

Berry-bearing shrubs to feed birds in winter

By Kym Pokorny
OSU Extension Service

CORVALLIS – When winter comes and the menu for birds shrinks in urban backyards, they rely on the kindness of humans.

That doesn't mean just a bird feeder of seeds and nuts.

"Different birds are attracted to different foods, and it's good to have a variety," said Dana Sanchez, a wildlife specialist for Oregon State University's Extension Service. "In addition to bird feeders, which people sometimes forget to fill, they need plants to forage on."

This time of year, you'll notice winter wrens, pine siskins, scrub jays, chickadees and robins. All are searching for food to give them the energy they need to survive the prolonged stress of cold and wet weather.

"Birds need a lot of energy to make it through cold nights," according to Sanchez. "They can't eat during the night and they burn off whatever food calories they found during the day."

Fortunately, birds have feathers – the ultimate down jacket, she said. They fluff them and huddle together to reduce heat loss. And shivering keeps muscles warmer. For all that, they still need the right foods for energy production. A few insects remain, flying around or

hiding under moss and lichen ripe for the picking. Some plants, like thistle, hold on to seeds that birds fit into their diet. Plants with berries full of good fat provide necessary nutrients, too. Take a look at Sanchez's suggestions and consider adding some berry bearers to your garden.

Dana Sanchez's picks for plants with berries for birds:

Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) breaks out in brilliant yellow flowers in mid-winter that leave behind bunches of blue-black berries. The state flower of Oregon grows to an erect 6 feet tall and 5 feet wide. Hardy to Zone 5.

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) is recognized for distinctive clusters of white berries that last well into winter. At 5 feet tall and 6 feet wide and rather rangy, snowberry makes a great choice for a bird-friendly hedgerow and its vigorous roots will help with erosion control on slopes. Hardy to Zone 3.

Pacific wax myrtle (*Myrica californica*) is an evergreen that grows up to 30 feet at maturity, making it a popular option for a screen or small tree in the garden. A Pacific Northwest native, wax myrtle presents purplish berries in fall that persist into the winter months. Hardy to Zone 7.

CLARIFICATION

Speak Your Peace spokesman Rob Karwath will speak in the last part of the Sisters Kiwanis meeting on Thursday. Sisters Kiwanis Club will meet at 7 a.m. at

Aspen Lakes Lodge. The meeting is from 7 to 8:30 a.m. and the speaker will be during the last half-hour. Anyone wishing to attend may RSVP to Kiwanis program coordinator Jim Horsley at jimhorsley4@gmail.com.

Teacher releases original music

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Rick Johnson makes his living inspiring students to sing. Now the Americana Project and choir teacher has been inspired by those same students to create his own original songs, released this month on the CD "All That Matters."

The new CD features 18 original songs penned by Johnson, accompanying himself on guitar or ukulele, with harmony vocals by his wife Tara.

"It just evolved organically," Johnson told *The Nugget*. "I spend a lot of my summer up in the mountains and I bring my guitar with me and just let the music come through me. I think the songs reflect how much I appreciate my family and the place where I live."

Indeed, the songs extol the simple life and love of family, which includes two-and-a-half-year-old Collier.

The youngest member of the Johnson family is already picking up the music bug, playing his ukulele and drumming on a mini-cajon (a box drum) with his dad in the evenings.

"We even sampled my son saying 'ukulele' and slapped it on the end of one of the songs," Johnson said.

Johnson recorded the CD himself in his home studio.

The teacher has an extensive background in musical theater – which means his accustomed singing voice is "big" and stagy. That wouldn't do for straightforward songs with solo acoustic accompaniment. He had to change his approach.

"That was one of the hurdles in making the CD," he acknowledged. "It's really about the story. It's really about the lyrics. It's about



PHOTO BY TARA JOHNSON

Collier is following in his dad, Rick Johnson's, footsteps.

getting across the meaning of the song."

This is Johnson's first writing endeavor in many years. His music theater and teaching careers are a long interlude between songwriting efforts, which started when he wrote lyrics for his high school thrash-metal band.

He's a long way down the road from those days. He credits the influence of the Sisters Folk Festival and his Americana Project students with inspiring him to pick up the guitar and get back to writing, with a whole life's

worth of material to draw from.

"To be inspired by that on a daily basis pushed me to taking the serious steps to writing and carrying a guitar with me every day," Johnson said.

Though he is busy with his music-teaching day job and a young family, Johnson plans to be booking local gigs to get his new music out into the community. All That Matters is available locally at Paulina Springs Books. For more information visit Johnson's Facebook page, Rick Johnson Songs.

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