

POND PAD

A detailed illustration of a pond ecosystem. In the upper left, a leopard frog tadpole with dark spots is partially obscured by the large, 3D, light blue title letters 'POND PAD'. To the right, a white water lily with yellow centers is in bloom. In the foreground, a large green damselfly with iridescent wings is perched on a lily pad. The background shows more lily pads and reeds.

Leopard frog tadpole

Fragrant water lily

LIFE ABOVE AND BELOW

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Green damselfly

Lots of cool critters hang around a pond. But don't let the peaceful water and pretty flowers fool you. This scene is anything but chill. From the agile dragonflies that buzz the air to sneaky snapping turtles lurking below, the pond is a combat zone where everything is lunch, and everybody is hungry — all the time. Let's dive in and see who's eating who.



Bottoms up!

Is this big bird
drinking or eating?

Turn the page to find out.

Great blue heron

Leopard frog

A dragonfly zips over the lily pad, and a leopard frog shoots out its long, sticky tongue to catch it. When the frog strikes or swims, its lower eyelid, called a “haw,” slides up to protect its eyes — kind of like when you wear swim goggles in the pool.

Mosquito larvae

Golden shiner

Great blue heron

Largemouth bass

It's lunchtime under the lily pad!

Tiny mosquito larvae cling to the leaf. They breathe with their bottoms, which snorkel up into the air. Their hungry mouths hang down, eating microorganisms. Minnows cruise by, snapping the larvae up like hotdogs at a picnic.


With its scissor-like bill, the great blue heron can snag a fish mid-swim. Like the leopard frog, the heron has a special protective eyelid that slides up when it plunges its head underwater.



To the left, a dragonfly nymph shoots out its lower jaw to harpoon a passing minnow. This fierce predator detects its victims by movement and eats any water animal smaller than itself. The dragonfly nymph can live for years underwater, where it will eat lots of water critters before becoming an adult dragonfly.

To the right, the water scorpion has a long, pointed tail, but it doesn't sting. Instead, it uses its powerful forearms to catch and hold prey like this chubby tadpole. Water scorpions suck the juices out of their prey with their sharp, hollow beaks.

Both dragonfly nymphs and water scorpions are the terrors of small pond life, but they help humans by controlling lots of mosquito larvae.

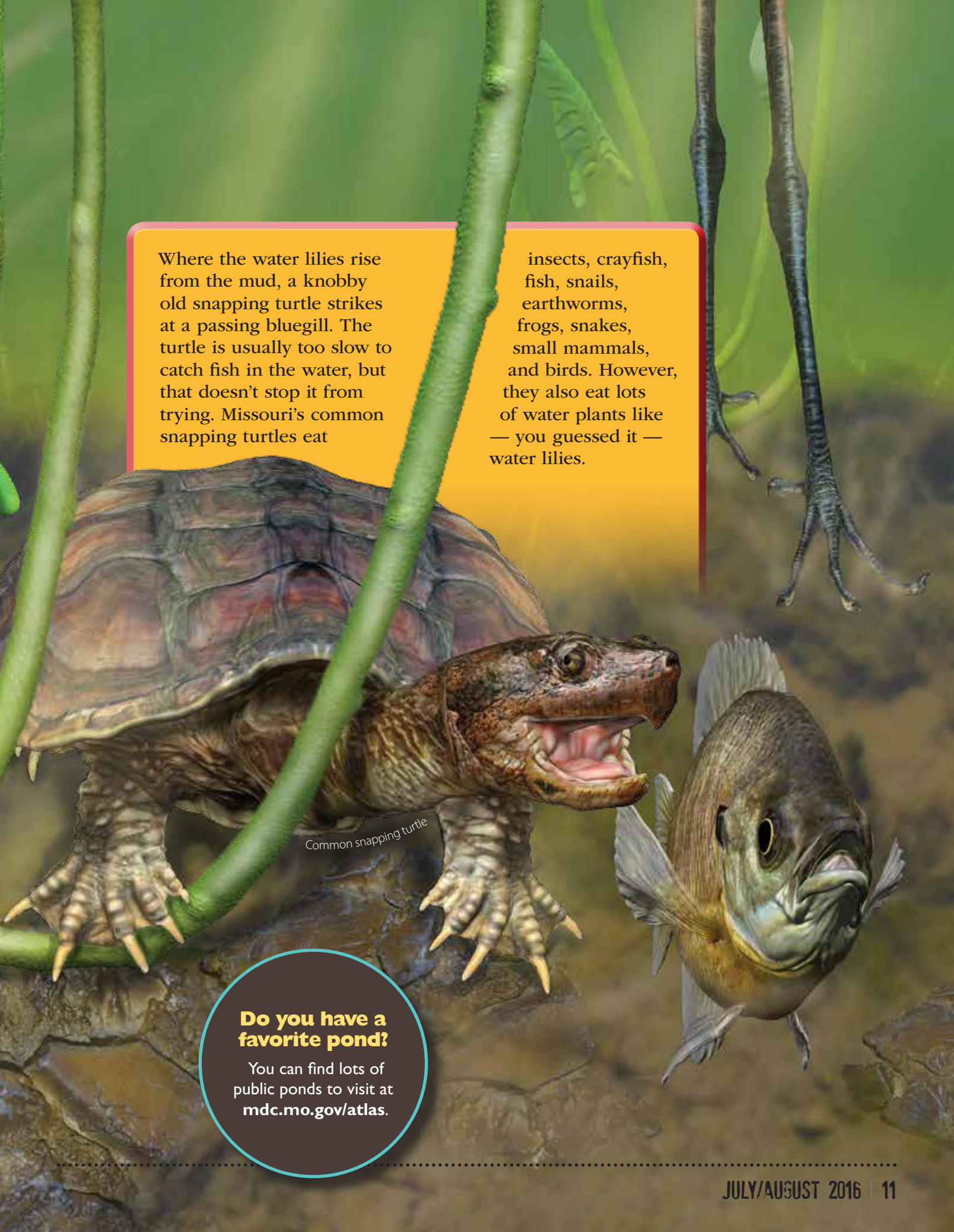


A couple of hungry bluegill eye a wary crayfish. Bluegill have small mouths, but they love bite-sized crayfish and will eat them if they can catch them.

Bluegill

Northern crayfish

When threatened, crayfish propel themselves backward with a flip of their powerful tails. After the coast is clear, this crayfish will continue searching for lunch — decaying plants and animals, and little water critters, including other crayfish!



Where the water lilies rise from the mud, a knobby old snapping turtle strikes at a passing bluegill. The turtle is usually too slow to catch fish in the water, but that doesn't stop it from trying. Missouri's common snapping turtles eat

insects, crayfish, fish, snails, earthworms, frogs, snakes, small mammals, and birds. However, they also eat lots of water plants like — you guessed it — water lilies.

Common snapping turtle

Do you have a favorite pond?

You can find lots of public ponds to visit at mdc.mo.gov/atlas.