



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.

November/December 2008

Hello Dear Nature Friends

I hope you will receive this newsletter on a beautiful crisp and clear fall morning, one of those days where the sky becomes a sharp blue and everything shines under the sun. It may be strange to send so early my best wishes for a great holiday season, but this newsletter is for November and December and those days are coming fast! I hope you will be able to spend some good times with families and friends and we thank you for your interest and your support throughout the year. Happy Holidays!

Docent Graduation

The Nature Center Associates of Los Angeles County invite you to a Graduation and Recognition Award and Continental Breakfast on Saturday November 22, 2008 from 9:30am until 11:30am at the Eaton Canyon Nature Center.

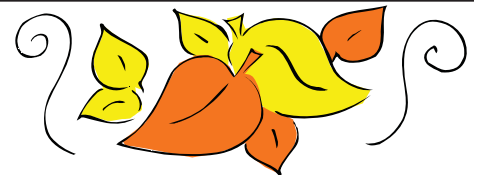
This event is sponsored by the Board of Directors and Senior Docents. Please RSVP to Sue Wallander by November 5. It is casual dress, ties optional.

If you are a new docent, do not miss this lovely ceremony and bring your family to share in the glory of your graduation.

What is this Natural Area About?

Placerita is a unique east-west running canyon featuring cool, shaded oak groves, a willow and sycamore-lined seasonal stream and numerous other interesting plant and animal communities. The historic "Oak of the Golden Dream" is the site of California's original gold discovery in 1842. Another landmark in Placerita is our Walker Cabin, built by Frank Walker in 1920 for his family. The Nature Center museum contains exhibits on the natural history of southern California, and there is a small collection of live animals.

A network of self-guiding nature, history and hiking trails radiates out into the park from the Center, with longer hikes leading to a seasonal waterfall and to the top of the Santa Clarita Divide. Picnicking is available near the Nature Center. The park encompasses oak woodland and chaparral on the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains southeast of the City of Santa Clarita. The park not only serves to conserve a slice of the wild environment but also endeavors to educate the public on the value of undisturbed flora and fauna through wild animal shows, nature hikes and educational trails.



Annual Dues are Due

The dues are not being collected any more in September, but in January to coincide with the new start of Docent Training.

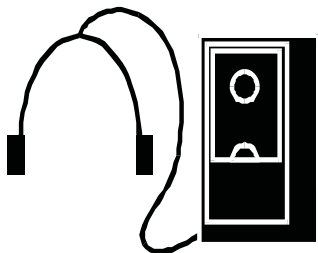
The Rattler is a bi-monthly publication sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates to promote the preservation and enjoyment of the Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Please come, enjoy, learn...and volunteer.

UPDATE ON THE CONSTRUCTION

The bad news is that we won't be back in Placerita Canyon Nature Center before March. The good news is the reason why: additional scope of work for the interior and the exterior of the building was accepted and approved. We will be a LEED building (that's a "green" building). Our performance will be supervised for 6 months, and then we will be certified after a study is done of our behavior. April to October will be the performance period needed for our certification.

LEED certification has many requirements. For example, 100% of the building material was recycled. The material used had to come from no more than a 50 mile radius. The insulation in the walls is made of cellulose which is, in fact, old newspapers. The AC system has to be super energy efficient. When we are in operation, we cannot use any toxic chemical or herbicide. We already did that but we are going to have to be careful what kind of product we use to clean things.

The day will come when we will have a big opening celebration.....we hardly can wait.



**Placerita Canyon Audio Discovery
for the Canyon Trail
now Ready for Download**

Explore the beauty and history of Placerita Canyon Natural Area not just through your eyes, but with your ears as well! Thanks to the hard work of our staff (particularly Jessica Nikolai), the Placerita Canyon Audio Discovery for the Canyon Trail (in mp3 format) is now ready. You can download it from the iTunes Music Store (iTunes software required) by checking our web page at Placerita.org. and clicking on the link.

The "discovery" starts at the nature center trail head and ends at Walker Ranch. There are numbered sign posts along the trail marked with an owl logo to guide your way. Placerita Canyon Audio Discoveries—it's like having a personal tour guide with the convenience of a play, pause and rewind button!

Volunteer of the Year

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates are pleased to announce that Bob Moss has been nominated as Volunteer of the Year 2008. He will be honored, along with other center Volunteers of the Year at the Eaton Canyon Graduation on November 22. Please read the more in-depth article about Bob in this issue of the Rattler, explaining why he was chosen.

The Rattler

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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 evelynvandersande@gmail.com. Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

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.

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

**Fall is Acorn Season at
Placerita Canyon**

The lovely fall weather is here, with cool nights and warm days, and with it comes the crop of acorns in our native oaks. We have three common oaks in the natural area-Coast Live Oak, Scrub Oak, and Canyon Oak. Walk up the Canyon Trail and you will find the long, skinny acorns of the Coast Live Oak and the stout, rounder acorns of the Canyon Oak. Also, you may see some of our native animals fighting over the acorns-woodpeckers, Scrub-Jays, and squirrels sometimes wage noisy battles over them!

The above was written by Ron Kraus for our web page. If you want to see the photos, why don't you try Placerita.org and have a look at the photo gallery. It is a true joy for the eyes.



Here is a sample of the beautiful animals you can see at Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Gray Jay

By Shirley Morano

In July I was visiting in Canada and went with my cousin up to Whistler Mountain. We rode the gondola up to the top (6000 feet) and had a spectacular view. While we were taking pictures we became aware of a bird that was hopping around near us. My cousin found a cracker on the ground, broke it in pieces



and put them in her hand. Then she held her hand out and the bird came and landed on her fingers and began to eat the pieces of cracker. She called it "whiskey-jack." When I got home I tried to look it up but at first was not successful. Then I tried again and found that it was a gray jay. I was so fascinated when I read more about it. The gray jay is a bold bird, equipped for survival in the harsh North Woods. The Indians call it "wiskedjak" from which "whiskey-jack" came. The bird is fearless and will help itself to any food. Campers soon learn that all food is the fearless bird's prey. It may even light on a plate or a frying pan to filch a tasty morsel. The Indians say that the whiskey-jack will eat anything, including moccasins and fur caps. The bird's opportunistic behavior is not purposeless. It is storing up food and fattening itself against the long northern winter.



Bob Moss—Volunteer of the Year 2008

Bob Moss is a big gentle guy with a smile that comes from the heart. He has a low-key way of doing things, gently and quietly, but he knows what he wants and how to make it happen. He always gets results in the end without fanfare and always sees what needs to be done. For example, during the last docent training, Bob noticed that the new docents needed a sponsor. He did not plan meetings and agenda, but came to every class, quietly developed friendships, providing help, advice and words of wisdom to reassure them and make their experience more comfortable.

We have a great birder's program in place but Bob noticed that some novices did not dare to ask questions during the bird walk because they were afraid that their questions would be too basic or sound stupid.

Again, Bob started a program where children were welcomed, giving the beginner birders a perfect opportunity to start from scratch. The classes were not intimidating, were full of information and very much hands on. It was such a tremendous success that the classes are repeated on a regular basis.

Bob has been our Santa at Placerita for many years, a job that he loves and you have to watch the sweet interaction that develops with the children to understand what a soft heart Bob has. He told me "I love to see the little kids. They either want to talk to you or are too afraid to come close. They tell you what they want for Christmas and you see the parents listening."

Bob's knowledge of the animal kingdom is impressive. What is special about Bob is that all this information he so quickly can give you comes from books but also from personal experience. That makes a very interesting combination. As a young man for example, Bob had a bear for a pet. He has been seen reading different books on scat during long plane rides to the great puzzlement of his fellow passengers...

At Placerita when we have a question about an animal, we have learned to ask Bob and we can always rely on his knowledge about birds, scat, animal tracks and animal behavior at different times of the year.

Bob received professional training and that helped him to become the expert he is now. He joined the Air Force and for four years was a medic in Canada and Greenland where he taught Arctic Survival. He lived with Eskimos, learned their ways to endure the climate and be safe.

Since he was a child, he has read every kind of book about nature including his own encyclopedia set. He is also a docent at Sepulveda Basin where he received training and gives tours to school children there as well as at Placerita.

PCNCA would like to warmly thank Bob for his many years of teaching the children and the docents and helping us to grow as a more friendly and scientific organization.

Bob, thank you for sharing your knowledge—always with a gentle smile.



This is how a Docent Thinks:
"I am only one, but still I am one.
I cannot do everything, but still I can do something;
And because I cannot do everything
I will not refuse to do the something I can do."
Edward Everett Hale



Thanks to all those generous folks who have donated to Placerita. Our creatures and educational programs benefit greatly from your generosity.

Diana Kalisz
Diane Klein
Live Oak Elementary School
Shirley Morano
Judith Rothman



Ian Swift

We are extremely proud that Ian Swift, Superintendent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center, was again chosen this year to be on the list of the "51 Most Influential People in the Santa Clarita Valley". We have the highest respect and admiration for Ian and it is very nice to see that other people have also noticed the great potential of this young man.

As you all know, Ian has been busy overseeing the renovation to the nature center and making sure it follows the guidelines so it can be LEED certified. He is the person who is called when the local newspapers or radio station need a comment about various forces of nature in the Santa Clarita Valley. He is also our "Bug Man".

He is a 2002 graduate of Cal State Bakersfield. He travels the world studying beetles. Last summer he confirmed a new species of beetle right here in the Santa Clarita Valley naming it *Xylotrechus hovorei* in honor of his friend and mentor, the late Frank Hovore. Ian, you are Number One on our list!

See What Docents are Capable Of!

by Pam Koch

The Mud Run at Castaic (Jack Bones Equestrian Center) was held Sunday morning, September 28. Jordana Capra, Linda Cormack and Pam Koch, hooked up with folks from Fitness Edge Boot Camp and entered as individuals, over 40 female. While waiting at the start line with the crowd, a fire truck sprayed us with the fire hose while a police helicopter whipped up dust to get us all in the mood. After that soaking and dusting we were game for the course.

Emboldened by course veteran Jordana, Linda and Pam entered it with trepidation and ended it looking forward to next year's mud run. Think 5 miles of hiking, mostly relatively flat. Even 'suicide hill', the only noticeable uphill challenge, was doable for us over 40 types. But just after suicide hill is when the real fun began – six excellent mud pits to slog through. Each mud pit is situated between a mud hill to climb over, and then slide into the next pit. We had already slogged across a couple of long mud pits, mostly muddy water, some shallow, and the deepest up to our thighs.



Pictured left to right:

Capra, Cormack, Fitness Edge Instructor Tako, and Koch

One mud hill boasted a rope net to scale over with optional assistance provided by local sheriff's Special Enforcement Bureau. What mud run is complete without crawling through mud? The last pit is laced with ropes to crawl under – great fun! Some participants opted to walk over the ropes; not a choice our inner warriors would allow and thankfully we are physically capable of wallowing through the mud pit.

After crossing the finish line, we grabbed our bags and headed for the showers. Open air, in front of the world we stripped down to sports bras and bike shorts and stowed

wet, muddy clothes and boots in sturdy plastic bags. After rinsing and towel-drying off we slipped into dry clothes and sandals and headed to the BBQ area for a cheeseburger to replenish our strength. The \$5 price tag included a bag of chips and a Pepsi.

The S.E.B. Mud Run is organized with the intent of creating a fun athletic event to promote teamwork and foster goodwill among policing agencies. The course consisted of approximately 5 miles that included several mud and water obstacles, and a few 3 - 5 foot fence/wall obstacles. The course must be completed wearing fatigue pants and boots if you're entering for competition but these clothes are recommended for everyone. The course is designed to enable people of all fitness levels to complete it. The run emphasizes teamwork and having a good time as opposed to being a grueling event for only elite athletes. My good luck was being invited to participate through Fitness Edge Boot Camp. Why not join in next year?

Connecting people with nature

Fall PROGRAMS 2008

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.
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. For more information, visit their website at communityhikingclub.org
AMPHITHEATER NIGHTS	A new program on the 3rd Saturday of each month.. Call the center at 259.7721 as times vary with the season. November 15, Bird Night.
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. November 22, Turkey Survival.
HOLIDAY DINNER	Sunday, December 14 at Jim's clubhouse at 6pm. For Docents and Volunteers. RSVP to Evelyne at 254.2972 by December 10.

Please Note: The Placerita Canyon Nature Center building is closed for construction. 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.).

About Hummingbirds

by Richard Norton

Some of the non-birders I know have recently taken to falling asleep when I talk about birds, only to reawaken when the subject of hummingbirds begins. I'm sure this is due to the overwhelming uniqueness of hummingbirds and the fascination that is universally shared among people for this unusual bird. Yet it is not only their outward appearance and behavior that is so appealing. A deeper look reveals many physiological differences that, when understood, show hummingbird adaptations as not only unique, but as further examples of nature's perfection in structure, form and function.

Hummingbirds belong to the order Apodiformes and share it only with swifts. As the order name "footless" suggests, their tiny legs and feet are covered with bare skin rather than the scales (scutes) of other birds. With nearly 450 species they are the most diverse after the passerines or "perching birds". They evolved in the northern hemisphere, but their closest relatives are believed to be the owl nightjar of Australia, having many anatomical similarities. (Hyman, 1992)

The most endearing quality of hummingbirds is their unique mode of flight. Unique in its own right, but made more so by a series of adaptations that make the characteristic rapid figure-eight wing movement possible. Reinforced shoulder, pectoral bones and all red muscle fibers (chicken breast muscles are all white fibers) in flight-related muscle groups are just the beginning. This permits the up and down wing beat to be equally strong allowing for twice the thrust as other birds that use a passive up beat. Also, hummingbird wing structure is all hand bones with rigid elbow and wrist bones permitting the wing to remain straight out from the body and not fold in half.

Having the largest heart relative to total body weight (2.5%) in the animal kingdom enables a heart rate of over 1200 beats per minute while in flight. Combined with the highest concentration of smaller red blood cells and super efficient avian respiration the hummingbird maintains high oxygen transport for its needs. There is also an intestinal modification which allows for rapid transport of energy-rich sugars so crucial to their high metabolic rate and body temperature (105 F)

At night hummingbirds enter into a state of torpor where all body functions are reduced to a fraction of daytime highs. In particular, those living in the high Andes of South America where all four seasonal extremes are expressed daily, body temperatures may drop 50 degrees F in order to conserve energy and avoid starvation.

In contrast, prior to migration hyperphagia begins; a feeding frenzy where copious amounts of nectar and sugar water are constantly lapped up. This supplements a prodigious consumption of tiny insects full of fats and proteins. The carbohydrates are used up quickly, but the proteins are used to strengthen flight muscles for the long flight. Yellow fats are stored in the farcular region (wishbone) and along the upper legs. This forces the feathers up slightly making the hummingbird appear much fatter than normal. Indeed, its weight nearly doubles at this time.

When it comes to brain power the hummingbird is left wanting. The cerebral area is small and not well developed as it is with minas and crows. This reduces learned response and memory abilities. Hummingbirds must rely on instinctive behavior. Size is also key to the absence of gall or urinary bladders, thus reducing weight. It explains why birds excrete a combined form of nitrogenous waste at any time and in particular, while eating or under stress.

This all relates to a hummingbird's small overall size which, with the way it flies, creates the illusion of great speed. Top speed during a mating display dive is only around 50 mph whereas falcons and other raptors can fly at speeds well over 100 mph. It was recently discovered that during these mating dives Anna's hummingbirds can vibrate their tail feathers like a clarinet reed and produce a loud chirp.

Clearly, hummingbirds are uniquely interesting and are among the favorites of those who love birds. Due to the popularity of my feeders I might experiment with varying concentrations of sugar water or study agonistic behavior among Anna's hummingbirds while feeding. Many opportunities of study arise when one takes the time to look a little deeper. The rewards are nearly always satisfying. (Mayr, 1992)

References: For general physiology, Bill Hilton, Jr. - www.rubythroat.org. For flight Robert Sanders, UC Berkeley News, Jan. 2008, Dec. 2004. For comparative anatomy, Dr. Mayr, 1994



Volunteerism

As we roll into the New Year our Docent Training classes will be starting. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people with similar interests. It is educational and simply makes you feel good about yourself and what you are doing. We would love to see many new faces in January, but even if you decide that Placerita isn't necessarily the place for you, think of where your talents would be valuable elsewhere. You are never too young or too old to make a difference in someone's life.

The spirit of volunteerism can be described in many ways, and perhaps anthropologist Margaret Mead said it best:
"Never doubt that a small group of committed individuals can change the world: indeed, it is the only thing that ever has".

Bonnie Felt



1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I grew up in “The Valley,” Sun Valley specifically. Like, oh my gosh! In the early years we lived just a few blocks from Jessup’s Dairy that had REAL cows. I was fascinated to watch them up close and personal while they ate their hay. This was back in the day when milk came in glass bottles with paper/foil caps and the milkman delivered fresh milk to your back porch and collected empty bottles! Our neighborhood was frequented by the Helm’s Bakery Truck and the all important Ice Cream Truck. Upon hearing its scratchy tunes, you never saw three kids run so fast and jump so high to collect money from their mother to buy a tasty frozen treat. “I would like an orange push-up stick, please.”

2. How did your love of Nature get started? I think having the good fortune of having a backyard in which to play initiated my love for nature. I used to love turning over the bricks lining the flower beds to look for bugs, in particular, the pill bug. I played with leaves, flowers, and sticks. I climbed trees and rolled summersaults down our hilly front lawn. I drew on the pavement with sticks dipped in puddles left by the previous night’s rain. I jumped up and down in piles of autumn leaves. And there were the memorable experiences like my father waking me up on an early morning drive to go ocean fishing to see a gorgeous sunrise; digging for sand crabs in the wet sand during a day at the beach with my

mother and siblings; and seeing and catching fireflies at my uncle’s farm in Missouri. All those experiences of my early childhood set the tone for a great love of nature to develop later on beginning in my late 20s.

3. What was your education? I went to college at Cal State University, Northridge and majored in Art, General Studies. I loved my art classes but I also enjoyed the natural sciences including the class, Geography-The Human Environment. That class introduced me to the global environment discussing things like biomes, climate, weather and so on. That class left a lasting impression.

4. What is your work experience? For most of my adult life I have worked in publishing in graphic design for books, magazines and newspapers.

6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place? I believe I came there to introduce my niece, who lived nearby, to nature. She was about three? (2001) and I signed a petition to keep the nature center open. And then in 2004 I got a letter from the nature center to train to be a docent and it was exactly what I had been looking for. I enjoyed children and enjoyed nature so it was the ideal combo. What do I remember about this place? The animal shows and wondering if we would ever get to go inside the cabin. And having my niece put money into the donation box. I believe it was a hundred dollars. Ya, that’s it, a hundred dollars.

7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center? Docent, Assistant organizer of Open House 2005.

8. What did or do you like most about your job at the Nature Center? Being outside and seeing the seasons change the landscape throughout the year. I really enjoy the children they really do say the darndest things. One other thing, I especially like my badge!

9. What did you or do you not like about the job? What’s not to like. Except, well, sometimes I stab myself with the pin on my badge...

10. At Placerita, is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud? Mastering the Felt board presentation. Considering my last name, it was a given that I had to master that task.

11. What is your favorite food? Some of my Placerita friends would probably say the food at Telley’s Diner but I actually love Indian food. Or just about any of the Asian foods: Chinese, Thai, and Japanese. And CHOCOLATE! Dark chocolate with raspberries. ooohhh.

12. What is your favorite color? There are so many colors to choose from and for me the best are found in nature. The blue of the precious stone, Blue Topaz; the blue of the bird, Lazuli Bunting. And for flowers; the magenta of Elegant Clarkia, the yellow of Buttercups, the blue of Woolly Blue Curls, and the pastel orange of the Sticky Leaf Monkey Flower. And let us not forget all the colors of autumn leaves contrasted against a deep blue sky. Yum yum.

13. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? Or pastime? TV: Divine Design, Color Splash, Dancing with the Stars, and Desperate Housewives!

14. Favorite music? I really like Country Music.

15. Favorite pastime? Leading children on nature walks.

16. Is there anything else that describes you that we should know? Is there any passion or special events in your life that you would like to tell us about? Before my docent training at Placerita I spent a few years going bird watching with the Audubon society and as a side benefit I learned a lot about wildflowers. So, on my walks you can bet that the children will learn a thing or two about birds and wildflowers. Also, I really love storytelling, although I have a long way to go in the development of my own storytelling skills. I love listening to professional storytellers and if you do too, then come on down to the Los Angeles Storytelling Festival on November 15 in Culver City. 8:30am to 6pm. Come for the whole day or just part of it.

Culver-Palms Methodist Church Complex

4464 Sepulveda Blvd

Culver City, CA 90230

<http://www.lastorytellingfestival.com>

Happy docenting,

Bonnie Felt

Jill Goddard (Kraus)



1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I was born in Chicago IL and lived there until I was 10 when our family moved to Van Nuys, CA. A year later we moved to Sylmar where I lived until I met and married Ron (Kraus). Moving cross country and to a new home my brother Bill and I became the best of friends (the Hummingbird Garden at Placerita is in his memory).

2. How did your love of Nature get started? My grandmother's home on a lake in IL and I remember watching and catching fireflies there. My other grandmother took me on a train trip when I was 5 or 6. I remember seeing the Northern Lights and that was quite exciting.

3. What was your education? I graduated from Cal State Northridge with a degree in art and have done some graduate work.

4. What is your work experience? I started out as a teen volunteering with the City of Los Angeles Rec. and Parks teaching classes at Sylmar Park. I worked two summers with the YMCA as a day camp leader. I was supposed to co-direct the camp the following year but there were cutbacks in the program, instead I worked at Stonehurst Park

(where I worked during the school year). I thought I recognized the summer gardener caretaker from a Sylmar High yearbook and we started talking. Ron and I were married three years later. After cutbacks with the city I returned to the YMCA (Mid Valley again) teaching art and kids cooking classes and later Verdugo Hills and Crescenta-Canada YMCA where I was graphic artist. I retired in 2003 after 27 years of work there. I also helped out in our family business. I am a published editor and illustrator of a cookbook. I was working on a second project when our dear friend Patti Ballard, the author passed away last year. There is no word from the publisher if it will be published.

5. What is your family life? I am married (34 years) to Ron Kraus. Our kids are two Pekingese.

6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place I think my mom took us there. When we moved to California she loved to take us on drives to see the area. It seemed so remote and rustic, like we were in the big forest but surprisingly close to home.

7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center? Volunteer specializing in art and graphics.

8. What did or do you like most about your job at the Nature Center? Seeing or hearing that people enjoy my work. I have been able to get back to drawing and use that for several projects at Placerita. I also like doing the posters for various special events, a lot of that is last minute but it is fun being there with the group.

9. What did you or do you not like about the job? People who do not have the passion for Placerita. People who just want to use Placerita for their resume or social aspirations. Volunteers at Placerita are welcomed for their time and talents (check books not required). So many agencies "talk the talk" but just want your money.

10. At Placerita, is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud? Designing the PCNCA OJ logo--I am really proud of that one. Heidi and Evelyne were able to get good printers who were able to duplicate the fine lines of the drawing in our wearables (t-shirts, hat and totes) and plaques.

11. What is your favorite food? Currently pickled things radishes, kimchee. The halibut cheeks we get in the Pacific Northwest and yam sushi are treats but almost impossible to find locally.

12. What is your favorite color? I love all colors.

13. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? Or pastime? TV show--Top Chef Music--Harry Chapin Pastimes--cooking, gardening, art, knitting and crocheting, walking, traveling by car

14. Is there anything else that describes you that we should know? Is there any passion or special events in your life that you would like to tell us about? The past five years I have held a Holiday Sale of Knitted and Crocheted items (hats, scarves, ponchos, afghans, totes and handbags) with 100% of the sales going to Heifer International (heifer.org). I do all of the needlework and donate all materials.

Here is a little about the organization: Heifer's mission is: To work with communities to end hunger and poverty and to care for the earth. Heifer's strategy is: To "pass on the gift." As people share their animals' offspring with others – along with their knowledge, resources, and skills – an expanding network of hope, dignity, and self-reliance is created that reaches around the globe. Heifer's History: This simple idea of giving families a source of food rather than short-term relief caught on and has continued for over 60 years. Today, millions of families in 128 countries have been given the gifts of self-reliance and hope. Judy McClure and Diane Henry are two of my best supporters. Though I do most of my sales at our church (I have yet to set the dates) I am willing to show my items to other interested buyers. Contact me by e-mail if you are interested.

I am currently working on murals for our church's preschool toddler and infant rooms too.

From a Parisian Who Used to Stroll

I was born in Paris which is a city where you do much walking. The subway stations are far apart and distances are not huge so we walk everywhere. On Sunday, my family would take a picnic into the forests around Paris, an elaborate affair followed by a “digestive stroll”. The idea of hiking was completely foreign to me. A few years later, I found myself with my Dutch husband moving to New York City. We did plenty of walking there too, our heads tilted back to see the tall buildings.

After a few months of that we bought a second-hand Volvo to explore upstate and to escape the heat. That summer we went all the way up to Vermont and we were taking a short walk on a path when two young men came from behind. They were lean and deeply tanned, with beards and huge backpacks. This was not a Sunday stroll...we sensed there was a story and we engaged in a conversation with them to find out what the natives were up to. They told us we were on the Appalachian Trail, and that they had left their Virginia home in the spring and were planning to walk for months going all the way to the Canadian border.

We were flabbergasted; it seemed such a romantic but complicated concept. Most of all we were entranced by the idea of a trail going from south to north, spanning the USA. It became a template for all of our vacations. We would go somewhere up north (always this problem with getting used to the heat) along the Appalachian Trail. We did so for many years, throughout the different seasons and we saw the most beautiful landscapes in New Hampshire, Vermont and Main, always following parts of the Appalachian Trail.

Our world was turned upside down when we moved to Los Angeles. The climate, the plants, the animals: all were foreign to us and incomprehensible. The wilderness was grandiose, but forbidding with a certain rawness that was disconcerting. There was danger lurking in these mountains where no road could be seen.

Thank goodness it was the beginning of Docent Training at Placerita and I started to learn my ABC's of California's nature. The book opened my eyes which were full of wonder at every discovery. To top it all, I discovered the existence of the Pacific Crest Trail after a long conversation with Frank McDaniel, who had walked the trail, placing signs marking the way under a boiling sun.

My husband and I went to explore...we have not stopped since then and we have discovered a different kind of beauty that we have learned to appreciate and love deeply.

Last summer I surprised myself. I took the plane to Alaska, wearing hiking boots and a backpack. You have to understand that a Parisian would never be seen walking in Paris wearing sneakers. They are reserved for playing sports. My Americanization was a slow process and I have definitely come a long way.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the founding of a national system that incorporates 1077 trails totaling more than 66,000 miles in all 50 states. “Build a trail and they will come” says Pam Gluck, Executive Director of American Trails. Trails promote exercise and can help ease traffic congestion and decrease pollution.

Most of all, trails put us in touch with nature—and ultimately ourselves.

Ref: National Geographic-October 2008



Happy
Holiday
FROM US TO YOU



What! Another Mockingbird!

by Bob Fischer

Yes! Besides the Mockingbird, there is a related species found in California's chaparral regions that can imitate the songs of other birds. But unlike the Mockingbird which spends much of its time in the open and is very easy to see, the California Thrasher, *Toxostoma redivivum*, generally hides in and under dense shrubbery as it scratches and searches the leaf litter looking for insects and other small prey. It is especially fond of beetles. Fruits and berries when available are also important foods. The easiest way to find a California Thrasher is to listen for its enthusiastic singing. When singing, it can usually be found sitting at the top of the highest bush or small tree you can see. That's the way I have seen them on the hill behind my house. Their song is series of long, scratchy, whistling, chuckling not very melodic phrases, sounding a little bit like a Mockingbird with a sore throat. Though it is in the same family as Mockingbirds, Family Mimidae, and is supposed to imitate other birds, I haven't heard it do that.

The California Thrasher is one of eight species of thrashers in North America. It is a year-round resident found only in the chaparral regions of California where there is very dense shrubbery. Placerita Canyon is the ideal home for

it. The literature says they stay very close to their nesting area year round. None of the other Thrasher species overlaps its range. The Cal Thrasher is a big bird, twelve inches from the tip of its very long, slender, down curved bill to the tip of its long round-edged tail. It runs, not hops, often running long distances between cover in preference to flying. It runs fast and as it runs it holds its tail up at an almost forty-five degree angle, resembling a miniature Road Runner. Color is dark gray-brown over-all, with a pale throat, dark cheek, dark eye and a patch of brick red under the base of its tail similar to the California Towhee. You could almost confuse it for the California Towhee except for that long, dark down-curved bill and its larger size. It's fully three inches longer than a Towhee. Males and females appear the same.

Cal Thrashers pair up during winter. Both sexes work to build a bulky stick nest lined with grass and rootlets and hidden in dense shrubbery or low trees. Two to four pale blue eggs with pale brown spots are laid in February or March. Incubation lasts 14 days then both parents brood and feed their young by regurgitation for the first four days. They then feed their nestlings large insects whose legs and wings have been removed. Young leave the nest between 14 and 17 days but cannot fly until several days after leaving the nest. Shortly after the first young have fledged, and while the male is looking after them, the female lays a new clutch of eggs for a second brood and after that even occasionally for a third.

References for this article include the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, "Lives Of North American Birds" by Kenn Kaufman, The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology web page and "The Birder's Handbook" by Paul R Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye, Wikipedia and Cody, M. L. 1998. California Thrasher (Toxostoma redivivum). In The Birds of North America,

Journeys of Migrations

As warm summer evenings give way to crisp fall nights, the skies over much of North America is filling with animals on the move, billions of songbirds, shore-birds, raptor, waterfowl and insects winging their way south for the winter. In the oceans, whales, turtles, sharks and other creature are also voyaging toward winter homes, while land mammals from elk to bighorn sheep to caribou are tracing ancient routes to warmer altitudes and greener forage.

Among nature's most astonishing phenomena, these seasonal mass movements of wildlife have fascinated scientists and other for millennia. It is now known that some 50 species-including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects as well as birds- follow magnetic pathways, although scientists are still debating just how the animals detect magnetism.

Other navigational aids include circadian clocks, internal sun and star compasses, smalls and geographical features such as mountain ranges and coastlines. Most migrants seem to rely on a combination of theses, depending on conditions. The irony is that just as we are entering a golden age for studying migration; it is becoming a greater challenge for the animals as the ecosystems are changing. Conservation is badly needed. The habitats of migratory species nearly everywhere are under pressure from deforestation, farming, overfishing and expanding human population.

Ref: Steve Kemper "National Wildlife"

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For further information call or visit

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Fire Season is Here Again

I just came back from the airport and the traffic was horrendous. The 210 is closed both ways and the air is heavy with black smoke. When my daughter and I were crossing the Newhall pass, it was actually difficult to breathe and we kept quiet, concentrating on breathing slowly while our throat was tightening up. Since then, and it is only around 1pm I heard that one person was found dead. The wind is so strong that walking was becoming difficult.

This wind, strong wind from the desert has many names according to what part of the earth you live in: Tramontagne, sirocco, simoun, mistral....are just a few. In California, we have just started the Santa Ana season.

What is that Wind?

Named after Southern California's Santa Ana Canyon and a fixture of local legend and literature, the Santa Ana is a blustery, dry and warm (often hot) wind that blows out of the desert. In Raymond Chandler's story *Red Wind*, the title being one of the offshore wind's many nicknames, the Santa Anas were introduced as "those hot dry [winds] that come down through the mountain passes and curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen." Local legends associate the hot, dry winds with homicides and earthquakes, but these are myths.

Another popular misconception is that the winds are hot owing to their desert origin. Actually, the Santa Anas develop when the desert is cold, and are thus most common during the cool season stretching from October through March. High pressure builds over the Great Basin (e.g., Nevada) and the cold air there begins to sink. However, this air is forced down slope which compresses and warms it at a rate of about 10C per kilometer (29F per mile) of descent. As its temperature rises, the relative humidity drops; the air starts out dry and winds up at sea level much drier still. The air picks up speed as it is channeled through passes and canyons.

Santa Anas can cause a great deal of damage. The fast, hot winds cause vegetation to dry out, increasing the danger of wildfire. Once the fires start, the winds fan the flames and hasten their spread. The winds create turbulence and establish vertical wind shear (in which winds exhibit substantial change in speed and/or direction with height), both posing aviation hazards. The winds tend to make for choppy surf conditions in the Southern California Bight, and often batter the north coast of Santa Catalina Island, including Avalon cove and the island's airport.

Ref: Chris McGowan



The Rattler

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