

Prairie State Park's

Tallgrass Tribune

Summer 2018

Missouri State Parks

Prairie State Park's Mission Statement

To preserve and interpret the largest remaining example of original tallgrass prairie in Missouri. The park further provides healthy outdoor recreation for all visitors. The park is dedicated to sustaining a large tallgrass prairie in its native form for future generations to learn from and enjoy.

Elk Removed from Park

Katy Holmer

This spring Missouri State Parks staff made the difficult decision to remove the elk herd from Prairie State Park. To better understand this decision, it is important to know the history of the park's elk reintroduction program.

In 1993, an initial group of eight elk were brought to the park from Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota. Originally, the animals were introduced to the park with the idea of returning an important grazer species to the prairie ecosystem. But despite good intentions and high expectations, the new elk program faced some early setbacks, beginning with the escape of three animals during their first week in the park. Then in 1995, the entire herd escaped and remained "at large" for nearly five years. During this time the park had to reimburse a local farmer for crop damage the elk had caused.

In an attempt to locate and capture the notoriously elusive animals, park staff used helicopter surveys, a baiting program, and installation of tall, woven-wire fencing in the new elk unit. Seven of the elk were eventually captured when they were discovered hanging out near the park's cattle guard, and by 2000 all of the elk were finally back in the park. The last animal from the original 1993 herd died in 2011, and no new animals have been introduced to the herd since 1993.

The park's elk program faced another challenge when Missouri Senate Bill No. 109 was enacted in 1996, identifying elk as domestic livestock. To comply with the new law, Missouri State Parks staff worked with the state veterinarian and the Missouri Department of Agriculture on a comprehensive health plan for the elk, including annual veterinary checks, vaccinations, and disease testing.

Due to the elk's history of escaping and in light of the new health standards, the elk were relegated to a 260-acre unit, with access to another 45 acres when the bison weren't in the corral area. To allow the elk to naturally expand their territory in the park, we would have to increase the number of the cattle guards and add 8-foot woven-wire fence throughout the park, all requiring huge increases in cost and manpower. Further, the tall fences would make it difficult for deer to move in and out of the park and they encourage the growth of invasive plants, such as bush honeysuckle. Since no trails run through the elk unit and with the animals' elusive nature, very few visitors ever got to see them. Further, when one of the elk would die, park staff weren't always able to discover it in time to determine the cause of death.

After considering all of the issues, Missouri State Parks staff ultimately determined there was no benefit to maintaining an elk herd in the park. We determined that the best solution, both for the animals and the park in general, was to sell the entire herd together. After seeking bids for the elk, the sale was completed and the animals were moved from the park on May 9. We are now working to remove the elk fencing and restore the park's original open prairie.

~Mystery Plant ~ Shooting star

Jerry Decker correctly identified the mystery plant from the spring issue as a shooting star. *Dodecatheon meadia* is one of the showier spring flowers. Most of the ones here in the park are white, though they can be shades of pink as well.

In the spring, the basal leaves are the first signs of life and are bright green. After they are established, the flowering stem begins its skyward ascent, growing up to 24 inches. Atop the stem a cluster of flower buds points straight up before taking a downward turn. This is when the petals open and peel back, revealing a flower that looks like it has a beak pointing to the ground.

This flower is a trickster, though. It offers pollen, but no nectar! Queen bumble bees obtain the pollen through “buzz pollination.” They vibrate their thorax so quickly that the pollen is shaken off by the sound waves.

Follow the link to learn about buzz pollination.
<https://www.pbs.org/video/deep-look-bumblebee/>



~Mystery Item~

I am a close up of what?



Send your answer to prairiestatepark@dnr.mo.gov and the person with the first correct answer will be acknowledged in the next newsletter.



Dung beetles.

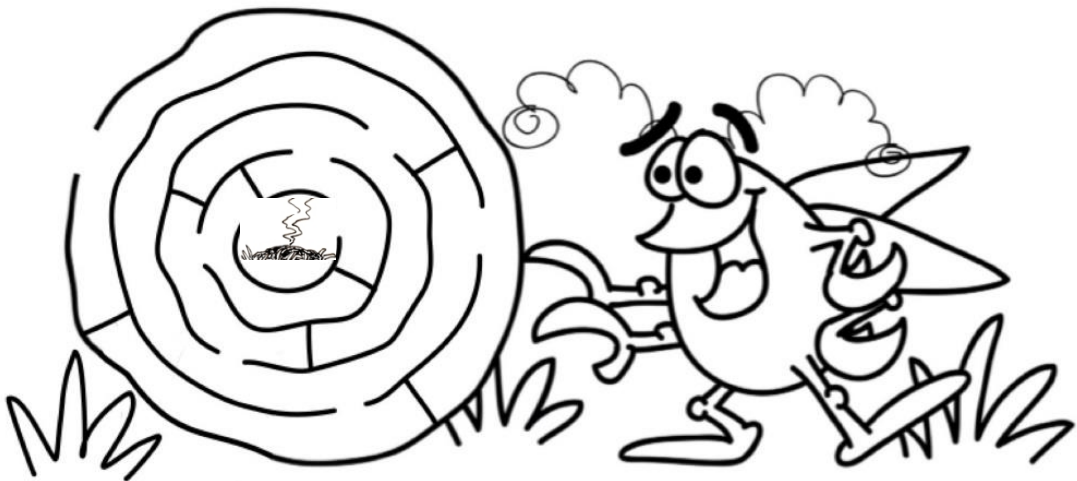
Hey Kids!

Dung beetles are important for nutrient recycling on the prairie. Learn about them and help Doug get some food.

Doug the Dung Beetle Activity Sheet

There are three types of dung beetles - roller, dweller, tunneller. Their names give you a clue as to what they do with dung when they find it.

Roller	That's Doug. He likes to make a small dung ball and roll it away to a safe nesting spot
Dweller	They like to dig into the dung and set up camp inside - wall to wall food!
Tunneller	They dig a tunnel under the dung, taking the food with them.



Help Doug find his way to the centre of the dung ball maze

For more free Doug activities visit www.dougthedungbeetle.com

2018 Calendar of Events

~Activities will meet at the Regal Tallgrass Prairie Nature Center ~

Hug a Herp Day

June 23, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Learn about two of the most misunderstood animal groups, reptiles and amphibians, in this open house event. Learn about snakes, lizards, turtles, frogs, and toads while having the chance to see and touch some up close. Crafts and activities for all!

*Bison Hike

July 7, 10 a.m.

Summer is here, bison calves are exploring their new world, and the prairie looks amazing! Meet at the Regal Tallgrass Prairie Nature Center. Don't forget your cameras! Be prepared for a two-mile hike over uneven terrain. We recommend bringing water, snacks, a hat and sunscreen, insect repellent, and wearing sturdy shoes. Dress for the weather, but shorts are not recommended. **Call 417-843-6711 to register by July 3.**

*Explorer Day Camp –Who gives a Hoot?

July 13, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

This day is devoted to a supreme group of nocturnal predators, owls. Learn about their habits, life history, and what makes them tick! You will dissect an owl pellet, learn about Missouri's species of owls, and more in this event. Successfully complete the day's activities and an Explorer Patch will be awarded! **Call 417-843-6711 to register by July 6.**

*Bison Hike

August 4, 10 a.m.

Is the heat of summer starting to get you down? The bison can handle it much better than we do. Get energized out on the prairie! We will go and see how they manage the heat. Meet at the Regal Tallgrass Prairie Nature Center. Don't forget your cameras! Be prepared for a two-mile hike over uneven terrain. We recommend bringing water, snacks, a hat and sunscreen, insect repellent, and wearing sturdy shoes. Dress for the weather, but shorts are not recommended. **Please call 417-843-6711 to register by August 1.**

*Sunflowers a la Petite Prairie

August 25, 1 p.m.

Enjoy an afternoon of fun as we explore the world of Vincent Van Gogh as you create your own masterpiece. This program is for the kid in all of us. **Class size is limited to 25 artists and preregistration is required. Please call 417-843-6711 by August 11.**

*Bison Hike

September 8, 10 a.m.

Fall is nearly upon us, and the prairie is reaching its full height. Some grasses and wildflowers reach more than eight feet tall - a bison could even be overlooked in such vegetation! The asters and goldenrods are apparent. Come out to the park for a guided bison hike to see what the prairie has to offer this time of year. Don't forget your cameras! Be prepared for a two-mile hike over uneven terrain. Bringing water, snacks, a hat and sunscreen, and wearing sturdy shoes is recommended. Binoculars will be useful in looking at bison and other wildlife. Dress for the weather; but shorts are not recommended. **Please call 417-843-6711 to register by September 1.**

Prairie Jubilee

September 29, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

This is our signature special event. Come out and see how cultural and natural history shaped the prairie. Activities include:

- Tours to see the bison
- Entertainment by The Fishin' Magicians
- Guided bird hikes
- Twine making
- Reptiles and amphibians
- Native plant sale
- Pollinators
- Bison chip throwing contest
- Pulled-bison lunch for a small fee

Nature Bingo

10 a.m. on the fourth Saturday of the month:

June 30
July 28
August 25
September 22



Check out our Facebook page for photos, interactive posts, information on upcoming programs and events.
Give us a "like".

<https://www.facebook.com/PrairieStatePark>

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