

The Signs of March
at the
Community Nature Center of Prescott



Pointleaf Manzanita

**1980 Williamson Valley Road,
Prescott, AZ**

Welcome to the Community Nature Center! We hope you'll enjoy observing & contemplating the many wonders of this natural area. New guides are available each month; we invite you to return again!

To help us preserve this special place, **please stay on the trails & leave plants and animals undisturbed.** Remember, footprints made on the fragile grassland, woodlands & trailsides do not heal quickly in our dry Highlands!

Also please keep dogs leashed & pick up pet waste.

HAVE YOU SEEN ...



Pointleaf Manzanita

... the large circles of Manzanita shrubs, and noticed that they are in flower?

Manzanita produces flowers in late winter; during this time there is little else flowering. The flower's pendulous, closed bell shape encourages some insect pollinators and discourages others. If you stay and watch carefully, you may see some tiny visitors coming and going. Pollination studies have shown that over 40 different insects visit the flowers. Most act as pollinators and also do some nectar robbing. If you look closely at the flowers you will find that many have a small hole on the side of the flower where a robber has been at work.

Two species of Manzanita dominate our Central Highlands chaparral community. In the Nature Center we find the Pointleaf Manzanita. In other locations you will find the dramatic Pringle Manzanita that has fine hair on the leaf, making the color grey-green. This species also grows to a greater stature with a sturdy trunk.

Interestingly, the Pointleaf Manzanita blooms first, during late winter. Then the Pringle Manzanita, which has similar flowers, takes over. So pollinators likely just shift over, from one to the other species.



Female Alligator Juniper

abundant food source for many animals including chipmunks, coyotes, foxes and bears, and in the past, humans. Watch for seed in animal scat along the trail. Passing through helps break down the seed coat!

... the difference in Alligator Juniper males and females? Alligators are *dioecious*, meaning that male and female reproductive parts occur on different plants. In late winter notice the color difference – male trees are loaded with pollen and take on a yellowish cast.

Junipers, pines, oaks and grasses are among our wind pollinated plants. Insect visitors do not *direct* this pollination, so wind pollinated species must produce copious amounts of pollen to assure wide distribution and fertilization success. For those with allergies, pollen-rich windy days are not pleasant!

Different Junipers are also easy to distinguish because of the fleshy blue cones that female plants produce once they are pollinated. In addition to holding seed, these cones are a critical and

... our variety of birds, and the noticeable changes of approaching Spring?

Activity, singing, and coloration changes of common residents like quail, towhees, doves, finches, bushtits and wrens are increasing. Most birds moult before breeding, resulting in fresh colorful, nuptial plumage; males sing and show their colors to define territory and to attract mates.

Bewick's Wren is common in the Nature Center. You will find these wrens are very busy foraging for insects. The wren posture with tail raised above the back is distinctive, as is the song. Listen for the Bewick's characteristic rising buzz "inhale" followed by slow trills.



Bewick's Wren

HAVE YOU SEEN ...

... **strategies to deal with the dry climate and wind?** Life in the southwest is harsh most times of the year. In addition to using the wind for *pollination*, plants and animals have strategies to deal with conserving moisture in our

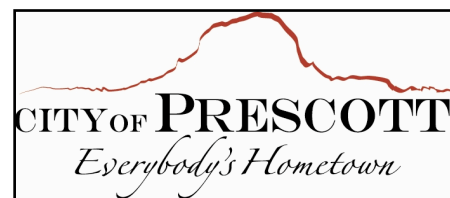


**Fuzzy new growth
on perennial Pearly
Everlasting**

windy and very dry conditions of spring and early summer.

Notice reduced **leaf size** (e.g. the tiny scale leaves on the Juniper), **stiff leaves and waxy surfaces** (feel the Manzanita leaf), and the delicate **white hairs** common on many leaves that reflect sun and cool the surface (Pearly Everlasting leaves are an example). All three are among many amazing adaptations to living with dryness.

Spring is a very **windy** time in the southwest. Why? During the spring in particular there is a “conflict” going on between cold and warm air. Storm systems and fronts develop frequently and move across the country very quickly, often to the north of us. We are squeezed between low and high pressures produced by these moving systems, giving us windy conditions.



For more information on the City of Prescott's Open Space and trails:
<http://cityofprescott.net/services/parks/parks>.

You are welcome to print this copy for personal use.

Created in March 2014 by Nichole Trushell for the Community Nature Center of Prescott. Photos with permission, or by Nichole Trushell or Steve Morgan.