

speak of the diets and habitats. She will also describe what they eat and suggest where they can be found.

All Pikes Peak Library facilities will be closed on Monday, Feb. 18 in observance of Presidents' Day.

Harriet Halbig may be reached at hariethalbig@ocn.me.

Palmer Lake Historical Society, Jan. 17

At annual meeting, group looks back

By Sigi Walker

On Jan. 17, the Palmer Lake Historical Society held its annual Potluck and Members Meeting. In addition to the ham and rolls furnished by the Society, there was more than enough of everything—many delicious side dishes, salads, and desserts of all kinds. Outgoing President Tom Baker presented a slide show recounting the Society's activities in 2018 and reported on the Society's financial status. He spoke of the original mission of the Society when it was organized in 1956 and how, over the ensuing years, that mission has continued to guide Society officers in planning future programs and events. Of particular interest was how closely the 2018 programs paralleled those of 1961.

Topics presented in 1961 programs included the history of Basset's Mill, located southeast of Monument; the life of William Jackson Palmer, founder of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad; color slides of the ghost towns of Colorado; an illustrated lecture on the Major Long expedition of 1820; the story of the first white group of record to pass through the Palmer Lake region; for railfans, an audio presentation of the last run of the Colorado Midland Railroad; a presentation on pioneer photographer William H. Jackson by his son; and a paper on the history of Custer County and

the Wet Mountain area.

Program topics in 2018 included biographical, historical, and film presentations as well as an innovative docu-concert, while events included the traditional Father's Day Ice Cream Social and the Return of the Rocky Mountain Chautauqua. Average attendance at the monthly history series programs was over 60 people.

The evening included election of 2019 officers: president—Michele Lawrie-Munro; vice president—Su Ketchmark; secretary—Patricia Atkins; and treasurer—Melissa Robohn.

Mark your calendars for Thursday, Feb. 21, when the Historical Society will present *Poker Alice Tubbs: The Straight Story* portrayed by Liz Duckworth. Hear the story of a professional, cigar-smoking lady gambler in the mining boomtowns of Colorado, New Mexico, and South Dakota. Poker Alice Tubbs, a self-proclaimed religious woman who never played cards on Sunday, will come alive through the performance. Duckworth, who lives in Colorado Springs, is a freelance copywriter and editor as well as the author of several books. The venue is the Palmer Lake Town Hall, 28 Valley Crescent. The event begins at 6:30 p.m.



Above; The new 2019 Historical Society officers are, from left, front row: Rodger Voelker, Su Ketchmark, Pat McCarthy. Middle row: Barbara Morehead, Melissa Robohn. Back row: Michele Lawrie-Munro, Patricia Atkins, Susan Kuehster. Photo by Mike Walker.

Palmer Lake Historical Society events and programs are free and open to all. ■

Bird Watch on the Palmer Divide

Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

By Elizabeth Hacker

A few weeks ago, Shyla Tant forwarded a photo she took of two bald eagles perched on an overhead electric line near Lewis-Palmer High School, and it caused quite a buzz on Nextdoor as many people observed them.

The eagles I've observed here before were single and I didn't see them during mating season, so I assumed they were migrating. Because Shyla observed two eagles during mating season, this could very well be a mating pair that has built a nest in this area.

Bald eagles' numbers have increased from an estimated 450 in 1970 to about 150,000 today. At one time seeing just one eagle would have been a rarity but fortunately today they are easier to spot. To survive, they must expand their range to establish new territories. It is a remarkable turnaround story due to environmental actions taken to protect our national bird.

Eagles

Worldwide there are 59 species of eagles. Our nation's symbol, the bald eagle, is one of 10 species of fish eagles, characterized by scales rather than feathers on their lower legs and feet. Fish eagles plunge their legs into water to grab prey, and wet feathers would weigh them down.

While the bald and golden eagles are both endemic to North America, the bald eagle is the only eagle that lives exclusively in North America. The golden eagle is also found on other continents. I have observed both eagles on the Palmer Divide and previously written about them in *OCN*.

Description

A bald eagle is not bald, but at one time the word "bald" meant "white," not hairless, thus the name.

A female bald eagle's body length varies from 35 to 37 inches with a wingspan of 79 to 90 inches. The smaller male bald eagle has a body length of 30 to 34 inches with a wingspan ranging from 72 to 85 inches. An eagle's average weight is 10 to 14 pounds.

Immature bald eagles have a mixture of brown and white feathers, with a black beak and brown eyes. It is easy to confuse an immature bald eagle with the golden eagle, but the golden eagle is not a fish eagle and will have feathers on its legs. A bald eagle's legs have yellow scales and are featherless.

Adult plumage develops when a bald eagle becomes sexually mature. It takes five years for a bald eagle to attain solid white head and tail feathers. For the first five years they gradually change. The beak turns from black to yellow, the eyes from brown to pale yel-



Above: Bald eagles. Photo by Shyla Tant

low, body feathers from mottled to dark brown, and head and tail feathers from mottled to solid white.

Habitat and diet

Bald eagles live near bodies of water where they feed mainly on fish. They are opportunistic birds and will eat mammals, snatch a catch from another bird or animal, and scavenge for carrion. On more than one occasion, I've seen an eagle grab a fish from the talons of an osprey.

An eagle's eye is almost as large as a human's, but its sharpness is at least four times greater. Bald eagles can see fish while flying several hundred feet above the water. This is quite extraordinary since most fish are counter-shaded, meaning they are darker on top and thus harder to see from above. In November I was leading a bird walk and we were standing next to a pond. To our surprise, an eagle swooped down, grabbed a fish in its talons, and flew up to a branch in a nearby tree. It took less than a minute for it to consume its prey and fly away. I was happy there were

witnesses because it's a story that might very well have ended up in the tall-tale bin.

Nesting

In the fall, eagles begin courting, forming pairs, and building nests. As early as December the female may begin laying egg, usually three. The pair goes through a hormonal change that cause feathers on a small part of their breast to fall out, leaving a bare patch of bare skin referred to as an incubation patch. The pair take turns "wiggling" as they settle upon the eggs to keep them warm until they hatch in about 35 days.

When the chicks hatch, they are totally dependent on the parents to feed them and keep them warm. The parents must also keep them safe from predators including other birds such as the red-tailed hawk and mammals. The chicks grow rapidly and in a little more than a month, they are size of an adult. They stay near the nest for about three months learning to fly, hunt, and fend for themselves. Survival in the wild is tough and rarely more than one chick survives to fledge and mature into an adult. Eagles have been known to live up to 30 years in the wild and 50 years in captivity.

What to do if you see an eagle or a nest

When viewing eagles, unless visiting a manned eagle observation deck, your car acts as an excellent blind and the eagle will not be threatened and fly off if you view the bird from inside it. Eagles require a lot of energy to survive in cold winter temperatures. If they are nesting, they need even more energy to care for their mate and brood. When humans get too close, the stress may cause a nesting pair to abandon their nest.

Thanks to citizen scientists like Shyla, we are learning more about the birds that live here, and I look forward to readers sharing their stories, photos, and sightings.

Elizabeth Hacker can be reached at elizabethhacker@ocn.me.

High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

Earth: It's rescued by lazy gardening

By Janet Sellers

Most of us keep away from bugs except for the favored butterflies and ladybugs. But we have a whole planet full of necessary creatures that we need to keep us going and keep our planet healthy. I'm not an entomologist, but I do know a thing or two about bugs and

balance, and when the little guys are out of balance, that starts a reaction for everything else. Small as they are, bugs and microbes make the world go 'round. And when they suffer, we suffer. Our pollinators are in view now for many of us to take stock of and consider, because we'll be out of the food they help produce if



Kennel-Free Doggie Daycare & Boarding • (719)-377-2325