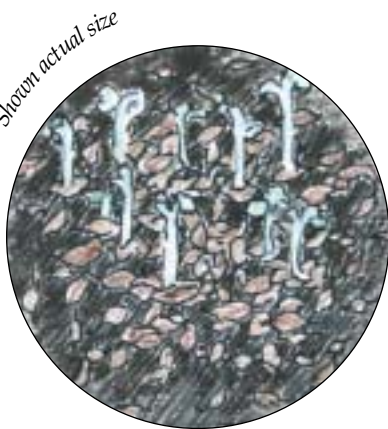


“To many people, sagebrush country is a wasteland...Yet, real beauty exists here for those who seek it, beauty expressed in colorful spring and fall flowers and more subtly in the wondrous adaptations that enable plants and animals to withstand the extremes so typical of sagebrush steppe.”

Ronald J. Taylor
(Sagebrush Country, page ix)

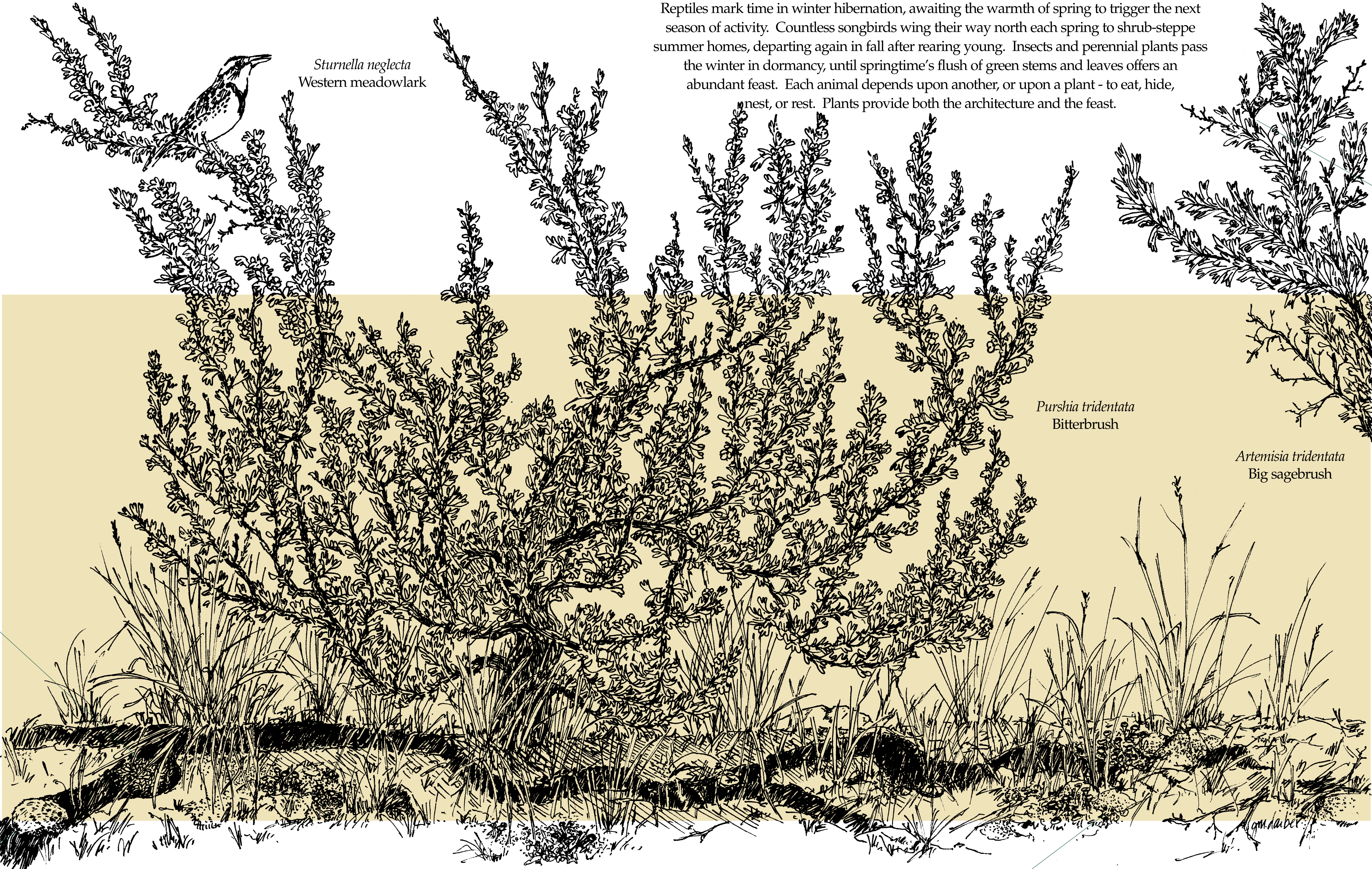


SPROUTING SEED CACHE
Rodents may cache a bitterbrush plant's entire crop of seeds in underground burrows. Returning in spring, rodents feast on the nutritious sprouting seeds. When a cache is forgotten, seedlings emerge, protected and deeply rooted in the burrow.



Microtus montanus
Montane vole

Sturnella neglecta
Western meadowlark



Purshia tridentata
Bitterbrush

Artemisia tridentata
Big sagebrush

CIRCLE OF LIFE

The shrub-steppe is a landscape bursting with life. Birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, and more than one hundred different kinds of wildflowers and grasses all claim this habitat as home. Mammals dominate the night, cloaked in the cool safety of darkness. Reptiles mark time in winter hibernation, awaiting the warmth of spring to trigger the next season of activity. Countless songbirds wing their way north each spring to shrub-steppe summer homes, departing again in fall after rearing young. Insects and perennial plants pass the winter in dormancy, until springtime's flush of green stems and leaves offers an abundant feast. Each animal depends upon another, or upon a plant - to eat, hide, nest, or rest. Plants provide both the architecture and the feast.



SAGEBRUSH GALL
Commonly growing on sagebrush stems and leaves, sagebrush galls may look like fuzzy grapes or smooth berries, yet they are not a fruit. After a tiny fly lays its eggs on a leaf, the plant reacts by surrounding them with round, fleshy galls. The gall is both home and grocery store to the growing fly larva that feeds by sucking the plant's juices. The larva eventually changes into a pupa with facial horns that are used to dig out of the gall. When the pupa emerges, its exoskeleton splits open revealing a two-winged fly. Typically living for only six hours, the fly mates, lays eggs, and dies.

Biological soil crusts are a fragile living groundcover of intertwined fungi, bacteria, algae, moss and lichens found in arid lands all over the world. All are able to dry out and become dormant until moisture returns. They contribute to soil stability, add nitrogen to otherwise poor soils, assist in seed germination, and retain water. Excessive grazing, wildfires, and foot traffic damage and break the crust, and recovery is very slow. When you stay on the trail, you are protecting the fragile crust.