

## NATURE NOTES



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### From the Naturalist

Happy summer everyone!

This spring has been a very active one at St. Francois State Park. In early May, the park experienced flooding that caused us to close the park for two days. While it was very muddy, park staff worked hard to get everything cleaned up. The bridge over Coonville Creek at the Mooner's Hollow trailhead suffered damage, but it is still passable.

We expect it will be a busy summer this year at St. Francois. Sadly, because of the economic downturn, the budget has been reduced this year. You'll notice that programs are only going to be offered on Saturdays this summer. While that is regretful, I'm doing everything I can to provide visitors with the highest quality programs possible.

A new event to watch for—on June 13, we'll be diving into our history with a visit from Civil War bushwhacker Sam Hildebrand. He will lead visitors on a bushwhacking adventure through the park—make sure you avoid the soldiers looking for you!

Finally, I'm happy to announce that we will be hosting the **Halloween Happenings** event on Saturday, October 24 at 7:00 p.m. See details on page 4. If you have any questions about upcoming programs or events, contact the park office. We hope to see you at the park soon!

*Jamie Hubert—Park Naturalist*

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#### New Camping Rates for the 2009 Camping Season

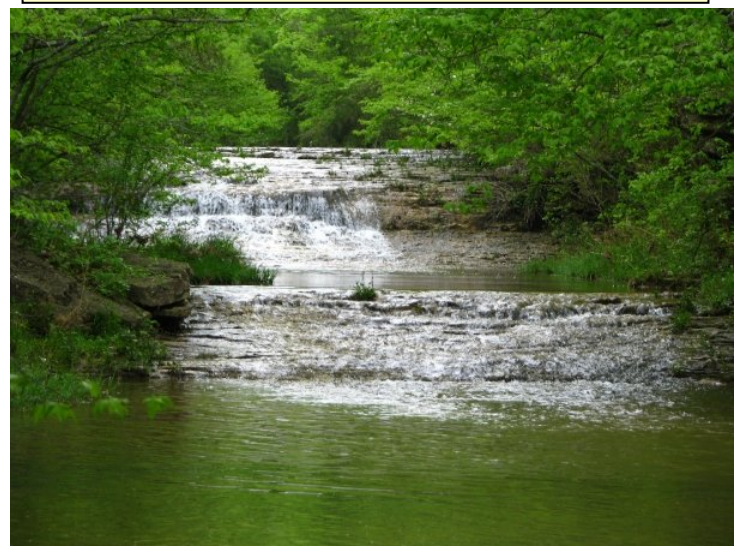
Basic Campsite- \$11.00

Electric Campsite- \$19.00

Electric/Water- \$21.00

Sewer/Electric/Water- \$24.00

\*Note that at St. Francois, we only have BASIC and ELECTRIC campsites. To make a reservation, call 1-877-422-6766.



Waterfall that can be seen along Mooner's Hollow trail.



## Copperhead and Cottonmouth Confusion

Missouri is home to 40 different species of snakes, of which only five are venomous—the timber rattlesnake, copperhead, western pygmy rattlesnake, cottonmouth and eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

Missouri's venomous snakes can be identified by their diamond-shaped heads, vertical pupils and heat-sensing pits on the head. Of course, you don't want to bend down close enough to look for those features! The venomous snakes in Missouri are easy to identify, if you know what you are looking for. Of those, the copperhead and cottonmouth are the two that are most often confused with other harmless snakes (and then needlessly killed). By knowing how to tell the difference between a harmless snake and the venomous snakes, you can feel better knowing for sure that what you are looking at isn't a venomous snake.

Copperheads are the most common of Missouri's five venomous snakes. They are secretive and rarely aggressive if left alone. Copperheads are easily identified by their rusty red color and markings that are shaped like hourglasses, or Hershey Kisses® when viewed from the side. They are most often confused with prairie kingsnakes, red milksnakes, midland watersnake and Great Plains ratsnakes.

Cottonmouths (or Water Moccasins) are found around waterways in southern Missouri. The northernmost counties in its range are Crawford, Washington and St. Francois. They do have markings, but most are so dark they are hard to see. Their body is very stocky, and when threatened, they

will show the bright white inside of their mouth—hence the name “cottonmouth.”




When threatened, the cottonmouth will place its head in the center of its coils and open its mouth wide, exposing the bright white inside of the mouth.

There are many species of harmless watersnakes in Missouri that are confused with the venomous cottonmouth. The easiest way to tell is by looking at body shape. If the snake is long and slender, it is not a cottonmouth. A cottonmouth is a very thick and stocky snake. Also, watch how the snake swims. A cottonmouth will swim with its head held high above the water, exposing its back. A harmless watersnake's head will be just barely above the surface, with most of its body underwater.

Use the guide on page 3 to see which snakes are most often confused with these two venomous snakes.

## Critter Corner

### Spotted Skunk



This small skunk will do a handstand before it sprays! Spotted skunks are endangered in Missouri-so if you ever see one, report it to the Department of Conservation.





Copperheads are rusty red in color, and have markings shaped like hourglasses, or Hershey Kisses® when viewed from the side. No other snake in Missouri has markings in that shape. They also have a stocky body and that diamond-shaped head. So watch out for the Hershey Kiss® snake!



Prairie kingsnakes are most often confused for copperheads. They are grayish brown (not rusty red) and the markings are not shaped like hourglasses. This is a very docile, nonvenomous snake. They will eat mice and even other snakes, so this is a good snake to have around!



Great Plains ratsnakes are a medium-sized snake found in central Missouri. They are grayish in color with brown markings. Their belly is white with black "checkerboard" markings, which copperheads do not have. This is another docile snake that is completely harmless.



While the Red Milksnake is red in color (bright red, not coppery red), this small snake looks nothing like a copperhead. The markings are not hourglass-shaped, and they have white stripes along the body. This snake is harmless and very secretive, so you will rarely encounter one.

## Western Cottonmouth Identification



The cottonmouth has markings, but usually they are so dark, it is hard to see the markings-unless it's a juvenile. They are a very thick, stocky snake often found near water. When threatened, they will open their mouth exposing the bright white inside, which is how they got their name, "cottonmouth". This snake is also called the water moccasin (they aren't two different snakes)



The northern watersnake is common throughout Missouri and is probably the one most often confused with the cottonmouth. It is easy to tell these two snakes apart, though. First look at markings-the watersnake is grey or dark brown with dark bands, while the cottonmouth is generally black. Then look at body shape-the northern watersnake is long and slender while the cottonmouth is very thick and stocky. Like its name suggests, this snake lives near water.



The black ratsnake is dark in color like the cottonmouth, and even has a white stripe near the mouth. These snakes can be found in the woods near streams and rivers, but also in drier areas as well. The big difference between these two snakes is size-the cottonmouth will be 30-42 inches, while the black ratsnake can reach 72 inches long! Also, the black ratsnake is long and thin, not thick and stocky like the cottonmouth.



## “Halloween Happenings” event scheduled for Oct 24, 2009

For the past two years, St. Francois State Park has been fortunate to be able to host the “Halloween Happenings” event in October. This event was traditionally held at Johnson’s Shut-Ins State Park, but after the park’s closing, park naturalist Janet Price took the event “on the road”.

This event has become a huge success for St. Francois, and we are pleased to announce that the event will be held at the park again this year.

“Halloween Happenings” features a dreadful Halloween vaudeville at the amphitheater, followed by a trail walk to meet some “creatures of the night”. This event is family-friendly—the only thing scary about it might be our jokes! The vaudeville features skits, songs, jokes and general goofiness, and the trail walk includes stationed stops to meet the creatures.

While the format each year remains the same, the theme will change. Last year was “The Year of the Frog”, so we had a frog theme to spread the awareness of amphibian decline. You’ll also meet new creatures on the “Creatures of the Night” walk. We’ve not yet chosen this year’s theme, but it is sure to make you *howl* with laughter.

More details will come out on this event as it draws closer. **This event was so popular last year, we are requiring reservations for the “Creatures of the Night” trail walk portion of the event.** To register for the walk or to volunteer to help with the event, contact park naturalist Jamie Hubert at (573) 358-2173. Duties can be as simple as helping us to decorate or being a trail leader. If you are *really* brave, you can even get up on stage with us!

So mark your calendars for Saturday, October 24, 2009 at 7 p.m. and we’ll see you at “Halloween Happenings”!

## Enjoy tasty treats at the “Wild Edible Buffet”

On July 25, join the park naturalist as we cook up our tastiest program yet. The “Wild Edible Buffet” will tickle your taste buds with treats such as Queen Anne’s Lace fritters, sassafras tea, and blackberry jelly. Each year we find new recipes to share.

Join us for the “Wild Edible Buffet” on Saturday, July 25 at 8 p.m.



Queen Anne’s Lace and Blackberries are two of nature’s finest edibles.

## Kids Zone

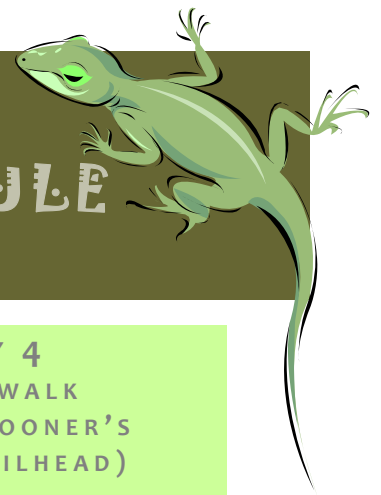


Hey, kids! Have you ever tried to catch a Fence lizard? They are FAST! This lizard has a lot of bigger animals that want to eat it, but it has a cool way to escape. If a predator tries to catch it, the lizard will drop its tail to get away. But don’t worry—in a few weeks he will grow a brand new tail.

Pretty cool, huh?



# ST. FRANCOIS STATE PARK INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM SCHEDULE



## SATURDAY, JUNE 6

2PM: THE GREAT  
MIGRATION CHALLENGE!

8PM: WHAT A BUNCH OF  
BIRD BRAINS!

## SATURDAY, JUNE 13

2PM: SNAKE CRAFT

8PM: TRIALS OF A  
SNAKE'S LIFE

## SATURDAY, JUNE 20

2PM: PREDATOR OR PREY?

8:30PM: NATURE'S NIGHT  
SHIFT: NIGHT HIKE\*

## SATURDAY, JUNE 27

2PM: AMAZING ANIMAL  
ADAPTATIONS

8PM: OWL PROWL\*

## SATURDAY, JULY 4

2PM: CREEK WALK  
(MEET AT MOONER'S  
HOLLOW TRAILHEAD)

8PM: SPIDER SNIFF

## SATURDAY, JULY 11

2PM: HERPETOLOGY HOUR  
(LIVE SNAKES!)

8PM: AWESOME  
AMPHIBIANS!

## SATURDAY, JULY 18

1PM: TOWNBALL

3PM: CLOTHES OF THE  
CIVIL WAR AND CANNON  
DEMONSTRATION

6:30PM: BUSHWACKED!

## SATURDAY, JULY 25

2PM: WILD EDIBLE RECIPE  
BOOK CRAFT

8PM: WILD EDIBLE BUFFET

### \* Bring a flashlight

- 🌿 All programs meet at the Amphitheater in the campground unless otherwise specified.
- 🌿 For the Creek Walk on June 20 and July 4, wear water shoes. For their safety, children under 12 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- 🌿 On July 18, Townball (an early form of baseball) will be played in the large field in the campground.



Missouri Department of Natural Resources