

As the name implies, the burrowing owl makes its home underground in abandoned holes excavated by animals like prairie dogs.

It nests in loose colonies. Females are the same size as males. After she lays up to a dozen eggs, both she and her mate take turns incubating the eggs and hunting for food. A male may mate with more than one female and tend to several nests.

The burrowing owl is diurnal, meaning that it primarily hunts during the day. Large insects, small rodents, amphibians, and reptiles make up the burrowing owl diet, and to ensure a readily available food supply, prey is stored in large underground caches. The burrow entrance is often lined with cow dung to attract beetles that chicks can hunt without venturing too far.

Many of the eggs will hatch, and it's truly amazing to watch all these little heads pop up and down as they peer out from their burrows. Only a few chicks will survive to adulthood. Interestingly, adults will mimic the sound of a rattlesnake in an effort to scare away predators like coyotes.

Once commonly found in this area, burrowing owl populations have dwindled due to habitat lost to development and extermination of the prairie dog. The City of Colorado Springs has dedicated land for burrowing owls, but there has been no effort that I am aware of to do so in northern El Paso County.

Barn owl

The barn owl is an exceptionally beautiful and graceful bird and is the only member of the family of Tytonidae. It is a medium-size owl with a slender body and a heart-shaped face. Its large dark eyes contrast with the white feathers on its face, and the tawny colored feathers on its side and back are lighter than other owls.

The barn owls' diet is restricted to mice and small rodents and it is found only in areas where mice are abundant, like barns—thus the name. It is also found in marshy areas where the protected Preble's meadow jumping mouse is also found.

Barn owls mate for life and when one dies, the remaining mate might or might not seek another. The female builds a nest from the pellets she expels while the male supplies her with a cache of food that might last up to a month. Barn owls will defend a nesting location, but they do not establish or defend a territory.

Unfortunately, the barn owl is not an adaptable species, and sadly its numbers are declining due to a variety of factors including habitat loss.

I've only scratched the surface of information available on these owls, and every year new research provides even more information about these amazing birds. The Nature and Rapture Center of Pueblo is open to the public and often rescues owls. It's well worth a visit.

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



High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

Ethnobiology: gorgeous natives, ancient olla water tech

By Janet Sellers

Want to live green all season—even on vacation? Olla (oh-yah) is an ancient watering system for easy, consistent watering care used with plants indoors or outdoors. An olla is a lidded terracotta water jug, a mini water tower that seeps water into the soil and has been used for thousands of years in Asia and the Americas. It saves lugging water to the garden and offers consistent moisture underground. Usually filled once a week, and with good mulching (using the plant's natural canopy of leaves such as big squash leaves, dried pine needles, leaves or gravel on the ground), the moisture stays in the ground with the plant roots.

Olla keeps a consistent moisture in the under-surface soil environment for healthy microbiological support of crops and ornamentals, and benefits our surrounding forest habitat area as well, limiting the water loss we experience with irrigation/evaporation issues. The olla sits idle when it rains, as water is not drawn from its moist surface to the plants. A 2-gallon olla can reach a 36-inch diameter garden bed area, so make sure the olla's pot is a size relative to the planter.

Potted plants can also use the olla system on a smaller scale with good results, and it's not limited to terracotta jugs. One can use a milk jug, water bottle, or another container as long as it can be submerged into the soil, with non-porous containers using tiny pinprick holes to let the water seep out into the soil. Or, glue an upside-down terracotta pot to a snug-fitting terracotta dish and bury it upside down; water fills the pot via the hole.

Let's all plan now for spring garden success, and let's fall in love with native plants. Native grasses and flowers evolved to thrive in our area and offer breathtaking beauty in all their growing cycles. Wild iris, Mariposa lily, pasque flowers, and our show-stopping yucca plants are just a few of our native beauties. Yucca flowers are edible, they say, and I heard one gardener tout stuffing them with cheese and deep-frying them.

We need to respect our local habitat as we care for our gardens. Bringing in non-native plants doesn't always work out for the rest of the ecosystem. Charlotte Reemts, vegetation ecologist of the Nature Con-

servancy, explains that "insects, and sometimes other wildlife are unable to eat or breed on introduced plants with the same success. Like any healthy food web, where you find insects—like butterflies and moths—you will also find the species that feed upon them, such as birds, mammals, and reptiles. Without native plants as the primary food source, diversity in such a system can be drastically reduced."

Many plants used thoughtfully in terms of the forest climate can do well and not ruin the forest habitat we so love in our region. Dry, rocky soil-loving and new to me are the long-seasoned chocolate flower (yellow daisy-like, smells chocolatey, edible), and cowboy's delight, a hollyhock-looking groundcover.

Janet Sellers is an avid lazy gardener (aka leave-it-natural) and active ethnobiologist promoting the dynamic relationships between people, biota, and environments from the cultures of the past and immediate present. She can be reached at JanetSellers@ocn.me.

Art Matters

Local art can warm your heart and home

By Janet Sellers

Cold days are upon us, and here are some ideas to warm your heart right up. Did you know that making art can be a powerful mood elevator? Mindless sketching and doodling are powerful friends for helping us focus. And they are powerful friends to

help balance our brain and relax as well. Curiously, though, making art can also create short-term mood repair, regulate mood, and more.

Many people have the blues in winter, and making some art just might be a helpful activity. Humans have made art throughout their existence, with no particular reason or motive other than it feels satisfying or important to do because it is meaningful. Researchers in the field of ethnobiology, which looks at the relationship between humans and the natural world emphasizing the cognition, resource management, and actions people take to reframe their world optimally, seem about to learn what the ancients (and artists) always have known: that making art is vital to a meaningful, satisfying life. I would further the idea that art is integral in how people manage to thrive wherever they are.

A study in the journal *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* found that "... in confronting sadness through art making, distraction is more beneficial than venting." The researchers found that distracting yourself by making unrelated art was far more effective than either venting your feelings through art or just sitting in your sadness. (Other forms of distraction might have this effect too.)

Lots of times, people won't get started on their own but will get going when with others if given the chance. People can enjoy a class or group workshop to get them started and begin enjoying making art

and lifting their spirits. Art classes make for a gift of a lifetime, and anybody can set up a month or two of art classes for the proven winter uplift effect.

Local art events

Join our local art scene this month for a fine art time and bring a friend or your sweetie. The following places not only have art you can bring home the same day but also offer a wish-list program so you can get just the right artful gift and see the smiles grow big.

Southwinds Art Gallery—10 local artists for the holiday season: paintings, photography, glasswork, jewelry, fiber art. Nov. 3-5; Friday 5-9 artist reception, Saturday 10-6, Sunday 1-5. 16575 Roller Coaster Rd., corner of Baptist and Roller Coaster Roads.

Tri-Lakes Center for the Arts—2017 Member and Resident Artist Show through Dec 30. Tri-Lakes Center for the Arts, 304 Highway 105, Palmer Lake.

Holiday Pop Up Shops—see Facebook: "local holiday pop up shops" Tri-Lakes area.

Bella Art and Frame Gallery—Nov. 4 and Dec. 2, 2-4 p.m., artist Joseph Bohler is selling and signing his art prints with a special incentive. 183 Washington St., Monument.

Janet Sellers is an award-winning artist, writer, and speaker. She teaches art and creative writing in the studio and on location. Contact her at janetsellers@ocn.me.



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