

Thanks, Mom!

by Bonnie Chasteen

**Share the love
with wildlife
moms this
Mother's Day**

Everything from bugs to birds to bears has a mom that laid an egg or gave birth. Wildlife moms like bears work hard to raise their young, and others like turtles just look for the best nesting place they can find. Either way, wildlife moms spend lots of energy bringing young critters into the world. Spotting wild families in our woods, prairies, and streams is one of the best things about spring. Thanks, mom!



Rainbow Trout

Before she lays her eggs, a mother rainbow trout will fan a shallow nest in the riffles with her tail. After the male fertilizes the eggs, she will swim upstream and fan up a little more gravel. This will wash down and settle over the eggs, protecting them until they hatch.

How you can help

Do your part to keep trash and pollution out of streams, especially in the Ozark region. Wild trout need clean, cold water to thrive.



Virginia Opossum

Possom moms have childcare in the bag. Literally. Newborn possum babies creep into their mom's tummy pouch, where they nurse until they are fully formed. Even after they leave the pouch, babies will ride on mom's back until they are about 4 ½ months old.

How you can help

Possoms are wild animals, so help them stay that way. Don't leave out pet food or smelly trash that will attract them close to your house.



Killdeer

Killdeer parents often scrape out a shallow basin in bare soil or gravel, and mom will lay her eggs among the dirt or rocks. If a predator comes too close, both mom and dad will fake a broken wing to lure it away. Once the eggs hatch, the babies leave their dusty cradle in a day or two, ready to scratch for themselves.

How you can help

Steer clear of bird nests wherever you find them. Leaving nests alone helps keep predators from detecting them and gives parents the peace they need to keep eggs warm until they hatch.



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American Black Bear

Mama bears keep a sharp eye on their cubs, especially when the family is out foraging for food. If a cub cries, mom comes running. And if a strange bear (or human) comes too close, the mama bear will charge the challenger.

How you can help

Are you in the Ozarks? Then you're in Missouri's bear country. Be bear aware, and give bears plenty of room if you see them in the wild. To keep bears from sniffing around your place, don't leave out pet food, livestock food, or smelly garbage and greasy grills.

Monarch

To help their young get off to a good start, monarch moms lay their eggs on milkweed plants. These are the only kinds of plants their caterpillars can eat. After they hatch, caterpillars gobble about 200 times their hatch-weight in milkweed leaves before they become chrysalises.

How you can help

If you have a sunny spot in your yard, plant some milkweeds there. Be sure to get plants grown without insecticides. Monarchs will visit your milkweeds, and you may soon find striped caterpillars chomping the leaves.



Monarch egg



Monarch adult

Monarch caterpillar



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Crayfish

Mama crayfish carry their eggs under their tails using little legs called swimmerets. Mom waves her swimmerets back and forth to keep water moving around the eggs. When the eggs hatch, the baby crayfish will hang on to mom's tail for a little while before dropping off.

How you can help

Clean up a stream and don't dump stuff into storm drains. Crayfish, fish, and other stream critters need clean water to live in.

Five-Lined Skink

These lizard moms brood their eggs, just like birds do. They wrap their bodies around or over their eggs, and they remove rotten eggs from the nest. Skink moms stay with their eggs until they hatch.

How you can help

Five-lined skinks occur statewide. If you have a rocky, south-facing slope, you probably have skinks. Keep your pets away from them, and they'll do just fine.



Crayfish eggs

