Jeopardy
Saturday, April 30	8 p.m. Awesome Amphibians!
Saturday, May 7	Boy Scout Day of Service-Thank the scouts in the park today for helping to make our park beautiful! 8 p.m. Bat Night: Bats in Peril
Saturday, May 14	2 p.m. Hike with a Naturalist: Mooner's Hollow Trail (Meet at Mooner's Hollow trailhead for this 2.7 mile hike) 8 p.m. Nature Jeopardy
Saturday, May 21 National Kids in Parks Day!	2 p.m. Hike with a Naturalist-Swimming Deer Trail (Meet at Swimming Deer trailhead for this 2.7 mile hike) 8 p.m. Spider Sniff

## It's TV time!

And no, I don't mean television. I mean **Turkey Vulture!**



One of the first signs that spring is here is the return of one of nature's most inter-

esting (and most disgusting) birds. While some remain during the winter, many will retreat to the southern states and return around mid-late February.

Turkey vultures are easily spotted as they circle in the sky. The best way to recognize them is to look at the wings as they fly-they hold them in a V shape. If you are lucky enough to see one up close while they are perched, you'll notice a bird that certainly will never win any beauty contests.

The red, naked head of the turkey vulture may not be pretty, but it does serve a purpose. Turkey vultures are carrion eaters, meaning they eat dead animals. Often, in order to get to the meat, they have to stick their entire head into the dead carcass. By having no feathers on its head, the turkey vulture is able to stay relatively clean and disease-free.

You will often hear turkey vultures referred to as "buzzards", but this is a misnomer. A buzzard is a term used to describe a hawk in Europe. When the English colonists arrived in North America and saw turkey vultures (which they do not have in England), they probably started using the familiar term buzzard.

If they were to win an award, it would be "best smeller", because the turkey vulture is one of the only birds with a keen sense of smell!

## Why Do They Do That?!

**Vomit:** Turkey vultures are known to throw up when threatened. The stomach acid is so strong, it will take the paint off your car. That and the smell is enough to chase off any would-be predator.

**Pee on himself:** This serves two purposes. One, vultures cannot sweat. By urinating on its legs, the bird can cool himself. Two, any bacteria that may be on his legs after stepping on his meal will be killed by the strong acid in the urine.

**Fly in circles:** Contrary to popular belief, turkey vultures don't circle over dead or dying animals. These birds ride on currents of warm rising air called thermals. They are nature's best gliders-often riding from one thermal to another for six hours without ever flapping its wings!



# May-June Interpretive Program Schedule

Date	Programs
<b>Saturday, May 28</b> <b>MEMORIAL WEEKEND</b>	2 p.m. What Scat is That?  8 p.m. Home is Where the Dung is-The Life of a Dung Beetle
<b>Sunday, May 29</b> <b>MEMORIAL WEEKEND</b>	2 p.m. Explorer Hour-Recycling Roundup  8 p.m. Nature's Garbage Disposal-Turkey Vultures
<b>Saturday, June 4</b>	2 p.m. Explorer Hour-Bat Games  8 p.m. Bats: Myth and Reality
<b>Saturday, June 11</b>	2 p.m. Herpetology Hour-Snakes  8 p.m. Return of the Mountain Lion (a chat with Missouri Department of Conservation Agent Derrick Gant)
<b>Saturday, June 18</b>	2 p.m. Explorer Hour  8 p.m. Owl Prowl
<b>Saturday, June 25</b>	2 p.m. Explorer Hour  8 p.m. Nature at Night: Night Hike

## Signs of Spring

### April

- During the first week: look for blue-bells, rose verbenas and birds-foot violet in bloom.
- During the second week: look for morel mushrooms, listen for American toads calling and say goodbye as Dark-eyed Juncos depart for their Canadian breeding grounds.
- During the third week: Dogwood and columbine starts to bloom, listen for whip-poor-wills, put out your hummingbird feeders, drive slowly and watch for turtles crossing the roads.
- During the fourth week: Mayapples begin blooming, indigo buntings and dickcissels return and warbler migration is at its peak, and turn on your porch light and look for June bugs.

### May

- During the first week: Jack-in-the-pulpits, Ohio buckeyes and hawthorns bloom, skunks and raccoons bear young, and the Eta Aquarid meteor shower peaks (May 5)
- During the second week: watch for common nighthawks, honeybees begin swarming, deer start fawning this week
- During the third week: start watching for lightning bugs and listening for the calls of Blanchard's cricket frogs, say goodbye to purple finches as they migrate north, and hello to chiggers for the next four months.
- During the fourth week: coneflowers start blooming, young beavers, coyotes and groundhogs leave their dens and deer begin to grow antlers

### June

- During the first week: Lady's-slipper orchids bloom, turtles begin laying eggs and gooseberries start to ripen.
- During the second week: Butterfly weed, trumpet creeper and elderberry begins to bloom, wild turkey eggs hatch and catfish fry leave the nests
- During the third week: Northern bobwhite hatching is at its peak, watch for fledgling birds, bobcat kittens are born and bullfrog calling is at its peak
- During the fourth week: Summer officially begins, but still look for American toadlets leaving water, northern water snakes basking near water, and listen as dog-day cicadas begin their summer serenade.



## ST. FRANCIOS STATE PARK

8920 U.S. Highway 67 North  
Bonne Terre, MO 63628  
Phone: 573-358-2173  
[www.mostateparks.com/stfrancois.htm](http://www.mostateparks.com/stfrancois.htm)



GET OUT AND PLAY  
IN MISSOURI STATE PARKS!



Find us on Facebook!

## Take a hike with a naturalist

In May, there will be two opportunities to take a hike alongside the park naturalist. These guided hikes will give you information about the park's resources and an opportunity to ask questions.

On Saturday, May 14, the naturalist will lead the group on the Mooner's Hollow Trail. The hike will begin at the trailhead near Shelter #1, and will wind its way along the Coonville Creek Valley-once a hideout for Civil War bushwhackers and Prohibition moonshiners. It winds through bottomland forest, open woodlands and wildflower-splashed glades.

On Saturday, May 21, hikers can join us for a hike on the Swimming Deer Trail. This trail begins near the river and winds its way into the open forest that has been restored through fire. An old sawmill cabin and mine shaft hint at the parks cultural history.

Both trails are 2.7 miles long and moderate in difficulty. The hike is not recommended for children under 10.

## 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



American Woodcock  
(*Scolopax minor*)

A shorebird that lives in forests, the American woodcock is seldom seen but can be heard while performing displays for females

### Did you know...

- The woodcock is actually a shorebird-that doesn't live near water!
- They spend their time probing the ground for earthworms.
- The male performs a spectacular display called "peenting". He flies upward in a large spiral, and at around 300 feet, he dives down in a zig-zag pattern while chirping. He lands softly near a female and repeats the display until he's won her heart.
- Is sometimes called a "timberdoodle"