

**The Signs of Winter**  
*at the*  
Community Nature Center of Prescott



1980 Williamson Valley Road  
Prescott, AZ

**Printable copy**

## Welcome to the Community Nature Center!

We hope you'll enjoy observing & contemplating the many wonders of this natural area. To help us preserve this special place, **please stay on the trails** and please leave plants *and* animals undisturbed. Remember, footprints made on the fragile grassland & trail-sides do not heal quickly in our dry environment! Since this is a **Certified Habitat Site**, dogs **must be leashed** and please pick up after your pet. Thank you!

Look for other **Signs** each month from March-November.

### HAVE YOU SEEN ...

.... **Leafless trees and shrubs?** It may seem frustrating to identify plants when they do not have leaves, however, look closely. The characteristics of bark and stems are very distinctive. Some examples:



*Sumac stem with new flowers*

The **Three-Leaf Sumac** can be found in numerous locations on the site. This plant has distinctive dark green 3-parted leaves in summer and fall colors that range from yellow to orange to red, plus bright red fruits that ripen in late spring. But how do you identify them in winter?

The youngest growth on sumac will be covered with fine velvety hair that looks almost like that found on new antlers. In the winter, small purplish-red buds will form on these hairy young branches. Plants bloom before leaves reappear, the flowers are tiny and yellow. Watch for buds late winter. The yellow-green leaves of **New Mexico Olive** turn yellow and drop in the fall and tiny purple fruits form on female plants in early spring– these things are distinctive, but what about winter?

## HAVE YOU SEEN ...

Look for smooth gray bark, and notice the branching pattern of the plant. Branches arise distinctively from the main stem in wide angles, and are often opposite in position. In some parts of the region they are called “elbowbush” for this reason.

Some other deciduous plants you will find at the CNC are Texas Mulberry (sign on the trail near the amphitheater) Chokecherry (behind the cabin) Red and Gooding Willow plus Cottonwood (by the pond). Look at them closely through the seasons, and notice their distinctive characteristics.



***New Mexico Olive showing angled stem branching with new male flowers that appear before the leaves.***

**... Feeding flocks?** Summer brings flashy color, breeding behavior and nesting, but in winter you may be lucky to find yourself surrounded by a



***Bridled Titmouse***

[www.naturespicsonline.com](http://www.naturespicsonline.com)

mixed-species feeding flock; insectivorous birds of different species that join each other and move together while foraging.

Here at the CNC you will find Bushtits, Juniper Titmouse, Bridled Titmouse, Lesser Goldfinch and others moving together through the shrubby vegetation.

The birds keep in touch using calls, which keep the group together. By staying together, they likely improve their chance of survival with many eyes

watching. The feeding flock is also effective at finding food that is scarcer in winter months, and may be able to move into other birds' territories where one bird could not.

In November, we highlighted the White Crowned Sparrow as a common migrant you can find here in winter. Watch closely for other bird changes in winter.

## HAVE YOU SEEN ...

... **A nascent inflorescence on Manzanita?** In winter, flower buds will begin to form from these interesting structures. These began to form last spring, then stayed dormant until winter. Plants will sometimes flower as early as January! Watch for fragrant, pink, bell-shaped flowers.



***Nascent inflorescence***

by Chris Hunter

... **Lichens?** You will find them on tree bark, rocks, and even on the ground! They appear in a rainbow of colors: green, yellow, orange, grey & more.

Lichens are not really plants; they exist as a partnership between a fungus and an organism capable of creating food by photosynthesis. This second organism may



be a green alga, a cyanobacterium, or both. The fungus forms the basic structure, water storage, and mineral-gathering capability.

**Lichens** are famous for being able to survive harsh, cold or dry conditions. Photosynthesis can occur at low temps as long as there is liquid water and light, so lichens can be productive all year. Some can be active on freezing days if the substrate warms. When respiration is high in the

summer, they may actually grow slower than in winter. They are sensitive to foot traffic however, so please do not walk on them.

So on moist, sunny winter days, when rocks or bark warm but most plants are dormant, imagine the activity awakening in lichen. The sunshine and moisture bring them out of dormancy to make food and grow.



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

This guide was created in 2015 by Nichole Trushell for the *Community Nature Center of Prescott*. Photos by Nichole or with permission as noted.