



**Above:** Illustration by Elizabeth Hacker of Bullock's Orioles. A color version is posted at [www.ocn.me/v13n6bird.htm](http://www.ocn.me/v13n6bird.htm).

extract nectar from flowers, pick fruit, and glean succulent insects like caterpillars, spiders, and aphids from leaves, bark, and grasses. In addition to pollination, orioles help to keep forests healthy by consuming large quantities of insects during the spring when protein is necessary for egg development and in summer when protein is needed to sustain chicks and help them grow fast and strong. Removing large quantities of insects from tree leaves and bark helps to maintain healthy forests.

### Song

Given the male's bright yellow underbelly, one might expect that it would be easy to spot him but he blends into the foliage and is difficult to see. Orioles tend to dart from leaf to leaf and when they do, it is possible to see a flash of color. But the forest is large, so it helps to get a bead on

their location by listening for their song.

An oriole's song is unmistakable, and I rely on it to determine its location. Male and female have a similar series of whistles, tweets, and rattles. The female's ending to the song is harsher and more abrupt and her song is much louder than the male's, especially when she is constructing the nest.

Typically, birds are most vocal in the morning, quiet in the afternoon, and sing again but to a lesser degree in the evening. But why do birds tweet?

Bird songs are form of communication and birds' way of sending a message. For example, it is easy to distinguish the difference between a frenzied warning cry that a predator is near and a melodic call of love, but there are other subtleties that are less obvious.

An oriole's call is complex and carries more than 60 notes per second. Males sing to mark and defend a territory. The more complex his song, the better chance he has of attracting a mate, because females evaluate a male's ability to provide for her and defend the nest by the complexity of his song. Female birds don't have to look good or sing to attract a mate. A female sings because she has assumed dominant role, and this role for the female oriole is nest building.

### Mating and nesting

Oriole nests are masterpieces of engineering genius. The female tweets to her mate to let him know that she needs to build the nest. He happily responds to her requests and often surprises her by bringing manmade shiny objects to brighten up the nest. She takes his "gifts" and weaves them into the nest.

She uses her long, slender beak to weave long pliable stands of grass to form the basic structure. Bark, hair, fur, twine, wool, and feathers are added to strengthen the pouch-like nest, which is attached at the rim and hangs down 6 to 8 inches from thin outer branches of a tree.

Nests are located 8 to 20 feet above the ground and, while they may sway in the breeze, they are strong and secure and can withstand gale-force winds. While remnants of a nest often last for several seasons, and the male may return to the same location, nests are never reused.

Oriole nests blend into the foliage and are difficult to find. It takes time and patience to find the nest because orioles search for food a good distance from their nest so as not to alert predators, such as crows, magpies, and jays, to its location.

The female lays two to seven eggs and incubates them for about two weeks while the male brings her food. When the chicks hatch, both the male and female bring food to the nest. Chicks fledge the nest in about three weeks but stay close to the parents to learn survival skills.

### Other interesting facts

Chicks are unable to sing when they hatch. They quickly learn this skill from their father. The first song they learn is a cry for food. The louder they cry, the harder the parents work to bring them a meal.

There are regional variations in the Bullock's oriole song. Oriole songs in Colorado are slightly different than songs in Wyoming. Regional dialects develop because birds listen to other birds and adapt their own song.

When a male's song is played back to him, he does not recognize it and becomes defensive, thinking it is an intruder. Many birders now use recording devices to play back birds' songs. The recording alarms a male and coaxes him out of hiding, giving birders an added advantage. I don't use this technique and discourage its use because it puts added stress on already stressed out males. Also, when a male comes out of hiding, predators are alerted to its location.

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## Art Matters

# Plein air is the art of being outdoors



By Janet Sellers

Artists and art collectors of all levels enjoy plein air paintings. The artworks appear fresh, the colors are vivid, and the brushstrokes reveal the artists' thoughts about nature as no other art tends to do.

Plein air art is a challenge few artists are able to meet. There is no time for labored drawings, color studies or photographs as reference. The artist must be able to quickly assess the approach, then with speed and accuracy apply each brush stroke efficiently to create the painting.

Artists usually use watercolors or oils for the painting: watercolors because they are quick and immediately finished; oils because the artist likes them, even though they take a year to dry.

So, just what is plein air art? Basically, the term implies that the work was created outdoors in nature, without the convenience of the studio. Some artists still bring a work back to the controlled environment of the studio to complete it without the wind, sand, and bugs the outdoors provides as distraction. Plein air art works are usually paintings or drawings, but some sculptors also work outdoors as the name of the genre suggests.

The artist must create the work in the conditions of the day, often in spite of

conditions less than ideal. Outdoors, the artist has the freshness and inspiration of nature but also the inconveniences. There are few second chances for observation of the skies, sunlight, and colors, because these things change in minutes or an hour or less. So the artist must take the scene for what it is and gather the vision quickly and accurately.

If the call of making a picture outdoors sounds appealing, I encourage you to start right away. I've written a few tips here to help make the process as simple as possible, and while the fun is guaranteed, the addition of a glass of wine (or lemonade) is one of my favorite must-haves for summer plein air painting.

My secret weapon for plein air success is a small cardboard viewfinder that I bring along every time. With a viewfinder, an artist can scope out many scenes in nature and choose the composition for the artwork most easily. Just point and shoot, so to speak. One can also take a photograph instead of using a viewfinder, but some artists and collectors don't consider that genuine plein air technique.

For plein air watercolor works, an artist might choose these materials: a small viewfinder cut from cardstock, the sketch box with clips, watercolor paper, pencils,

eraser, pencil sharpener, a large round brush with an excellent tip, palette, at least the three primary colors of watercolors (in paint or colored pencil form), water, paper, and a knapsack to carry it all. Then take a hike to the mountains or your back deck and get to painting!

### June art events

**Monument Art Hop**—Venues open until 8 p.m. **June 20**. Galleries, restaurants, and boutiques of historic downtown Monument feature art openings, food, and live music.

**Friday Art Night**—**June 7, 14, 21**. Local art gallery receptions for featured artists, events and art shows. See below for details.

**Tri-Lakes Views will install its 2013 outdoor sculptures exhibit June 5**; artist reception 6 to 8 p.m. at Tri-Lakes Center for the Arts (TCLA). The exhibit will run until summer 2014. Maps are available at local merchants. TCLA is located at 304 Highway 105 in Palmer Lake.

**Bella Art & Frame presents Colorado Barnscapes by Margaret Zimbrick**, on display **June 1 to 27**; artist reception 5 to 8 p.m. **June 14** (a Friday Art Nights event). Bella Art and Frame, 183 Washington St. in Monument.

**Palmer Lake Art Group art show and sale June 7-15**; artist reception **June 7**, 5 to 8 p.m., with refreshments, music, raffle drawings for artistic gifts created by member artists. Show judged by Anthony T. Archuleta. Monument Hill Church, 18725 Monument Hill Rd. in Monument.

**Southwinds Fine Art Gallery shows fine local artists' works (a Friday Art Nights event), 5 to 8 p.m. June 21**. Refreshments and karaoke-style fun will be featured for June, so bring your ukulele or just a smile—it's always a blast at Southwinds. Southwinds Fine Art Gallery, corner of Baptist and Roller Coaster Roads in Colorado Springs. (The entry is just north of Baptist Road. If you go all the way to Baptist Road, you've gone too far).

**TLCA presents Black and White Mixed Arts Exhibition June 3 to 27**. The artist reception is 6 to 8 p.m. **June 7** (a Friday Art Nights event). TCLA is located at 304 Highway 105 in Palmer Lake.

*Janet Sellers is an American artist, art teacher, and writer. She makes public art sculptures, puts brush to paint every day, and teaches art locally outdoors (and indoors). Sellers lives in Woodmoor. She can be reached at [janetsellers@ocn.me](mailto:janetsellers@ocn.me).*

## Snapshots of Our Community

### Art Hop May 16



**Left:** Wisdom Tea House presented the art of Jennifer Hickman, left, and Shelley Olivier, who chatted with Art Hop guests about their *Color and Light* art show that filled the teahouse walls for the first Art Hop of 2013. **Right:** At Hangers Thrift Shop, guests including Jackie Spegele, left, with store manager Cara Vanderkolk, created fun, free glass sculptures to take home. The staff at Hangers showed visitors how to invert glass bowls and place them atop other glassware to create the effect of whimsical "glass mushrooms" for the garden. *Photos by Janet Sellers.*

