

The Signs of August

at the
Community Nature Center
of Prescott



Mountain Mahogany with Seed

1980 Williamson Valley Road
Prescott. AZ

Welcome to the Community Nature Center! We hope you will enjoy your time here observing and contemplating the many wonders of our natural environment.

To help us preserve this special place, please:

- stay on the trails, and please*
- leave plants and animals undisturbed.*
- keep your dog leashed and please pick up all waste.*

HAVE YOU SEEN ...

... the lush leaves of the **Long-tube Four-o'-Clock**? The soft foliage of these perennials vanishes during winter; then, once summer's warmth and the monsoon's humidity arrives, plants seem to burst from the ground. Large underground tuberous roots allow them to survive our many dry months waiting for warm, wet weather to arrive each year.

The flower is white, very delicate and has a very long tube (3-6"). This tube-length helps exclude unwanted pollinators & encourages specific hovering pollinators like the Sphinx Moth.



***Long-tube
Four-o'- Clock***



Sphinx on Columbine

... the **White Lined Sphinx Moth** hovering by flowers? Often called a "hummingbird moth" they don't look like hummingbirds, but they hover by garden flowers as they feed on sweet nectar.

Adult moths can be seen flying most anytime -- at dusk, during night, at dawn, and during day. Using their long, straw-like **proboscis**, they pollinate many species of plants. This mouthpart is kept curled under the head when not in use, and when extended it can reach into flowers with very long tubes like the Four-o'-Clocks. **Sphinx Moths** also sip

nectar from Columbines, Larkspurs, Salvias, Honeysuckle, Thistles, and Sacred Datura.

HAVE YOU SEEN ...

... the **Sphinx Moth caterpillar**? It is one of our “hornworms” -- they are yellow green to black. To have these and other moth and butterfly pollinators, we must allow for the feeding of their **caterpillars**. With the exception of years with high numbers, it does not cause severe damage to cultivated plants.

These caterpillars eat a variety of plants: our wild four-o'clocks, evening primrose, and purslane among them. The moth pupates in shallow burrows in the ground then emerges to become the hovering pollinator we find in gardens and woodlands.



Sphinx caterpillar



Phainopepla

... A **Phainopepla**? This distinctive black, crested male bird has a distinctive single note call. During summer they are found in our woodlands where they feed on fruits of native plants. They rarely drink water; moisture comes from their food. A favorite food? They can eat over 1,000 mistletoe fruits in a day if available! They are sleek birds, their name means “shining robe.” The ragged crest and a red iris are present on both males and females; females are colored plain grey. Males flash a broad white under wing-patch in flight.

... **Rufous Hummingbirds**? The feisty males are brilliant orange and females are green and orange. Rufous Hummingbirds are fierce attackers at flowers and feeders, going after much larger hummers. They have extreme mobility and maneuverability.

They pass through our area on their migration northward to breeding grounds as far north as southeastern Alaska. The Rufous Hummingbird makes one of the longest migratory journeys of any bird in the world, if it is measured by body size. At just over 3 inches long, it travels roughly 3,900-mile movement (**one-way**) from Alaska to Mexico! They overwinter in Mexico in oak-pine forests.



Rufous male

HAVE YOU SEEN ...

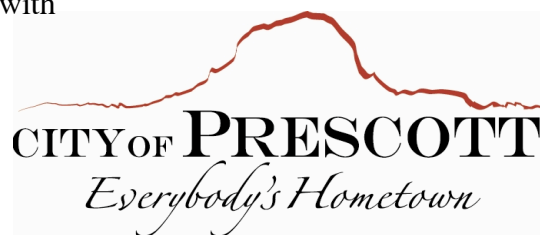
... or have you *noticed* the fragrance of the **Mountain Mahogany** shrubs as you walk along trails in the Chaparral? Look for the yellow-green, inconspicuous flowers. These are producing a lovely fragrance – they are members of the rose family!

After these tiny, petal-less **flowers are fertilized**, the ovary grows into a unique seed with a twisted 3" fuzzy seed "tail" which originates from the flower's style. These seed tails held on plants create silvery hillsides around the Prescott area in the fall.



Mountain Mahogany in Seed

This seed holds a wonderful story of adaptation to a dry climate. Once the seed is mature, the curled seed tail acts as a parachute to carry the seed away from the parent plant. Once it lands, the pointed seed end catches in the soil, and it typically sits upright waiting for rain. Once moisture does wet the seed tail, the corkscrew tail unwinds and drives the seed a bit into the ground. When it dries it curls again, when wetted again, it straightens. With a number of such events, the little seed is nicely planted into the soil at a time when moisture is present and ready to help with successful germination.



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

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