



MK Nature Center

# STREAM

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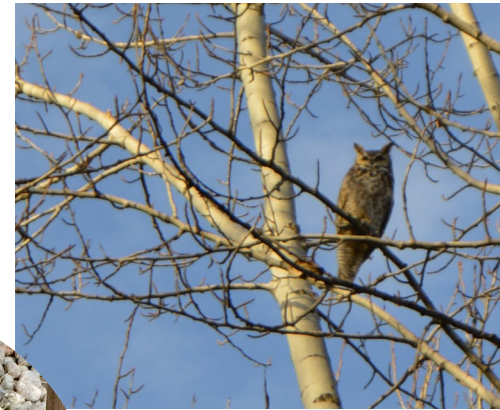
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## Owls of MKNC

MK Nature Center’s owl program is one of our most popular. It’s no wonder! They are charismatic birds with unique features and adaptations. We have had four species of owls at the nature center over the years: great horned, barred, burrowing (in captivity) and by far the most common, western screech-owl.



Top left: barred owl by Austin Reich.  
Top right: great horned owl by Sara Focht.  
Bottom right: western screech-owl by Abie Diaz  
Middle: burrowing owl (Whoots) by Brian Lawless.

# Nature Notes

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor, IDFG

Walking around the nature center on a recent early morning, I enjoyed the quiet, broken only by the emphatic rattle of a kingfisher. Poofs of cottonwood seeds floated lazily on the still air, finally settling on the water. Colorful splashes of flowers brightened the pollinator garden. As summer's heat settles, this landscape will change, reflecting the ephemeral nature of the seasons. So too, is the nature of those who act as temporary custodians of places like the nature center. We focus our passions to create change and nurture new ideas before moving on. And now it is I who will be moving on as I retire at the end of summer.

Being here at the nature center has been a privilege. To play a role in helping others learn about and connect with the natural world is a joy beyond words. Nature center visitors, volunteers and colleagues have been endless sources of inspiration, knowledge, support, enthusiasm and friendship. The dedication, passion and creativity of my colleagues is incredible as is the willingness of our amazing volunteers to jump in and help bring creative ideas to life. The work of both has been such a pleasure to witness. You all have my deepest thanks for being the best part of my job.

The important work of the nature center will continue. Visitors will come and go, and busloads of enthusiastic students will continue to arrive. I also know that our dedicated corps of volunteers will continue to share their passion, skills, knowledge and camaraderie. How lucky is this little facility to have such deep connections to our community and how lucky is the community to have the nature center. Even though it might be small, this little place has the power to inspire, create awe, and facilitate connections to nature for all of us. This is an exciting new chapter for the nature center, an opportunity for creative new ideas that will help shape the facility's future. I look forward to seeing the nature center continue to grow and thrive and will always be proud of the small part that I have played in the larger success of this special place.



# Native Plants Have Never Been So Popular

Bethany Tennant, BioAide, MK Nature Center



This year's native plant sale was the first that I've attended since I began working at MK Nature Center as a Biological Aide in 2023. Even before the doors opened for the sale, the energy was palpable as I watched the line of waiting customers stretch into the parking lot, so far that I couldn't see where it ended. Before my time at MK Nature Center I had worked many years in retail, and I knew immediately that the turnout for this sale was to rival most Black Friday events I'd seen in the past. It was amazing to see just how many members of the community arrived early to wait in long lines for the chance to purchase native plants. I lay in wait at a register, and once the doors opened, eager customers trickled in and eventually made their way to me.

It became clear that people were not just buying plants— they were engaging in conversations about sustainability, pollinator support, and the importance of preserving local biodiversity. I saw how this event fostered a genuine connection between attendees and the natural world, leaving so many attendees inspired to cultivate their own small patches of paradise. Overall, the native plant sale felt like more than just a shopping experience; it felt like a celebration of nature and community. It was a joy to spend time with the numerous volunteers that worked so hard to bring this event together, and it was truly inspiring to see just how many community members were invested in supporting our native plants.

Photos clockwise starting in upper left: Plants and carts await quietly for the sale to open. The line of buyers went out the door and around HQ. Busy buying and discussing plants. Checkout stand was in the auditorium to keep traffic circular. Photos by Bethany Tennant.



# Inconspicuous Flowers

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, IDFG

Early summer is dotted with beautiful blooms all around. It's hard not to notice the gorgeous roses, peonies, the fragrant honeysuckle and syringa these days. But not all flowers are showy and scented. Grasses are flowering plants too, but since they are wind pollinated, there is no need for a fancy petal or a drifting smell.

One recent morning at the nature center, the sun caught the grass flower anthers to remind me of these inconspicuous flowers. The anther is the part of any flower that holds the pollen. It's the male portion of the flower, if you will. Wind carries pollen away from one grass flower to another to pollinate the flower and produce the seed or grain.

Many people suffer from seasonal allergies in the spring/summer and tend to blame the beautiful flowers around, but it is more likely to be grass pollen carried on the wind to your nose.

About 18 percent of flowering plants are pollinated by wind. Another wind pollinated plant at the nature center is a cottonwood tree (flowers pictured right). When you are out and about this summer, be sure to notice the flowers that don't want to be noticed.



Grass (above) and cottonwood (below) flowers are both hard to recognize as flowers. Photos by Sara Focht.

## Volunteer Work Days

Micron-April 24

Julie Houston, Lynn Kelly,  
Lauren Studley, Elizabeth Grosse-April 8



Idaho Power, May 23

LAM Research Company-April 2



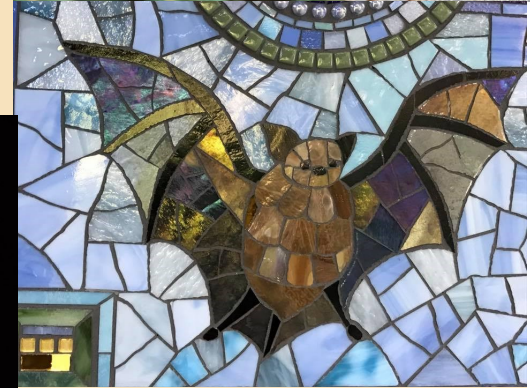
# A Flutter in the Night: Idaho's Bats

**Who:** This program is designed for adults and older children. Free and open to the public

**What:** Join us for an evening exploring the fascinating lives of bats. We will join bat biologists to learn about the biology and behavior of bats, and why they are so beneficial. After dark, we will head outdoors to observe bats and “listen” to their echolocation calls. Spend an evening getting acquainted with these shy, but incredibly important mammals!

**When:** July 11th, 2024 8:30pm

**Where:** MK Nature Center. 600 S. Walnut Street, Boise, ID



Top: Big brown bat. Photo by Rita Dixon PhD.

Bottom: Bats are important creatures at the nature center. This mosaic bat near one of our underwater viewing windows won't be the only bat you see during the program.



Left: Rita Dixon PhD. is one of Idaho's leading experts on bats. Photo by Sara Focht.

Right: Managing bats in Idaho involves inventorying and monitoring, capturing, improving habitat, and detecting diseases. Photo by USDA Forest Service.

## BAT FACTS

Idaho is home to 14 species of bats.

Bats in Idaho are insectivores.

The smallest bat in Idaho is the canyon bat (6-7 inch wing span)

The largest bat in Idaho is the big brown bat (13-16 inch wing span)

Bats in Idaho are protected nongame species.

All Idaho bats migrate in winter. Migration distances range from 60-600 miles.

Baby bats are called pups.

# Pollinator Celebration 2024

Sue Dudley, Gift Shop Manager and Volunteer Coordinator, MKNC

The nature center had another wonderful education event. The weather was great and visitors seemed to really enjoy learning all about pollinators. The volunteers who helped the event run smoothly are simply the best.

Thank you to all who came out to support the nature center and to all the volunteers who spent their day giving back to their community- we greatly appreciate YOU!



# Flight of the Bumble Bee

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor, MKNC



Bumble bee photo by Austin Reich.

Bumble bees are a favorite here at the nature center. Moving like miniature dirigibles amongst the flowers, they are attractive insects that are fun to watch. Given their size and plump, fuzzy bodies compared to relatively small wings, their flight is amazing. In fact, it was once said that bumble bees really should not be able to fly at all. Fortunately, the bumble bees ignored such commentary and continued to buzz about their daily business.

The reason for this misunderstanding was due to a comparison between a manmade object and a living creature. A few scientists applied the physics of fixed-wing aircraft flight to that of a living buzzing insect with anything but fixed wings. But this was during the 1930s and today, we understand much more about insect flight.



Bumble bee photo by Ross Winton

A bumble bee's four wings are made of a supple, elastic protein called resilin. Elasticity in the wings allows them to stretch nearly three times their length without tearing. This lets the bumble bee move a lot of air considering the small surface area of its wings. In addition, bumble bee wings rotate flexibly up to 200 times per second in a circular motion, almost like a horizontal figure-eight. This creates a vortex along the edges of the wings, creating lift. To further assist their flight, bumble bees have specialized joints in their wings. These joints allow the wings to bend in flight, enhancing the bee's aeronautical capabilities. Interestingly, the presence of similar joints in other species of bees has not been confirmed.

Thanks to their wing structure, bumble bees can fly forward, sideways, and backwards. They are also able to lift twice their weight in pollen. Even high elevation flowers benefit from their pollination services. Bumble bees have been seen foraging on Mount Everest at elevations close to 17,000 feet! Closer to home, the nature center hosts a variety of bumble bee species. Next time you spot a bumble flying among the flowers, take some time to appreciate the unique riff these bees have taken on the physics of flight.

## An Unusual Visitor

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, MKNC



In mid-May, a couple of MKNC employees noticed an unusual animal in the turtle pond. Was this western fence lizard was trying to find another reptile friend to hang out with? Though not completely unheard of, his presence was fairly unique for the nature center. The Idaho Botanical Garden, just a mile away in the foothills, is crawling with this species.

Males have the distinct blue throat and side belly patches (see photo) and they grow to be a maximum of 3.5 inches long. Their distribution is limited to the southwest corner of the state and they are related to the sagebrush lizard.

Western fence lizard. Photo by Vicky Runnoe.

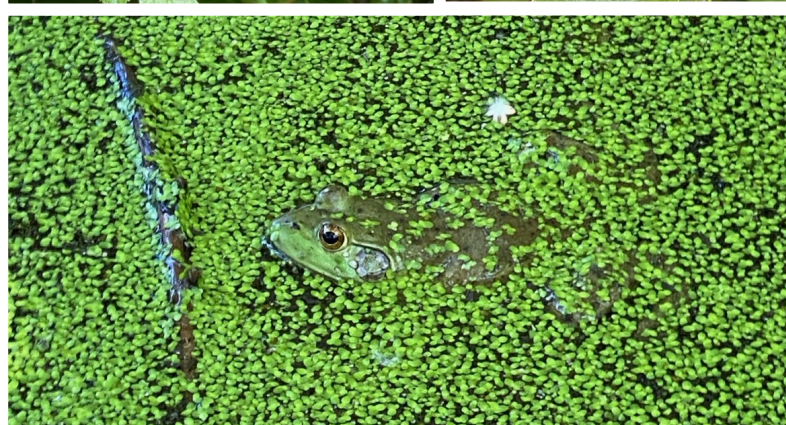
# Small Stuff

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, IDFG

The big attractions at the nature center are the visitor center, underwater viewing windows, the sturgeon pond and the flower gardens. For a first time visitor, these features make for a great experience. But for those of us who work here and for those of you who are frequent visitors, slowing down and noticing the small stuff might enhance your walk around the nature center loops. On a late June day, I had a rare lull in my workday and decided to capture some photos of “the small stuff.”



Clockwise starting in upper right: slug slime, cranefly, bullfrog, rose gall, male pine cone. Middle: Oregon grapes turning from green to purple.







# New Faces

Did you know that MK Nature Center has two full time employees, three 2/3 time employees and four 1/2 time employees? Introducing three new 1/2 time employees! Not often do several folks start together, so this has been a big spring for training and bonding! Part time staff work together to cover our front desk, greet customers, answer the phones, clean, take care of captive animals, wash the INSIDES of the fish viewing windows, perform trail work, prune, sweep, rake...and so many other tasks that are too numerous to list. You will see one or more of these new faces when you visit the MK Nature Center. We welcome them to our team!

## Gage Pendleton

Hi I'm Gage and I'm one of the new part time employees at the MK Nature Center! I recently graduated from Boise State with a bachelor's in biology! I wanted to work here at the nature center because I've been going here since I was a kid. I would also like to pursue a further career path in biology and this job is a great experience!



## Mina Catovic

Hi everyone! My name is Amina but I usually just go by Mina. I just recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from BSU, and I hope to one day work in wildlife conservation or pursue my masters, possibly in ornithology-related research. In my free time I enjoy reading, spending time with my sisters, and cuddling all four of my cats (Lala, Jasper, Raven, & Milo). I am new to the birding world, but have already fallen in love with seeing as many beautiful birds as I can and now birding takes up mostly all my free time.



## Kennedy Peel

My name is Kennedy Peel, and I'm an Ecology, Evolution and Behavioral Biology student at Boise State. I chose to work at MK Nature Center because I value the importance of providing natural spaces for our wildlife amidst our expanding urban setting. My role at MK will allow me to learn more about our native flora and fauna and provides me with learning opportunities that I wouldn't have anywhere else. I'm excited to be a part of a wonderful team of people who share the same passion that I do, and to build connections with the public by providing meaningful experiences here at MK.

# Moving On

Saying hello to new employees (see page 8) means saying goodbye to others. We have thoroughly enjoyed our year with these four hard-working women.

## Hannah Myers

I learned more in my short time at MKNC than I did working in Yellowstone National Park for five years! It was such a fun and rewarding experience, and I am very grateful.



## Jenna Welinski

It has been a pleasure working at the MK Nature Center this year. We have an incredible group of volunteers and our amazing staff that work so hard every day to keep this place so beautiful all year round, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to have been part of it. I will forever be thankful for the new skills I have gained and newly discovered interests that I've come across throughout my time at MK. Thank you to everyone that contributed to my experience, and I will miss working for this wonderful place!



## Erica Wilson

Coming to work at the nature center, never knowing for certain what the day would bring or what new critters may show themselves was always exciting. Every day was a mix of the regular work and new experiences waiting to be had. I will miss it and will be sure to visit often so I can continue having new experiences.

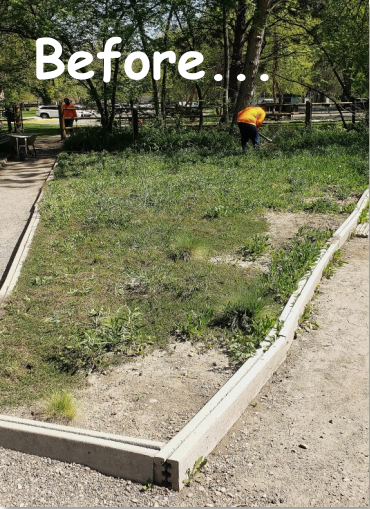


## Vicky Runnoe

Vicky has been the Conservation Education Supervisor at the Nature Center for 8 years. Prior to that, she worked in a similar capacity at Idaho Fish and Game Headquarters for 10 years. She started her prolific IDFG career in the Salmon Region as their Regional Conservation Educator for 9 years. Vicky is retiring at the end of the summer and will be missed for her good sense of humor, positive attitude, advocacy for the nature center, liaison with the Friends Groups, teaching and birding skills and problem solving. See page 2 for Vicky's parting thoughts. As you can see from the photo on the left, Vicky won't have any problem keeping busy in her retirement. Good luck to Vicky and CONGRATULATIONS!



Before...



# New Sensory Garden

Sue Dudley, Gift Shop Manager and Volunteer Coordinator

Many years ago, Susan Ziebarth had an idea to turn one of the spokes in the butterfly garden into a sensory garden. She got the idea from a person who volunteered from Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, who mentioned it would be great to have a garden where someone could smell, touch and see vibrant colors of flowers. This year I decided to bring the idea to life. I reached out to three amazing volunteers Jan Egge, Benita Putzier and Susan Floriana-Riley, who I knew would welcome the challenge of taking a flower bed with mostly grass and weeds growing in it, and transforming it into beautiful garden oasis of color, smells and textures for all our visitors to enjoy.

Jan, Benita and Susan worked tirelessly on this project, starting in April with designing the garden layout. Thanks to a donation from the Friends of MK Nature Center, a landscape crew was hired to do the initial removing of the topsoil. However, due to the long-time compaction of the soil a lot of work was still required. Never ones to shy away from hard work, the trio spent a lot of time removing roots and rocks by hand before the garden bed was ready for planting. During this time many conversations were had to decide the types of plants needed to meet their vision for the garden.



Talk about a labor of love! Countless hours went into the making of this garden with the majority of those hours done by Jan, Benita and Susan. They had support from the nature center staff Susan Ziebarth, Jenna Welinski, Bethany Tennant, Erica Wilson, Gage Pendleton and myself. Todd Finato volunteered to build a beautiful wooden bench and stepping stones for this garden. He and his son, James, installed them in the garden.

By June, the garden was done. It is an amazing addition that visitors will enjoy both now and into the future. Jan, Benita and Susan, we greatly appreciate all your hard work! THANK YOU!

James and Todd Finato.

During...



After...



Jan Egge, Susan Floriana-Riley, Benita Putzier are the dynamic trio behind this project. Photos by Sue Dudley.



# Remembering Hilda Packard

August 3, 1925-April 21, 2024

Sue Dudley, Gift Shop Manager and Volunteer Coordinator

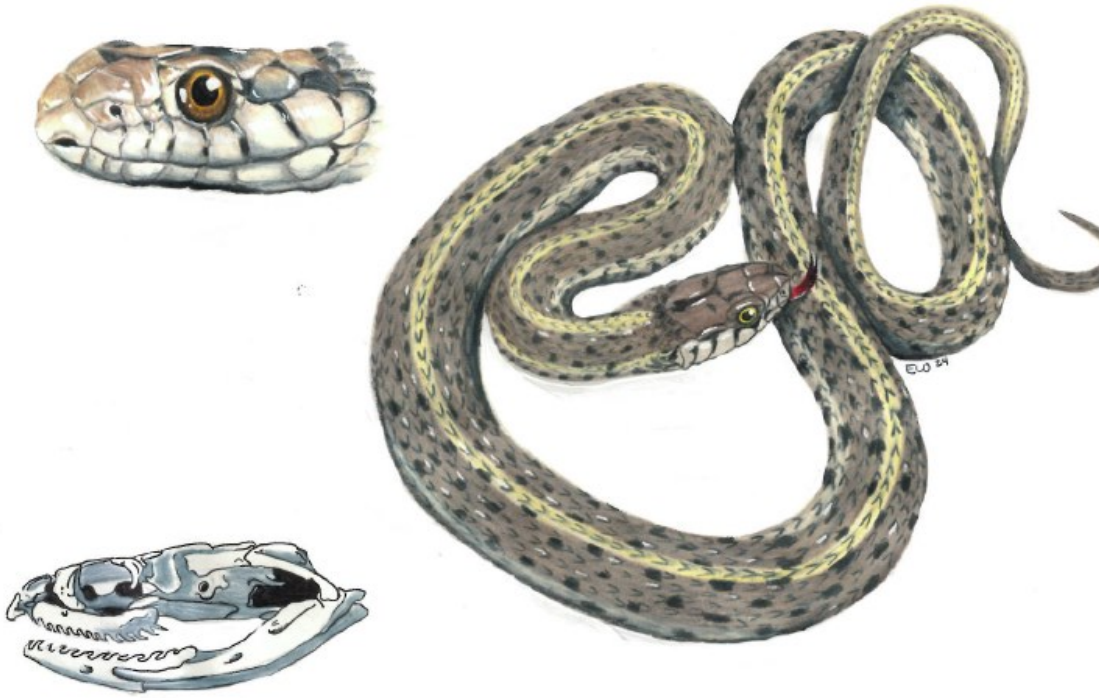


I first met Hilda back in 2007 when she came to the nature center for the unveiling of our new viewing windows. I was immediately drawn to her spunky, fun-loving personality, she would become a person I really cherished and admired over the years. What an amazing woman she was! You would never meet a more giving or thoughtful person. She donated faithfully, every month to the nature center *for 17 years*. She would also bring the staff chocolates every Christmas and give me a beautiful hyacinth bulb that she grew herself. I always said that I wanted to be Hilda when I grew up. I will miss you, Hilda.



# Art and Nature

Artwork and information by  
Erica Wilson, MKNC



## Garter Snake

**Common Name:** Terrestrial Garter Snake

**Scientific Name:** *Thamnophis elegans*

**In Idaho:** Year-round, native species

**Life Cycle/ Reproduction:** Females give birth early August to mid-September to live young, ranging in number from 5 to 50 babies. Young snakes develop into mature adults within two to three years. Wild garter snakes have an average life expectancy of about four to ten years but can live up to 20 years in captivity.

### Facts:

Most garter snakes are about 30 to 35 inches long, but they may be 18 inches to over 50 inches long.

Garter snakes hunt in the water and on land. Fish, frogs, tadpoles, earthworms, slugs, mice or other small animals make up their diet.

Snakes use their tongues to smell. They flick their tongue out, pick up scents on the tongue and then pass the tongue over a special organ on the roof of the mouth called the Jacobson's organ.

Garter snakes will often hibernate together. Hundreds of garter snakes may be found using the same den in the winter. By huddling together, they help to keep each other warm.

Cold-blooded means snakes are the same temperature as their surroundings. Cold-blooded animals are ectothermic. Ectothermic animals get heat from outside their bodies.

Their saliva is slightly toxic, so it helps to immobilize their prey. This makes it easier for garter snakes to swallow their meal. Garter snakes swallow their prey whole.

Garter snakes are one of the few snakes in Idaho that give live birth to their young, they don't lay eggs.

Shedding their skin allows snakes to grow and remove any parasites that may have attached to the old skin.

# DONORS



Keith Allison  
Hilda Packard

Donors listed above do not include Friends of MK Nature Center members and donations.

# VOLUNTEERS

## April

Tom Allen  
Glenn Anders  
Michele Andrews  
Jaimi Anghel  
Violette Anghel  
Kim Bakruth  
Kristen Barrash  
Kay Beall  
Steve Berg  
Pam Bly  
Brandon Burgess  
Susie Carlson  
Cindy Clark  
Beth Corbin  
Ray Corbin  
Cyndi Coulter  
Alan Crockett  
Alice Crockett  
Patrice Davies  
Ann DeBolt  
Chadwick DeFehr  
Laurie DeRocher  
Nancy DeWitt  
Joan Dodd  
Kevin Drews  
Jan Egge  
Christie Englesby  
Helen Faith  
Todd Finato  
Krystell Finato  
Dayne Galash  
Steve Getlein  
Brooklyn Gore  
Elizabeth Grosse  
Marylee Hale  
Anne Halford

Helen Harrington  
Vicki Henderson  
Ed Henderson  
Julie Houston  
Tao Huang  
Jody Hull  
Jim Hull  
Kay Hummel  
Jim James  
Linda Jarsky  
Tara Jennings  
Lynn Kelley  
Eric Keren  
Carolyn King  
Susan King  
Gail Kirkpatrick  
Carolyn Larson  
Kevin Laughlin  
Mike Mancuso  
Cindy Marlow  
Jon Mathews  
Linda Mazzu  
Martha McClay  
Barbara McGillivray  
Nanette McGrath  
Michelle Meyers  
Caroline Morris  
Rene Mullen  
Terri Muse  
Bronwyn Myers  
Gail Nottingham  
Crista O'Conner  
Karie Pappani  
Christie Patterson  
Benita Putzier  
Jenna Raino

## May

Susan Riley  
Jane Rohling  
Madeline Rosa  
Beth Schadd  
Arleen Schaeffer  
William Scott  
Kirsten Severud  
Katie Sewell  
Howard Sheppa  
Katie Sheppa  
Christine Simon  
Lorna Snowden  
Laura Speerhart  
Denise Steneck  
Al Straessle  
Lauren Studley  
Sandy Sweet  
Bonnie Urresti  
Mariano Vargas

## June

Claire Veseth  
Marc von Huene  
Roger Wallace  
Debbie Wiggins  
Kevin Wilson  
Judy Wojcicki  
Doug Zamzow  
Julia Zarbnisky  
LAM Research 17 Volunteers  
Micron 7 Volunteers

Volunteer Julia Zarbnisky staffs an education booth about pollinators and their connection to big game animals.



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