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Cape Nature Center Snake Gives Virgin Births

SEPTEMBER 07TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

Cape Nature Center Snake Gives Virgin Births

Cape Girardeau, Missouri - The Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) Cape Girardeau Conservation Nature Center reports a resident female Yellow-bellied watersnake at the center is likely reproducing without contribution from a male. Intern Kyle Morton, who cares for the snakes at the center, didn't know what he was looking at when he went to clean the snake cage one morning.

"I thought, 'what joker put tomatoes in here for the snake'," Morton said.

It wasn't tomatoes, though; as Morton examined the round, soft, egg-like structures, he realized they were freshly laid membranes from the female snake.

"She had acted normal other than not eating for several weeks," Morton said. "So it definitely took me by surprise."

Morton reported his find to one of the naturalists at the center, who verified what it was. The snake did the same thing last summer, giving birth to two now healthy year-old watersnakes. Naturalist Jordi Brostoski found the membranes last summer, when it first happened.

"At first I thought the snake had regurgitated something until I looked at it closer," Brostoski said. "That's when I realized what had happened and then the hatchling snakes surprised me by slithering under the bedding in the cage."

According to Jeff Briggler, MDC herpetologist, although it's not heard of often, virgin births can be common in some species, through a process called parthenogenesis.

Parthenogenesis is a type of asexual reproduction in which offspring develops from unfertilized eggs. It occurs in many insect orders, most commonly with bees, wasps and stick insects and is also found in some species of fish, amphibians, birds and reptiles, but not in mammals.

"There are many types of parthenogenesis in which I will not go into great detail," Briggler said. "In layman's terms, parthenogenesis is a mode of asexual reproduction in which the offspring (babies) are produced by females without genetic contribution of a male."

Briggler said parthenogenesis seems to occur in both captive and wild situations and it doesn't seem to impact the health of the female snake. Additionally, this species of snake has not been documented as participants in parthenogenesis.

"For many years, it was believed that such birth in captivity was due to sperm storage," Briggler explained. "However, genetics is proving a different story."

This snake has been a resident at the nature center for nearly eight years, which is likely too long of a time for this to be a result of sperm storage.

Briggler said parthenogenesis is a common occurrence in many lizard species. Published accounts of this form of reproduction in snakes have included the Brahminy blind snake, Timber rattlesnake, Copperheads, Cottonmouths, Burmese python, Rainbow boa, Common boa, Green anaconda, several gartersnake species, Aruba island rattlesnake and Afarura filesnake. As more genetic work is conducted, Briggler believes it may turn out that parthenogenesis is more widespread than scientists have thought in the past.

One interesting result of the process is that in the majority of the species that participate in parthenogenesis, the offspring produced are all male, Briggler said.

"There is always a high proportion of infertile eggs due to chromosome combination, but a few can be successful and hatch if the mother has a dissimilar sex chromosome (ZW) compared to the male with copies of the ZZ chromosome," he said.

In this case, the female ZW chromosome will produce egg cell with ZZ and WW via meiosis. The ZZ combination can form a male embryo cell that can begin to divide and

produce a snake. The WW chromosome is not viable.

The Yellow-bellied watersnake’s offspring didn’t survive this year, possibly due to the combination of chromosomes. However, last year’s two young ones are thriving and serving as educational reptiles for the Cape Nature Center.

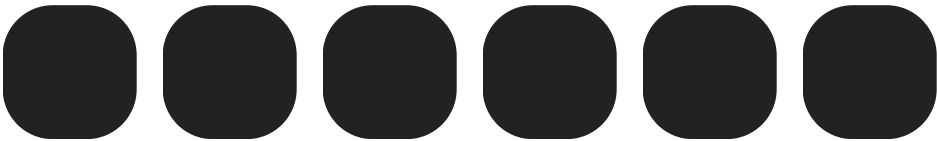
The Cape Nature Center is located inside Cape Girardeau's North County Park, just east of Interstate 55 (Exit 99) and Kingshighway (State Highway 61). More information about the center can be found at mdc.mo.gov/CapeNatureCenter.

Photo by Candice Davis.

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New Changes for 2016-2017 Deer Regulations

AUGUST 20TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

New Changes for 2016-2017 Deer Regulations

Approved changes include shortening November and antlerless portions and expanding late youth portion. Potential changes include allowing crossbows during archery seasons and reducing antlered deer limit.

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – The Missouri Conservation Commission set season dates and limits for the 2016-2017 fall deer season and gave initial approval to several deer-hunting regulation changes proposed by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) at the Commission's Aug. 19 meeting in Jefferson City.

Approved changes to fall deer season structure for 2016-2017 include:

Maintain current timing of the November portion and reduce the length from 11 to 9 days.

Expand the late youth portion to three days beginning the first Friday after Thanksgiving.

Reduce the length of the antlerless portion from 12 to 3 days and begin on the first Friday in December.

Eliminate the urban zones portion.

Proposed regulation changes to fall deer season structure for 2016-2017 include:

Allow crossbows as a legal method during the archery deer and turkey seasons.

Allow the use of crossbows during the fall firearms turkey season.

Reduce the limit of antlered deer from 3 to 2 during the combined archery and firearms deer hunting season, with no more than one antlered deer taken during the firearms deer hunting season.

Remove the hunting method exemption requirement related to crossbows.

Missouri's rule-making process includes a 30-day public comment period. Comments related to the proposed regulation changes can be submitted online to the Conservation Department from Oct. 2-31 at mdc.mo.gov/node/24141. Full verbiage of the proposed amendments will be posted on the webpage after Sept. 15.

The Commission will make its final decision on these proposed changes at its December meeting. With final approval, the regulation changes would become effective in March 2016 and implemented for the 2016-2017 deer hunting seasons.

The Department is also working to simplify conservation area deer-hunting regulations by limiting methods and use of firearms and archery antlerless permits. To see the list of conservation areas with proposed changes to hunting methods and to provide comments, visit the MDC website at mdc.mo.gov/node/18891 from Sept. 1 to Nov. 30. The webpage will not be available until Sept. 1.

The Department will also continue to gather input from citizens on a variety of deer hunting-related topics, including nonresident permits and prices, through public surveys and its website in early 2016.

When formulating recommendations for these regulation changes, the Conservation Department used deer hunter surveys, landowner surveys, archery-hunter observation surveys, deer population simulations, biological data, harvest summaries, and public input gathered from 22 public open houses held around the state and about 11,800 public comments received at the public meetings and online.

“The goal of the Conservation Department's deer management program is to use science-based wildlife management combined with public input to maintain deer population levels throughout the state that provide quality recreational opportunities while minimizing human-deer conflicts,” said MDC Deer Biologist Jason Sumners. “As deer populations in Missouri have changed over the last 75 years, so have our management strategies. In modifying the hunting season structure, our aim is to achieve a deer population that is biologically and socially acceptable while also promoting hunter participation, recruitment, and retention.”

Missouri offers some of the best deer hunting in the country, and deer hunting is an important part of many Missourians' lives and family traditions. Deer hunting is also an important economic driver in Missouri and gives a \$1 billion annual boost to the state and

local economies.

2016-2017 DEER HUNTING SEASON DATES

Archery Season

Sept. 15 - Nov. 11, 2016, and

Nov. 21, 2016 - Jan. 15, 2017

Firearms Season

Early Youth Portion: Oct. 29 - 30, 2016

November Portion: Nov. 12 - 20, 2016

Late Youth Portion: Nov. 25 - 27, 2016

Antlerless Portion: Dec. 2 - 4, 2016

Alternative Methods Portion: Dec. 24, 2016 - Jan. 3, 2017

REASONS FOR REGULATION CHANGES

REDUCING NOVEMBER PORTION LENGTH

Regarding maintaining the current timing of the November portion and reducing the length to nine days, MDC Deer Biologist Jason Sumners explained that over the last two decades deer hunter numbers and deer harvest opportunities have increased substantially while the deer population has stabilized or been reduced in many parts of Missouri so additional harvest opportunities are no longer necessary to meet desired deer population goals.

“The final two days of the November portion of the firearms deer season have traditionally been the two days with the lowest hunter harvest and number of hunting trips,” said Sumners. “Reducing the November portion by two days will not result in a dramatic decrease in harvest or hunting opportunities. This one regulatory component, when combined with other changes, will help to stabilize and increase deer populations in some areas.”

EXPANDING LATE YOUTH SEASON

Sumners explained that the current late December or early January timing of the late youth portion has resulted in low participation and low success. Expanding the length to three days and adjusting the timing to the weekend after Thanksgiving should increase participation and success as a result of better deer activity and weather conditions in late November compared to the current timing.

“Hunter recruitment and retention is an important component in maintaining Missouri’s hunting heritage and our ability to manage deer populations in the future,” Sumners said.

REDUCING LENGTH OF ANTLERLESS PORTION

Regarding reducing the length of the antlerless portion to three days and beginning on the first Friday in December, Sumners explained that the deer population in most of Missouri is currently at or below population goals so the additional antlerless-harvest opportunities are no longer necessary to meet desired deer population goals.

“Shortening the antlerless portion is a compromise to maintain some additional hunting opportunities and allow for additional antlerless harvest where necessary,” Sumners said. “The increase in the number of deer hunting days over the last two decades as a result of the creation of early and late youth portions, and the expansion of November, antlerless, and alternative methods portions has created conflicts between deer hunters and other outdoor users such as small game hunters. Therefore, the reduction is a compromise that is acceptable to most firearms deer hunters and will reduce conflicts that occur between deer hunters and other outdoor users due to the length of the current deer hunting seasons.”

ELIMINATING URBAN ZONES

Sumners explained that eliminating the urban zones portion will simplify the deer season structure and will not jeopardize progress towards effective urban deer management that has occurred in many communities across the state.

“The urban zones portion was implemented as one tool to address issues associated with overabundant urban deer populations,” Sumners said. “However, additional firearms hunting opportunities in urban zones do little to manage deer populations where the ability to use firearms is limited. The majority of harvest during the urban zones portion occurs in the most rural areas and does not ensure adequate deer harvest in the locations where urban deer conflicts occur.”

ALLOWING CROSSBOWS DURING ARCHERY SEASON

Sumners explained that allowing crossbows as a legal method during the archery deer and turkey season will provide additional opportunities for young hunters and prolong participation for older hunters while not significantly increasing the harvest.

“Physical limitations of young hunters delay their entry into archery hunting and physical limitations of older archery hunters result in their declining participation,” Sumners said. “Our challenge is to balance contrasting hunter opinions with the desire to provide

maximum hunting opportunities while also responsibly managing Missouri's deer population. We have received an increasing number of requests to expand the archery season to include crossbows. We expect that the inclusion of crossbows will increase the harvest during the archery season, but do not expect it to result in a significant increase in total deer harvest."

ALLOWING CROSSBOWS DURING FALL TURKEY FIREARMS

Sumners explained that allowing the use of crossbows during the fall firearms turkey season would be consistent with method allowances for other firearms hunting seasons and spring turkey season.

"The Department has tended to allow all lesser hunting methods during firearms hunting seasons so it is natural to allow crossbows during the fall firearms turkey season," Sumners said.

REDUCING ANTLERED DEER LIMIT

Sumners explained that reducing the antlered deer limit stems from an increasing desire of hunters to see more bucks in older age classes.

"We considered a number of regulation changes, including pushing back the opening of the November portion of the firearms season and limiting hunters to one buck during the combined archery and firearms hunting season," Sumners said. "However, results from our archery and firearms hunter surveys showed little support for those changes. Therefore, reducing the limit for antlered deer from three to two during the combined archery and firearms deer hunting season, with no more than one antlered deer taken during the firearms deer hunting season, is supported by many hunters, and a step in the right direction."

REMOVING HUNTING METHOD EXEMPTION RELATED TO CROSSBOWS

Sumners explained that allowing crossbows during archery seasons will make the crossbow medical exemption no longer necessary.

SIMPLIFYING AREA REGULATIONS

Sumners explained that simplifying various conservation area regulations by limiting methods and use of firearms and archery antlerless permits would both increase hunter satisfaction and give area managers the ability to adjust regulations to adapt to current deer population conditions.

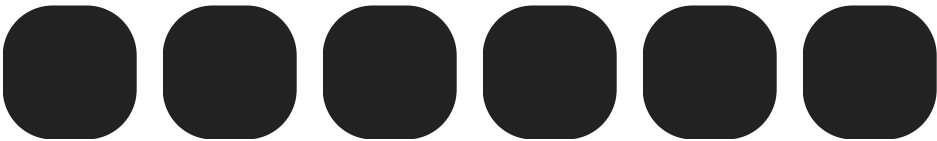
"We continue to strive to manage deer numbers at desirable levels while providing

diverse deer hunting opportunities for the public,” Sumners said. “The current set of deer hunting options on conservation areas can be confusing and do not allow managers to adapt regulations to changing deer populations. As a result, deer hunters on public land generally have lower success rates, perceive lower deer numbers, and tend to rate their hunting experiences lower than hunters on private land.”

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Perseid Meteor Shower Tonight

AUGUST 11TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

Perseid Meteor Shower Tonight

You're in luck — it's a particularly good year for viewing the Perseid meteor shower, which peaks this week and is widely considered to be the best annual shooting star show.

- [Meteor shower calendar](#)
- [Meteors and night skies: Photography tips and tricks](#)

"It is usually the strongest one of the year, so you see more meteors per minute than other meteor showers," says J. Randy Attwood, executive director of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.

"This is the one in the year where I would say that it would be worth someone's while to make an effort to see it."

The best times to watch it are expected to be after midnight on Tuesday (early Wednesday morning) and Wednesday (early Thursday morning.)

This year is better than most for viewing the Perseids, as Aug. 14 is a new moon, so there will be no "light pollution" in the form of moonlight to wash out the fainter meteors.

Here are some tips for catching the most falling stars:

Go someplace dark

If you're up at the cottage or camping, you should "definitely" look for this meteor shower, Attwood says.

"If you can get outside the city, the darker the sky the better."

NASA says if you're somewhere with a dark sky, you can expect up to 100 meteors per hour at the very peak of the meteor shower. That may include some particularly bright ones known as fireballs that the Perseids are known for.

Attwood says it's more typical to see a meteor every couple of minutes or 25 to 30 per hour during the peak of the Perseids, although you may only see one every hour or two if you're in an urban area like Toronto that's flooded with artificial light.

Try to catch the peak

The meteor shower is expected to peak at 4 a.m. ET or 1 a.m. PT on Aug. 13, according to NASA.

While you'll see the most meteors early Wednesday and early Thursday morning, there should be an above-average number of them already, right through to Aug. 24.

Also, there may be other periods when you can see an unexpectedly high number of meteors.

That's because the meteor shower is caused by the Earth passing through a trail of dust and debris left behind by the comet Swift-Tuttle, which can be thicker in some places than others.

"There's a chance you might get a few hours where we're going through one of these thicker, denser clumps of material, so you'll get more meteors," Attwood said.

Watch after midnight

Whether it's the peak night or not, you'll see more meteors in the early morning than the late evening.

The geometry means you'll see more meteors, just as you'll see more bugs hitting the front windshield of the car than the side or back windows.

Later in the night, the part of the sky where the meteors originate will also be higher overhead, giving you a better view, NASA says.

Look toward Perseus and Cassiopeia

The meteors will streak across the sky at about 60 kilometres per second from near the constellation Perseus that the meteor shower is named for.

NASA recommends lying with your feet pointing toward the northeast, with a view of as much of the sky as possible.

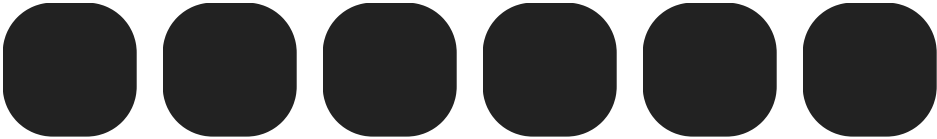
"You don't need telescopes or binoculars," he says.

Be patient

NASA suggests that you give your eyes 30 minutes to fully adjust to the darkness to improve your chance of seeing meteors.

And if it happens to be cloudy on the night you hoped to see the meteor shower, don't worry. Try again the next night.

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Small Acres Can Be a Big Help for Wildlife

AUGUST 06TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

[Small Acres Can Be a Big Help for Wildlife](#)

Dexter, Missouri - It doesn’t take a lot of land to have a big impact on local wildlife populations according to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). Though the words “wildlife habitat” may bring to mind vast forests, tall timber and massive wetlands, MDC Private Lands Conservationist Kara McSpadden says setting aside low production areas like field borders can make a big difference for wildlife.

“Small areas like pivot corners and field borders are good places for farmers to develop

habitat for quail, rabbits and even deer,” McSpadden said.

McSpadden’s been working with Steve Jackson, a row-crop producer from Cardwell. Jackson has numerous field borders and odd field corners that he’s transitioned into wildlife habitat. He’s planted native broadleaf plants, native grasses and scattered clumps of brush in these small areas.

“I have seen more pairs of quail and rabbits this spring than I have in years,” Jackson said, adding that it’s his goal to take his grandson on a successful quail hunt on the Cardwell farm someday.

“Many Bootheel landowners wish they had quality small-game hunting on their own family farm,” McSpadden said. “Steve has proven that even with a few acres, it is very possible.”

McSpadden added that the MDC has various programs to help fund wildlife habitat development on private land.

“Most of the land in Missouri is privately owned, so if wildlife habitat was only developed on public land, our wildlife wouldn’t have enough,” she said. “That’s why is so important that we work with private landowners on the ground and financially to help transition land into areas where wildlife can thrive.”

More information on financial and technical assistance for private landowners can be found online at mdc.mo.gov or by contacting a Private Lands Conservationist. McSpadden can be reached at (573)624-5939, extension 136.

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Help Band Hummingbirds at Cape Nature Center

AUGUST 06TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

[Help Band Hummingbirds at Cape Nature Center](#)

Cape Girardeau, Missouri - It's nearly time for ruby-throated hummingbirds to depart on their annual fall migration to Central America. Before these tiny birds leave the area, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Cape Girardeau Conservation Nature Center will host a hummingbird banding event Saturday, Aug. 29, from 8 a.m. to noon.

"This event is truly a special opportunity for children and adults to get up close to a hummingbird," said Sara Turner, manager of the center. "If you've not had the opportunity to see these fragile little birds when they're banded, then this is something that you won't want to miss."

Cathie Hutcheson of Makanda, Ill., will be capturing, banding, and releasing hummingbirds. She will record important information that can be used to track the annual migration of these small birds.

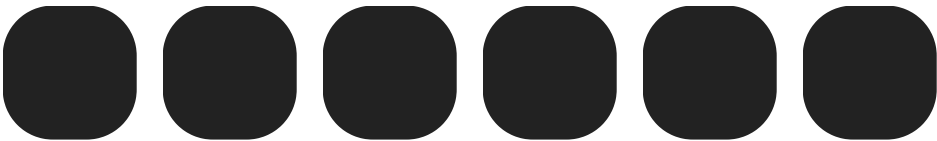
Many people provide needed energy for hummingbirds by growing native plants and hanging out feeders. Participants will learn how to attract hummingbirds as well as how to choose and maintain feeders which give the busy birds the needed boost for their long journey. Those who wish to attract hummingbirds to their own garden will be able to pick up free seeds for native plants that provide the preferred nectar for hummingbirds.

Doors will open at 8 a.m. with banding beginning shortly after. The Cape Girardeau Conservation Nature Center is located in Cape County Park North, just off I-55 at exit 99. No advance registration is required for this program. For more information, call the nature center at (573)290-5218.

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