



**Above:** Drawing of a mountain plover and a prairie dog by Elizabeth Hacker. A color version is posted at [www.ocn.me/v12n5bird.htm](http://www.ocn.me/v12n5bird.htm).

when breeding, it has a black patch on its crown and a thin black loreal (a stripe) that extends from its beak to its eye. Male and female look alike.

**Classification**

The mountain plover is classified as a shorebird but it avoids water and wet ground. It is one of nine species of birds endemic to the North American grasslands.

**Habitat**

Despite its name, the mountain plover doesn't reside on mountain tops or on slopes but rather on the flat tablelands of arid, short-grass prairies that are dominated by dry-land grasses, cacti, yucca, and prairie flowers like Indian paintbrush. It would be rare to find a killdeer in this dry habitat because it is a shorebird that likes to be

near water.

**Migration and range**

In March, the mountain plover migrates from the southwest United States and northern Mexico to the high plateaus that extend from Colorado north to Canada.

Prior to development of the land between Lewis-Palmer High School and Gleneagle, I observed mountain plovers along with prairie dog colonies on land that had been used for grazing cattle for most of the 20th century.

**Diet**

The mountain plover is an insectivore that eats juicy insects like beetles, grasshoppers, and crickets. It rarely drinks water but gets the moisture it needs from the insects it eats. Its favorite insect is reported to be the beetle, but it will eat any insect including the Miller moth.

It has a symbiotic relationship with the black-tailed prairie dog. When prairie dogs dig tunnels, many burrowing insects come to the surface so a plover doesn't have to travel far to find a meal. This works in the plover's favor because unattended nests are more vulnerable to predation from roaming animals like foxes and coyotes. The plover helps to control the insect population that can be problematic in prairie dog colonies. When both species mutually benefit from each other's natural behavior, it is referred to as a symbiotic relationship.

**Nesting**

The arid short-grass prairies of Colorado and Montana are prime nesting areas for the mountain plover. Breeding season is short. It begins in mid-April and ends in July. The plover is selective and scratches out a number of depressions before laying three olive-colored spotted eggs that look like large pebbles. Often the hen will lay her eggs near a pile of rocks or a cow pie to hide and pro-

tect them from being crushed.

Only a small percentage of eggs will actually hatch. Predation, wet weather, hail, livestock walking on eggs, and farm equipment running over nests all contribute to egg loss. And if that were not enough, the mountain plover will abandon a nest if the vegetation grows too tall.

If the eggs are lost early in the season, the female may lay two more clutches to increase the pair's chances of successfully producing chicks. When two clutches are laid, the male sits on one clutch while the female incubates the other.

Chicks hatch in about 28 days and within a few hours of each other. The hen sits on the eggs and keeps the hatchlings close until the last chick is on its feet. Within an hour after the last chick hatches, the hen and chicks leave the nest. The chicks are able to feed themselves shortly after hatching but stay with the adults for a little more than a month. After separating from the adults, the juveniles won't begin to fly until a few weeks before they begin to migrate in late July. The adult and chicks are constantly moving to avoid predators including golden eagles, falcons, hawks, loggerhead shrikes, coyotes, foxes, and feral cats.

**Conservation status**

The mountain plover population has declined due to loss of nesting and wintering habitats. It was considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1999, but was withdrawn in 2003. Due to continued habitat loss, it is still listed as a species of concern.

*Elizabeth Hacker is a writer and artist. Email her at [elizabethhacker@ocn.me](mailto:elizabethhacker@ocn.me) to share bird pictures and stories*

**Art Matters**

**Oil and acrylic paintings are both popular choices**



*By Janet Sellers*

Well, I've gotten so many questions in the last month about the differences between acrylic painting and oil painting, I thought I would write a very brief note answering those questions about the two and explain a few things. I've done work in both mediums for decades, and while I tend to favor using acrylics, I do have reasons why both are so compelling to do the actual artwork and to own as a work of art. With any luck, I can address the questions here for you with dispatch and serve up a short answer.

For hundreds of years, oil painting has dominated the painting scene as the stronger lead for art support/sales and as a very satisfying medium for artists to use. The creamy texture, bright colors, and soft edges it creates make oils attractive to use for many people.

It's good to understand not just the imagery and visual picture, but also the materials, so you really know what you have with an oil painting. Taking a class in the making or collecting of paintings can offer a wealth of information and enjoyment of them. With artists using proper knowledge of technique in its application, works done in oils have lasted hundreds of years.

The really tricky problem, though, is if the colors are not applied properly (thin layers only, white at the end as it dries slowest, etc.), or in the right order or with the right added materials—called mediums—the painting can crack and fall off the canvas or panel in months or years, and will need repairs or be beyond repair. Oil paintings must dry for a year before they can be safely varnished, since that is how long a traditional oil painting needs to be fully dry and accept varnish.

Acrylics, introduced around mid-century last, use traditional artist pigments in a polymer medium instead of an organic oil medium (which is a monomer) and have the advantage of being immediately stable, are dry and workable in hours, not weeks, and create an extremely durable work of art with or without expert understanding of the painting process oils require. Acrylic paintings can be finished with their own clear varnish, and can be wiped clean with a cloth and water, while oils must be professionally cleaned or you could ruin the surface.

That said, both materials can offer a superb work of art given the artist's skill and the specific artwork itself. The real worth is in the spirit of the thing. We like what we like, and there is the telling moment. To collect well, all we need is to like and enjoy the work, and that just takes some money, being alive and saying, "Hmmm, I

like that one." Works done in oils, as with acrylics, can be finely detailed or broadly brush-stroked, laid on with a palette knife or even in other inventive ways, such as credit cards as an art tool to put on the paint.

**Art news and art fun in town**

Our local arts events and places seem to keep growing and growing. We really have an arts district now, with studios, galleries, and events dotting the landscape from Palmer Lake to Baptist Road. Our public art sculptures flow in the same arts path from all three lake areas and centering on the old town part of Monument.

**The Art Hop**—Hooray for May. The 2012 Art Hop starts this month on the third Thursday and continues a monthly schedule into the fall. Maps and information on participating venues are available around town, and online at [www.MonumentArtHop.org](http://www.MonumentArtHop.org). I counted at least 14 venues on the map so far. It will be fun to take a look and see what the Art Hop has planned. I, for one, am very happy to greet this favorite event. We get to see art in unusual places at third Thursday's Art Hop, and the Friday Art Walk exhibits at the customary art places. How cool is that for us?!

**Second Fridays Art Walk**—I talked with various galleries about how it went for the first Monument Arts Art Walk in April, and it seems there were dozens of people visiting the various art venues that evening. Since the weather was still kind of chilly and very windy, it was unknown how the inaugural evening would go. As it turned out, it was a happy success even if some of the tents wafted in the wind somewhat. I was inside at the Bead Corner shop for the evening, and it was humming with cheerful people. The Art Walk adds another fun time zone for us to get into the local art scene, all the while enjoying other local attractions as we go.

**The Palmer Lake Art Group**—The group recently visited the Secret Window art gallery for a meeting and to take in what the gallery has to offer to art groups and events. The gallery has recently expanded beyond the spacious indoor gallery and floral studio. The back courtyard now is a sculpture garden landscaped with lush grass and stone, and has beautiful views of the mountains surrounding the Tri-Lakes area (and yes, those local trains go by in all their glory and add excitement and the familiarity many locals know and love). The year-round venue provides an outdoor seating and reception area and stage, and has a heated all-weather tent for any inclement weather.

*Janet Lee Sellers is an American painter and sculptor who works in paint, metal and, most recently, concrete. Sellers lives in Woodmoor, Colorado. She can be reached at [JanetSellers@OCN.me](mailto:JanetSellers@OCN.me).*

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