



The Rattler

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Placerita Canyon Nature Center

PCNCA's Mission Statement

To inspire a passion, awareness and respect for the environment, and to preserve and protect for future generations the history and ecosystem of Placerita Canyon.

March/April 2008

Hello Nature Friends,

We all will have to agree that The Rattler is a wonderful newsletter (Heidi Webber and I are patting ourselves on the back...) However, if we think that trees are being cut to make all this paper, it does not sound so nice any more.

Shall we do something about it? We have to work together on this and I am going to ask your help. I can email you the PDF version, just like a regular email to your computer. You will get the Rattler faster and with color, so that would be an improvement. You will save trees, postage for us and delays for you.

If you still want to walk to your mailbox in the bitter Southern California cold to pick up your Rattler, do not do anything. We will always have a paper version available to you.

If you want to get the email PDF version, please email me at: evandersande@gmail.com. Please include your email address and your home address.

If you change your email address and you forget to update it with me, I will need to send you a little note to ask you for your new email. I would hate to lose any readers this way.

Another milestone in the life of the Rattler: I was there when we used to do it with cut-and-paste and it meant with a pair of scissors and white school glue! Please help us to keep Placerita Canyon Nature Center "green" and without excessive use of paper.

Thank you for your understanding and your cooperation and have a great spring.

The Rattler is a bi-monthly publication sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates to promote the preservation and enjoyment of the Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Please come, enjoy, learn...and volunteer.

Another Car Accident

On Saturday, February 9 at about 2am, a 19-year-old driver lost control of his car and plunged over the hillside landing in the creek--this time on the other side of the tunnel from the Oak of the Golden Dream. He wiped out a portion of the chain link fence and a portion of the steel hand-rail. He was not discovered until after 9am when hikers found him. He was taken to Henry Mayo and was in stable condition with moderate injuries. This curve is tricky, please slow down every body. Our good wishes are with this young man.

Hart Park

Thank you David Jallo, superintendent at Hart Park, for giving us a roof for our board meetings during the construction of Placerita. We were stranded and needed to find a central location that all our board members could attend. Mr. Jallo was very accommodating, providing a room so we could take care of business and we are grateful for his help. Lynn Zdonek will still have her home available as a backup.

I want to remind all the Placerita Canyon Nature Center members that if you want to present a problem or suggestion to the board, the first 15 minutes of each board meeting are yours. We meet every first Tuesday of the month at 1pm at Hart Park in the hall. Be sure to let Jim Southwell know in advance if possible, so he can include you in the agenda for the meeting.

Lynn Zdonek

Lynn is a docent at Placerita and also at the William S. Hart Mansion. She gives excellent guided tours of the house and was nominated to be the "Volunteer of the Year" for Los Angeles County. Congratulations Lynn!

The Rattler

Editor:

Evelyne Vandersand

661 254-2972

Publisher:

Heidi Webber

661 251-7978



If you have an article you feel would follow the interests of this publication, please feel free to submit it. The deadline is the 10th of every other month. Mail your article to:

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

19152 Placerita Canyon Road

Newhall, CA 91321-3213

or you can email it to Evelyne at evelynevandersande@gmail.com.

Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

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Visit our Internet site at www.placerita.org--Ron Kraus is the webmaster. Moving? Please let us know so you won't miss any issues of the Rattler.

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Disclaimer

Because there is often limited space on various field trips, we find that we need to enforce the following: All trips and dinner celebrations are open only to Placerita Canyon docents and volunteers who have paid their yearly dues. Many trips can be open to family and friends but only with previous authorization from the person planning the trip. Thank you for your understanding.

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area Park are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial District of Michael D. Antonovich. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, has designated an ADA Coordinator to carry out this Department's compliance with the non-discriminatory provisions of the ADA. For more information you may contact the ADA Coordinator's Office at TEL 213-738-2970 TDY 213-427-6118 FAX 213-487-0380; Upon 3-day request notice, sign language interpreters and related materials in alternative formats (Braille-transcript, large print, audio-record, video-captioning, live-description) or any other reasonable accommodations are available to the public for County-sponsored activities and events.

The Recycle Bin

With our ability to send the Rattler in PDF format and save paper, I came to wonder what you were doing at home in view of recycling and being “green”. I was looking for simple ways, easy and inexpensive and fast. We had such a great response that we are unable to put them all in one issue, so we decided this would be a great time for a new feature to the Rattler. Please feel free to continue to email me at evandersande@gmail.com with more tips on being green. Evelyne



Another idea I like, which answers that great question “Paper or Plastic?” Well neither, I never get any sort of bag if I am making a small purchase at the market and if I plan to do a weeks worth of shopping I just bring my bags with me, many stores will even give you a credit of about 10 cents per bag that you use. *Michael Teagardin, Docent in training*

My recycling is very simple. I separate all clean packaging and also vegetable and fruit scraps as well as garden greens and leaves. I have 3 bins, one for the greens, one for the plastic and packaging materials and one for dirty trash. This makes it very easy. Have a great green day!

Rosemarie Sanchez-Fraser

1. use 2 bins under the kitchen sink- 1 for trash and 1 for recycle
2. use “green” cleaning products and laundry and dishwasher soap
3. use only the draft mode to print “drafts” of things we are working on.
4. print draft documents on scratch paper. In other words, we use both sides of the paper before recycling.
5. car pool to events whenever we can.
6. use only ceramic cups and never plastic or Styrofoam cups.
7. replaced standard light bulbs with compact florescent light bulbs.
8. set the air conditioning at higher and heat at a lower temperature.
9. purchased an Energy Star refrigerator
10. purchased a Prius. I know that not everyone can do this one, but it does help the environment and saves money
11. re-set our irrigation system to water less frequently and less time.

Susan Gilliland, Volunteer at Eaton Canyon Nature Center

I keep a small dish tub on my kitchen counter to toss in the day’s bottles and cans. I also keep two small trash bins on the kitchen floor; one holds dog kibble and the other holds newspapers, magazines and junk mail. They help me quickly straighten up and I can empty the dish tub and the trash bin into the city-supplied recycle trash can at my convenience. When I have cardboard boxes to throw away, I cut them up with a box cutter and put them in the recycle can. One day while feeling ferocious, I jumped on a cardboard box attempting to flatten it. I hurt myself.

Tree Hugger Pam Koch

I have been gradually replacing the plastic containers in my pantry with thick glass jars ranging from gallon size on down. This means I look at very little packaging material and see the product for what it is, which would include food freshness. I get no problems with pantry moths, ants or other pests because they can’t get through glass. As for concern with earthquakes, bungee cords and child locks keep everything pretty much secure. The larger containers and liquids are kept on the floor.

I used to weed around my property and tossed out quite a bit. Now I have been learning to identify what these ‘weeds’ are and finding what delicious additions they are to our meals. Many homes in our area have sow thistle, pigweed, dandelion, alyssum, filigree, mallow, mustards and even Russian thistle, which are all edible. A little homework will tell you which is fine raw, which need to be cooked and what parts are eaten. They actually taste pretty good!

Helen Sweany, Docent in training

TOSS IT TODAY, DRINK IT TOMORROW

Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel

The World's population at the turn of the century was over 6 billion people. By 2050, it is expected to be over 9 billion. Our natural resources are being stretched to the maximum already, with some being nearly depleted. We are also seeing toxins being introduced into our landfills, our farmed fields, and our water supply. What will happen in 42 years with more than 3 billion people added to the mix?

The City of Santa Clarita has taken some great steps in recycling and going green in many ways such as using alternative fuel vehicles, placing bike racks on buses, purchasing local wild lands to protect them, and passing resolutions to pursue local wilderness areas such as Santa Clarita Canyons. This is a great beginning for us. But we, the people, have to do more.

We, as a responsible, able body, need to consider saving clean air, water, fuel sources and other natural resources for future generations. After all, we save for college....why not save air and water too? It's time to rethink recycling. Although saving bottles and cans is something easy we can all do, it is not enough. Many of the things we throw away every day contain some of the most dangerous chemicals. Once these items are in a landfill, it is possible for them to leak beneath the bottom barrier and pollute our groundwater. That means it can contaminate everything in the soil, including our food crops, and our tap water. Batteries, electronics, and CFL light bulbs are among the hazardous items being sent to the local landfill. College of the Canyons has a hazardous waste collection which is an easy and healthier alternative.

According to Go Green Initiative, between December 2005 and December 2006, Go Green schools kept the following out of our nation's landfills:

- ◆ **Nearly 3 million pounds of paper**
- ◆ **Over 223, 000 pounds of cardboard**
- ◆ **30,000 pounds of aluminum**
- ◆ **58,000 pounds of plastic beverage containers**
- ◆ **1971 cellular phones**
- ◆ **10,906 printer cartridges**
- ◆ **More than 222,000 pounds of mixed recyclables**
- ◆ **21,000 pounds of food waste**

According to Jill Buck, the founder and executive director of Go Green, "It's so inspiring to see this level of voluntary stewardship". The above figures were from a mere handful of participating schools nationwide. Imagine what we could do if all of our schools were to participate in this program!

To give you an idea of the advantages of recycling, a ton of recycled paper saves us 7,000 gallons of water, 380 gallons of oil, and the equivalent of electrical power used in an average home for 6 months. In addition, we save space in landfills by recycling. When a landfill is full, the taxpayers pay for a new one. The longer we use a landfill, the lower your taxes could be. For every glass bottle you recycle, you save 4 hours of electricity. For every aluminum can, you save six hours of electricity. With numbers like that, every person can make a direct impact on our environment. It's up to you to make that impact positive or negative.

The bottom line is that everything we do can change our environment, our standard of living and our future. Everything we throw away has a consequence. It is in our hands to preserve everything we still have for our posterity. Our goal should be to preserve our air, water, and soil, for without it, we, as a people, cannot survive.

Class of 2008



Janelle Harmon	Richard Norton
Eric Indermill	Art Resendez
Caryn King	Helen Sweany
Linda Kopatz	Bethany Sweany
John Lampignana	Michael Teagardin
George Phelps	

These students have been attending classes, learning and showing great interest. They still have to audit the trails, do their report and pass the exam.

We are impressed by their commitment and wish them good luck. We will give them a graduation party with a barbecue on Saturday, March 29 at 6 pm. I have to find a room but I will let you know where. All the docents and volunteers are invited. Please RSVP to Evelyne at 254.2972 so I can order enough food from the Rattler (the restaurant, not the newsletter).

ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

PCNCA gratefully acknowledges the following new special guardians who are helping in the care and feeding of their adopted animals at our Nature Center:

Arlene Hale - "Wee-bit" the American Kestrel, a gift from Holly, Dan and Irene Hale.

Charles and Dorothy Duncan (a third-year renewal of guardianship) - "Kia" the Red-tailed Hawk, "Owl Junior" the Great Horned Owl, and "Hopi" the Barn Owl.

Tyler Woernley (a third-year renewal of guardianship) - "Owl Junior" the Great Horned Owl, a gift from grandfather William Warrick.

William & Wesley Felber - "Wee-bit" the American Kestrel.

We have just gotten off the River Barge Explorer. The River Barge was 730 feet long, made up of two barges, the first part was staterooms and the other part was dining and public areas. We were part of an Elderhostel Group "The Texas Gulf Coast: Ornithology, Ecology and History". The people in our group were active birdwatchers and were especially interested in seeing the Whooping Crane. Attached to our group was a team of instructors from the University of Texas Marine Science Institute and from Texas A & M University in Kingsville.

The top deck of the barge was a perfect viewing area to see out over the swampy area on both sides of the waterway. We floated through the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge for a day. It is the home to the largest flock of Whooping Cranes. We were told to watch for a tall white bird with a "bustle". The Whooping Crane is over 4 feet tall, a foot taller than the Sand hill Crane or Great Egret. The profile of the Great Egret has sharp tail feathers where the Whooping Crane has the puffy bustle. When flying, the Whooping Crane's black wingtips are visible. We saw approximately 30 cranes, in family groups of two or three.

While drifting through the waterway, we saw hundreds of Roseate Spoonbills. It was easy to spot them with their vivid pink color. There was also many other herons and egrets. The Reddish Egret and Tri-colored Egret were first time birds for us. At one time, we saw a pasture full of Great Egrets.

Whooping Cranes **Grus Americana** *By Sue Wallander*



Another highlight of our visit to Texas was the famed King Ranch. It is one of the largest ranches in the world with over 825,000 acres, an area larger than the state of Rhode Island. It was founded in 1853 by Richard King and is still owned by his descendants. Much of the ranch is devoted to ranching but a substantial area is leased out for hunting. We saw huge herds of reddish cattle, a breed that was developed on the King Ranch. They hold both historical and nature tours. Since the ranch has leased so much land for hunting, they actively feed the wildlife and many animals are seen on the side roads munching on the corn and pellets fed by the ranch hands. White-tailed deer, Javalinas, alligators, coyotes, Bobcats, and an armadillo were some of the animals

sighted on our tours. We also saw many first time birds on the ranch. They are known to be the best place for sighting the Green Jays, Vermilion Flycatcher, Olive Sparrow, and a large variety of hawks. Our naturalists/scientists were enthusiastic birders that made this an adventure. A total of 124 species was counted between the King Ranch and the Aransas national Wildlife Area.

Before we left on our trip, we read the Audubon Magazine for December. The magazine had an excellent article about the struggle to preserve the Whooping Cranes and especially about the attempt to re-establish an Eastern migration route that was completely lost. We were all upset when reading about last year's flock of cranes. All of them died after reaching Florida, a result of the hurricane and flooding their pens. This year, 17 young cranes reached Florida on January 24 after a 90-day flight led by ultra light aircraft. There is a site operationmigratin.org that journals the flight of the cranes. Operation Migration is also the name of a movie about the attempt to establish the Florida flock. The 17 cranes started in central Wisconsin and were guided on their flight but will return on their own in the spring.

One of our docents wrote that when he was in grade school he was told that the Whooping Crane would be extinct in a short time. There were 21 birds in 1941. This year there are 266 in Aransas and 59 in Florida. We wish them well.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
Thank You!

- Yes! I want to contribute to help fund programs at Placerita
- \$25 Friend \$50 Donor \$100 Sponsor Wall
- I can pledge _____ monthly
- Please contact me about the Adopt-an-Animal Program
- _____

Your tax-deductible donations are needed to help fund programs provided by volunteers.

Send your donation to:

PCNCA
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213



This photo was taken during Docent Training. The class was about Native American culture and Phil Rizzo explains how Indians would cut rabbit hides into strips and then woven to make warm blankets.

CHC Winter Schedule
Communityhikingclub.org

All hikes meet at 8:15am for a prompt 8:30 start unless otherwise noted. Please go to the CHC website to get important information regarding conditions, parking fees, carpooling, etc. or contact Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel at zuliebear@aol.com

March 1-East Canyon- Meet at the East Canyon Trail head.

March 8-Big Tujunga Stewardship Project- Meet at the gate in front of Towsley Canyon.

March 15-Magic Mountain Old Miner's Trail. Meet at Placerita Nature Center.

March 29-Manzanita Trail. Meet at Placerita Nature Center.

April 5-O'Melveny Park. Meet at the OUTSIDE gate of Towsley Canyon.

April 12-Weldon to East Canyon. Meet at the Weldon Canyon Trail head.

April 19- Pico Canyon to Odeen #1 -Meet at Mentryville under the big Pepper tree.

April 26-Slide Mountain Event. We will meet at the outside gate of Towsley Canyon. May 24-Lowe Mtn/Echo Mtn. to Inspiration Point.

Security Company

I am very pleased to let you know we have a security company which will open the park at sunrise and close it at sundown. The last two months, Roger McClure took care of this which we certainly noticed and appreciated, especially with the cold temperatures we have had. I am sure he would have preferred to stay in his warm bed. Thank you so much Roger.

Concern

We were very sorry to hear that Renate Colvin's grandson passed away suddenly in a motorcycle accident. Our thoughts are with you and your family during this tragic time.

Shari Newman's mother passed away after a long illness in February. Losing a mom is always a very difficult time, all our condolences.



Millie Bonazolli

When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place?

I had just moved here in the late 1980's, it was farm fields and cowboy terrain. I grew up on TV Western serials, so this area's history found me a Dorothy in Oz. I took a Native American class circa 1988, also met with Frank McDaniel about the Boy Scout Eagle Projects.

When did you join the docent program? What titles have you had at the Nature Center?

Well, first off, I am just a casual docent. Others do the hard lifting, the day to day operations and hikes. I just show up for the big things, work the fundraisers.

I became a docent in 1998, when Kathleen was in the office and the County of LA ran the operation. Fund raisers and banquets were pot-luck; we led only a few hikes a week and had the whole LA County staff to rely on for docent training. And Frank Hovore, lest we forget our mentor. It was much more relaxed. Our class included Jim Southwell, Gordon Uppman, Ella and Greta. Our twenty first century PCNCA is a model for dynamic volunteerism.

How did your love of Nature get started? Appreciating nature really came with my travels; but I think it truly awakened in Oregon: the waterfalls, rainbows at the Columbia River Gorge, to crest I-5 in Portland and see Mt. Hood and St Helen's snow capped. The vastness of nature awed me. It contrasted to my small town youth along the Assebet River. Spring fed ponds that flowed into it, small brooks and falls, second growth woodlots with stone fences, corn fields in summer, apple orchards, snow in winter, and ice storms that coated the maple trees like crystal against a black moonlit night sky. I'm comfortable with the zen philosophy of microcosm and macrocosm, the idea that we are all one whole.

Where did you grow up? I grew up in a small (8,000) New England factory town. People walked everywhere. We skated on frozen ponds, hiked the woods on old Indian trails to Danver's Falls, hunted arrowheads on Indian Hill, (French and Indian War skirmish). New England has a lot of small ponds and water is public property. We lived on a residential street with a lot that sloped down to Bruce's Pond. It was daily life co existing with nature. You heard the frogs croak, you hastily picked the garden before the first frost, tomatoes and concord grapes were preserved, you were set out in a group with cans to gather blueberries. There were no deer ticks, no Lyme disease, only mosquitoes.

My father was a Boy Scout, my brother was a Boy Scout, and I was a Girl Scout. At day camp we swam in lakes and ponds with leaf scum on the bottom. We'd drive country roads in spring to hunt asparagus. My father would spot squirrel and rabbit, tell us the names of the trees, often driving onto old dirt roads that embarrassingly led to people's yards... life seemed an adventure. Historical Louisa May Alcott, Emerson and Thoreau's houses and Longfellow's Wayside Inn were short excursions to the next town.

One day, they built new houses at the far end of the road; Bruce's Pond became stagnant with algae. Indian Hill became a subdivision; they built a new high school, bulldozed the skating marsh behind to build a hockey rink, and then tore down the Poor Farm to build an indoor rink. Tonic bottles were non refundable and piled up, you couldn't burn your leaves or rubbish, they built RT 495 from the Mass Pike to NH, and one day my home town became just another freeway exit with a Holiday Inn.

By then I had lived in New Orleans' French Quarter, gone west to Alaska, Oregon, Washington, to New England then to Southern California. I've been awed by nature and the earth, the Columbia River Gorge, the aurora borealis, egrets from my kitchen window, and Pacific sunsets. My mother often complained that I was a rover. I told her raising me on National Geographic Magazine might not have been the best idea.



Our Trip to Cachuma Lake

By Evelyne Vandersande

We took a 2-hour cruise on the lake with a docent and it was a very interesting place; the weather cooperated and we saw many kinds of birds. Let me explain first about the eagle migration. There is a pair of year-round resident golden eagles; they chase all other mature eagles away to keep their territory intact, but they allow the juveniles to spend the winter. It was a good opportunity for many of us who had never seen juveniles with their patchy plumage. It is such a short stage in a bird's life that it is not easy to observe. It was very satisfying to be able to see a few and one was very close. Can you imagine that we saw so many ospreys that we hardly looked at the last few? Ospreys being such spectacular birds, I think it sums up our expedition.

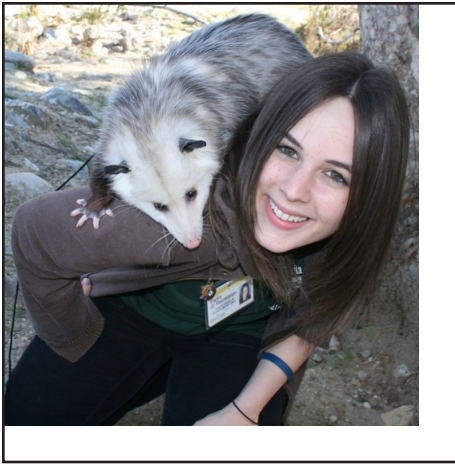
Here is an incomplete list of birds we saw as I could not write the names fast enough:

Pacific Loon	Western grebe
American white pelican	Cormorants
Great blue heron	Bufflehead
Ruddy duck	Ring-neck duck
Yellow-rumped warbler	Gadwale
White-throated swift	Immature Golden eagle
Greater scaup	Northern Harrier
Northern Shoveler	Red-tail hawk

We had lunch at "Cold Spring Tavern" which was an experience in itself. It is an old stage coach stop but now during the weekend, it becomes the hangout for motorcyclists clubs. They were coming to enjoy the barbecue and the small band and the scene was colorful and lively. We took a peek but stayed inside to enjoy each others company. We were 15 and it was a fun group and a great trip.

Goodbye John Boston

If you have ever read our local newspaper The Signal, you know who John Boston is. John announced his retirement in the last issue of the Escape in January and we want to thank him for the many years of writing those passionate and fun columns. I have personally taken a few trips because of his recommendations. We certainly want to thank him for being such a good friend to Placerita through the years and for his fascinating history classes about this valley. Many of the docents have enjoyed them and we were always so proud when he would bring his class to our nature center. We wish him the very best in his new life and we know we will meet again on the trails. Thank you for sharing your love of the Santa Clarita Valley with us and thank you for all the fun and interesting reading you provided us with our morning coffee for so many years. Happy Trails to You!



Jessica Nikolai

1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I was born at the Granada Hills Hospital in 1989, but I was raised in good old Newhall and I've lived here ever since. Well ... I live right on the dividing line between Valencia and Newhall, but Valencia has a reputation for valley girls with expensive cars and Hollister t-shirts, so I'd rather be from Newhall where things are a bit more rural and not so...paved.

2. How did your love for nature start? I've always loved to be outside, and I remember as a kid wanting to spend more time with animals than people. Animals have always just fascinated me, and I've always had a passion for them. I have a bunch of pictures of me as a toddler hanging out with random animals and I've watched Animal Planet

since I discovered TV. I've also loved to explore wild places since I was younger, like Yosemite, so I guess I've always had a love for nature.

3. What was your education? First Newhall Elementary and then Placerita Jr. High. I just graduated from Hart High, and I'm currently attending Moorpark College (aka Krapproom). I'm majoring in Animal Science, and trying to get into the EATM (Exotic Animals Training Management) program, so I'll hopefully be working at the student-run on-campus zoo.

4. What is your work experience? Whelp, the whole reason I wound up here at the center was through my ROP Animal Care and Services class. A requirement for the class was 6 hours of volunteer time per week, and I came here and never left. I also worked at Hart Park for four months while working at the center, but Placerita has always been my home. I love it here!

5. What is your family life? I'd like to make this interesting and say that I sprouted from a plant or something, but truth be told I just got my two parents like most people do and I can't help but thank them enough for putting up with all the weird things I do. I also have two older brothers who loved to torment me as a kid, but I love them anyway. I think growing up with two brothers and no sisters kind of molded me into the tomboy I am today.

6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place? I remember coming here as a kid and hiking the Canyon Trail with my dad; it was one of those fatherly-daughter bonding times. One time while hiking I remembering hearing a growl (I'm now thinking was a bobcat) from behind a bush that scared me pretty badly. I also remember visiting the gift shop and buying a book marker and a necklace back sometime when I was in elementary school, and I still have them.

We Were on the Radio

Ian Swift and Ron Krauss were interviewed by KHTS on January 7. The interview was done in the mall in the morning so at least it was quiet and they did a terrific job to promote the Nature Center and the new docent training class which was just about to start. Thank you so very much KHTS for supporting the Nature Center. You truly are a Home Town Station helping the community and Janice Murray is a lovely and vivacious young lady.



Placerita Canyon Audio Discoveries A Whole New Way to Enjoy the Park!

By Jessica Nikolai

A lot of people have been wondering what the Placerita Canyon Audio Discoveries (or PCAD for short) is all about. Well, PCAD is very similar to the audio tours you'd find at a museum, but instead of learning about paintings or ancient artifacts, you'll be learning about the ecology and history of Placerita Canyon!

What we have done is placed 23 wooden posts on the Canyon Trail; all are visibly numbered, and each post has been marked with PCAD's symbol (a silhouetted great horned owl with headphones). Guests rent out an mp3 player that has been pre-loaded with the trail's recording simply by leaving some basic information on a sign out sheet and leaving their current driver's license (which is securely stored until the guest returns), just to ensure the return of our mp3 players!

Guests, with mp3 player in hand and headphones placed in ears, then venture out to begin the Canyon Trail. When they arrive at the



first post at the start of the trail (marked with a number one), the guests push play on their player and listen to track one, introducing them to the trail and what they will be experiencing. Each number on the posts corresponds to the tracks on the mp3 player, so if a guest is standing in front of a post with a three, they should be listening to track three of the program.

The guests then hike the trail, stopping at each marked post and listening to each interesting stop, be it an oak tree, rock formations or bubbling oil! And, of course,

guests can choose to skip a stop if desired, just by pushing the "next" symbol on their player until reaching another post.

The Canyon Trail's recording will lead guests all the way to Walker Ranch, from where they will then head back to return their mp3 player to the office. We're planning on creating more recordings for a few of the parks' other trails as well, and the recordings will also apply to all seasons of the park (so it won't need to be re-recorded four times a year)! So if you're looking for a new way to experience Placerita Canyon, PCAD may be your answer! If anyone has any questions, feel free to ask me or Ranger Frank.

This article was written in January and the completion of PCAD may have been delayed by Mother Nature herself! Please have patience, and check back with the nature center for the completion of this program!

A Trip with Bob Moss and Reg Fear

Have you ever been bird watching at the Sepulveda Basin? This is your opportunity and you will be led by two professionals as they are docents for this organization. It is a wonderful area because you can find different types of environments: lake, tree, meadow and the LA River with the opportunity to see many different kinds of birds.

We will be leaving the Nature Center at 8:30am on Monday March 10 and plan to stay for lunch after. Bring your binoculars and water and be sure to wear comfortable shoes.

Springtime in the Life of a Bird

Courtship

The magical behavior we tend to lump under the name of courtship is far from understood in any animal (and probably least of all in our species) It involves close interaction and displays between male and female, which result in a kind of bonding or mutual benefit that keep a pair of animals together. In migratory birds, females usually arrive slightly after males have established territories, soon after which males and females begin to “court”– choose mates and form pairs. Once paired, the male and female are much more synchronized in their activities and tend to stay together as they move about the territory.

Nest-Building

Nest-building usually starts soon after courtship is completed. In most species, all building is done by the female, with the male often following her to and from the nest as she gathers materials. The male may build the foundation and the female add the lining in some species, such as the house wren. (Women usually choose the drapes and comforters but I digress...) In other species, like cedar waxwings, both sexes participate. Nest-building normally takes from a few days to about a week to complete.

Mating and Egg-Laying

To mate, the male steps onto the back of the female and bends his tail down as she lifts hers up. The anal opening, or cloaca, of the male and female touch, and sperm is transferred. After a few seconds the male steps off the female back. The female lays one egg per day, usually early each morning. Four to six eggs is a common number for most small species. The birds generally do not spend very much time at the nest until most of the eggs are laid.

Incubation

Incubation does not usually start until the day before the last egg is laid, probably so that all the eggs will hatch on the same day. In most species, only the female incubates. She actually develops added blood vessels on her breast and may lose some of her feathers at the same spot. This area, called the brood patch, is like a little heating pad that warms the eggs. During this period the male may bring food to the female or he may guard the nest while the female takes breaks and feed. Incubation lasts about ten to twelve days in small birds.

Nestling Phase

Once the eggs have hatched, things get really busy at the nest, for the young call from the nest and the parents have to make repeated trips with food. The young are called nestlings because they remain in the nest and are fed by the parents. For the first few days of the nestling phase the young birds need to be “brooded”– Have an adult sit over them – since they have no feathers and cannot keep warm. Soon they develop feathers and no longer need to be brooded. The nestling phase last about ten days.

Fledgling Phase

Most birds cannot master the ability to fly immediately. Some spend as long as two weeks in that stage. They hop around on the ground or in low vegetation exercising their wings and learning to fly. Their parents continue to feed them throughout this period. If you find a down-covered nestling on the ground, the best thing to do is to locate the nest and return the baby to it. The adult won't reject the baby because of human scent as most birds have poor sense of smell. If you find a feathered fledgling on the ground, leave it alone. Raising baby birds by hand is very difficult and it result in failure most of the time. (Ok, this was my soap box moment). Fledglings often sit and call continuously, and the adults may feed them less frequently than when they were nestlings but with larger pieces of food. Gradually, the fledglings will begin to find food on their own. This phase may end abruptly with the parents becoming aggressive to their young and chasing them away. The fledglings phase lasts from one to several weeks. For humans, this phase may last a few years... but this is another story... Enjoy the wonders of spring

Reference: “The Birdfeeder Book” by Donald and Lillian Stokes



Construction Update

Construction started in December 2007 on the nature center refurbishment project and the building will be closed for approximately a year. However, we are open during this time with the park office now located in a trailer. Most programs will continue without interruption. The contractor has installed a construction fence around the building and there is no public access to the area. The first work to be done is demolition of the existing bathrooms. All of the old fixtures and interior furnishings have been removed and will be hauled away. The remodeling will be done in accordance with LEED (Leadership in Energy En-

vironmental Design) parameters developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. Accordingly, much of the construction debris will be recycled.

Do Birds Sing With an Accent?

Just as our speech patterns vary regionally, the songs of many birds also show great geographic variation. For example, in states east of the Mississippi, the song of Spotted Towhees consist of 2 introductory notes followed by a buzzy trill. Songs in the Rocky Mountain States begin with a single introductory note followed by the trill and the West Coast population has dropped the introductory notes entirely.

The songs of population often differ on a much smaller geographic scale.

Local variants are called dialects. They are commonly found in songbirds with population restricted to particular habitats and separated from other population by unsuitable terrain.

Vocal dialects appear to be learned. Young birds hear the songs sung around their natal territories by their fathers and neighboring males and acquire the peculiarities of these renditions.

Many ornithologists have assumed that dialects serve as indicators of genetic adaptation to local conditions. The dialects enable females to choose males from their own birth area, who are carrying genes closely adapted to the specific environment in which breeding occurs. Dialects function to promote the breeding together of similar individuals. Experimental work with several species has shown that females are more responsive to their own song dialects than to the more distant song dialects.

Preening

Preening is a commonly observed behavior involving the careful cleaning, rearrangement, and oiling of the feather with the bill. Preening is essential in preserving those delicate structures so critical both for flight and, because of their insulation properties, for regulating body temperature. Most birds have a “preen gland” on the rump at the base of the upper tail feathers. The bill is used to work oil squeezed from this gland into the feathers, and head scratching may be an attempt to distribute preen oil over the head, where the bill obviously cannot do the job. The oil apparently has several functions: to help keep the feathers flexible and waterproof and to inhibit the growth of fungi and bacteria.

In Ross’ Gulls and some other gulls and terns, the preen oil contains a pink colorant. The intensity of color seems to depend on the diet and if the bird is in breeding condition. But in these species the head gets little color because of the difficulty of spreading the oil on the head

Reference: The Birder Handbook by Paul R.Ehrlich, David S.Dobkin and Darryl Wheye

A Different Year, Different and Fewer Birds

by Bob Fischer

The birds seen on our Second Saturday Bird Walk in February 2008 were very different from those seen on the walk one year ago. The birds we did see were the ones you expected to see, Scrub Jays, Acorn Woodpeckers, Mourning Doves, Starlings, Goldfinches, American and Lessers, Red -shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, California and Spotted Towhees and a few more. Eighteen species altogether. But many fewer species compared to twenty-eight one year ago. What species were the missing? Hermit Thrush, Golden-crowned Sparrow, California Quail, Anna's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, White-tailed Kite, White-crowned Sparrow, Northern Harrier, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Bewick's Wren. All of these, with the exception of the Northern Harrier have been commonly seen in Placerita Canyon during the winter season. Some even this season. So where were they on Saturday, February 9 in 2008? Almost anyone of them could be missing, hiding, overlooked or elsewhere in the Canyon during the two and one half hour period of our walk. But so many species missing! That is what was so striking.

We were a large group, over twenty, with experienced birders in the group. So we should have been finding the birds if they were there. Also, it seems to me that there were fewer birds over-all. So, is something really different? Are there fewer birds and fewer species, especially the migrating species? Is a changing weather pattern affecting bird movements? Is it just a local pattern resulting from the fires in this area and elsewhere in California and the west? Is it loss of habitat due to human activity? Is it just a natural, normal cycle? The San Fernando Valley Audubon Society reported that the 2007 Christmas Bird Count totaled 15,400 birds of 125 species. That compares to 19,000 birds counted in 2006 in 125 species and the 2005 count of 17,000 birds in 134 species. They note the '06 and '05 counts were conducted in rainy weather not conducive to birding in contrast to the '07 count conducted in perfect birding weather. Yet fewer birds were counted in '07 than in the two previous years. Arthur Langton, the compiler for this last report, asks if the drought is a factor. He notes many fewer water birds were reported. We keep draining and filling in marsh land. The most numerous bird counted was a water bird, the American Coot. Our Santa Clarita Bridgeport home owners upset by Coots in their artificial pond might be interested in that fact.

On a lighter note, I'm happy to report that the recent Beginning Birding Class attracted over ten students including Placerita docents. and staff and docents from Whittier Narrows Natural Area. All attendees exhibited great interest and enthusiasm. It was very exciting for them to see birds that were familiar and learn to identify them and learn something about their habits. To cap our viewing, a Red-shouldered Hawk perched close by in a sycamore tree then dove to the ground and captured a small animal, covered it with its wings, then flew back up to its perch in the sycamore. Our next Beginning Birding class starts March 22. Come out and help the birds and yourself by becoming more knowledgeable about this fascinating part of our natural history.

SPRING PROGRAMS

- FAMILY NATURE WALK** Every Saturday from 11 to noon.
An easy, 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.
- ANIMAL PRESENTATION** Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.
See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.
- VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION** First Saturday of the month from 10 to 11 am.
Learn about volunteer opportunities at the Nature Center and Park.
- TRAIL TEAM** First Sunday of the month at 9 am. Help repair trails, pick up litter and remove weeds.
Fifteen minute safety orientation mandatory. Please wear long pants, boots, and bring water.
- BIRD WALK** Second Saturday of the month from 9 to 11 am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.
- COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB** A monthly community event that invites organized groups and families to get into the outdoors, visit wilderness areas, and lead healthy lifestyles. Call the Nature Center for more information, or visit their website at communityhikingclub.org
- AMPHITHEATER NIGHTS** 3rd Saturday of each month. March 15: Feline night. April 19: Canine night. Call the center as times vary with the season.
- BEGINNING BIRDERS** A new program meeting in 4-week sessions each Saturday at 9am, lasting 2 hours. Session 3 begins March 22 through April 12. Focus on ages 10+. Call for a reservation (first come basis) as each session will have a maximum of 20 students.
- THE NEW JR. RANGERS** A revamp of an old favorite program. Meetings will be held the 4th Saturday of each month. From 9:30 to 11am. Subjects vary monthly. March 22: Endangered Species. April 26: Reptiles and Amphibians.
- NIGHT OWL CINEMAS** Enjoy educational nature films in our outdoor amphitheater every second Saturday of the month. Time varies by season, please call the center at 259.7721. March 8: Pole to Pole. April 12: **Mountains. Arrive early to watch pre-show cartoon.**

Please Note: The Placerita Canyon Nature Center building will be closed for construction beginning this Winter. During the construction period, the Nature Center office will be in temporary trailers. The temporary office will be open and operating during normal business hours: 7 days a week, 9 am to 5 pm. All trails will be open as usual, and park hours will remain sunrise to sunset. The campground will be closed during this construction period. Many of our usual programs will be presented in the outdoor amphitheater, and appropriate clothing during all types of weather is recommended (i.e. jackets, hats, loose-fitting and light colored clothing, umbrellas, rain gear, etc.).

Eagle Scout Projects

At Placerita, we are always very appreciative of those young men who want to improve the park and do their Eagle Scout project here:

Albert Columbe built six very plain benches along the Hillside Trail. We like the simple lines of these benches which are well-placed.

John Kasum planted 45 trees: oak, willow and elderberry and installed irrigation to ensure their survival.

Thank you for your efforts at Placerita.



DONATIONS

Once again, we would like to thank all those generous people who thought of Placerita when making their donations. It is much appreciated by all of us at Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

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The Rattler

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and oaks
can grow together."*

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