

insects, spiders and their eggs, larva, and pupae hidden deep within layers of tree bark. It uses its slender, downward-curved bill to glean harmful insects wedged into the bark. If insects aren't kept in check, as they multiply and feed on a tree, which weakens the structure of the tree. When a tree becomes weak it is defenseless to fight off disease, which will kill a tree and can ultimately eliminate a forest.

By digging deep into the bark of a tree, the brown creeper removes many insects that damage a tree and thereby contributes to the overall health of the forests. Trees consume carbon and produce much of the oxygen in the air we breathe, so in a way, the busy little brown creeper is working to improve the overall health of our environment.

Brown creepers prefer insects but occasionally will go to a feeder to eat seed and suet.

When looking for birds that don't often frequent feeders, I often look for opportunities to join a field trip sponsored by the Aiken Audubon Society or the Wild Bird Store. With all the excitement of the holidays, it's often difficult to take the time to join a field trip. When relaxing on a free evening, I start to plan or think about things I'd like to do the following year. Here are a few opportunities that sounded interesting.

Raptor field trip: Raptors are fascinating birds. To observe winter raptors and learn more about them, join the Aiken Audubon Society on Jan. 19. Aiken Audubon is sponsoring a one-day field trip to eastern El Paso County to look for winter raptors. They always provide a number of experienced guides, and I've found Audubon field trips very enjoyable and I always learn something new. For more information, go to www.aikenaudubon.org.

Volunteer as a citizen, scientist, or naturalist. Have you ever wanted to be involved with research that leads to bird conservation? Are you passionate about getting more youths and adults outdoors? If so, the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is looking for people who live along the Front Range to join the citizen science and volunteer naturalist programs. For more information, check out www.rmbo.org. RMBO is an organization that offers many interesting programs and activities.

Become a HawkWatcher. RMBO is also looking for volunteers to collect data on raptor migration at its HawkWatch site near Morrison. Contact Jeff Birek at 970-482-1707 ext. 25 or email him at jeff.birek@rmbo.org

Join the bald eagle watch. RMBO also is looking for volunteers to monitor and collect data on bald eagles' nesting behavior and productivity at nests along the Front

Range. Training typically takes place in January, with monitoring starting in February. Contact Kacie Miller at 303-659-4348 ext. 16 or kacie.miller@rmbo.org.

Become a volunteer naturalist. RMBO is also looking for volunteers to lead interactive in-class programs, field trips, and outreach events along the Front Range.

These are exciting opportunities for people who want to be outdoors. The good news is that for all the aforementioned opportunities, knowledge and experience in ornithology is not necessary.

As 2012 comes to a close, I'd like to wish all my readers a very happy holiday season and thank all the advertisers and volunteers whose contributions bring Our Community News to Tri-Lakes residents.

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

Art Matters



Make warm memories every week this December

By Janet Sellers

I'd like to introduce you to the Artist's Way for the holiday season. Creatives have been accessing this secret toolkit forever, and it continues as favorite unseen power in their creative treasures repertoire.

What is the Artist's Way, exactly? Besides a best-selling book by Julia Cameron, it's really a way of looking at your life, caring for yourself, and doing wonderful, small things for yourself each week. You have a date with yourself each week to do something you like—it could be expensive, but more likely can be fulfilling and little or no cost at all, yet tremendously rewarding.

How to do that here in our town? Easy. Our December weekends are going to be a lot of fun for all ages, with weekly events planned. Most events will be from 10 to 2 p.m.

First week's events

Saturday, Dec. 1, in Historic Monument, the merchants will put on Traditional Small Town Christmas. Bring your camera and your kids. Santa and Mrs. Claus will be at Secret Window Gallery (located at Third and Front streets), with all sorts of traditional old-timey Christmas activities throughout the Historic Monument quarter. I always look forward to seeing the live reindeer and miniature donkeys and hearing the carolers, and I hope to get in a hayride, too.

Who's on first? The ongoing Second Friday Art Nite actually will be on the first Friday, Dec. 7, hosted by Bella Art and Frame. You can meet and greet its December featured artist, Diane Schroeder, at this traditional artist reception complete with refreshments.

Second week

The next day, Dec. 8, will feature the glamorous Cinderella's Carriage at the Secret Window Gallery (47 Third St., corner of Third and First Streets in Monument). (See the photo on page 1). Anyone can be Cinderella and Prince Charming for the day! Carriage driver Lencho Griego and his beautiful white horse, Big Ben, will be there to take you and your kids for a ride around town in style. Photo ops with the family are free, so bring your camera. It's a small fee to take the ride in the dreamy carriage. I can hardly wait—I've never ridden in a royal horse-drawn carriage, or any carriage for that matter.

Secret Window Floral and Art Gallery owners Anthony and Rhoda Archuleta had this day especially in mind when

they invited their friend Lencho and his Cinderella carriage to celebrate the season on Historic Monument's new Kids Shopping Day. Historic Monument merchants will have specially priced merchandise displays for kids to buy at "kid prices." It promises to be a stress-free zone for parents as well, with available refreshments while the kids shop. So after your magical Cinderella Carriage ride, enjoy your fresh-air walks around to the shops.

The Tri-Lakes Center for the Arts (TLCA) will have its Annual Member Artists Show and sale through Dec. 8. The annual Resident Studio Artists Exhibit starts up just a few days later on

Dec. 11 and continues through Jan. 5, with the opening reception Dec. 14. Resident artists debi Story Maddox, Kathryn Hart, and Mattie O. will show

their paintings. For this exhibit, debi has created a new series called The Future of Trees. John Haines, Carolanne Ryan, Mia Cassar, and Dusty Severn will unveil their pottery designs. TLCA is at 305 Highway 105, Palmer Lake.

Third week

Even in the midst of hectic holiday entertaining, there is a wonderful way to treat yourself to some art enrichment each week. Visit the Wisdom Tea House for the Susan Fowler painting exhibit Living Experiences through Dec. 29. Holiday Afternoon Tea continues through the first week of January.

You could also drop by TLCA for its serene shopping scene and stroll the gallery and gift shop. The TLCA resident studio artists will have the gallery filled with their artworks, and the gift shop is

loaded with unique, artful gifts.

Fourth and fifth weeks

After a long hard week of holiday parties and too much fun, create a change of scene with an art gallery stroll. Your out-of-town guests can enjoy a nice brisk walk with you around our town, and that will definitely invigorate each of you and recharge your batteries. The cheerful holiday decorations will still be up, and the nice thing about strolling our arts venues here is that they are fun for everybody. Every arts venue in our area is near easygoing, dressed-up walking areas, and if that's not enough, there's a kid's playground on each end of the Historic Monument art quarter and lots of eateries for lunch, tea time, or dinner.

Janet Lee Sellers is an American painter, sculptor, and freelance writer. Sellers

Gray Matter

OCN is pleased to include some of the work of budding cartoonist Levi Pennison. Levi is 12-years old and lives in Palmer Lake. Let us know what you think at editor@ocn.me.

