



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.

September/October 2009

An Exciting Day!
June 19, 2009



Rudy Ortega Jr., Rudy Ortega Sr. and Marsha McLean observe as Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich and Laurene Weste cut the ribbon.

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.

Hello Dear Nature Friends

Fall is coming very soon. Already, the days are getting shorter and early in the morning there is a new crispness in the air. Even if the temperature has not dropped much, many plants are starting to be in their new fall colors, so changes are in the air. We do have seasons in California but the changes are subtle and it slowly creeps up on us. Come and hike our trails and discover what fall looks like in California.

Schools have begun and schools have started making their reservations for the year. We cannot wait to welcome all the children to our newly renovated building; we will all enjoy so much to be able to do our programs "back home again" in freshly painted rooms and use our beautiful new gift shop.

Tamarisk Removal Project

Tamarisk is an invasive weed that has become rampant in Southern California. It threatens many of our native plant communities and destroys wildlife habitat. We have been fortunate at Placerita Canyon in that it has not gained a big foothold. Recently, while on an early morning walk with Ron Kraus, some was spotted along the Canyon Trail and was removed (thank you Judy & Roger McClure).

Ron Kraus and Diane Erskin-Hellrigel led a group of Placerita docents along the creek bed in search of tamarisk. They went out, along with Chris Mowery to search and destroy. Diane demonstrated how to first cut the plants and as carefully as possible insert them into a plastic bag to prevent seed dispersal. By leaving some of the stem, you can locate the plant and then dig up the roots. The group worked backward from the tunnel to the bridge digging up any tamarisk that was found.

The tamarisk establishes in streams, waterways, and drainage. It was introduced to the western US as an ornamental shrub in the early 1800s.

Each flower can produce thousands of tiny seeds that have a tuft of hair that aids in seed dispersal.

Management requires a long time commitment to prevent re-infestation. The most effective management is digging the root by hand. Fire has also been used to control the plant but is fire-adapted and will re-sprout after a fire.

Rick Brammer

The elections took place and the board remains the same. However, we are pleased to welcome Rick Brammer who was voted as new alternate board member. Welcome on board, Rick!

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:

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or you can email it to Evelyne at evelynevandersande@gmail.com. Please email your article in MS Word if possible.



Moving? Please let us know so you won't miss any issues of the Rattler.

Visit our Internet site at www.placerita.org--Ron Kraus is the webmaster.

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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

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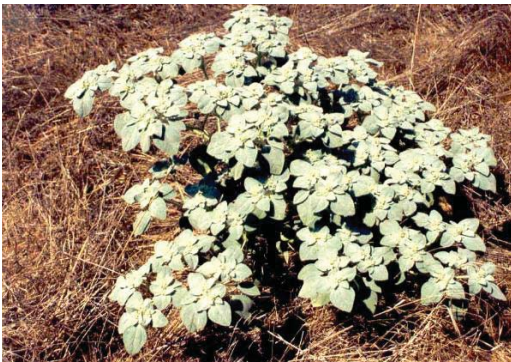
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Fishing Around
Pam Koch



Many years ago I took several classes with a medicinal plant expert out of Cal State San Bernardino. One plant he pointed out with distaste was the turkey mullein. He didn't like the smell and he said the foliage was toxic to animals. Ok. We trudged on to learn about nicer plants. I filed turkey mullein in the back of my brain.

Why is it called turkey mullein? You can't, with good conscience, use it in turkey stuffing. The leaves are toxic

and were used by Native Americans to stun fish. The plant doesn't in any way resemble any part of a turkey I can recognize. Research (*Weeds of California and Other Western States* by Joseph M DiTomaso and Evelyn A. Healy) led me to find out wild turkeys and other game birds like to eat the seeds. The seeds are tiny – about 4 mm and look very much to me like a smaller version of the wild cucumber seeds, a plant also reputed to be used to stun fish.

I wander though websites about wild cucumber trying to find any basis for the stunning fish story. I learn from Wikipedia the wild cucumber actually IS in the cucumber family and our particular one is in the genus *Marah* which sports seven species. The most common species is called *fabaceus* and is the one noted for stunning fish. A bit of the (huge) root is crushed and thrown onto the water. It contains saponins (soap) which are thought to enter the gills and interfere with breathing.

Musing further – do turkey mullein leaves contain saponins? A slow reading of a scholarly article (<http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/jf60232a041>) told me the leaves contain turpene compounds. Next question, are saponins the same as turpene compounds? I learned saponins are a detergent and terpenes are solvents. Detergents and solvents have similar activities don't they? What would happen if you combined turkey mullein leaves with wild cucumber root and went after fish? This is where my brain gets too full and I leave the discussion to others.



Fruits and Nuts and Seeds and Pods

The docents believe in continuous education to sharpen their skills. Since many of our beautiful wildflowers are setting up fruit in June, Ron Kraus organized an in-service to observe this transition. As usual, the docents ended up hungry and after their hike and observations, they went to lunch in the new plaza at Golden Valley.

Ron, thanks for keeping us on our toes. Do you know the name of this fruit?

Condolences

Frank Hoffman lost his mother May 17. Her name was Violet Margaret Armstrong-Guth. She was the reason Frank became so interested in nature and we are sorry for his loss.

Millie Bonazzoli lost her brother who was only 50 years old. Our thoughts are very much with her.

Rudy Ortega Sr.



Rudy Ortega Jr, Rudy Ortega Sr.
. and Marsha McLean

We were so sorry to hear that Rudy Ortega Sr, 82,. was killed on July 28 in a car accident. Rudy Sr. attended our re-dedication ceremony on June 19. One of his main focuses in life was to attain federal recognition of his tribe, the Fernandeno Tataviam Band of Mission Indians. Our condolences go out to his family and friends.

Re-opening and Dedication

It was a beautiful day with a sharp blue sky after weeks of overcast weather, a very emotional day for so many of us who had waited a long time to be able to go "back home". We expected 40 to 50 people at most, but 157 showed up; committed and vibrant supporters of the Nature Center.

Around 10am the officials took their seats on top of the stairs in front of the building under the shade of the oak trees and under a large banner. Frank Hoffman, who is the (acting) Park Superintendant, welcomed all of us.

The rather moving raising of the flag performed by Boy Scout Troop #583 and the Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Then we had a Tribal Blessing done by Rudy Ortega Jr. Tribal administrator of the Tataviam Band of Mission Indians. He burned sage while blessing the sky and the earth around us and reminding us of the connection we have with them.

This set the tone for the ceremony. This was something different. This reminder of our needed reverence for our surroundings and the smoke of the sage brought a special feeling to the rededication.

Russ Guiney, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation, spoke about his pride in dedicating the first nationally certified building in LA County for energy efficiency, referred to as a LEED building.

Michael D. Antonovich was the keynote speaker and he told of his love for the Nature Center. He had just returned from spending a weekend at Vasquez Rocks with his equestrian friends. He did the same at Placerita last year. He told us how his children were never afraid of snakes because of their early visits to Eaton Canyon.

Gwynne Pugh is the accredited Professional Principal for Pugh and Scarpa Architects, Inc. He explained what a challenge it was to build the first LEED building and touched on some of the difficulties found along the way but shared his great satisfaction at the end of the process.

Jacqueline W. Bick, Field Representative for Senator George Runner and Laurene Weste, Mayer Pro tem for Santa Clarita and SCV councilwoman Marsha McLean shared their satisfaction in being at Placerita that morning for such an important event and they both gave us a certificate to commemorate the occasion.

Then the official mood lightened up. A large red ribbon had been tied at the bottom of the step and a very large pair of gold scissors was given to Mike Antonovich. Well, these scissors are made of wood and they are the same scissors that were used for the ribbon cutting ceremony in 1971. We kept them proudly hung on the wall all these years but...were they going to be able to cut the ribbon?

All the officials gathered together and there was a slow try, with the ribbon being stretched but it cut beautifully, accompanied by loud applause. That was quite a fun moment...with a breath of relief from some of us who knew the scissors!

We had been told that after the ceremony, all the officials would leave and that one hour would be the maximum. Not so for Placerita Canyon Nature Center! We were thrilled that the ice had been broken and everybody wanted to visit the facility, ask questions and see it all. You can only imagine how proud we were since we had been told that this never happens with their tight schedules.

We had a buffet with finger food and cakes, even vegan food was available and we started to be in a party mood. Rick Brammer, Linda Ioerger and Roger McClure were presenting the birds and Smoky the Bear came with the firemen.

Bob Moss and his grandson had cleaned all the taxidermy, which was proudly displayed about the largely empty museum. Also in the museum Sue Wallander had made a display of school children's Thank You letters and Dave Stives set out his collection of skulls and bones (nice hobby Dave...) The Herpetologist Society was in the classroom with their snakes and literature alongside a display Diane Hellrigel set up showing the trash she had picked up when cleaning various trails in the mountains (thanks for THAT, Diane!). Susan Ostrom was at the cabin in period dress, making yarn with her spinning wheel and everyone checked out the new Gift Shop.

It was a beautiful day, it was a fun day. Most of all, it feels so good to be back home again. We have longed for this to happen for 18 months. We left an old building and now we have this beautiful, clean place which is LEED certified.

It is a dream come true.

Scenes from the Re-Dedication Ceremony



June 19, 2009

The American Crow

By Bob Fischer

We see crows so often in Placenta Canyon and know instantly what species they are, we usually give them little thought except perhaps to find them annoying. But the American crow is quite a remarkable bird and deserves thoughtful attention. The American crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*, is a large passerine (perching bird) belonging to the family Corvidae (crows and jays), and, along with a few primates, has made us re-think our own species' so-called uniqueness within the animal kingdom as the only toolmakers and problems solvers.

Jet-black to purplish in color, sleek and nimble in the air, crows have a special place in human history. Yet they are maddeningly elusive and wary. They communicate about perceived danger so well that successful study of them frustrates all but the most dogged of scientists.

American Crows are familiar over much of the continent. They are common birds of fields, open woodlands, and forests. They thrive around people, and are found in agricultural fields, lawns, parking lots, athletic fields, roadsides, towns, and city garbage dumps.

They usually feed on the ground and eat almost anything—typically earthworms, insects and other small animals, seeds, and fruit but also garbage, carrion, and chicks they rob from nests. Their flight style is unique, a patient, methodical flapping that is rarely broken up with glides. Ravens resemble crows but are larger, longer-winged, and heavier-beaked than crows. Ravens' tails are tapered at the end, giving them a diamond or wedge shape compared to a crow's shorter, more square tail. This is most notable during flight.

American crows are very social, sometimes forming huge flocks and are rarely seen alone. They are inquisitive and sometimes mischievous and are good learners and problem-solvers. They're also aggressive and often chase away larger birds including hawks, owls and herons. Crows are consummate opportunists. As scavengers, they most likely evolved a close association with wolves and other hunting animals that killed prey and left carcass remains unguarded or abandoned.

Obviously, the human-altered environments of North America are well-suited to the crow's way of making a living. Agricultural lands, urban and suburban areas, and all the interfaces between rural and urban, field and forest provide crows with a host of different ways to find food and thrive. And, in fact, American crow populations across the country have generally increased size and geographic range over the last several decades.

Crows are tool users, but they are also toolmakers and problem solvers. Their behavior and apparent ingenuity make them a fascinating group. Brain size increases with body weight, a relationship observed across nearly all animal groups. A corvid's brain size, however, is more in line with that of mammals than birds—and more in line with primates when graphed against its body mass. It's a relationship that undoubtedly figures into what many researchers consider the bird's intelligence in getting along in the world.

Like some other birds, crows will drop food items, such as shells and nuts, from the air onto hard surfaces in order to crack them open and get access to whatever is inside. But crows have taken it to another level, placing hard-to-crack nuts on roads in front of passing vehicles, then retrieving the crushed-open nut.

The same attributes that lend crows their keen intelligence undoubtedly figure in their status as one of the more able predators of songbirds nests—robbing both eggs and nestlings for food. In some studies done in Maryland and the Great Smokey Mountains in the 1980s, American crows emerged as important players in predation of songbirds' nests, especially where the woodlot or forest stands are relatively small. As crows easily adapt to human-induced changes in the landscape, and tend to be highly associated with forest edges, forest-dwelling birds in small tracts of wooded land might face higher densities of crows—and therefore higher nest predation by them—than birds in larger forested areas. As with other long-lived, social animals, crows exhibit behavior that can only be described as play.

Reports of crows grabbing an object like a foam toy from a backyard or something as simple as a piece of paper and creating a game-like play of shaking, dropping, and repeatedly retrieving it are common from researchers and birders alike. And the play does not always require such objects; crows are quite content to make use of natural conditions. They've been seen flying hard against a stiff wind, climbing to a certain height, only to let themselves be taken by its currents as they fall earthward in a series of rolls and tumbles before catching themselves and doing it all over again.

A lifelong, monogamous relationship between mates plays off against competition with other mated pairs and offspring for resources and territory. Younger individuals will likely spend much of their time with siblings of their own or another related brood, and even help their parents raise young from subsequent clutches.

Seasonally, crows tend to associate with family during spring and summer, only to go off and join large aggregations in fall and winter. Some of these big groups of roosting crows can harbor thousands of individuals.

Both members of a breeding pair help build the nest. Young birds from the previous year sometimes help as well. Three to nine eggs are laid. They are a pale bluish-green to olive-green, with blotches of brown and gray toward the large end, hatching in 16 to 18 days. The babies are ready to fly in 20 to 40 days.

The nest is made largely of medium-sized twigs with an inner cup lined with pine needles, weeds, soft bark, or animal hair. Nest size is quite variable, typically 6-19 inches across, with an inner cup about 6-14 inches across and 4-15 inches deep. Crows typically hide their nests in a crotch near the trunk of a tree or on a horizontal branch, generally towards the top third or quarter of the tree. They prefer to nest in evergreens, but will nest in deciduous trees when evergreens are less available.

Sources: Adapted from an article by Robert Rice in the Migratory Bird Center of the Smithsonian National Zoological Park. The entire article can be seen at the web page below. Additional material from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Featured_Birds/default.cfm?bird=American_Crow



California Buckwheat

By Pam Koch

Placerita Natural Area is full of buckwheat. It grows naturally on dry slopes and canyons and provides habitat for insects, nectar for bees and butterflies, and the seeds are a food source for quail. Deer will also eat the plant.

The flowers are pink in the spring turning to white when they open and dry to a crisp brown by the end of the summer.

There are several varieties of buckwheat. The one we see in the chaparral is *Eriogonum fasciculatum foliolosum*. Another variety is *Eriogonum fasciculatum polifolium* (more drought tolerant and has greayer foliage.) The latin names make my eyes cross so we will leave it that there are over 250 species of wild buckwheat throughout North America.

Can we make pancakes out of this buckwheat? Sadly, no. The wild buckwheat is in the new world genus *Eriogonum* and has very tiny seeds. The cultivated buckwheat is in the old world genus *Fagopyrum* and has larger seeds ground for flour or simply hulled, crushed into smaller pieces and cooked as groats. Our local native buckwheat is best left to our local native wildlife to use for food and housing.

Ref: http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_erfa2.pdf <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/em/em8693/>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eriogonum> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckwheat>



Vista del Lago Visitor Center

By Sue Wallander

Our Placerita Canyon docents visited the interesting exhibits at the Vista del Lago Visitors Center which overlooks Lake Pyramid. It is located about 30 miles north of the Santa Clarita Valley at the Vista del Lago turnoff.

One of our own Placerita docents was our guide. Candace Arney has worked for the California State Water Project for 25 years and is very knowledgeable about the story of water.

Placerita will be constructing a new museum when we are back in the Nature Center so we were interested to see that one of the companies that we have asked for ideas is the company that built the exhibits at Vista del Lago.

There are a number of timelines so that you can see how important water has always been in the history of California and especially Southern California. Maps show where our water comes from and how it is distributed throughout the state.

The exhibits show the percentage of water used for home, industry and agriculture. There is also a scale and exhibit that lets you determine that 60% of your body weight is water.

We found out that the water we drink has another use. That is to generate electricity for California. Water in the reservoirs also offers recreation opportunities to Californians.

Placerita Interpretive Center Update

By Ron Kraus

Although the nature center refurbishment has been completed, there is still a lot of work to do before the facility is restored to a fully functional interpretive center. As many of you are aware, the old museum had to be cleared of all of the old exhibits in order for the space to be brought up to current building standards. In keeping with the spirit of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), many of the old furnishings and exhibits were donated to other facilities for re-use.

In order to re-equip the interpretive center, a comprehensive process has begun. A committee of docents and staff has been established to oversee a process that will include the preparation of an interpretive master plan, preliminary and final design, and fabrication and installation of new exhibits. Areas included in this process include the old museum, the classroom, and the patio. The goal is to provide an exceptional interpretive experience for our patrons that accomplishes our mission: *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.*

The committee has reviewed three proposals from firms qualified to do this work and has narrowed the list to two finalists. The finalists were interviewed on July 20 and a recommendation for a contract award is anticipated at the August PCNCA Board meeting.

The first phase of the project will include an extensive public input process where all "stakeholders" will be asked to provide their ideas as to what needs to be included in the new center. This process will lead to the preparation of an interpretive master plan which will guide the redevelopment.

There is sufficient funding within the PCNCA accounts to complete the process through the interpretive master plan process. However, the actual redevelopment work will require, at a minimum, several hundred thousand dollars, so an extensive fund raising effort including grants, donations, and other means will be necessary. Accordingly, this is a long range project which will require several years to complete. The committee will provide regular updates to keep all interested parties informed as to progress in this effort.



A Joyful Open House



June 20, 2009

No Snakes?

We used to have a display next to the entrance of the patio called "The Fish Bowl" with large display windows of snakes and lizards. This was eliminated during the construction but the park visitors have expressed—sometimes rather vocally—their dismay that this fixture has been removed.

"This was the only place close to home where I could show snakes to my children." And the guilt is piling up on our shoulders. This reaction has been so unanimous that we are thinking about different ways to have a safe display and we need to address this situation soon.

Hike-U *Pam Koch*

Hiking in summer
Sweat drips in every crease
I long for the Fall

Hiking in winter
Cold cheeks, nose, fingertips, toes
I long for the Spring

Spring and Autumn hikes
Soft sun warms my preferred path
I long for nothing

Trip with Jim

Gibbons are small arboreal apes, native of Southeast Asia, with a slender body, long arms, no tail and very strong vocal cords...they can be heard from afar and this is why they are tucked away in an isolated spot in the Santa Clarita Valley at the Gibbon Foundation Compound. They are studied and well taken care of.

Jim Southwell took the docents on a trip to visit the compound and it was fascinating to hear the explanations and see these very human little faces of the Gibbon.

Thank you Jim, for this interesting trip.

Open House 2009 Thanks You!

This year's Open House heralded the refurbished Nature Center. Our Open House is a thank you to the community for your support during the year and we celebrated the re-opening with tours, crafts, and food. Many, many thanks to the 2009 Open House Committee: Ron Kraus, Pam Koch, Richard Norton, Evelyn Vandersande, Sue Wallander, Bill Webber, Heidi Webber, and Lynn Zdonek.

Other thanks are in order too: Frank Hoffman, Augustin Hernandez, Chris Sapovchak, Jessica Nikolai, Bernardo Eiro and Steve Iorger along with the boy scouts kept the parking lot well under control – a BIG job with a huge thanks to our neighbor Disney Ranch for standing by with overflow parking if we needed it, and we very nearly did.

Jill Goddard made sure we had all the signs we needed. Donna Fagan took charge of the bake sale and our new baked goods cabinet kept everything fresh and clean. Many thanks to her helpers Debra Barroso and Fran Bojorquez. Millie Bonazolli was on-hand again to take charge of the kitchen with helper Meg Piekul. Linda Iorger took charge of the raffle and did an outstanding job – thank you so much to her and helper Candy Arney.

Lynn took charge of the gift shop and Jim Owens was working in over-drive – so much fun! Thank you also to Lynette Brammer and all the docents who stopped by to help out at the gift shop. A huge thank you to Shirley Morano for handling the phones. Thanks to Sima Bernstein for handling cashier and ticket duties.

Judy McClure was on hand to lead the Saturday hike and Roger McClure and Rick Brammer were on hand to show the animals. What would an Open House be without face painting? Thank you Mary Hoffman and Debra Barroso! Also Jill Goddard was on hand to do caricatures, and along with Angel Macdonald, Shana Radecki, Bethany Sweeney and Alexandra Owens headed up a new craft, Rock Critters. Next to her, Hannah White was working the button maker.

Bill Webber was once again in charge of gold panning. The challenge this year was gold panning without using water in a drought year! He did the job admirably using a trough with helper Kendra Geiger. Diane Southwell was on hand in the assay office. Sue Wallander, Phil Rizzo and Helen Sweeney set up the Native American artifact table and Helen demonstrated some pioneer games. They were joined by Corrina Robets of RedBird who brought wonderful pelts we were allowed to touch!

David Stanton and James McGuire set up booths to show off their wonderful woodcarvings. Also, many thanks to the Forest Service for bringing Smokey the Bear to visit us for the day. Thank you to our good friend Henry Schultz and the Sierra Club for joining our Open House. Across the lot, thank you to the Sierra Pelona rock club for adding so much to the enjoyment of the day.

We had wonderful impromptu museum displays and Jim Southwell, Bob Moss and Richard Norton were on hand to talk about the plans and funds needed to replace the erstwhile museum with an interpretive center. They also told our visitors what it means to be a LEED building. Adding to the festivities, Jessica Nickolai was there with opossum Poppet and Sue Mayhew and Janet Kubler were on hand to explain the displays. Jim Southwell also headed up the very popular watermelon-eating contest. Thank you Ron Kraus for filming the day, posting the pictures and taking care of our web site.

Moving inside the classroom, thank you to the Community Hiking Club and The Southwestern Herpetology Society. A new feature this year was Bonnie Felt and Story-telling. It was so popular we had to schedule a second show!

Heading down to Walker Cabin, a giant thank you to Leigh Moon for once again telling the Walker story. And thank you to Cliff Kelling and Allan Wallander for stepping in as pioneers and demonstrating the two-man saw. Thank you Allan for getting that saw sharpened for next year! And thank you Cliff for making the small wood plaques commemorating the re-opening. Also at the cabin, Sue Ostrom was demonstrating the spinning wheel – always a welcome sight at the Open House. Thank you also Sue for coming to the Rededication ceremony and setting up a demonstration there as well. Thank you to local author RuthAnne Murthy for telling the story of the Oak of the Golden Dream.

The raffle table donations were terrific - afghans and quilts, books, DVD's, artwork, many homemade items. Thanks to everyone who donated: Jason, Debra, Jan F., Steve, Helen, Gordon, Sima, David G., Angel, Pam, Judy, Ella, Jill, Ron, Janet and Rosemarie. A huge thank you to everyone who donated baked goods to our bake sale and to those who helped set up and clean up for the Open House. You can see it takes a small army to staff an Open House and we did it admirably!

The Genesis of Gold, Placerita, and Transverse Mountain Ranges

By Richard Norton

Each of the three subjects stated in the title could easily be found in any comprehensive geological study of California. As it happens they are also of major concern to those who work and volunteer at the nature center. They are inextricably linked to the formation, history, and development of the park and the daily topics of lectures, programs, and school hikes as we work to increase environmental awareness by sharing information with our visiting public.

Gold is formed from the intrusion of magma into solid rock. Water and other volatile materials under extreme pressure separate out during the magma's cooling process. High pressure steam forces fissures to open which allow the hydrothermal solutions to travel into the surrounding solid rock. The cooling of these solutions allows the deposition of materials, especially quartz, in the form of quartz veins. Since gold has a low melting point it can be carried in hypothermal solution through the fissures where it solidifies in quartz veins near the intrusion of a magma body. Once tectonic forces uplift the rock and mineral deposits to form mountains then erosive forces can bring these materials to streams and rivers where it may be found. This explains why miners of the last century could pan for gold in the foothills of many mountain ranges throughout California.

It took several years for technology to catch up with gold discoveries. The gold found in Placerita Canyon as well as Sutter's Mill used scrape, pan, or sluice mining to remove the gold. When the great lodes were discovered in ancient alluvial river beds high on the western slopes of the Sierras, mining changed and became inconceivably destructive. Streams of high pressure water from hoses as thick as tree trunks removed colossal amounts of earth and ore doing much to transform the topography of the region. California gold, after impacting the local economy, would eventually fill the coffers of New York banks ultimately influencing the outcome of the War Between the States.

"Placer" is a Catalan word imported into Spanish meaning shoal or underwater sandbar. (Catalonia is a region in northern Spain home to the famous city of Barcelona.) By the time "placer" got into English around 1842, it came to mean a sandy place along a streambed but above water. Today, placer means a glacial or alluvial deposit of sand or gravel containing eroded particles of valuable minerals. 1842 is the same year that gold was first discovered at the Oak of the Golden Dream in Placerita Canyon. ("Placerita" means a small placer.)

The Transverse Ranges around Los Angeles represent a complex of tectonic forces arising from the interaction of the Pacific and North American Plates along the San Andreas Fault system. Their east-west orientation is exceptional as compared to the usual north-south orientation of mountain ranges around the world and results from a severe bend in this fault. Their elevation is a consequence of this bend. South of the ranges, the crust atop the Pacific Plate cannot easily turn westward as the entire plate moves northwest forcing parts of the crust to compress and uplift. The resulting orientation is key to the uniqueness of Placerita Canyon creating regional differences in weather, biohabitats, and erosive factors. The angles of slope incurred on many of the mountains of these transverse ranges are among the steepest in the country.

Clearly, Placerita Canyon Natural Area owes its heritage to the presence of gold and the influence of the varied peoples who lived and worked here. Add the unique geology of this region and one may discover that this park is one of the most interesting and beautiful places in America and should always remain a place of teaching, learning and enjoyment.

Reference: J. McPhee, Assembling California, 1993; J. Erikson, Plate Tectonics, 1992; Wikipedia.com, 2009.

Outreaches

Most of you know about our core programs at the Nature Center; i.e.; the school program, the weekend nature hike and animal show and so on.

One pair of programs you may not be aware of are our outreach programs. Several years ago Phil Rizzo developed a program where he went to schools with his Indian artifacts and instructed the children on Indian culture. This has been a very successful program and this year Sue Wallendar will be in charge of it, giving Phil a much-needed rest.

Bill and Heidi Webber have been doing animal outreaches for about 12 years. They don't even remember when they started doing them, but they have been taking our nature center stars on the road to local schools, community centers, summer camps and libraries. They also can be seen at community events like the River Rally, Emergency Expo, Henry Mayo Memorial 5K Baby Walk (always a mystery to us why they want us there with our snakes and hundreds of pregnant women!!!) and A Day for Kids. Just look for the crowd around a table and that will be us. Bill and Heidi have developed a team which includes Rick and Lynette Brammer, Sue Mayhew and Sima Bernstein.

These outreaches bring a community awareness of the Nature Center while continuing the educational purposes that we all strive for. We want to thank all of you for extending yourselves beyond the Nature Center and for your enthusiasm for a job well done.



Congratulations!

Rosemarie Sanchez-Fraser and Donald Regis were married on June 14. They met at the Center and their love blossomed. We are so happy for them and send our best wishes to the lovebirds.

Goodbye Jessica and Good Luck



We all felt in love with Jessica at Placerita, her youth, her bubbling enthusiasm, her lovely face and her smart brain. It was such a treat seeing her interest for the animals grow by leap and bond, her knowledge of their behavior and the gentleness she had in handling them. Dave Stives give her much training but she just was drinking up all the information and you could see her passion growing. We are so very proud of her. Going to college was the best decision she could make and we know a strong education will allow her to blossom in this field for which she is very obviously talented.

We will all miss her dearly but we are happy if her being at the Center has helped her in any way in choosing this path for her future and we wish her the very best. Jessica's goodbye to us follows:

Hello all! It would appear that I have come to that crossroad in my life in which I leave the nature center to pursue my knowledge for wildlife elsewhere. I will be attending Moorpark College's EATM (Exotic Animal Training and Management) program beginning August 11th, which offers me a unique opportunity to work with exotic animals of all shapes and sizes at America's Teaching Zoo, where the students are responsible for the care and training of their assigned animals. While working at the zoo I will also be taking classes that range from animal anatomy to taxonomy, to

behavior and nutrition. The program will allow me to earn a certificate of completion from the EATM program, and either a certificate in Animal Behavior Management or Wildlife Education (or both, depending on the classes I take). The program runs for two years, and it is a full time commitment (beginning at 6:30am every morning and ending at 5:00pm everyday).

I want to thank everyone for making my past four years here so enjoyable and educational. I know I wouldn't be where I am today or know half as much as I do now if it wasn't for this amazing place; thank you all, and I will be visiting!

For more information about the EATM program or Moorpark College, visit http://www.moorparkcollege.edu/current_students/teaching_zoo

Good Luck, Jessica!

By Judy McClure

It was a bittersweet farewell to Jessica Nikolai on August 8th at our Breakfast of Champions. Docents and staff recognized Jessica for all she has done during her four years at our Nature Center and we will miss her dearly.

Jessica has always had a passion for animals and nature. Raised in Newhall, Jessica graduated from Hart High School and for the past two years has been taking general education classes at Moorpark College, majoring in Animal Science. It has been her dream to obtain entrance into Moorpark's Exotic Animal Training and Management Program (America's Teaching Zoo) – a very difficult program to obtain admittance to. This spring, she received the good news and begins this new phase of her life on August 11th. The EATM Program is two years, and it is a full-time commitment (6:30am to 5:00pm, 365 days a year). The students are responsible for over 200 animals while taking classes that range from animal anatomy to taxonomy, to animal behavior and nutrition. Jessica will earn a certificate of completion from the EATM Program and either a certificate in Animal Behavior Management or Wildlife Education (or both) depending on the courses she takes.

In 2005 during an ROP class in Animal Care and Services, Jessica visited the Nature Center and immediately became a volunteer. In October 2006, Jessica was hired as a Recreation Services Leader. She quickly fell in love with Penelope, the Nature Center's opossum, and has been instrumental in raising Poppet from infancy. Last fall, with help from Dave Stives, Jessica obtained her Falconry License from California Department of Fish and Game after a very difficult written exam, and now has Willow, her red-tailed hawk. (Dave and Agustin Hernandez have also helped Jess build a mew for Willow in Moorpark.)

In addition to feeding and caring for all the Nature Center's animals, Jessica has been responsible for the popular Saturday evening Amphitheatre Nights. Her Canyon Trail Audio Discovery Program has won a County award, and hopefully, many of you have seen her night photos of a bobcat, mountain lion and other nocturnal animals that live in our Placerita Canyon Natural Area. The artwork around the Nature Center is hers, and she is always in demand at the Saturday afternoon Animal Presentations.

She has been a big part of the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Program at Newhall and Peachland Elementary Schools (even attending their overnight campouts), and has given many voluntary animal outreach programs and campfire talks at Castaic Lake.

Jessica has been indispensable at the Nature Center, and we will miss her beautiful smiling face and cheery "Hello." We know, however, she will be successful in her studies at Moorpark. She has written us this farewell note: "I want to thank everyone for making my past four years here so enjoyable and educational. I know I wouldn't be where I am today or know half as much as I do now if it wasn't for this amazing place. Thank you all for such a great experience!"

Rattlesnakessssss!

Submitted by Pam Koch



Southern Pacific rattlesnake (*Crotalus helleri*)

Found throughout Southern California's densely populated coastal valleys and foothills, this dangerous snake is responsible for most of the rattlesnake bites in the greater Los Angeles basin. It was considered a subspecies of *Crotalus viridis* for many years, but recent genetic analyses have led to systematic revisions of these taxa, with some researchers classifying *helleri* as part of the *Crotalus oreganus* group while others elevate it to full species status. It can exceed 1.5 m in length.



Mohave rattlesnake (*Crotalus scutulatus*)

This rattlesnake is common around many high-desert communities north of Loma Linda. It produces one of the most toxic venoms of any North American rattlesnake. Called "Mohave Greens" by the locals, they seem to have achieved "urban legend" status with a greatly exaggerated reputation for aggressiveness. Like other rattlesnakes, they prefer to remain still in hopes of going unnoticed. But if bothered, they will defend themselves enthusiastically. Length rarely exceeds 1 m in this area



Southwestern speckled rattlesnake (*Crotalus mitchelli pyrrhus*)

This snake is a rocky hillside specialist in the deserts north and east of Loma Linda. South towards San Diego, however, this species inhabits coastal hills and valleys. Probably due to their habitat preferences, they seem to suffer fewer encounters with people than other species that inhabit flatter terrain. The dorsal coloration of speckled rattlesnakes can vary greatly from gray to tan and even burnt orange. They are relatively small but occasionally exceed 1.25 m in length.



Western diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus atrox*)

This snake can be found about 100 km east of LLU. It inhabits a large portion of the arid southwestern United States and northern México, including the southeastern corner of California. Adults can exceed 2.0 m in length and are the largest rattlesnake species in the western United States. They are notoriously nervous and quick to rattle, often assuming a dramatic defensive pose when bothered by creatures as large as humans. The western diamondback's range in California encompasses sparsely populated areas where they encounter few people.



Red Diamond Rattlesnake (*Crotalus ruber*)

This large, brick red snake is primarily a Baja California species, including several islands, and extends only into the corner of the United States, with Loma Linda representing just about the northern limit of its range. It is common in the low hills within a kilometer of the campus. Red diamond rattlesnakes can exceed 1.5 m in length but tend to have a rather passive disposition compared to many other rattlesnake species



Sidewinder (*Crotalus cerastes*)

California's smallest rattlesnake species, this elegant snake rarely reaches 0.75 m in length. Famous for their specialized method of moving efficiently over loose sand by pushing straight down in only two places at a time, they can also be common on firmer substrates. Due to their small size (therefore, low venom yield) and comparatively low venom potency, their bites are usually not as serious as bites by other species.

Breakfast of the Champions August 8

A few years ago, Phil Rizzo was lamenting that the summer was too long without seeing other docents so he had the bright idea to organize a pot luck breakfast in August. Another occasion to party? You can be sure that we have honored this tradition ever since. Thank you Phil.

The buffet was plentiful and delicious and the company terrific, as usual. Once our plates had been refilled a few times, Ron Kraus took the stage to say a few words about Jessica Nikolai who is leaving to go to college in Moorpark. (See



Most of our Group

article) Judy McClure was very kind in organizing a collect and Jessica was very grateful for the gift. There are many expenses when you are starting a new life...Shirley Moreno said a few words expressing her love for Jessica and how she saw her blossomed in her 4 years at the center.

Pat Coskran and his son Sean, volunteers at Placerita, came to say good bye. Sean presented Jessica with a framed photo of an osprey he had bought with his pocket money.

Then, Ron told use the rules about

the game he had been planning for weeks "Are you smarter than a Placerita 5th grader?" We had to rise to the challenge...The questions were complex, we could use a life line, the competition between the teams was fierce but a lot of fun and we were studying and learning at the same time. This was the "in Service" for August and clever Ron knew it was a great way to give us the continuing education that he strives for. Jill Goddard designed beautiful hats for the winning team. Thank you so much Ron and Jill for all the preparation, time and effort you put in this game. We all loved it.



They ARE Smarter than a Placerita 5th Grader
Jim, Roger, Diane, Bonnie, Linda and Bill



Yum, Breakfast and Good Companionship!

Update on the Eagle Scouts projects for 2009:

For many years, Placerita Canyon Nature Center has been a place of predilection for those great young men to come to fulfill their requirements to be able to reach the highest level of Eagle Scout. We are proud to give you the list of their names and the projects that they have accomplished. Congratulation to all and our warmest thanks to you who have chosen our natural area for your final work. You made the park more enjoyable, safer for our visitors and for our animals and we are grateful for your efforts.

Taylor Liberty planted native plants, installed irrigation lines across the bridge and installed irrigation to the plants he planted.

Stephen Ryken built the compost educational center.

Curtis Ryken planted native plants at the park entrance and cleaned the debris leftover from the bathroom demolition.

Nolan Rivkin painted and added new lids to 19 trash cans and created 6 recycle cans.

Ben Fairbanks repaired and added steps on the Waterfall trail and tread washout areas.

Matthew Godinez installed 5 skylights in the bird mews that are larger and closable so that the rain will be sealed out.

Daniel Bradford repaired Rufus' enclosure with fresh paint, new doors, new locks and added a wash basin.

ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

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

Sima and Milt Bernstein - "Squirt" the Western Pond Turtle, and

Audrey Morga - "Squirt" the Western Pond Turtle

Thank you so much!

What is a LEED Building?

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

The concept of environmental sustainability was the focus of the renovation. One of the things that make structures sustainable is the people who use them. The Nature Center is a learning tool for the community.

During the next 6 months, we will be inspected to see if we can obtain our Silver certification. We won't be able to get the gold because we do not have solar panels, and we will have to be very careful about the products we use and our recycling methods. The following is an excerpt regarding the center:

The new 5,500 square-foot center is "green" at every turn.

Appliances are energy efficient, the building is insulated with shredded media and the staff is able to mulch and compost on location. Offices feature skylights and rooms utilize automatic lighting. Doors and door hardware were reused from the old center and sent to a sister nature center to be used for bird enclosures. Old furniture now is being used at Whittier Narrows Regional Park. The bathrooms and sinks are also ADA compliant. Outside, the park is surrounded by drought-and-heat-tolerant plants.

Meet Linette and Rick Brammer



Linette:

1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? England
2. How did your love of Nature start? My earliest happy memories are playing outdoors where I could run free.
3. What was your education? Bs in Business, Masters in Health Education, Teaching credential, Medical Assistant & EMT cert.
4. What is your work experience? I used to manage medical clinics. Now I teach medical assisting.
5. What is your family life? I have been married 44 years to a great guy! (Rick) and we have 3 kids and 5 grand-kids.
6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place? I came on a bird watching class with Pierce College. Later I brought my grandson. We enjoyed the old museum and the hiking. Once he asked me "is that a bad snake?" and a Docent said "there are no bad or good animals" I thought that was a great answer. Why should we only look at animals from a human point of view? Roger led a bird walk I went on and he told me about the Docent training.
7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center? Docent.
8. What did or do you like most about your job at the Nature Center? I like working with all the other Docents, and learning from them. I was so impressed at the training and encouragement we were given when we started. Ron Kraus is so inspiring because he really enjoys what he

does. I could not get over how all the "old" docents fed us every time we "Newbies" had class. And they actually talked to us too! I like working in the store and going to out-reaches with Heidi and Bill who are so much fun to be with. I like the events that Evelyne plans.

9. What did you or do you not like about the job? Nothing I don't like.
10. At Placerita, is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud? I like the good feeling when the kids get excited about something.

11. What is your favorite food? Grated apple and raw oats with milk & nuts (my Scottish grandmother's recipe)

12. What is your favorite color? Blue

13. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? Or pastime? Reading and learning new things.

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? I really admire the docents at Placerita. They are hard workers and so cheerful while they help children see the importance of, and have a real love of nature. I hope I can put as much energy, enthusiasm and effort into the job for many years to come.

I would love to be helpful in building up the "interpretive center". This summer we visited several other nature centers in California, Oregon and Washington to get ideas. It is exciting to see it grow. I feel very honored to be a part of the team at Placerita.

Part of my favorite poem, "Inversnaid" by Gerard Manly Hopkins is:

What would the world be, once bereft

Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left.

Oh let them be left – wildness and wet.

Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet!

Rick:

1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? Born in Bell, California and grew up in Altadena, Ca.

2. How did your love of Nature start? In youth church camp in San Bernardino Mountains, above Redlands

3. What was your education? Have degree in Economics and almost a MBA in finance.

4. What is your work experience? Worked in electronics industry for over 35 years in the Materials field

5. What is your family life? Married, three children (2 boys, 1 girl) all married 5 grandkids (3 girls, 2 boys) and 1 great grandkid on the way.

6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place? Came for a bird watch 8 years ago and saw a blue bird for first time sitting on post.

7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center? Docent, Raptor Naturalist, Alternate member of board of directors.

8. What did or do you like most about your job at the Nature Center? Working with the Raptors, showing and explaining them to kids.

9. What did you or do you not like about the job? Nothing I do not like.

10. At Placerita, is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud? Being certified to handle Raptors

11. What is your favorite food? Rasselberry Pie from Marie Calendars

12. What is your favorite color? Blue

13. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? Or pastime? NCIS, County, Hiking and working with the Raptors.

14. Is there anything else that describes you that we should know? Is there any passion or special event in your life that you would like to tell us about? I am a loving family man, who has had a wonderful 44 years with my wife and have great kids and grandkids that I enjoy the outdoors with.



End of the School Year Dinner

It was held rather late this year. It had to happen after the re-dedication of the new building and the Open House, so we paid the price. It was just too hot for words and the AC system had not been connected yet. All the same, if you put the docents and the volunteers together, they know how to party and we still managed to have a good time while fanning ourselves. I can tell you the candles on the tables got blown out full speed: no more heat needed and Alan Wallander was not too disappointed to not have to stand over a barbecue! Heidi brought her steam tables to keep the hot food hot, so the grill wasn't needed. The food was good and the company excellent. Because of the nature of our jobs at the Center, we pass each other without having much time for interaction and our parties are a time where we can see and talk with each other.

We had a little ceremony after which Jim Southwell gave us a well-needed update about the first steps taken towards the museum renovation.

Bob Moss called Phil Rizzo to the podium and there were some very funny comments between those two characters, including a Sarah Palin-autographed

calendar for Phil.

Pam Koch and Heidi Webber received an engraved pen set thanking them for the tremendous job they did planning the Open House. The buildings were re-dedicated only the day before and we had barely moved in so it was quite a challenge. Of course, it wouldn't have happened at all without all the dedicated docents and volunteers who backed them up.

Ron Kraus also received a pen set. He submitted one of his glorious photos of Placerita for the cover of the Canyon Country phone book and his photo was selected. What better way to get publicity for our natural area?

Richard Norton received a plaque to thank him for his constant willingness to volunteer for any project at the center and his dedication.

Frank Hoffman received a certificate to thank him for keeping his sense of humor and being so helpful with all the demands made on him during the move from the trailer to the renovated building.

I want to thank all the docents and volunteers who helped so nicely in setting up and cleaning up in spite of the heat. It is really a joy to see so many of you ready to help.

We have to do that again, it was fun!

Donations from April to June

Once again we would like to give our warmest thanks to those of you who thought of Placerita when donating. These funds help to feed and house our animals and to run our programs.

AGBU Elementary School
 Albion Street ES
 AV Learning Academy
 Veronica Banuelos
 Sima and Milt Bernstein
 Eileen Blanchard
 Carpenter ES
 Cheav ES
 Nikki Dail
 Bob Fischer and Beatrice Jacobs
 Sylvia Fraser
 Germain ES
 Girl Scout Troup 323
 Linda Ioerger
 Ivy Academia Magnet School
 Justice ES

Shirley Lando
 Malabar ES
 Mary and Ben Masoyan
 Mitchell Elementary School
 Montevista ES
 Shirley Morano
 Bob and Linda Moss
 Mountain View ES
 Ann Myint
 Mary Myint
 Lawrence Nikolai
 Noble Middle School
 Oak Hills ES
 Madeleine and Yukio Okano
 Peachland ES
 Pico Canyon ES

Rio Vista ES
 Renate Rulof
 Kathleen Saathoff
 Neena Sachinvala
 SCV Charter
 Nancy Shannon
 Sky Blue Mesa ES
 Cande and Bama Strock
 Summerwind ES
 Sylmar ES
 Van Nuys ES
 Johan and Evelyne Vandersande
 Vintage Magnet ES
 David and Joan Warnock
 Wiley Canyon ES
 Haru and Dale Yamasaki
 Larry and Jeneane Young

Closed Mondays

We want to remind all of you that because of the difficulties with the budget, the offices will be closed every Monday but the park will remain open.

FALL 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.
- 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, or visit their website: www.californiawild.org/santaclarita.

For more information, please call 661.259.7721 or visit our website at Placerita.org.



The Rattler

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"We exist so children
and cats
can grow together."

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