Online Seasonal Activities for Families

Starved Rock Saplings

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Thank you for your interest in Starved Rock State Park. The following Starved Rock Sapling seasonal program is to help engage children and families in nature; at home, in their neighborhood, or at Starved Rock and Matthiessen State Parks.

Each packet will be posted to the Starved Rock and Matthiessen State Park Facebook page every October, January, April, and July. Packets can also be downloaded from the IDNR website at www2.illinois.gov/dnr/parks/pages/StarvedRock.aspx under the Interpretive tab.

Packets will include the following:

DISCOVER:

fun facts and information about the natural world.

CONNECT:

nature activities, storybook suggestions, games, and crafts .

EXPLORE:

ideas for getting outdoors and exploring the natural world in your backyard, neighborhood, or community parks.

Winter Edition

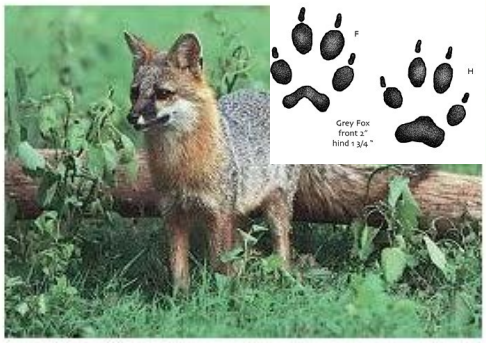
Starved Rock and Matthiessen State Parks

www2.illinois.gov/dnr **Starved Rock and Matthiessen State Parks**

By Lisa Sons, Natural Resource Coordinator

DISCOVER

MAKE YOUR OWN FIELD GUIDE TO MAMMALS AND TRACKS!



Print off page 1 with page 2 as the backside of the copy. Use cardstock for thicker cards, and laminate. You can also hole punch and attach each card on a key ring for easy use.

Red Fox

- Not native to North America. It is a very adaptable creature and can now be found virtually in any habitat in the world.
- Will eat anything from fruit, rabbits, birds, frogs, garbage, cat or dog food, and more.
- Uses its bushy tail for both balance and a warm cover for its face in winter.
- Have 5-12 pups every spring in a den.

White Tailed Deer

- An adult male will have antlers that he will shed every year. They can weigh up to 300 pounds.
- Named for the underside of their tails which are white. They show this when alarmed.
- Females can have 1-4 young every year. Fawns are covered in spots.

Ground Hog

- Whistle when alarmed or during courtship to attract a mate.
- Will climb trees.
- Herbivore that eats plants, roots, and other vegetation.
- Babies are born in spring.
- Hibernate or go into a deep sleep/coma during the winter.

Gray Fox

- The only member of the dog family that can climb trees.
- Love to eat cottontail rabbits, but will also dine on small rodents and birds.
- Coyote, wolves, and humans are their only predators.
- Do not cross breed with the red fox.
- Native to North America, where as the red fox came from England.

Striped Skunk

- Will only spray when cornered and threatened. Biggest predator is the Great Horned Owl.
- Babies are born in May and within 13-30 days are fully functional with scent glands of their own.
- Have sharp claws for digging up worms, slugs, grubs, and other insects.

Gray Squirrel

- A tree squirrel that eats eggs, birds, tree bark, nuts, and seeds.
- Nest in tree cavities or make nests of leaves and twigs in branches.
- Over 200 species of squirrels worldwide except for Australia.
- Belong to the rodent family along with beavers.

Opossum

- North America's only marsupial (female has a pouch).
- Solitary and nocturnal animal. Will play dead or frozen when frightened "playing possum"
- Omnivore: eats insects, worms, fruits, plants, snakes, carrion (dead animals), etc.
- Shortest lived mammal: 2-4 yrs.

Raccoon

- Raccoons will eat anything they can find: eggs, snakes, carrion (dead animals), fruit, vegetables, garbage, etc.
- Will den in tree cavities, holes, hollowed out logs, human's attics, etc.
- Cubs born in late spring and will stay with mom for several months in summer.

CONNECT

HIBERNATION EXPERIMENT

Humans stay warm in winter by putting on more clothes such as scarves, mittens, coats, snow pants, and boots! Fireplaces, furnaces, heaters, blankets, and warm fuzzy socks help too! Animals don't have those options, but one way they can stay warm is by growing a thick layer of fat, which acts as an insulator to keep them warm.

What are some other ways animals stay warm in the cold of winter?

- Some animals hibernate, they build a den or burrow and sleep for the colder months. Their body temperature drops and heart rate slows down to conserve energy.
- Other animals migrate for winter, this means they move to a warmer climate where food is available.
- Some animals adapt to the change in climate. They grow warmer fur or feathers or grow a layer of insulating fat. The fat also acts as a food store for when food is scarce.

Try this fun "hibernation" experiment at home!

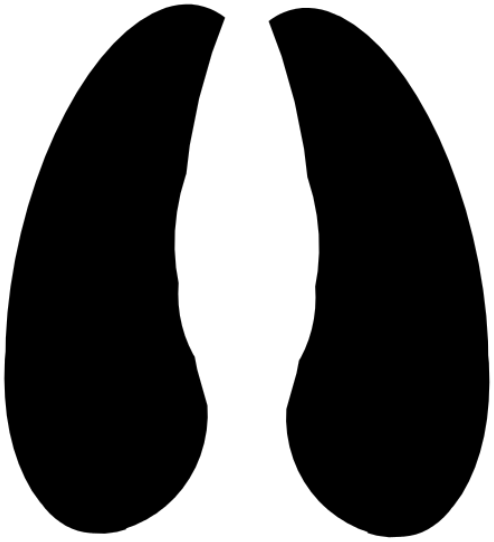
MATERIALS

Lard or shortening	Latex gloves	Ice or snow
Water	large bowl	Stopwatch

INSTRUCTIONS

- Place ice and water in a large bowl.
- Carefully place your hands in the ice water and time how long you can keep them in the water before it gets uncomfortable – be careful not to leave them in longer than that.
- Put the glove on and cover with lard.
- Put the gloved hand in the ice water and time how long it takes to feel uncomfortable this time.
  **You should find that the lard acts as an insulator and protects your hand from the cold of the icy water. An insulator is something that doesn't easily allow heat to escape. In this investigation the lard is insulating your hand from the icy cold water.

MAKE YOUR OWN TRACKS



MATERIALS

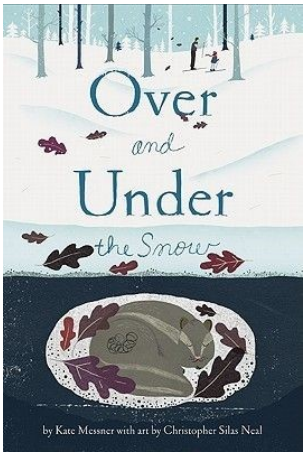
- Kitchen sponge
- 4 inch x 4 inch piece of cardboard
- Scissors
- Glue
- Track template (on right/deer track)
- Paper plate
- Craft paint (any color) or stamp ink pad
- Construction paper for stamping

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cut out the deer track on the right.
- Trace the track onto a sponge and cut out the shape.
- Glue the sponge track to a 4 inch by 4 inch piece of card board.
- Pour some craft paint onto a paper plate and tap your track into the paint.
- Gently stamp the sponge track onto a clean piece of paper to reveal the track you have made.
- What other types of animal tracks can you look up and make into a sponge track stamp?

NATURE READS!

- ***Over and Under the Snow,*** by Kate Messner
- ***Time to Sleep,*** by Denise Fleming
- ***Tracks in the Snow,*** by Wong Herbert Yee



WEBSITES FOR LITTLE NATURALISTS

- https://www.nrpa.org/blog/5-ideas-for-exploring-nature-with-kids-this-winter/
- https://runwildmychild.com/winter-nature-walk-ideas-for-kids/
- https://www.whatdowedoallday.com/indoor-nature-activities-for-winter/

EXPLORE

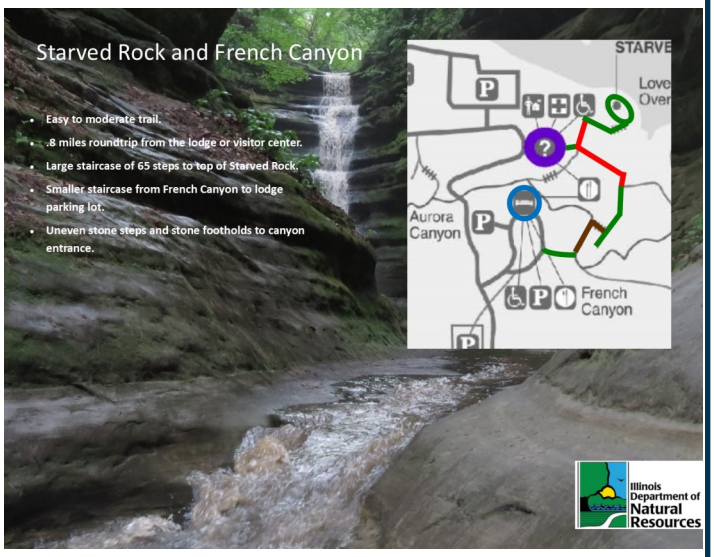
NATURE HIKE

- Explore your backyard, neighborhood, community parks, or Starved Rock and Matthiessen State Parks with a fun scavenger hunt this fall. Don't forget to "LEAVE NO TRACE" by leaving only footprints and taking only memories when visiting a park.

EXPLORE YOUR STATE PARKS!

Visit **www2.illinois.gov/dnr** to view state parks by region under the Parks and Recreation tab. What state parks are close to your home? Help your family plan a visit by exploring the parks webpage. What does your local state park have to offer; hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping, fishing, skiing, or boating? Read over the trail maps, trail suggestions, rules and regulations (stay on marked trails), and head out to explore. Here are some recommended trails for families at Starved Rock State Park. Happy Hikers=Happy Trails!

Great trek for families with little ones if you park off of route 178 at the St. Louis parking lot just south of the park's west entrance and hike into St. Louis Canyon.



The most convenient hike at the park starting from the main parking lot by the river and visitor center leading to the park's namesake Starved Rock and French Canyon. French Canyon is not recommended for children under age 5 or anyone in winter when the ground is snow and ice covered.

The eastern canyons of Illinois, Ottawa, and Kaskaskia are great for families due to their length and proximity to parking lots. Just one mile roundtrip hikes into the canyons. Be aware the trails are not paved and you will have a few small creek crossings in spring and early summer.