
Mark your calendars for Thursday, July 20, for a unique experience as Dan Blegen presents "Pete Seeger: A Musical Portrait." The presentation will

be in "docu-concert" format, created by Blegen. A retired teacher, author, poet, and playwright, he interweaves the music and historical highlights of the musician in his presentation. Plan on singing

along! This program is free and open to all. Venue is the Palmer Lake Town Hall. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the program begins at 7. Light refreshments are served after the presentation.

Bird Watch on the Palmer Divide Wren: *Troglodytes*



By Elizabeth Hacker

I've always considered the wren to be the Napoleon of the bird world. It's a small energetic bird with a big attitude. Short and pudgy in stature, it holds its head high and points its tail upward as if it is ready to conquer the world.

Range and characteristics

Many wren species and subspecies are found across the country. There are four wren species found on the Palmer Divide: house, rock, Bewick's, and canyon. Most wrens are less than 5 inches in length but at 6 inches, the canyon wren is bigger. Male and female look similar and are generally grayish brown on top and buff underneath. Wrens have a subtle stripe at the end of their short covert wings, an eye ring, an eyebrow, a thin, slightly down-turned beak, and pink legs. For me, the features that distinguish a wren from other little brown birds is a tail that tilts up and a perky song, which is only heard during mating season.

In comparison to the dull brown wrens in North America, the wrens in Australia are very colorful! Depending on the region, their coloring varies. Some are red but most are blue. However, the feature that distinguishes all wrens is their perky song. When I hear it, no matter where in the world I am, I know it's a wren before I even lay my eyes on it.

Nesting

Wrens will nest almost anywhere, including nest boxes, old woodpecker holes, flower pots, and other unsuspected places such as in the pocket of a scarecrow. Often, wrens return to the same territory each season. I often see them in old bluebird nesting boxes along the Santa Fe trail and wonder if the ones I see are descendants of the ones that nested there last year.

Mating

Males arrive a week or two earlier than the females and in their few days as bachelors, they build several nests to show to the females when they arrive, gen-



Above: Hear that loud bird song? It's probably a wren! Photo by Steve Davis.

erally a week or two later. Females inspect the nests of several males before choosing a mate. Once a pair bond is secure, the pair remains monogamous for at least for one breeding season. I often wonder why males spend so much time building nests to show to the female because once they pair up, the female chooses a new location where she then builds a new nest for her eggs.

Friend or fiend?

Many birders discourage wrens from nesting in their yards because of the tactics these little tyrants use to defend their territory. A single wren can wreak havoc on other birds by poking holes in eggs, destroying nests, and filling bird boxes with debris. One day I stopped by a friend's ranch and found this otherwise sweet diminutive lady to be distressed. A wren had gone down her line of bluebird boxes and poked a single hole in every egg. She was beside herself. Given that she had at least 20 boxes, it is a safe say that more than 60 eggs were destroyed.

Decline in nesting birds

Often, I received emails from readers who are con-

cerned that they were not seeing the number of birds nesting that they usually see on the Divide. I am not an expert, so when I'm asked questions like this I consult one. I was told that many migratory birds can arrive two weeks late due to the cold, wet or dry, spring weather. Birds are already stressed from their long migrations and conditions they encounter along the way, especially when they encounter unusually harsh conditions. Once they arrive and establish a territory, courting, breeding and nest building consume huge amounts of energy for these little birds. Many birds' diet shifts from carbs to protein from insects. Often weather inversions will delay or reduce the insect population, which puts even more stress on an already stressed-out bird and seasonal numbers may go into a decline.

Recovery

Birds are resilient, and even though the numbers may be in decline one year, as conditions improve most birds will recover. For many years, our state bird, the lark bunting, was in decline. The long drought we experienced at the turn of the century put stress on many animal species. The resilient lark bunting moved north to nest in Wyoming and Montana. When conditions improved in Colorado, it returned.

Record-keeping

Keeping track of the number of birds is an ongoing challenge. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology developed a cell phone app to help birders keep track of the birds they see. It's called ebird. It's free to download. When I lead birders on a walk, I list all the birds we see and then submit the list to ebird, so they will have a record of the birds in an area.

Elizabeth Hacker is a writer and artist. Email her at elizabethhacker@ocn.me to share bird pictures and stories.

High Altitude Nature and Gardens (HANG)

With a raised bed or container, crops thrive

By Janet Sellers

Current hot weather means it's time for summer crops and flowers, even though we've had some wild weather temperature changes. We must protect our ponderosa habitat and not deplete its need for its own food cycle of growth and decay in place if we wish to have trees, so for non-forest or "foreign" flowers and food plants, raised beds are optimal in our area, and keep the nutrients from our kitchen compost available on the spot for our food plants. Food soil from kitchen food scraps, how simple! Forest soil from forest habitat, even simpler.

In containers or raised beds, we can still seed baby lettuces, scallions, chives, etc., and staying on top of harvesting keeps plants producing, especially in the shade of the three sisters garden of corn, squash and beans, the symbiotic sisters. I've even seeded the

three sisters garden in July and had a harvest September/October. Use 50-day corn!

Propagate tomato plants and other leafy crop plants like basil easily by taking large stemmed leaves—leaf top clusters of four for basil—gently stripping the bottom 4 inches of leafy part for a stem of sorts, leaving at least 3-5 inches of leaf. For basil, just pop the stem in water and in 2 weeks you have a rooted plant. With tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and Russian sage, cover the stripped stem with good, composted soil in the raised bed where the parent plants are. Put a rock on top to keep the stem down and moist in the soil, water well but gently, and don't let it dry out! Same process for many ornamentals, too.

In about two to three weeks, gently check for root hairs, and after that, put the new plantlet where you like. It may flower if the temps stay warm, but can also

over-winter indoors and be a great plant for next year. Tomatoes can live for years indoors/outdoors if cared for and no frost. Believe it or not, we can start some fall seeds the end of July, mid-August tends to have the cool nights that are good for fall crops

New columbine tip: pinch off the immature seed heads from the spent flower of the columbine, and the plant will continue to bloom. Unlike dead-heading petunias and marigolds for optimal long blooming, the columbine needs the actual seed head off and it will do its continued blooming.

Janet Sellers is an avid nature and garden enthusiast.

For local high-altitude nature and garden information collected just for you, visit [facebook.com/MonumentCommunityGarden](https://www.facebook.com/MonumentCommunityGarden). Janet can be reached at JanetSellers@ocn.me.

Art Matters

Older Women Artists now blue-chip favorites



By Janet Sellers

The newest blue-chip artists are actually older women, now called "OWA" for Older Women Artists. The term "blue chip" comes from a trader on Wall Street in the 1800s who coined the term for stocks that consistently held their value at the top, and the blue poker chip that holds the highest value in poker.

It wasn't long before the art world took that moniker and applied it to art with consistent value as a commodity, to give some substance or consensus to the high priced and highly volatile albeit one of the few unregulated commodity markets, which

is fine art. The Wall Street Journal reports that older women artists are now the historically undervalued niche, and that women artists are now sought after by collectors and dealers as they attempt to identify the undervalued female artists. Age aside, the quality and power of the work still have to have teeth, value, and meaning not only to the artist but also to the collectors, for whom the dealers scramble to please, and of course sell, the works.

It appears the women artists were vastly overlooked by 20th-century scholars and museums, but the art world has taken notice now, and the OWA are

in demand, fetching the highest millions of dollars in the history of female artists in sales, and just plain popular as the next big blue-chip artists.

Legitimate demand exists when there is a large interest with buyers. If not, applied influential factors of interest, such as with institutions, critics, and those with the wherewithal to artificially buy out art shows, may come into play. Art is not fungible, so influence and interest play a huge part in the art world, but it is certainly not the only source of demand, sales, or collecting.

Like many artists in history, particularly the avant