

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



October/November 2011

Xplor

adventures in nature



ANIMAL ASSASSINS

BY BEAK, TOOTH
AND CLAW, HUNGRY
PREDATORS DO IT ALL

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photo by Danny Brown

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Maple leaf

Xplor

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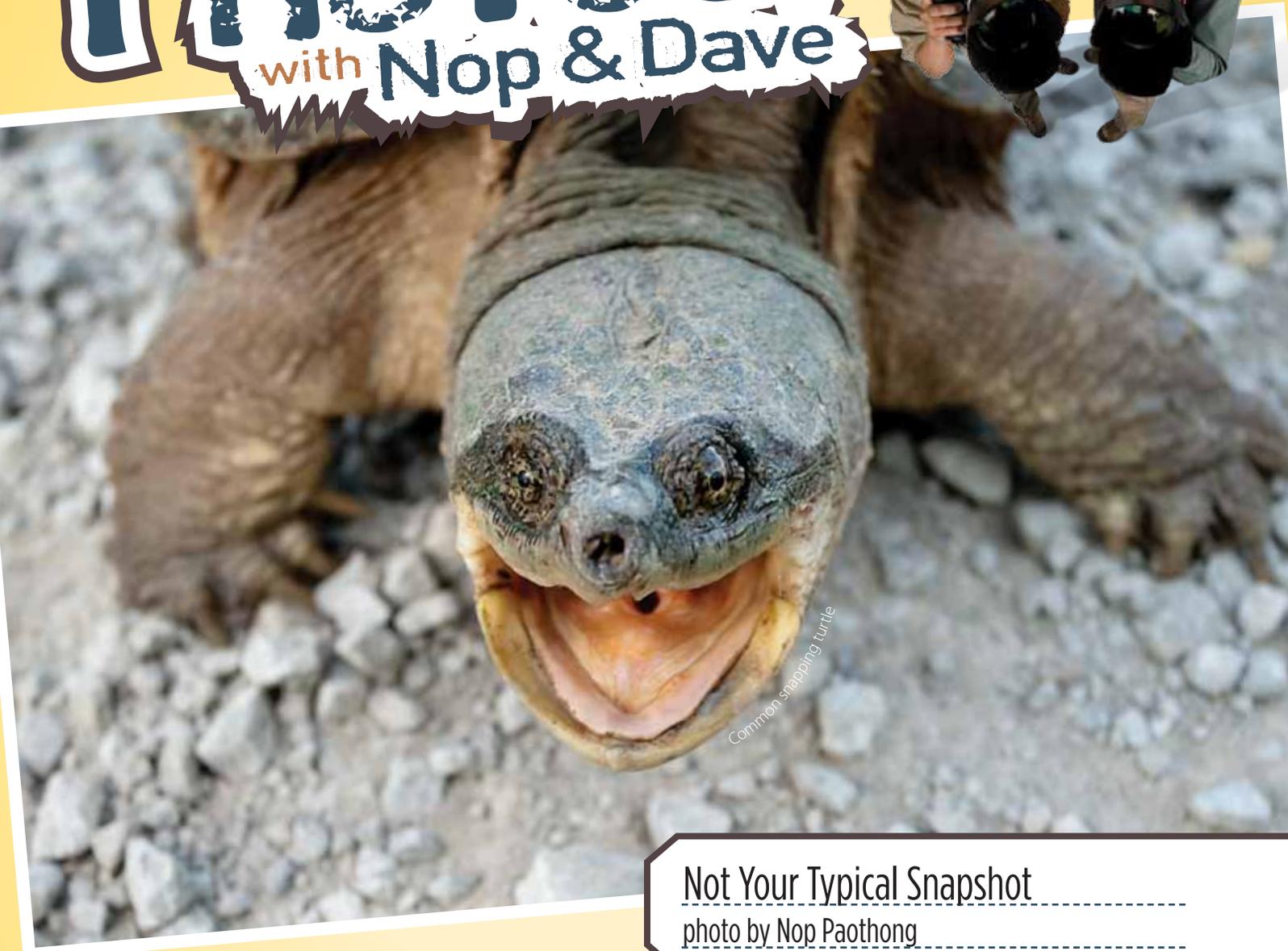
ON THE WEB

Visit xplormo.org for cool videos, sounds, photos, fun facts and more!

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PHOTOS

with Nop & Dave



Common snapping turtle

Not Your Typical Snapshot

photo by Nop Paothong

Photographer Nop Paothong was driving around Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge when he spotted a huge snapping turtle lumbering across the road. Always on the prowl for good pictures, Nop hopped from his truck, camera in hand. He crept close to the turtle and planted his tripod. But when Nop snapped a photo, the turtle snapped back! It lunged at Nop, knocking him over.

“I had no idea turtles could jump like that,” Nop says.

It wasn't Nop's first bad experience with a snapping turtle. Nop is originally from Thailand, a country

in Southeast Asia. When he moved to the United States, he was unfamiliar with snapping turtles—and how cranky they can be. Once, Nop tried to coax a snapping turtle off a busy street. When he gently prodded the turtle with his foot, the turtle whipped around and bit his boot. Nop didn't have much luck with the Squaw Creek turtle, either.

“After the first few shots, you just see blurry photos of the turtle trying to bite me,” Nop says. “I guess that's where the name ‘snapping turtle’ comes from.”

YAY! discover



Nature hustles and bustles in autumn. Birds fly south, leaves change color and mammals scurry about, fattening up for winter. There's lots to discover in October and November. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Whip UP some BIRD TREATS.



Downy woodpecker

With Halloween right around the corner, why not whip up some treats for your feathered friends? Suet—animal fat mixed with seeds, nuts and berries—is like candy for insect-eating birds. Fill a feeder with the stuff, and birds of every color and costume—from brightly colored blue jays to boldly patterned woodpeckers to understated but animated chickadees—will trick or treat your backyard. For a super-simple suet recipe, visit xplormo.org/node/16068.

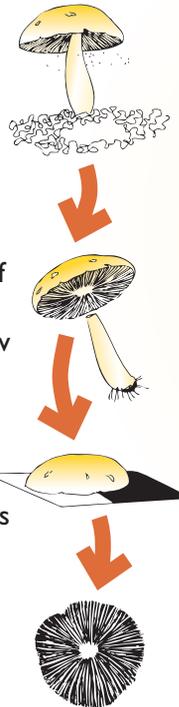


Create LEAF CREATURES.

If you're the crafty type, nature offers tons of free art supplies every fall—you just have to rake them up. Grab a bottle of glue, gather an assortment of brightly colored leaves, odd-shaped twigs and interesting seeds, then go crazy creating leaf creatures. See if you can build a butterfly or fashion a fish. Check out xplormo.org/node/16069 for a gallery of leafy critters to jumpstart your creativity.

Collect MUSHROOM autographs.

Fall mushrooms are popping up across Missouri, and each has a single goal: to release millions of tiny, dust-like "seeds" called spores. Wind carries the spores away, and if they land in the right place, they'll form new mushrooms. To see mushroom spores—and create some cool art in the process—make a spore print. It's easy, just follow the pictures to the right or go to xplormo.org/node/16070 for detailed instructions.



Snap FALL photos.

The Show-Me State's forests are showiest in mid-October when maples, oaks and hickories reach peak fall color. This dazzling display lasts only a few weeks, but you can capture the spectacle. Just grab a camera and head out to hunt for fall color photos. If you're no Ansel Adams—Google him—don't worry. *Xplor's* photography guru, Dave Stonner, has tips at xplormo.org/node/9750 to make your photos shine.



Hike beneath the HUNTER'S MOON.

October's full moon is called the Hunter's Moon. Native Americans used its light to hunt through the night to stockpile meat for winter. You can use it to light your way on a spooky and fun hike. Night hikes are a great way to see and hear nature's night shift—nocturnal animals such as raccoons, opossums and owls. *Hoo* knows what you'll encounter? For a list of possibilities plus tips to make your hike fun and safe, check out xplormo.org/node/16072.



GO RABBIT HUNTING.

For hare-raising excitement, try rabbit hunting. Cottontail rabbits live in every county of Missouri, and hunting them doesn't require fancy gear—a shotgun and a pair of pants sturdy enough to resist brush and thorns are about it. Ask an adult hunter to show you the ropes, and in no time you'll be chasing barking beagles as they boogie through the briars, hot on the trail of some cottontails. Rabbit season begins October 1. Hop over to xplormo.org/node/16071 for rules, gear suggestions, places to hunt, hunting tips and rabbit recipes.

ROAD TRIP for RAPTORS.

Road trip packing list: Snacks, check. Good book, check. MP3 player, check. Binoculars—wait, what? Highways are a great place to spot raptors—birds of prey. Grassy right-of-ways offer the birds ideal hunting grounds, and utility poles provide perfect perches. About a dozen kinds of raptors turn up in Missouri every fall. If you can't tell a red-tailed from a red-shouldered hawk, don't despair. Flap over to xplormo.org/node/16073 for a printable guide.



Take a MICRO-HIKE.

Some of nature's coolest plants and animals are also its tiniest. To find out what's creeping and crawling just underfoot, bust out your magnifying glass and hit the trail for a micro-hike. Stretch a three-foot piece of string along the ground and work your way slowly and carefully, inch by inch, along its length. You'll be amazed how much life you'll find when you truly take the time to look!



Looking for more ways to have fun outside? Find out about Discover Nature programs in your area at xplormo.org/node/2616.



WILD JOBS



Green sunfish

FOR CONSERVATION AGENT TAMMY PIERSON, NO TWO DAYS ARE EVER THE SAME.

Tammy Pierson scooped the baby deer into her arms. It shivered, but lay still as she placed it gently on the floorboard of her pickup. Someone had called earlier to tell Tammy the fawn's mother had been hit by a car. Tammy knew a veterinarian who had the skills—and permits—to care for the orphaned fawn.

While she drove, Tammy kept one eye on the road and the other on the fawn. The little deer hadn't moved. Tammy thought it might be dead.

She thought wrong.

With a scuffle, the fawn sprang off the floorboard, hopped the truck's center console and piled into Tammy's lap. There, it tried—repeatedly—to jump out

the rolled-up window.

Tammy managed to keep her truck and the fawn under control. As a conservation agent, she's trained to deal with the unexpected.

Tammy makes sure people follow hunting and fishing laws. Sometimes that involves busting bad guys in the dark of night. But she does much more than that. When folks can't identify a plant or want to know when duck season opens or find a skunk in their barn, they call Tammy.

"No two days are ever the same," Tammy says. "That's one of the best things about being a conservation agent."

Yuck!

Watching a peregrine falcon rip apart a pigeon is yucky. But how a peregrine captures its prey is deadly beautiful. When a flying falcon spots a bird below, the falcon folds its wings and dives. **WHOOSH!**

Like a feathered missile, the peregrine streaks toward its target at 200 miles per hour, slamming into the unlucky bird with spine-shattering force. As the victim tumbles from the sky, the falcon circles back to pluck it up for lunch.

YOUR GUIDE
TO ALL THE
NASTY,
STINKY,
SLIMY AND
GROSS
STUFF THAT
NATURE HAS
TO OFFER



pigeon

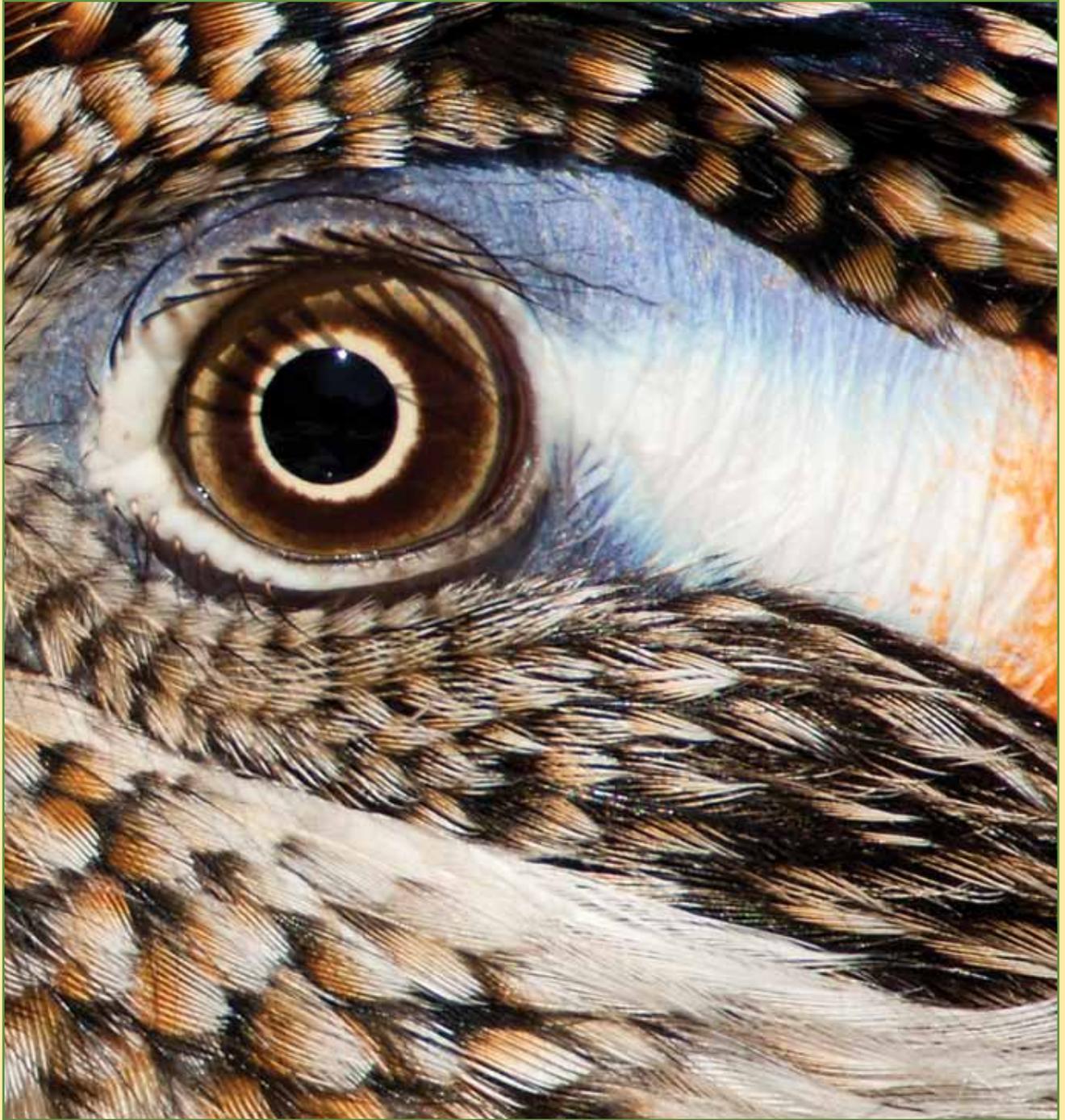
Strange BUT TRUE

Question: Why do leaves turn orange and yellow?
Answer: They don't. Those colors are always in leaves, you just can't see them. Green-colored stuff called chlorophyll (*klor-o-fill*) covers up other colors most of the time. Chlorophyll has an important job. It uses sunlight to make food for the tree. But when days get shorter in the fall, leaves stop making chlorophyll. The green fades away, and orange and yellow finally shine through.

Maple leaf

WHAT IS IT?

DON'T KNOW?
Jump to the back cover
to find out.



Some would say I'm a great big cuckoo.
Why fly when it's more fun to run?
Dinner with me is quite a bash.
My back is black for soaking up sun.

MAY

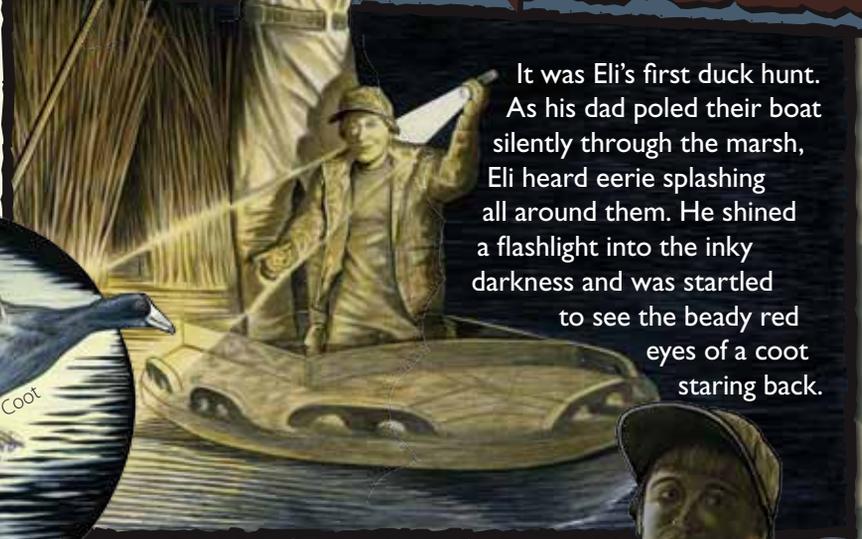
OUTDOOR

BY ELI RAITHEL, AGE 13

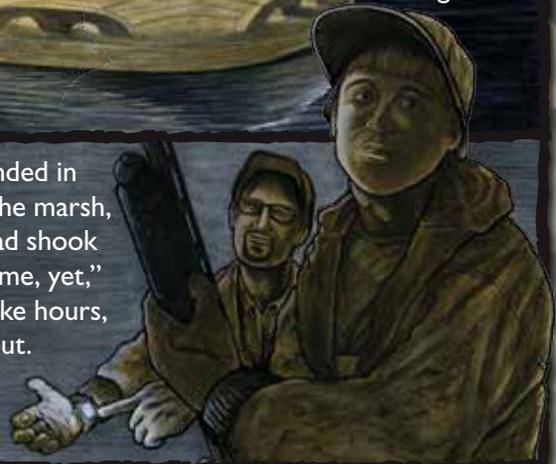
ADVENTURE

Eli pulled out a number. What rotten luck! Fourteen other hunters would pick hunting spots at Eagle Bluffs before him. They would surely snatch up the best ones before he got to choose.

It was Eli's first duck hunt. As his dad poled their boat silently through the marsh, Eli heard eerie splashing all around them. He shined a flashlight into the inky darkness and was startled to see the beady red eyes of a coot staring back.



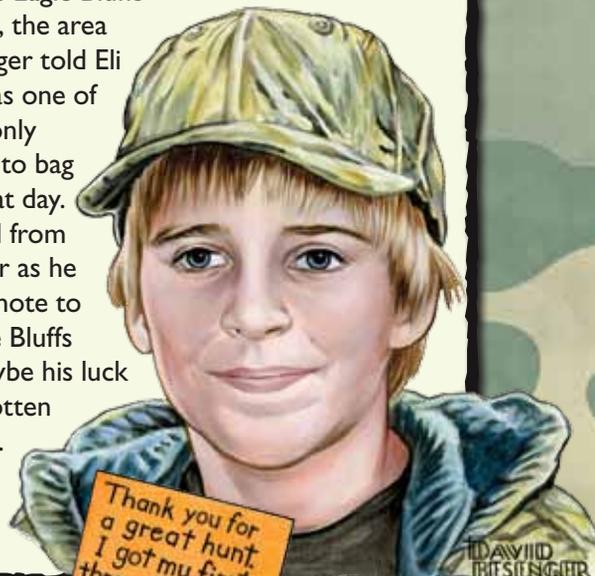
At dawn, a duck landed in their decoys. Across the marsh, shots began to boom. Eli's dad shook his head. "It's not shooting time, yet," he said. Minutes passed like hours, but the duck stayed put. "It's time," his dad finally whispered.



Eli shouldered his gun. The duck jumped airborne, water dripping from its kicking feet. Eli aimed, fired ... and missed. He didn't miss the next three ducks, though.



At the Eagle Bluffs office, the area manager told Eli he was one of the only hunters to bag ducks that day. Eli smiled from ear to ear as he wrote a note to the Eagle Bluffs staff. Maybe his luck wasn't rotten after all.



Thank you for a great hunt. I got my first three ducks today. Eli

DAVID BRESNAN

For more on duck hunting, visit mdc.mo.gov/node/303.



Lub-dub. Twelve-year-old Tyler Muenks feels his heart pounding—in his chest, in his head, in his finger resting on the rifle's trigger. *Lub-dub.* The whitetail buck turns broadside, the deer's wide rack glistening in the early morning light. *Lub-dub.* Tyler hears his dad whisper: "There's your shot." *Lub-dub.* Tyler peers through the rifle's scope, aligning its crosshairs on a spot just above and behind the

THE YEARLONG HUNT

photos by Dave Stonner • words by Matt Seek

deer's front shoulder. *Lub-dub.* S-L-O-W-L-Y
Tyler squeezes the trigger.



He'd been waiting nearly a year for this moment. The past Christmas Tyler had torn the wrapping paper off a brand-new rifle. A few days later, he and his dad drove to a

shooting range. They hung a target downrange and sat at a shooting table. Tyler steadied the rifle on a bean bag, took careful aim and fired. His dad watched through a spotting scope to see where the bullet hit, then adjusted the rifle's scope. Tyler shot nearly a box of shells, but he became comfortable with the rifle and got it sighted in.



Tyler spent summer scouring his uncle's farm for deer tracks and buck rubs. A buck's antlers grow beneath a fuzzy sheath of tissue called velvet. Eventually the velvet gets itchy, and bucks rub it off against small trees and shrubs. Tyler found a cedar sapling rubbed nearly to shreds. He hoped a big buck had done it.

Tyler set up special cameras alongside crop fields and deer trails. When animals walked by, the cameras automatically snapped pictures. Tyler loved checking the cameras. By late summer he'd collected snapshots of raccoons, opossums, coyotes and—of course—deer.



Birds wing south. Leaves flutter earthward. Days grow short. Early one mid-November morning, Tyler's dad gently shakes him awake. His dad has been nice and cooked a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs. Tyler scarfs it down, then tugs on warm coveralls. Before stepping outside into the black pre-dawn morning, he puts on his hunter-orange vest and hat. Tyler knows deer can't see orange, but other hunters can.

It's still dark when Tyler and his dad reach their deer stand, a metal platform 12 feet up in a tree. The stand hides Tyler and ensures that if he misses a deer, his shot angles safely down into the ground. His dad has placed the stand so Tyler will be shooting in a safe direction with no roads, houses or livestock nearby.

Tyler's dad climbs the ladder first. He tosses down a rope, and Tyler ties his unloaded rifle to it. Then Tyler climbs up. He wears a safety harness around his waist and shoulders that he clips to a strap encircling the tree. Only once Tyler is clipped in and sitting safely in the stand does his dad pull up the rifle. Then, the waiting begins.



As the minutes pass, Tyler watches squirrels raise a ruckus chasing each other through the dry, fallen leaves. He soon spies a doe walking along the edge of the field. Not far behind is what he's been waiting for all year—a big buck!

Waiting for a safe, clean shot is essential. But it's also nerve-wracking. The buck seems in no hurry. Through binoculars Tyler watches

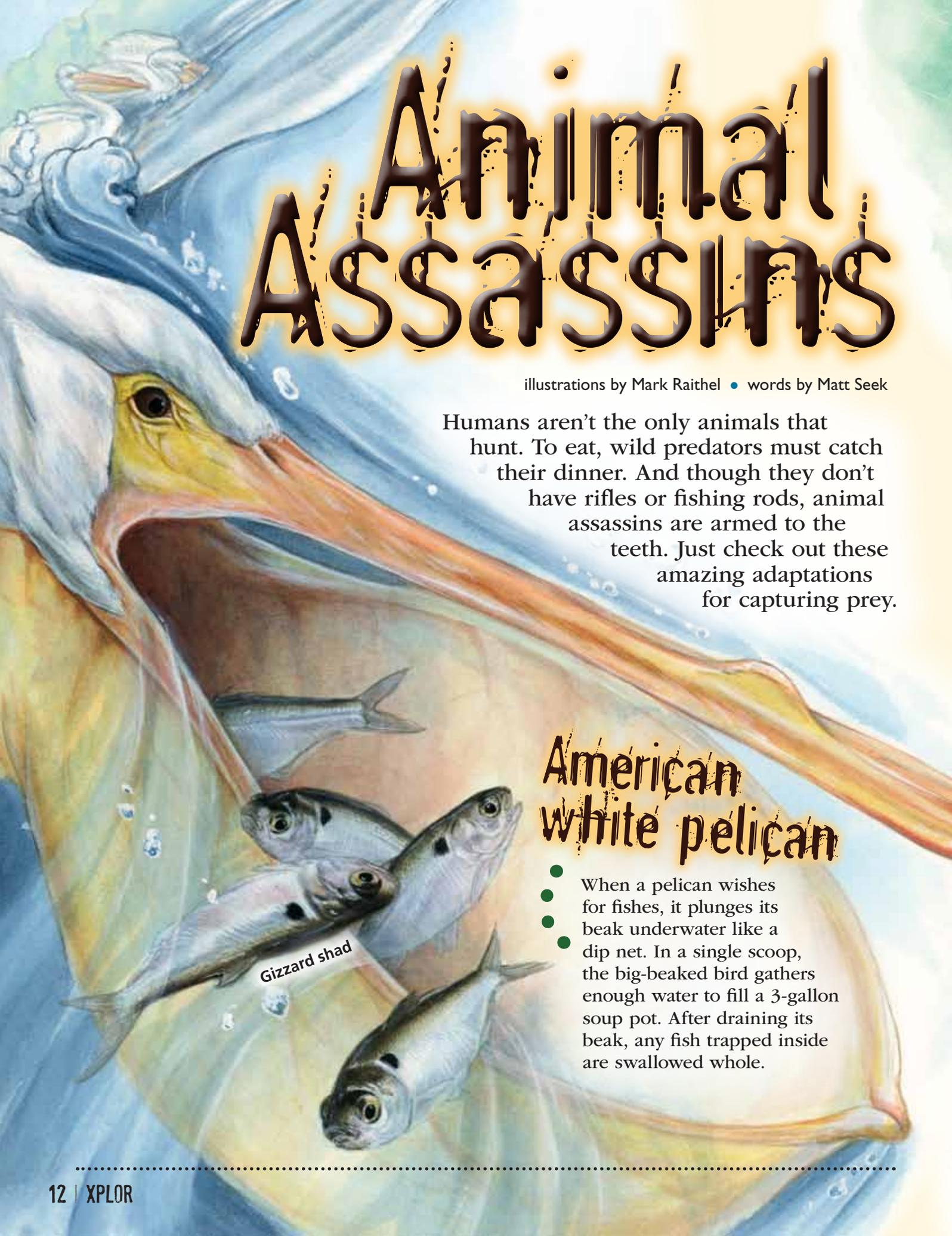


it graze. He counts the points on its antlers—six, seven, eight. It's a nice buck, and as minutes tick by, Tyler's heart pounds harder and harder. *Lub-dub.*



BLAM! Tyler doesn't hear the shot, doesn't feel the rifle kick. He sees the buck flinch, though, then watches it bound away. Tyler knows he must stay in the stand and wait. If the deer is wounded, walking up on it will only make it run farther. "I think you made a good shot," says his dad. "Don't worry."

While he waits, Tyler thinks about all that came before: getting the rifle for Christmas, sighting it in, scouting for deer, checking his trail cameras. And he realizes, buck or no buck, he's had a great time hunting deer—with and without a gun—all year long.



Animal Assassins

illustrations by Mark Raithel • words by Matt Seek

Humans aren't the only animals that hunt. To eat, wild predators must catch their dinner. And though they don't have rifles or fishing rods, animal assassins are armed to the teeth. Just check out these amazing adaptations for capturing prey.

American white pelican

- When a pelican wishes for fishes, it plunges its beak underwater like a dip net. In a single scoop, the big-beaked bird gathers enough water to fill a 3-gallon soup pot. After draining its beak, any fish trapped inside are swallowed whole.

Gizzard shad



Garden spider

Like eight-legged anglers, spiders weave silken nets to snare airborne insects. Spider silk is stronger than steel, plus it's sticky, stretchy and nearly invisible. Garden spiders have poor eyesight, but when they feel their webs quiver, they know dinner has arrived.

Big brown bat

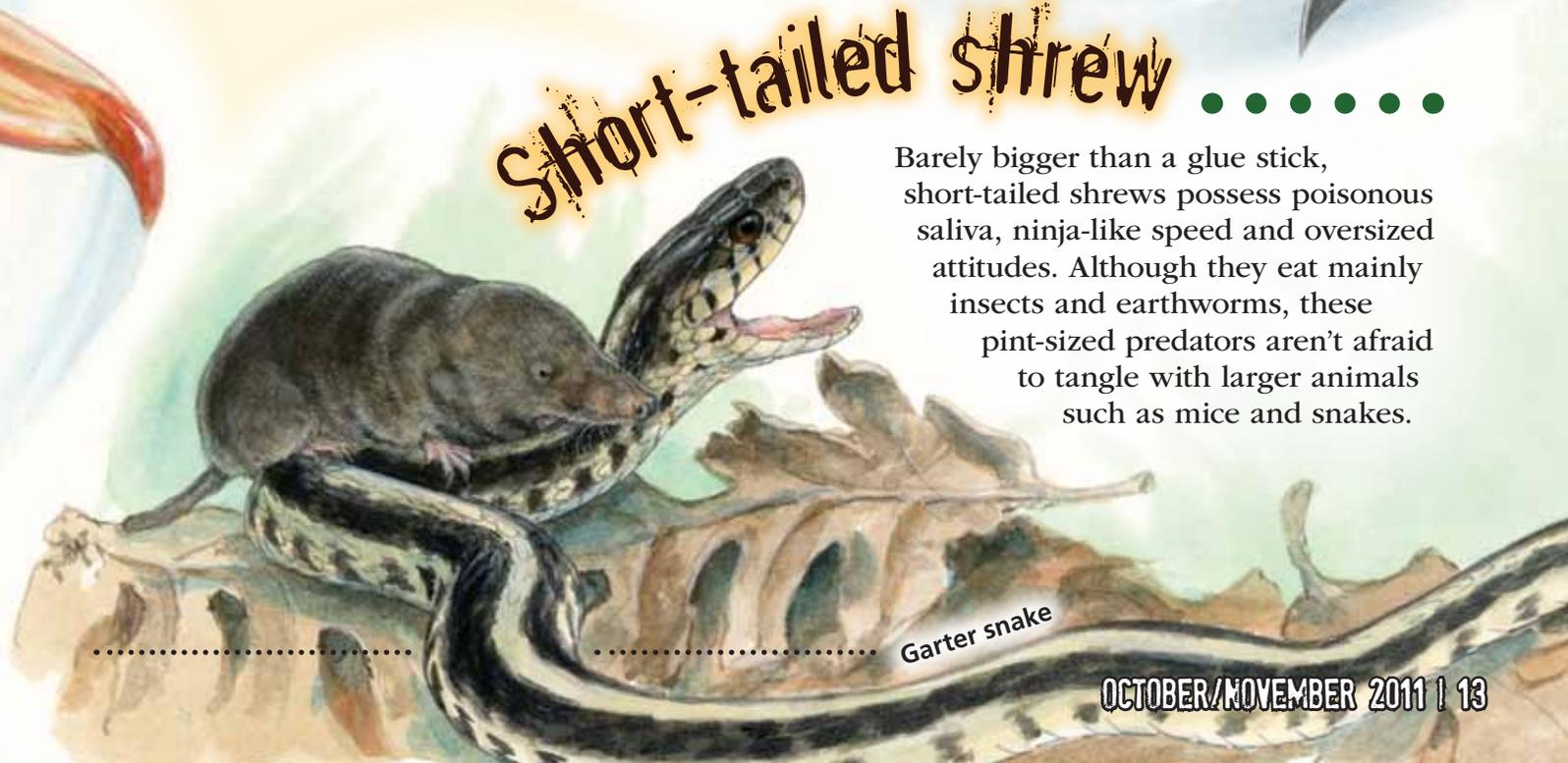
Bats bag bugs by "seeing" with sound. They produce high-pitched squeaks and listen for returning echoes. Be glad their squeaks are too high-pitched for humans to hear. If they weren't, they'd sound louder than a smoke alarm blaring inches from your ear.



Underwing moth

Short-tailed shrew

Barely bigger than a glue stick, short-tailed shrews possess poisonous saliva, ninja-like speed and oversized attitudes. Although they eat mainly insects and earthworms, these pint-sized predators aren't afraid to tangle with larger animals such as mice and snakes.



Garter snake



American toad

How do chubby toads catch fast insects? With spring-loaded tongues. Toads can flick out their tongues faster than you can blink. Plus, a toad's tongue is attached to the front of its jaw, so it can reach nearly two inches out of its mouth, leaving prey tongue-tied.



Horsefly



Alligator snapping turtle

When an alligator snapping turtle yearns for sushi, it simply opens its mouth and wiggles its pink, worm-shaped tongue. Hungry fish are lured in for an easy meal and learn too late where the name "snapper" comes from.



Bluegill

Bobcat

Although they normally prey on rabbits and other small creatures, bobcats sometimes take down white-tailed deer. How does a 20-pound kitty accomplish such a feat? With stealth, hook-like claws for hanging on to victims, and strong jaw muscles that deliver lion-sized bites.



Eastern cottontail rabbit



XPLORE XPLORE

Hiking at night is exciting and spooky, especially if you see eyes glowing back at you. Actually, though, eyes don't glow. They simply reflect light from your flashlight. Many animals have this trait, called eye shine. Want a clue about which critter's staring at you? Look at the color, size and location of their eyes.

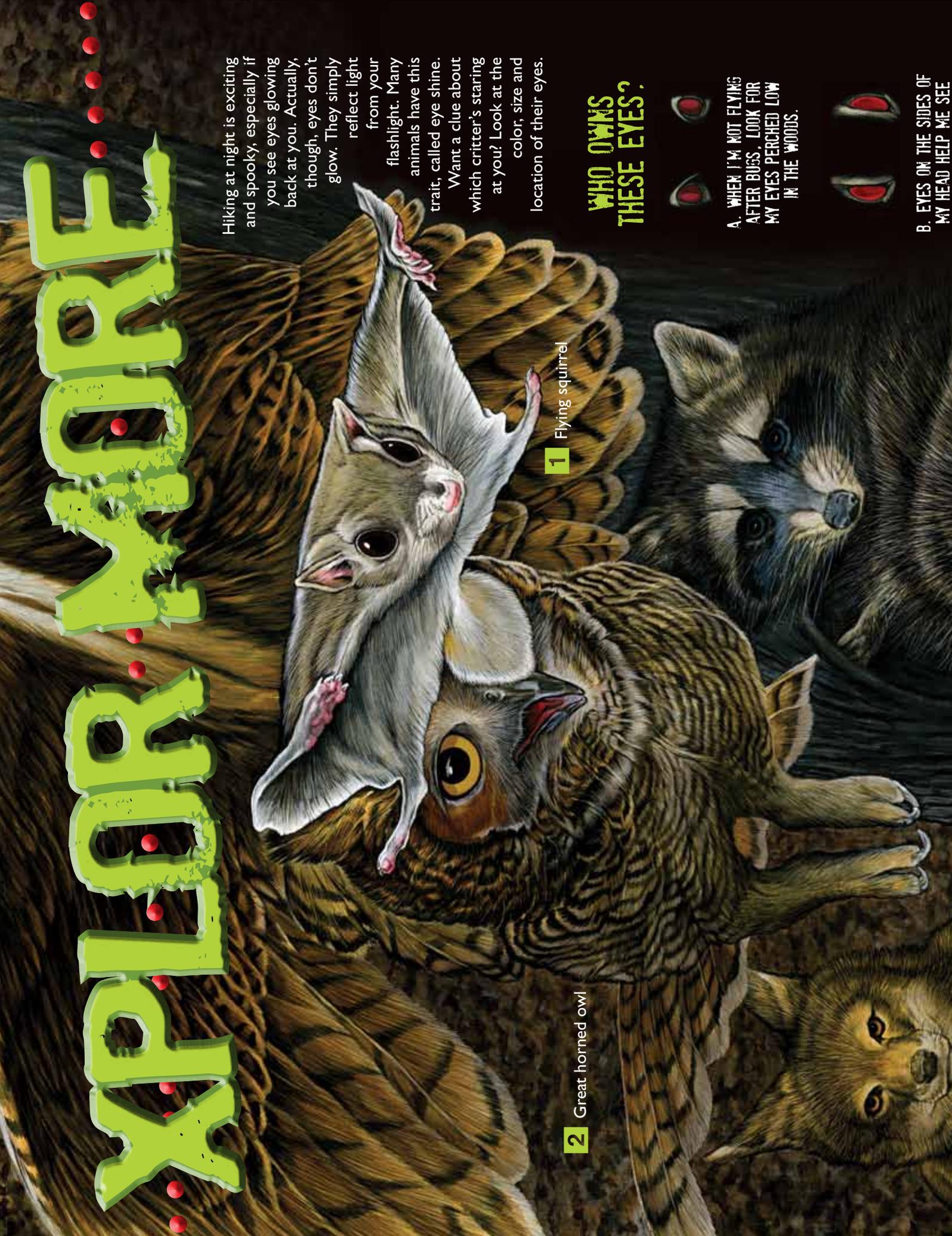
WHO OWNS THESE EYES?

A. WHEN I'M NOT FLYING AFTER BUGS, LOOK FOR MY EYES PERCHED LOW IN THE WOODS.

B. EYES ON THE SIDES OF MY HEAD HELP ME SEE

1 Flying squirrel

2 Great horned owl



4 Coyote

IN ALL DIRECTIONS. WHEN PREDATORS APPROACH, I HOP QUICKLY AWAY.

3 Raccoon

C. LOOK FOR MY TINY EYES SCURRYING UP AND GLIDING DOWN FROM TREE TO TREE.

D. SOME SAY LARGE EYES MAKE ME LOOK WISE, BUT THEY REALLY JUST HELP ME SPOT PREY.

5 Eastern cottontail rabbit

E. MY GHOSTLY GREEN EYES AREN'T AS SPOOKY AS MY HAUNTING HOWL.

6 Whip-poor-will

F. MY MASK DOESN'T HIDE MY PALE YELLOW EYES. LOOK FOR THEM HIGH IN A TREE OR PEERING FROM YOUR TRASH CAN.

Answers:
A-6, B-5, C-1, D-2, E-4, F-3

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE

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FREE TO MISSOURI HOUSEHOLDS

ANSWER TO

WHAT IS IT? FROM
PAGE 6



Beep, beep? No. *Coo, coo.* **Greater roadrunners** are large, leggy birds in the cuckoo family. They run better than they fly, hoofing it across southern Missouri's glades and woodlands at nearly 20 miles per hour. Roadrunners need speed to chase down prey such as lizards, snakes and scorpions. Once they catch a critter, roadrunners bash it brainless against a rock or stick. When they get cold, sun-loving roadrunners fluff up feathers on their backs to expose black skin underneath that's perfect for soaking up rays.