

THE

A B C S



**OF
KENTUCKY
FISH AND
WILDLIFE**

A Facebook post series by
the Kentucky Department
of Fish & Wildlife Resources



AMERICAN EEL

The American Eel is a long, slender, snake-like fish that can reach five feet in length. It has a continuous fin that runs from back to belly. Adult eels spawn in the Atlantic Ocean and some of their young make the long journey through the Gulf of Mexico up to the Ohio River and its tributaries, where they mature before making the trip back to spawn in the Atlantic. Adult eels die after they spawn.

The American eel can be found in large rivers and reservoirs statewide. They feed on worms, small fish, crustaceans and mollusks. In recent years, numbers have decreased due mostly to dams that block natural migrations.





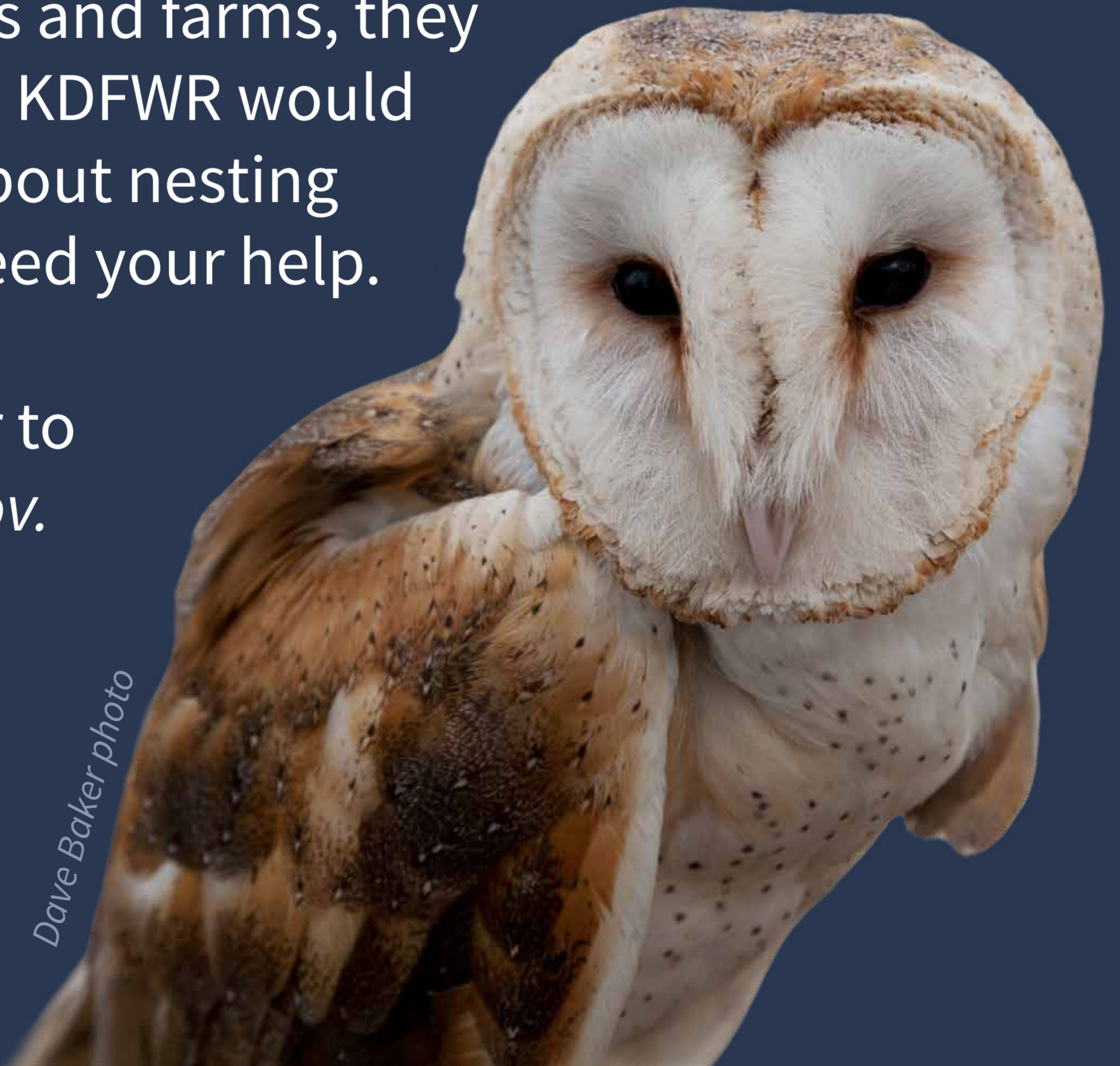
BARN OWL

The barn owl is a lanky, pale owl having a whitish face, chest and belly and buffy underparts.

Female owls are more reddish spotted on the chest. Barn owls often roost in hollow trees, barns or silos during the day, emerging at night to hunt rodents and small mammals. Their eerie, raspy call may have inspired many a ghost story. Despite plenty of suitable habitat in pastures, hayfields and farms, they are rare in Kentucky. KDFWR would like to know more about nesting barn owls, but we need your help. Please report nests to 1-800-858-1549 or to kate.slankard@ky.gov.

B

Dave Baker photo





COPE'S GRAY TREE FROG

This is a common tree frog found throughout Kentucky. They measure only two inches in length, having mottled gray to light green bodies with bright yellow coloration beneath the thighs. Tree frogs can change color to match their surroundings and have flexible toe-pads that help them cling to surfaces. They spend most of their lives in trees, but lay their eggs in fishless ponds and wetlands. Insects, spiders and caterpillars make up most of a tree frog's diet. Listen for their loud, rapid call during spring and summer months.





DRAGONFLY VS DAMSELFLY

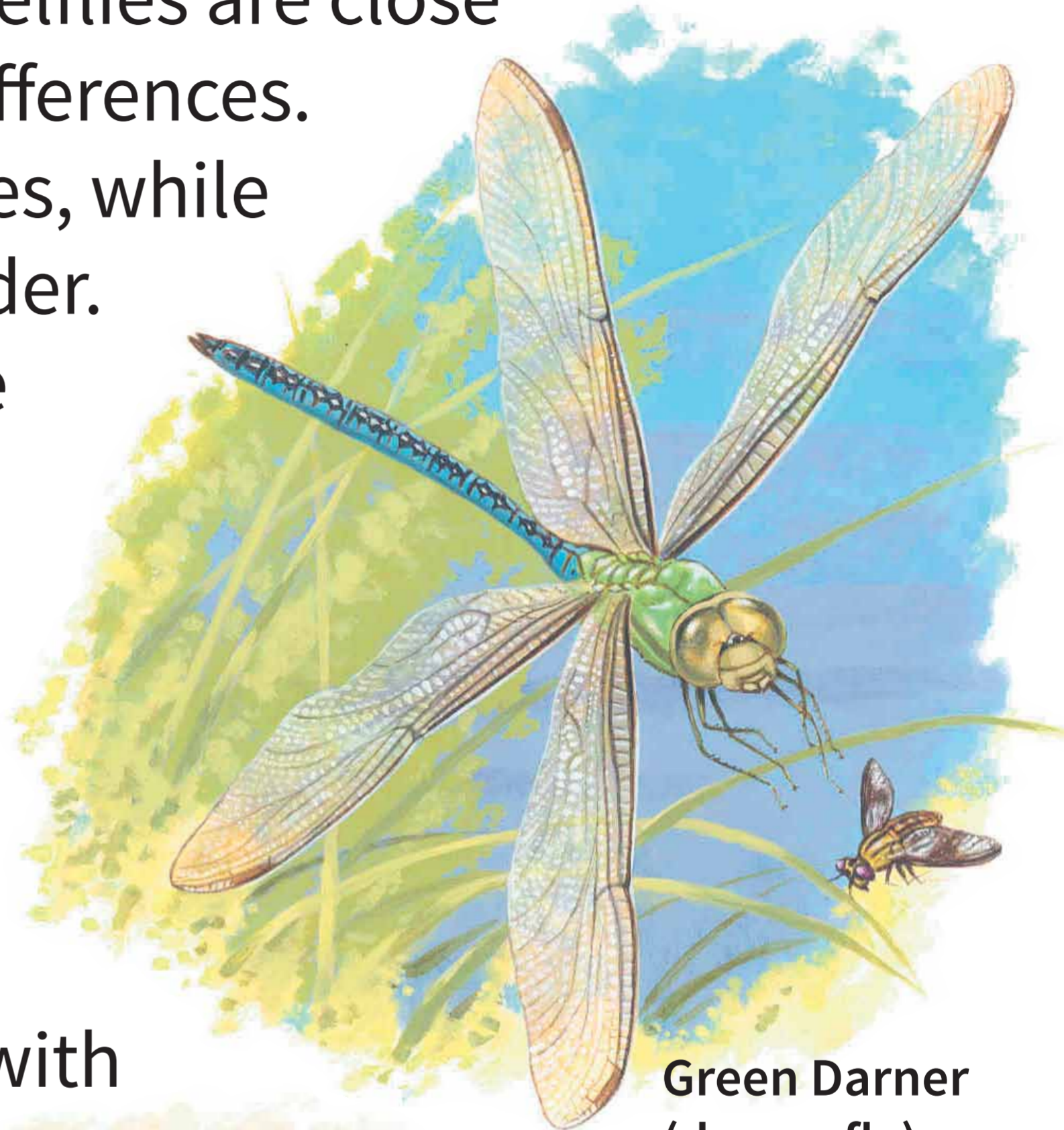
Can you tell a Dragonfly from a Damselfly?

Dragonflies and damselflies are close cousins, but there are clear differences.

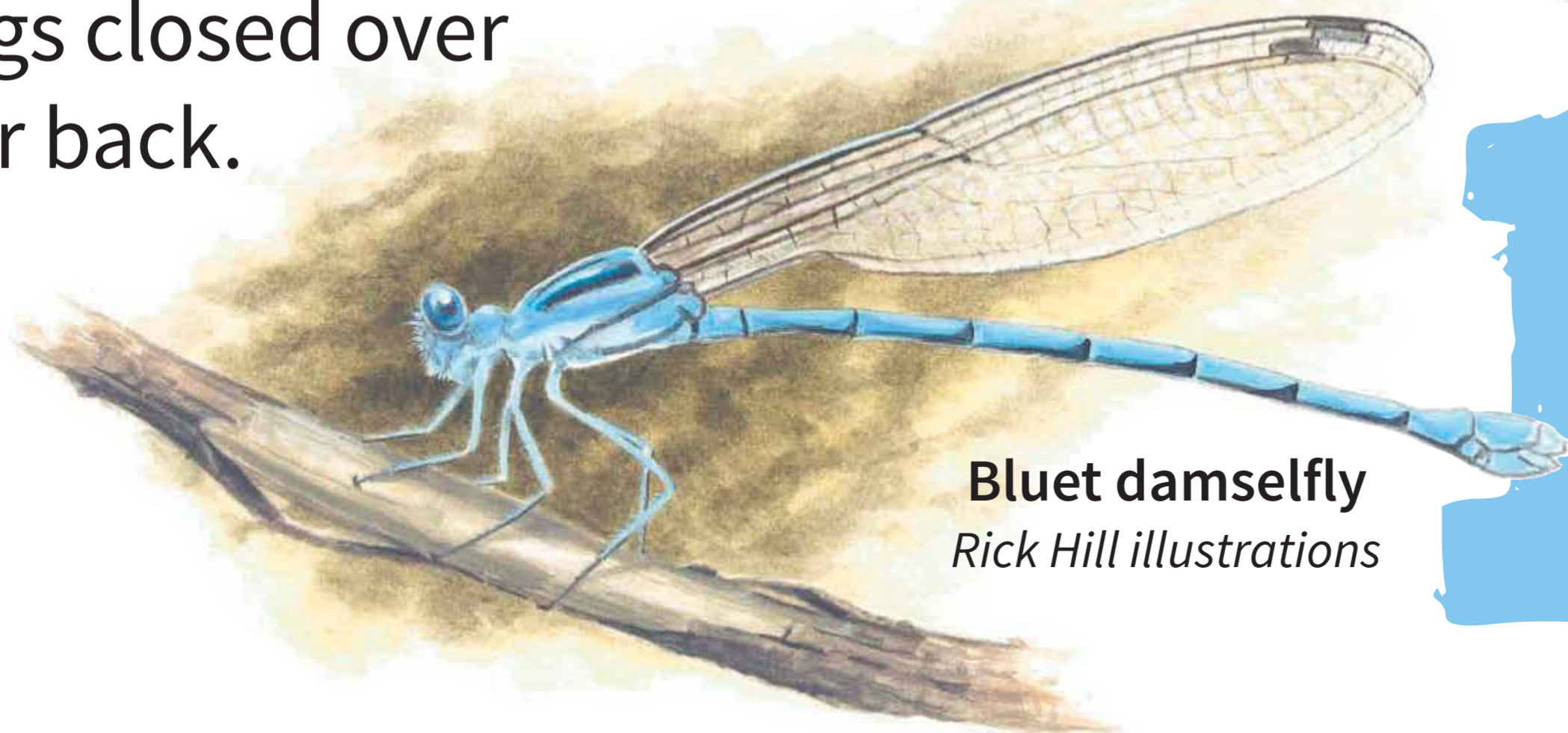
Dragonflies have thicker bodies, while damselflies are long and slender.

Dragonflies have eyes that are very close together and may even touch, while damselflies have eyes farther apart.

An easy way to tell them apart is their position at rest. Dragonflies rest with wings open to the side and damselflies rest with wings closed over their back.



**Green Darner
(dragonfly)**



Bluet damselfly
Rick Hill illustrations





EASTERN HELLBENDER

This is North America's largest salamander, averaging 12-20 inches. Although sometimes confused with mudpuppies, hellbenders are easily differentiated by their wrinkled folds of skin on their sides and lack of external gills. These fully aquatic amphibians live under large rocks and feed mainly on Crayfish. In order to survive, they need fast moving, well-oxygenated water. Because of their need for clean water, the presence of Eastern Hellbenders is a sign of good water quality. Although they have lungs, they breathe primarily through their skin, using the lungs for buoyancy. An old myth is that hellbenders are venomous. Although they may try to bite if handled, they are non-venomous.

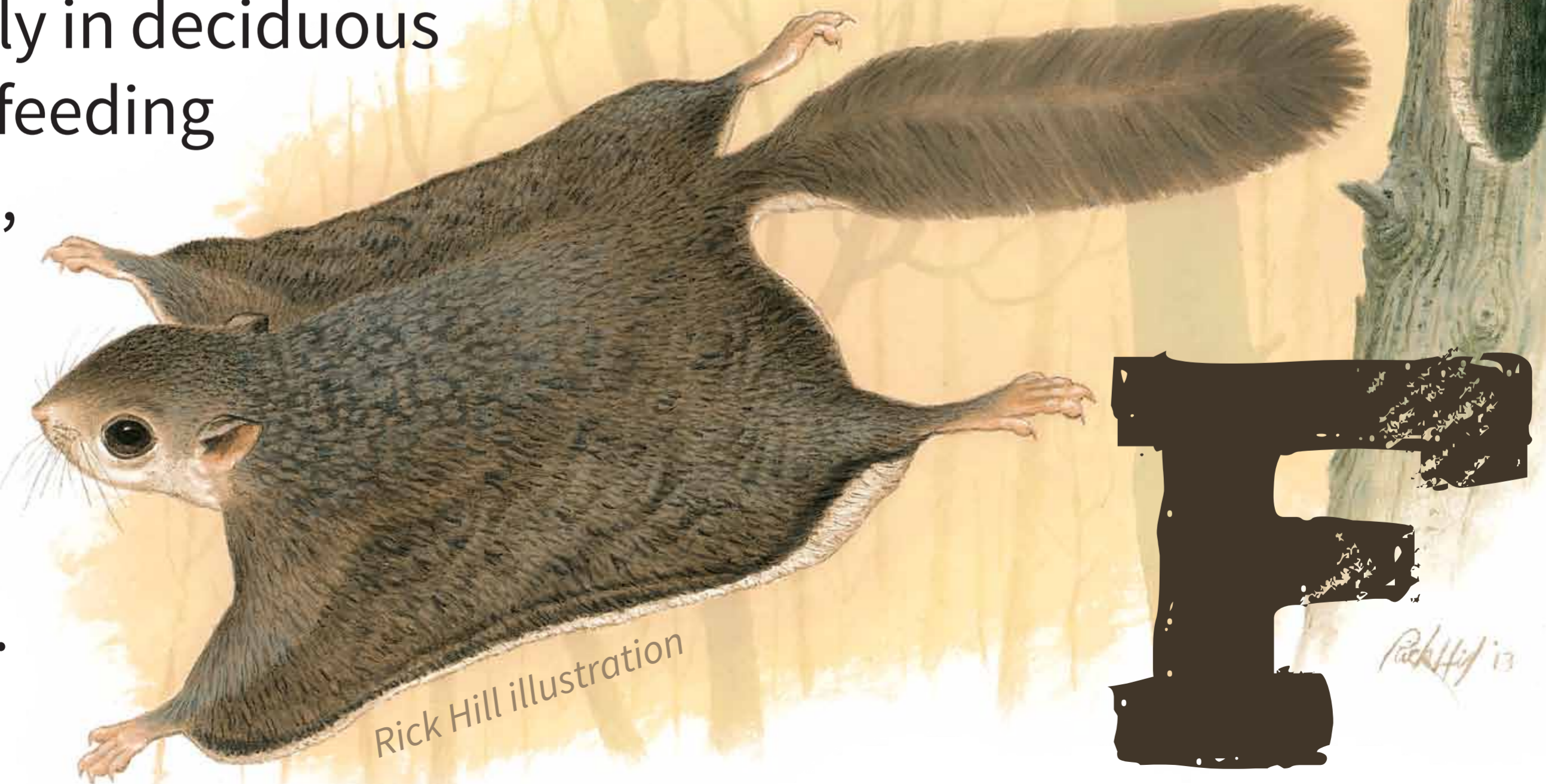


Rick Hill illustration



FLYING SQUIRREL

These southern flying squirrels have grayish/brown backs and light underbellies, measuring just nine inches nose to tail. Smaller than gray squirrels, they have large, black eyes, rounded ears and long whiskers. They don't actually fly like a bird or bat, but instead glide using a furry membrane that stretches between their wrist and ankle. They can control their glide, and have sharp claws and fleshy pads on their feet to help secure landings. Flying squirrels are nocturnal, and live primarily in deciduous forests feeding on nuts, seeds, fruit, insects and spiders.



Rick Hill illustration





Monte McGregor photo



GIANT FLOATER

The giant floater is a common mussel species in ponds, lakes and rivers. Its thin smooth shell is brown or green to dark green. It gets part of its name from the large size, up to 7 inches. The giant floater lives only a few years. When it dies, it may seal the two valves of the shell, trapping air, creating a bubble that allows it to float – as if it was a tiny boat. Wave action washes the shells ashore, where the tissue decays and the shell opens up – hence the name “floater.” It gets into ponds by hitching on a host fish before dropping off and starting its life on the soft mud bottom.





EASTERN HOG-NOSED SNAKE

Earning its name for its pointed upturned nose, the Eastern hog-nosed snake is harmless, averaging around 2-3 feet long, and thick-bodied like a copperhead. Some are uniform black, brown or khaki green in color



John MacGregor photo

and others have dark squares or crossbands on a bright yellow, orange, brown or reddish background. Although it doesn't have venom glands, it produces saliva that is harmless to humans or pets but can paralyze or kill amphibians. It feeds mainly on toads. When feeling threatened, the hog-nosed snake will flatten its head and neck like a cobra and hiss loudly. If the hissing fails to scare you, it may turn over and play dead.

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INDIGO BUNTING

The indigo bunting is one of the most abundant songbirds in Kentucky. Look for them along roadsides in weedy fields and shrubby areas near trees. They feed mostly on insects and spiders, but also seeds and berries. Males often sing throughout the day from the

tallest perch in sight. The plain brown females may be overlooked, while the showy males

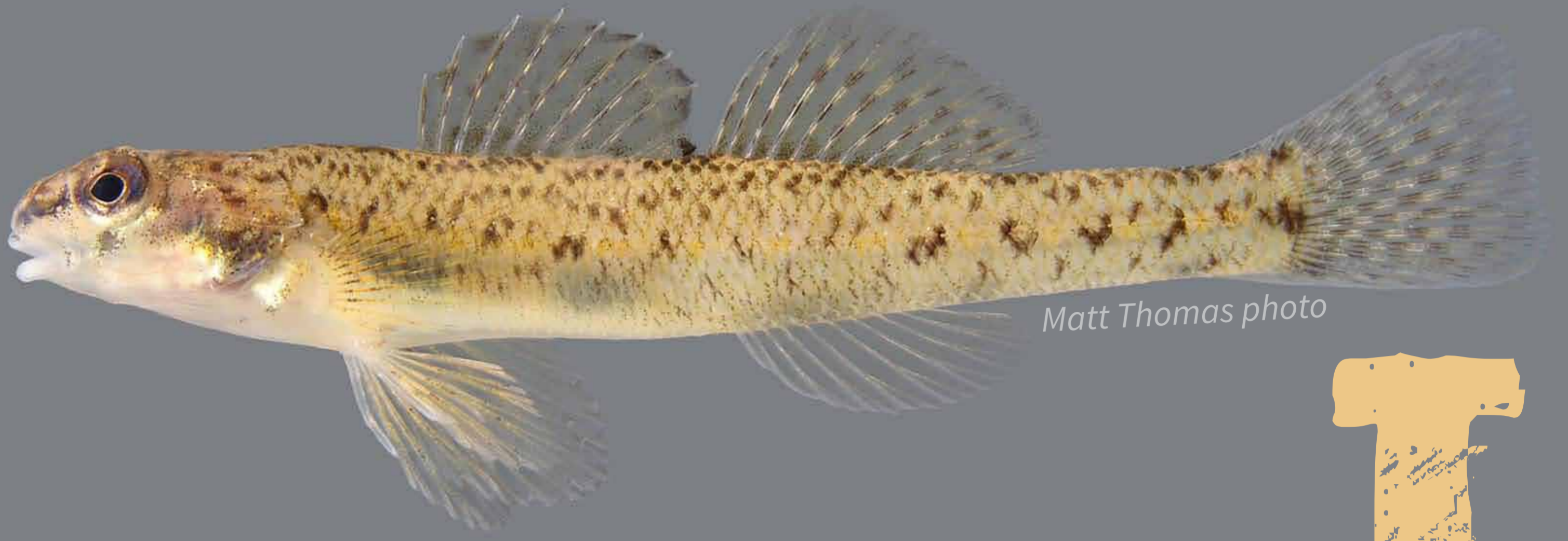
stand out in iridescent deep blue plumage.

Like all other blue birds, their color comes from light refracting from their feather structure, rather than from blue pigment.



Dave Baker photo





Matt Thomas photo



JOHNNY DARTER



Unlike many of the bright and colorful darters found in Kentucky waters, the Johnny Darter is pretty drab. But, its unremarkable color serves a purpose. Its straw coloring helps it blend in the bedrock, silt and sand bottoms it inhabits in shallow, slow-moving sections of streams. Its body is small and slender with a small head and blunt snout. The dark brown “W” and “X” shaped markings down the side of its body gives character to its otherwise muted appearance. The Johnny Darter is common in Kentucky, but is similar in appearance to the federally-protected Cumberland Darter.



USFWS photo



KILLDEER

The killdeer gets its name from the shrill “*kill-dee*” call, it makes in flight. Killdeer are common on residential lawns, airports, golf courses, sports fields and parking lots throughout Kentucky. They nest on open ground with little to no vegetation; their speckled eggs well camouflaged against gravel and mulch. Mother killdeer frighten potential predators by puffing up and holding her tail over her head, or by feigning an injured wing and luring predators away from her nest. Killdeer chicks hatch after 22-28 days and leave the nest as soon as their feathers are dry.



LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE

The loggerhead shrike is an uncommon bird in Kentucky. These gray bodied, black-masked birds inhabit open country with short vegetation and scattered shrubs and trees. Although technically a songbird, the cardinal-sized shrike shares a few raptor-like qualities, including hunting vertebrate prey. Lacking the iconic raptor talons and bill, loggerhead shrikes will impale prey on barbed wire or thorns in order to consume their quarry, coining the nicknames “butcherbird” and “thorn bird.” Despite plentiful habitat, loggerhead shrikes have declined throughout much of their range. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources is part of an international effort to study this interesting species.



Pam Spaulding photo



MONARCH BUTTERFLY

With its vivid orange coloration between speckled wingtips, the monarch is one of the most easily recognizable butterfly species in Kentucky. You can find the monarch in your own backyard, especially if you plant milkweed. The plant, named for its milky sap, is the sole food source of monarch caterpillars. As summer draws to

a close, look for these butterflies flitting overhead as they leave their breeding range to embark on a long journey to Central Mexico for the winter. Monarchs can travel more than 3,000 miles to reach this destination.

Once there, they cluster by the millions in the same oyamel fir trees used by generations before them.





NINE-BANDED ARMADILLO

This solitary, nocturnal mammal has moved into western Kentucky as its range expands north and east from Texas. The armadillo (Spanish for “little armored one”) is unique among mammals for the tough, armored shell made of leathery scales covering its back, sides, head and tail. It has long claws for digging burrows, and a sensitive nose for finding insects to eat. Females always bear identical quadruplets. The nine-banded armadillo can-

not roll into a ball like its three-banded cousin, instead it runs or quickly digs into the ground for defense. If startled,

it can jump 3 - 4 feet into the air!

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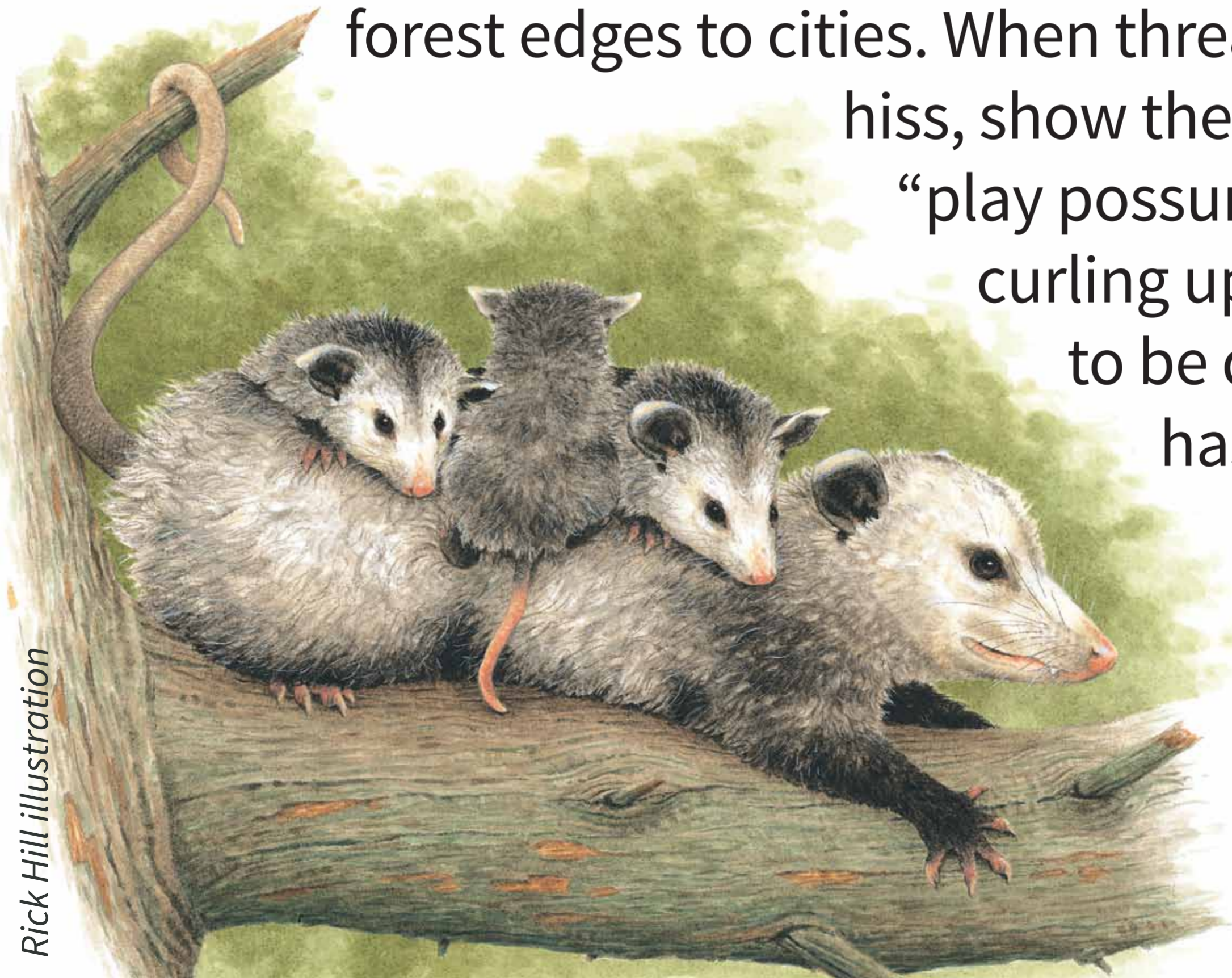
USFWS photo





OPOSSUM

About the size of a house cat, opossums are easy to identify with white to silvery-black fur, hairless black ears, pointed snouts and long, scaly tails. Though common, they have many interesting features, including a prehensile tail, opposable hind thumb, and a pouch to carry young, making them Kentucky's only marsupial. Opossums are nocturnal, good climbers and extremely adaptable. They eat plants, animals and carrion and live anywhere from forest edges to cities. When threatened, opossums hiss, show their teeth, and then “play possum” by falling limp, curling up and appearing to be dead until danger has passed.





*Rick Hill
illustration*



PADDLEFISH

Belonging to the Polyodontidae family, the Paddlefish is its only North American representative. Fossils show this species has been around longer than dinosaurs. The paddlefish can grow to 5 feet and 185 pounds and live 30 years. Paddlefish have skeletons comprised of cartilage, just like sharks, but are most recognized by their long, paddle-shaped snouts. They feed on tiny microscopic organisms called plankton by swimming through the water with their mouths open, filtering the plankton through closely spaced gill rakers. Paddlefish live in large turbid rivers and impoundments including the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and Kentucky and Barkley lakes. They are also found in Lake Cumberland.





John MacGregor photo



QUEENSNAKE

The queensnake is one of Kentucky's non-venomous water snakes.

Queensnakes are medium-sized and live mostly along shallow streams with good water quality and lots of flat rocks in the limestone regions of central and southern Kentucky. A queensnake's diet consists almost entirely of soft, newly molted crayfish. On sunny days, they often bask among rocks or in streamside vegetation and quickly drop into the water when disturbed. Although queensnakes sometimes bite when handled, they normally cannot penetrate human skin with their small teeth. Their main defense is a foul smelling musk they smear on your hands when you pick one up.



RED-EARED SLIDER

Red-eared Sliders are common in river backwaters, lakes, wetlands and farm ponds throughout central and western Kentucky. Juveniles and most adults have a broad reddish to orange stripe behind each eye, narrow yellow stripes on the head, neck and legs and a dark ring or smudge on each plate of the lower shell. Some large males are completely black. They grow to about 10 inches. They spend much of their time in the water, but often bask on pond banks, floating logs and stickups. Males have long claws, which they vibrate in front of the females, tapping

them lightly on the face and chin, while courting.



John MacGregor photo

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SPOTTED SKUNK

Kentucky is home to two kinds of skunks – the familiar striped skunk, and the more secretive eastern spotted skunk. Spotted skunks are smaller and more slender than striped skunks. They have white stripes and spots on their bodies, a white triangle on the forehead, and a white-tipped bushy tail. Spotted skunks eat mice, rats, insects, berries and often scavenge. They live in forests and forest edges in eastern and southeastern Kentucky. When threatened, they release a stinky musk and stand on their front paws, balancing with their bodies and tails straight up in the air. Unlike their striped counterpart, spotted skunks are protected and may not be trapped or hunted.



John MacGregor photo



TIMBERDOODLE

The “timberdoodle,” or American woodcock, is a chunky, short-necked shorebird found in forests, forest edges and old fields. Woodcock feathers are a mixture of brown, black, cream and gray, which camouflages them against the forest floor. Their large eyes are high and near the back of their heads. Woodcock have long, straight bills with a flexible tip used for probing earthworms. While hunting, the bird will walk slowly and rock its body back and forth. Spring is the best time to see woodcock as males engage in elaborate courtship flights. At dusk, males utter a distinctive, buzzy “peent” call from the ground, followed by spiraling flight displays.



Rick Hill illustration





UPLAND CHORUS FROG

Upland chorus frogs are among Kentucky's smallest amphibians; full-grown males are only 1½ inches long and the biggest females may approach 2 inches. Characterized by three dark and narrow stripes down the back, they are found in parts of western and southeastern Kentucky. Listen for their high-pitched trill, as they are easier to hear than they are to spot. Upland Chorus Frogs will hide in dense grass and leaf litter at the edge of the water with only the tip of the nose exposed. When approached, they quickly disappear beneath the surface to hide. Although some males start to call as early as January, these frogs are loudest during the breeding season from March through April.



John MacGregor photo



VIRGINIA BIG-EARED BAT

The Virginia big-eared bat is one of only two species of big-eared bats found in Kentucky. They measure only 4 inches in length, but have incredibly large ears that can reach over 1 inch long. Virginia big-eared bats feed almost entirely on moths. Their large ears direct forward in flight, and enable them to hear insect prey crawling along vegetation. Virginia big-eared bats are year-round residents in Kentucky, and use caves to hibernate and raise young. They live only in eastern Kentucky on the Daniel Boone National Forest. While some of Kentucky's bat species have declined due to white-nose syndrome, Virginia big-eared bat populations appear to be stable.



*John
MacGregor
photo*





WOOD DUCK

The wood duck is a magnificent waterfowl species. Males have a stunning hood of iridescent green and chestnut, and females have a delicate white pattern around the eye. Unlike most waterfowl, wood ducks perch and nest in trees. They have short, broad wings and a broad tail, allowing them the maneuverability for flying in a wooded environment. They are found in Kentucky's wooded swamps, marshes, streams, overgrown ponds and small lakes. Wood ducks are cavity nesters, using natural tree holes and nest boxes. After hatching, ducklings must jump from the nest tree and find water. Amazingly, they may jump from heights of more than 50 feet without injury.



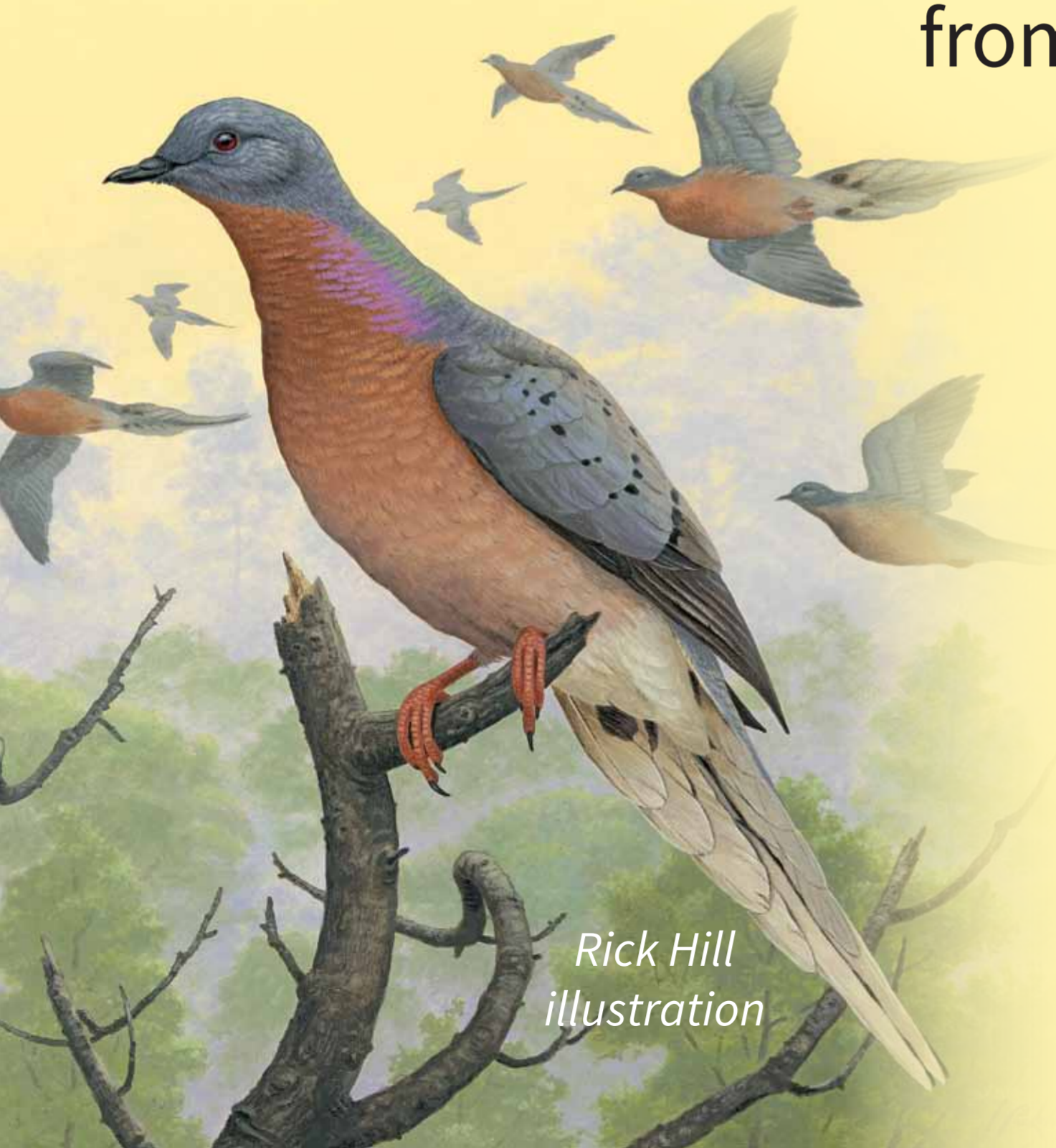
USFWS photo



Scientists believe that fish and wildlife **EXTINCTIONS** are happening at a much faster rate than expected. Kentucky's fish and wildlife species face challenges from habitat loss, water and air pollution, climate change, competition with exotic species and disease. Once a species' numbers become critically low, recovery is far more difficult and expensive. The historically plentiful passenger pigeon is an example of a common species that plummeted from billions of animals to zero in



just 50 years. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife is committed to conserving fish and wildlife species and their habitats *before* populations are in trouble. With good management practices, we can minimize the risk of losing species forever.



Rick Hill
illustration



*Rick Hill
illustration*



YELLOW BASS

The yellow bass is the smallest member of the temperate bass family, which in Kentucky includes white bass, striped bass and hybrid striped bass. It is mainly found in the lower Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, including Kentucky and Barkley lakes, and also the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. They can also be found in several small lakes, including Lake Beshear and Guist Creek Lake. Many anglers consider yellow bass a nuisance and toss them back after catching them, but yellow bass actually taste much better than anglers think. With no size or creel limits, anglers are encouraged to keep as many as they reel in.



ZEBRA SWALLOWTAIL

With a wingspan of 2.5 to 4 inches, this butterfly is found across the state. As the name suggests, the Zebra Swallowtail is black and white striped with a brilliant red on the hindwings. As is common in swallowtails, its hindwings have long tails. This species exhibits what is known as seasonal dimorphism. Early spring specimens are lighter in color, smaller and have shorter tails than summer forms. While the caterpillar form eats the leaves of pawpaw, spicebush and tulip, the adult butterfly eats nectar of blackberry, blueberry, lilac, milkweed and redbuds. Be on the lookout for the Zebra Swallowtail near woods and moisture.



USFWS photo

