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WAM! WILD ABOUT MISSISSIPPI

CRITTER CORNER

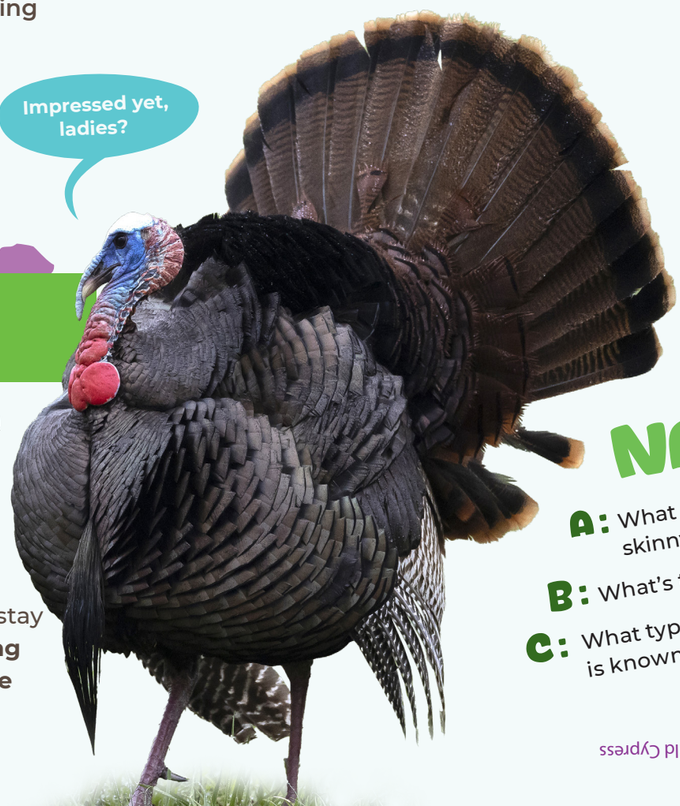
THE WILD TURKEY

Meleagris gallopavo silvestris

The wild turkey is a large, ground-dwelling bird native to North America. There are five different subspecies of wild turkeys, Mississippi is home to the Eastern wild turkey. These birds are known for their loud gobbles, fancy fan-shaped tails, and quick movements through the woods. Male turkeys are called “gobblers” or “toms,” and they puff up their feathers, spread their tails, and strut to impress the females, called “hens.” Turkeys are most active during the day, especially early in the morning or just before sunset.

WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Wild turkeys are omnivores, which means they eat both plants and animals. Their diet includes acorns, seeds, berries, insects, and even small frogs or lizards. They use their strong beaks to peck and scratch at the ground to find food.



FUN FACT!

Turkeys can fly—but not for long! Even though they’re big and spend most of their time on the ground, wild turkeys can fly up to 55 miles per hour for short distances. They usually fly up into trees at night to sleep and stay safe from predators. **Try flapping your arms like a turkey and see how far you can jump!**

EXPLORE MISSISSIPPI

Make a splash this summer at Mississippi State Parks! From zooming down twisting water slides to jumping waves in the pool or cooling off in the splash zone, there's endless fun for all ages!

SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE MUST-VISIT WATER PARKS AND SPLASH ZONES!



PLANT I.D.



Pokeweed

This tall plant with bright purple stems and dark berries goes by many names—pokeweed, pokeberry, poke salad, or just plain poke. Whatever you call it, it’s a native Mississippi plant that’s super important to wildlife like deer, birds, and even bears!

White-tailed deer love eating the leaves and stems—especially in late summer and early fall. Birds, like mourning doves and songbirds, eat the berries and help spread the seeds. Animals like raccoons, foxes, and even black bears eat the fruit too. Bees and butterflies visit the flowers for nectar and pollen.

Pokeweed might look cool, but it’s poisonous to people and pets if eaten or not prepared the right way. Its colorful juice can also stain your clothes!

Pokeweed grows well in sun or shade, and even after wildfires! Look for pokeweed on the edge of forests, open fields, or sunny trails.

how to spot it:

- Long, oval-shaped leaves that get smaller near the top
- Grows 3 to 10 feet tall like a bush
- Stems are red to purple, smooth and hollow
- Grows white or pink flowers in long, skinny bunches
- Berries turn dark purple or black and are super juicy!

NATURE TRIVIA

A: What Mississippi fish has armor-like scales and a long, skinny snout filled with teeth?

B: What’s the name for a young fish right after it hatches from its egg?

C: What type of tree, common in Mississippi swamps, is known for its "knees" sticking out of the water?

A: Alligator Gar | B: A fry | C: Bald Cypress

ISSUE No. 4



CAREER SPOTLIGHT
BEAR BIOLOGIST

SPRING DEN CHECKS

Ever wonder what it's like to work with bears? Bear biologists help protect and study black bears in our state! Each spring, they carefully visit female bears (called sows) in their dens to check on their newborn cubs. Mama bears can have between one and five cubs in a litter! The sows are safely put to sleep for a little while so the team can gently measure the tiny cubs, collect samples to check their health, and place a small microchip—called a PIT tag—under their skin. This tag helps scientists identify the bears for many years to come!



Bear biologists are super important because they help us understand how black bears are doing in Mississippi. By keeping track of how many cubs are born and how the bears are growing, these scientists help protect bear habitats and make sure future generations can enjoy this amazing wildlife too!

SPRING CHALLENGE:
BUILD & RACE NATURE BOATS!

When spring comes, melting ice and rain make little streams and puddles everywhere. That means it's the perfect time for **Nature Boat Races!**



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- leaves, sticks, bark, or grass
- string or vines (if you want)
- flower petals for decoration
- a puddle, small creek, or shallow stream

⚠ (Always play near water with an adult nearby!)



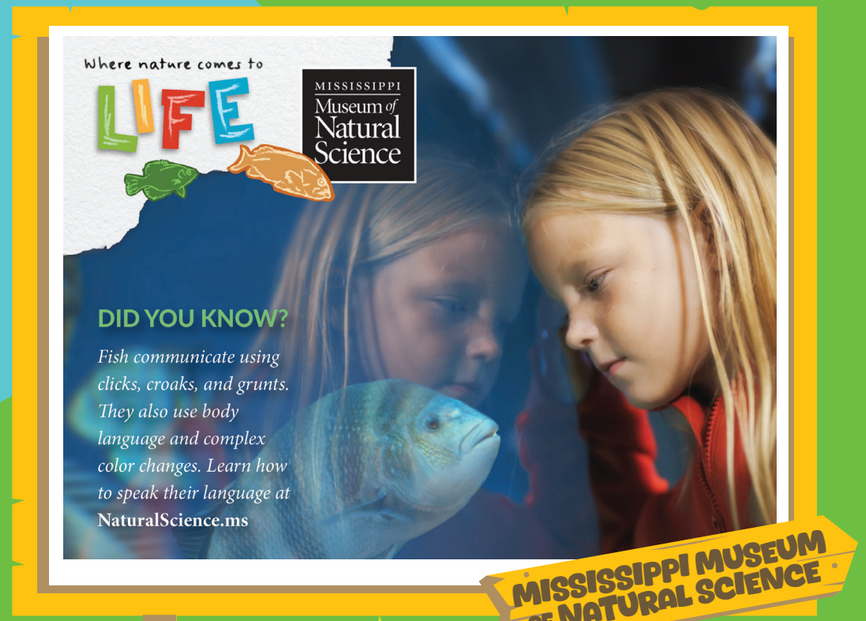
HOW TO MAKE YOUR BOAT:

1. Use bark as the base or line up sticks to make a tiny raft.
2. Add a leaf sail and attach it with a small stick.
3. Decorate it with petals or grass to make it colorful and unique.
4. Give your boat a cool name!

TIME TO RACE!

Place your boat in the water and watch it float! If you're with friends, start at the same time and see whose boat travels the farthest or fastest. You can even build a mini finish line using rocks or draw it in the dirt!

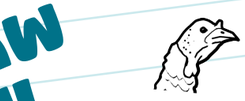




FUN EXPERIMENTS!

- Try making boats of different shapes and sizes!
- Test which sail works best - big leaves or small ones?
- See if your raft needs more balance or less weight.

DRAW IT!





Have you ever heard a turkey gobbling in the spring? Finish the drawing of this jake! **A jake is a young, male turkey.**

GIGGLE TIME!

Why did the turkey cross the road?
TO SHOW THE CHICKEN HOW TO DO IT!

What did the judge say when the skunk walked into the courtroom?
ODOR IN THE COURT!

What do you get when you cross a fish with an elephant?
SWIMMING TRUNKS!

