



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 2009

Dear Nature Friends

We have a lot to be thankful for this year. We are back in our beautiful new building and it is such a joy to be home again; get organized and be able to plan our future in this great new space.

Check out the flyer about Docent Training starting in January and tell your friends about it. It is a first-class education and a fantastic opportunity to become a docent.

This newsletter is for November and December so the holiday season is upon us and I want to take this opportunity to send you all our best wishes for health and happiness. We hope that you will be able to share many great times with family and friends during the season and that you will still be able to escape all the preparations and hit the trail from time to time or at least open a window and just enjoy the beautiful state we live in. Fall is a beautiful season with crisp mornings, dark-blue skies and migratory birds coming back, so a lot of excitement is to come. Enjoy the season and we thank you for your interest and your support throughout the year. Happy Holidays!

Holiday Crafts Faire

This year's Holiday Crafts Faire will be held on Saturday December 5 from 10am to 3pm. It is always a big event in our community and people are already calling to inquire about it. We are so happy to be back in our building and be able to keep up this tradition.

The last Faire was held in 2006, so everyone should be ready to become very creative!

The wreath-making is very popular because the results are always so spectacular. You buy a straw wreath and you approach the tables covered with greenery, pinecones, seeds, pods, etc. With the help of a glue gun and floral pins, it soon becomes a work of art. It is very easy but you would not know it when you see the finished product. I will ask you to donate cake, cookies and other goodies for our bake sale. If you have seeds, pods, dried berries and other evergreen-type trimmings from your yard, bring them in as close to Saturday as possible so they are fresh. The more variety we have, the more creative we can be. We all have a fun time and the rooms smell so nice with all those evergreen branches. This is our



main fund-raiser of the year so spread the word: Saturday, December 5.

Donna Fagan is the chairperson for the event. This is a lot of work and she will be posting a work sheet for helpers to set up, participate and tear down. If you have never been to this event, you will be amazed—that's a promise!

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.



Goodbye

The first trailer has gone back to its home at Disney Ranch. It was very useful for the last 2 years but now that our Nature Center is completed, it was time to go.

We want to extend a big Thank You to Sly, the caretaker of Disney Ranch, for making this generous loan to the nature center.



Update on Eagle Scout Projects

We want to thank William Wohlfarth for all the work he did for his Eagle Scout project on the upper half of the waterfall trail. I know there is some shade there but it still is very demanding and difficult to work so far from the access road and to have to carry all the tools to the trail.

Thank you for choosing Placerita Canyon to complete your Eagle Scout project.



Have a fun and safe winter!



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.

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

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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

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:

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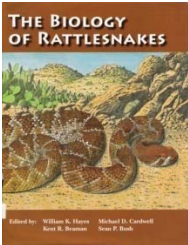


New Electric Car

A LEED building, careful about the environment, gets some help to do just that. We are very pleased with our new electric car that is very useful, convenient and in keeping with our efforts required to become a LEED-certified building.



The Biology of Rattlesnakes



2008. Edited by William K. Hayes, Kent R. Beaman, Michael D. Cardwell & Sean P. Bush.
606 pp. Loma Linda University Press, Loma Linda, CA. \$85

One thing you will learn from this new book is there are currently recognized 37 species and 80 species plus subspecies of rattlesnakes, according to most broadly accepted taxonomic views. They are all new-world, ranging from Canada through the U.S. and Mexico into Central and South America. Mexico appears to be the center of origin for rattlesnakes, with currently the highest diversity.

This large and rather comprehensive work contains 50 contributions (articles) by 98 authors. Included are 20 color plates with 92 rattlesnake images. The book comes out of a 2005 Symposium by the same title, which I attended, so I was looking forward to seeing the text.

Don't be put off by the size of this work. Based on your level of interest you can scan through selected chapters to glean interesting overviews and updates on many facets of rattlesnake life history and interactions with their prey and encounters with humans. Studies featured in the book cover rattlesnakes in the Eastern and Western United States and a couple from Mexico. Southern Californians will be most interested in articles concerning our six species of rattlesnakes, especially the one around the Los Angeles basin, the southern pacific rattlesnake, (*Crotalus oreganus helleri*), which is specifically featured in three or four articles.

Chapters of interest to the non-herpetologist:

- Checklist of scientific and common names for all rattlesnakes and literature summary of publications on rattlesnakes over the last several decades.
- Biography of Laurence Klauber, San Diego Zoo herpetologist, by his granddaughter.
- Klauber's scientific contributions. He collected some 8,300 rattlesnakes, examined over 10,000; authored over 100 herpetology publications including the major, previous 2-vol. Rattlesnake reference work.
- Venoms and how venoms evolved in rattlesnakes. Can rattlesnakes really control the amount of venom they inject? The powerful venom of the famous Mohave rattlesnake (*Crotalus scutulatus*), aka "Mohave green", and the geography of the neurotoxin and other venom complements.
- Interesting article on the latest hypothesis on how rattlesnakes got their rattles.
- Several papers on feeding habits. What do young rattlesnakes eat compared to adults?
- The ground squirrel's varying immunity to and behavior around rattlesnakes.
- Color photos of the vast majority of rattlesnakes.

The dust jacket cover features a superb painting of a red-diamond rattlesnake (*C. ruber*) in natural, rocky habitat in southern California (above). This book will appeal most to the specialists and rattlesnake aficionados, but it should be purchased by and made available at colleges, universities and nature center libraries. Eaton Canyon has a reference copy that can be seen in the library.

Mickey Long



Birch Aquarium at La Jolla

The Placerita Docents celebrated the end of summer with a field trip to the Birch Aquarium in La Jolla. The Aquarium is located right next to UCSD and the beautiful Pacific Ocean.

On a previous visit, many years ago, it was called Scripps Institution of Oceanography. The Aquarium has now grown to four times the size of that original building.

The Aquarium has a mission. Visitors are entertained, and educated. They also learn about what can be done to preserve our oceans. The Scripps Institution of Oceanography has grown to a small city. Oceanographic research is conducted at that facility.

Docents gathered at the entrance for picture taking next to a beautiful sculpture of a whale leaping from the ocean. It was a setting that fit our group of nature lovers.

A favorite spot for the docents was the Kelp Tank. It could have been because there was a comfortable sitting area for

us to rest. The Kelp Forest looked just like an area around Catalina Island that is a favorite spot for snorkelers. There was colorful garibaldi, the state fish of California.

We saw a huge octopus which nearly covered the entire window. Our guide told us that the octopus is very intelligent.

My personal favorite was the exhibit which featured sea horses. Some of them were fanciful looking and others were well camouflaged to look like sea weed. All the females in the group love sea horses. That's because the male of the species carries the babies



Hummingbirds

It all started with a new mother! We discovered a tiny nest with one egg in a rose bush in the front yard of our home. The location was not a wise choice on the part of this new mother. That's why we thought she had to be a new mother. The nest was waist high, in the front yard, next to the garage door, which went up and down all day. Also, it was located about 2 feet from the favorite perch of our cat. The only good part about



her nest was the fact that it was located in a rose bush.

We wanted to help her be successful hatching and raising this baby hummer so we put up the FIRST feeder. Then she didn't have to leave the nest to search for food. Did you know that the incubation for a hummer is just two weeks? The baby hatched the first week of May and successfully fledged on Memorial Day. Mom has to feed baby for just three weeks.

The hummingbird feeder was not being used very often so I would have to dispose of the nectar every three days. Then I hung it in the back yard. Allan thinks they told all the neighbors about the free food. Pretty soon we had 20 or more hummers swarming around that one feeder. So, I got another and then another and another.

All feeders are not created equal. Some are clearly wrong for the bird. They have a small neck, which is impossible to clean. Mildew can build up in the container if it isn't washed every time the feeder is refilled. I found one sold at Wal-Mart that is endorsed by the Audubon Society. It has three pieces, which come apart and are easily cleaned.

My feeders need to be refilled every day. I wonder how many times these tiny tongues flick back and forth with a bit of nectar before that feeder is empty. I never buy the nectar sold in the store. It would break the bank. Instead, I boil up four cups of water and one cup of sugar, but in 2-quart batches. I keep the nectar in the refrigerator until it gets used.

I thought we had only Anna's and Allen's Hummingbirds in this area. We discovered we also have Costa, Black-chinned, and Rufous. Every one of them is so beautiful. The Rufous is so different from the others with his brown body. The Rufous must migrate because I haven't seen them in a week so they would have left the first week of September.

I discovered the Black-chinned hummer when he was face-to-face with me in the sunlight. He is a beautiful purple color. One thing about all the hummers is that they don't mind us being near their feeders so they are easy to observe.

Now my neighbor has gotten her FIRST feeder. The thing is I haven't noticed a lack of hummingbirds in my yard but I can see them also visiting her feeder.

Helen Sweeny



1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? West New York NJ, a canyon of skyscrapers, a 15-minute bus drive away from NYC. Wildlife was what people did in the back alleys. Sinatra and Springsteen were born here also.

2. How did your love of Nature start? We moved when I was 9 to a Polish/Italian/American housing tract being built from a section of a clay pit (Sayre Fisher) that made bricks. Talk about a sheltered life, but that was the first I got to see that a sun made a sunset with all kinds of colors, and that it didn't just get light and dark to mark the day. As fun as it was playing around the construction site, there was also a form of quicksand and woods surrounding it. We found old Indian paint pots, pieces of clay smoking pipes, arrowheads and animal bones and donated it to the library. Already I was hooked at going to the library to learn more about what all this stuff was.

3. What was your education? Honor Society in high school but also loved learning from my grandmother, who lived on a farm until the depression. She knew a lot about plants, insects, animals and the weather. Oh, I went to 2 different universities but we're not going to talk about that.

4. What is your work experience? I worked for a paycheck since I was 15 until my first baby. When kids came into the picture I worked harder except now without a paycheck.

5. What is your family life? Well, I mentioned I was from NJ and you know the mafia is big over there, so the best I'm able to say is that Vinnie is part of our household. Actually, Vinnie (short for Vincent Van Gogh) was a rescue animal (turtle) from Placerita we acquired 10 years ago and he, Greta, Dusty and Squirtle live in my pond. Hmmm, I also have a daughter at home, Bethany who has been going to Placerita since she was born (She's been an official docent going on 3 years now), and 2 older kids. Jacob volunteered about 10 years ago and Lanette is working on her BS studying fish in Northern California.

6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place? I live in Mission Hills and I remember it really wasn't that far, and how much more fun we had in a wilderness environment than in the local urban playgrounds.

7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center? I've been a volunteer since the mid-1990s, would help with the Junior Ranger program and some of the open houses and whenever an extra adult needed to be around on some hikes.

13. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? Or pastime? I'm a member of the Community Hiking Club and sometimes do backstage stuff for Canyon Theater Guild. I kind of live more in my car so I enjoy satellite radio rather TV.

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? Err, well, truth be known, I'm a bit OCD (obsessive compulsive). When I'm not going on trails at Placerita, I'm on trails at other places. This area is filled with them! There are trails that lead to caves, trails that lead to lush fern forests, fossils, waterfalls, creeks, ruins from the 1920s and much older and incredible plants. There are places that are sacred that call me back again and again. I love learning about our local plants and their usage. I love learning about our rocks, minerals and shells. I also respect sharing the trails with the occasional critter or signs of critter. Besides, doing stuff like this is where all the cool people are.

This was sent to us by Helen Sweeny (see her interview). Is there is any trail that is special to your heart? Then, please share your interest with the readers of The Rattler and send us a little description explaining why you are attracted to this place.

"One of the trails I've been drawn to of late is called the "Hummingbird Trail". It's on the eastern side of Simi Valley and really an amazing place. It's filled with caves and rock formations. The deepest cave is supposed to be about 100 feet but I've yet to find it. There's a huge amount of graffiti over there too, along with bagfuls of bottles and cans that we've been hauling out. Next cool day, I want to go there with a file and maybe wire brush and see if some of that graffiti can't be removed.

I'm at the very beginnings of working my camera. When I can figure how to take some of these pictures and share them with others, I'll forward some of these of Hummingbird. By the way, Hummingbird is one of those sacred sites I've mentioned. Local Chumash belief is that birds were able to communicate directly with the Great White Chief. Chumash actually called this area "Hummingbird Nest" and the ranch owner who bought it in the early 1900s just shortened it to Hummingbird Ranch, and now it is H. Trail. Interesting rock formations such as what I described combined with a lot of birds' nests and a few other geological oddities made this particular place something special. The climb is kind of steep for a while, so I really wouldn't recommend it until we start having weather cooler than the 70s."



We Have a New Flag at the Center



Thanks to Bob Haueter, Chief of Staff in Santa Clarita for Congressman Howard P. “Buck” McKeon, who donated a new American Flag when Eileen Blanchard notified him that the Nature Center was in need of a new flag. This is a special flag as it was previously flown over the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Mr. Haueter said that any person or organization may request to have a flag flown over the Capitol Building in honor of a person or special achievement.

If you would like to take advantage of this service, contact Congressman McKeon at his Washington office at: mckeon.house.gov. Click on “At Your Service” on the top line, and then scroll down to Flag Requests. Prices and sizes of flags are shown there, as well as an order form. A personalized Certificate of Dedication will accompany your flag.

Thank you very much Eileen for being so resourceful and making sure that we have a new flag flapping in the wind in front of the Nature Center. It is always a very welcoming sight for all of us at the Center.

Getting My Balance

Pam Koch

Hiking is more popular than ever and the health benefits are unquestioned. What’s bothering me is why am I not on the trail every day? Hiking alone can be scary. If you fall and can’t get up, how long will you lie there waiting to be rescued? Or eaten? Hiking with a buddy is best but who has schedules that mesh at a moment’s notice? I know men who hike alone and don’t give it a second thought. Women (high-strung types like me) don’t typically allow themselves that luxury and meeting a stranger in a secluded area, be it urban or wild, carries a fight or flight risk, mostly just in our imaginations. Even so, the fright is real.

So what to do? Carry a big stick, a whistle, pepper spray, a cell phone? I was hiking recently in the Grand Tetons. I had to carry bear spray. I thought it was a joke when I was handed the bottle. I was told not to use it until the bear was about 6 feet from me. What? Make a lot of noise first see if you can scare him off. What? I never did see a bear but the anxiety of the possibility detracted from the solo hike. Others might have found the possibility of danger exhilarating. My everyday life is fraught with enough worry – I want a hike to be my get-away-from-stress time.

I want my hike to be filled with the wonders of nature. When I’m on the trail, I’m not out there for exercise and heart rate improvement and muscle toning. That is relegated to mere side benefits. I want to mingle in raw materials and think my thoughts about the wonders of nature and the nature of the universe. I’m a slow hiker breathing the air, listening to the wind in the trees, the birds going about their day, the rustling in the underbrush. I want to see wildflowers, muse over which plant holds the cure for cancer, hug a tree. Well, maybe not hug a tree but you get my point.

I can find all this on the Ecology trail at the nature center. It’s different enough at different times of the year and for an every day hike, I’m close enough to civilization to feel safe yet far enough away to feel primeval. The Hillside and Hidden trails offer similar benefits and somewhat different landscape. If I’m feeling stouthearted, I’ll hike the length of the canyon trail and feel like the lord of all creation. And I’ll feel small and reverent and grateful.

I’m grateful we have these and many other trails in Santa Clarita. I’m grateful we have a society cognizant of the need to protect and maintain these trails and where possible, add to them. I’m grateful to the nature center associates and their mission to preserve and protect these trails so people like me can walk them and find pathways to serenity and balance.

Many big thanks to those wonderful people who thought of the Nature Center when giving their donations. Extra big thanks to Emma, Kellie, Monica and Faith who donated their earnings from their lemonade stand because Placerita is “awesome!” Also, many thanks to newly-weds Rosemary and Don Regis who directed donations to the nature center in lieu of gifts

Jane Adams
Emma, Kellie, Monica and Faith
Frances Bojorquez
Dr. Annette Stiefbold
Alvan Gendein
Georgia George
All and Virginia Ivie
Kaiser Permanente Behavioural
Health Department
Ron and Jill Kraus

Constance and Howard Labadie
Lawrence McLaughlin
Shirley Morano
Audrey Morga
Joseph and Elma Pollock
Judith Rothman
Betsy Thornburgh
Barbara Wampole
Kimm Webber

The Red-shouldered Hawk; My Bird of the Month

by Bob Fischer

Our September bird walk had a fantastic conclusion. It was a hot summery day and we moved from one shady spot to the next as we listened and watched for birds. Towards the end of our walk we sat in a shady spot in the picnic area and watched a steady stream of house finches, bluebirds, scrub jays and towhees come to drink and bath at a leaking water fountain. As many as four birds at a time would be on the fountain and then give way to the next group of thirsty and hot birds. We were mesmerized by the sight and must have watched for at least 15 or 20 minutes before moving on. As we left the picnic area, we began to hear a Red-shouldered Hawk calling. It was the first time that day which seemed a bit odd since in Placerita Canyon Red-shouldered Hawks are so common you often hear them calling as you step out of your car. We saw the hawk flying nearby. It perched on the giant sycamore tree at the end of the meadow. After passing the tree we crossed the creek and returned to our starting point past the Walker Cabin. Suddenly, just in front of us two Red-shouldered Hawks flew into the top of the dead tree above the butterfly garden. They perched side-by-side, facing in opposite directions, giving us a perfect, unobstructed view. It was the best view I've ever had of a Red-shouldered Hawk let alone two of them! The two hawks just sat there. Finally, as we were hot and tired of standing and the hawks were still sitting there, we said our goodbyes and began leaving.



The Red-shouldered Hawk, *Buteo lineatus*, is in the Order: Falconiformes, diurnal birds of prey and in the Family: accipitriadae, eagles, hawks and kites. They are a common forest-dwelling hawk in California and much of Eastern North America. It is perhaps the most vocal American hawk making a rapid kee-ah, kee-ah, kee-ah repeated many times. Members of the genus *Buteo* are medium-sized raptors with robust bodies and broad wings and are known as buzzards in Europe, but hawks in North America. Red-shouldered Hawks are about 17 inches in length and have a wing span of 37-42 inches. Adapted to living and hunting in the forest, they have a longer tail and shorter wings than other *Buteos*.

Adults have a brownish head, a reddish chest, and a pale belly with reddish bars. Their tail is marked with narrow white bars. The red "shoulder" is visible when the bird is perched. These hawks' upper parts are dark with pale spots and they have long yellow legs. They are permanent residents throughout most of their range, though northern birds do migrate mostly to central Mexico. The major modern threat to these birds is deforestation, which has eliminated these birds as breeders in some areas. Red-shouldered Hawks hunt by dropping on prey from a perch in the canopy. They may hunt from ground to catch mammals in burrows, hopping after them when they out. Small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and crayfish are their usual food.

A breeding pair builds a large bowl of sticks, lined with fine bark, leaves, mosses, lichens, and conifer twigs placed in a major fork of a large tree. They are frequent nesters in our picnic area. The clutch size is typically 2 to 5 eggs that are dull white or faint bluish with brown blotches and markings. The incubation period can range from 28 to 33 days. The hatchlings, 1.2 oz. at first, are helpless, with eyes open, covered in buff-colored down and are brooded for up to 40 days. The young leave the nest at about six weeks of age, but remain dependent on the parents until they are 17 to 19 weeks old. Red-shouldered Hawks sometimes collaborate and peaceably coexist with American Crows, which are usually an enemy to all other birds because of their egg-hunting habits, in order to mob Great Horned Owls and Red-tailed Hawks.

References: Wikipedia, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Crocoll, S. T. Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) 1994. In *The Birds of North America*, No. 107 The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

Rick Rises Again

Poor Rick Brammer has had a rough time lately and some of it was very scary.

We were pretty horrified to get this email from Linette: "Rick was hit by a hit-and-run driver in the parking lot of the physical therapist and is in the hospital for evaluation. He is a little sore but otherwise fine."

Then he has surgery on his right hand. His thumb should be in great working order soon, but that is a little much to happen all at once. Latest news, he has a bad scratch on his left arm from being footed by Wheelie.

Rick, please take it easy, we need you at the center!

Do you have someone on your Holiday gift list who has everything? You wrack your brain for the perfect gift even though you know that if they need something they just go out and get it (mom!). Why not surprise them with a different and useful gift that is also tax-deductible? Adopt an Animal! This gift helps to feed and house our various critters. Check out our Adopt an Animal program at Placerita.org. You can even do this at the last minute! You are welcome. We love to help people with their various lists.

Adopt-an-Animal

PCNCA thanks the following special guardian who is helping in the care and feeding of her adopted animal:

Judy McClure - 'Hopi,' the Barn Owl; a birthday gift from David McClure and Elizabeth Franco.

Birding Pal



A few issues back, the Rattler had a small article about a web site called Birding Pals. It has listing of people throughout the world who bird and are willing to take visitors to visit their favorite birding spots. They do not charge a fee but just enjoy taking people who also like to bird.

We were going to Miami in October and would be staying several days. I went online to the Birding Pals site for Miami. We were put in touch with Laura. She e-mailed us and we arranged to meet.

Laura picked us up at our hotel at 6 am and drove us one hour west to the Everglades. We arrived while it was still dark and caught the sunrise over the Everglades. The park did not open for several hours so we walked around the fence and down the road into the Everglades. Later, when the rangers came through they just waved. Bird Watchers are not a threat!

Evelyn told us to look for Anhinga in the Everglades and that was one of the first birds we saw. It reminds me of a cormorant but with a long snake-like neck. Another bird that Laura pointed out was a Limpkin. I thought it was an Ibis

with its long curved beak. We saw flocks of them flying and making harsh calls.

Little Blue Herons were quite numerous as were Green-backed Herons and Cattle Egrets.

While walking along the road, we encountered an alligator basking and soaking up the morning sun. We gave her a wide berth. While skirting the alligator, we heard a loud roar within the swamp. We decided to walk a bit faster.

After we returned to our hotel, we encountered a number of iguanas. Some were up to four or five feet. The handyman near the pool said they are able to tell time and tend to show up at noon. People feed them.

If you enjoy birding and want to share your love of birding sign up to be a birding pal. When you travel, check to see if there is a birding pal in the area you will be visiting.

Laura said she recently visited Colombia and could not find a birding pal there. She ended up hiring a guide plus a car for a cost of \$350.00.

Thank you for your article Sue. We are very pleased if The Rattler information was useful to you in finding birders in Miami to help you enjoy the Everglades.

The Anhinga is an interesting bird who catches fish in spearing it with its pointed bill. Then the fish is stuck there! The bird shake its head violently left and right to loosen slightly its grip without losing the fish or rubbing his bill on a branch while applying pressure. Quite a production...only then can it stretch its neck and gobble it up. You can see the fish traveling down because the neck is very long and slim. They are sometimes call snake birds...



Sad News

September 16, 2009

"It is with great sorrow that I share the loss of Rufus, our (at least) 31-year-old Red-tailed hawk. He hadn't been eating the last week, even when offered a variety and quantity of food, and was taken from the enclosure on our front patio immediately. Dave began giving him fluids and hand-feeding him until he was found deceased this morning."

That's really old for a Red-tailed hawk! According to Fish and Game statistics, they're lucky if they live to be a year old as they typically suffer a 73% mortality rate in their first year; that's 73 out of 100 that die before age one. At the end of 5 years, only 5 of the original 100 are typically surviving in the wild. Only 2 Coopers' and about 19 Osprey survive to age 5, but about 40 of 100 Bald Eagles make it that long.

Thanks to Rufus for educating more people than probably all of us put together. He's taken more things thrown at him than anyone else and has seen every single thing that has come into his compound, including wild Red-tails (I scared on off about 10 years ago that was locked talon-to-talon with him), several gray foxes, rattlesnakes and every human that's ever walked through.

He will be deeply missed.

Frank and Dave

Rufus was a part of the Nature Center for so long that we would like to collect some memories about him. If you have some personal stories about Rufus, please send them to evelynvandersande@hotmail.com and they will be published in the Rattler in his memory.

Butterfly FACs

What are some interesting butterfly behaviors?

Butterflies bask in the sun to warm their muscles and dry their wings so that they can fly. They join in “puddle parties” at wet, muddy spots to get fluids, salts, and minerals. These congregations are almost all males. The males also patrol stream edges and other places, on the lookout for females emerging from the chrysalis.

Butterflies also have a habit of “hill-topping” seeking high places where males and females can find each other more easily; similarly, males perch in sunny places at the top of a tree or other high point, defending it against other males and waiting for a female to come by. Male great purple hairstreaks (and I am not making up those names) for example, are known to commandeer Palo verde trees for several weeks, the same butterfly returning to the same tree through time.

How high, how fast, and how far can they fly?

Migrating or moving with storm fronts, butterflies can reach several thousand feet in altitude, but most average 2 or 3 feet above the ground. Most butterflies can travel 5 to 12 miles an hour, but in a sprint their top speed could be 50 miles an hour. In terms of distance, a migrating monarch might go 80 miles a day, but that would be a long distance for any butterfly.

Do Butterflies have relationships with other insects?

Yes. Most interesting is the beneficial association between certain butterfly larvae and ants. In some blues, for example, the larvae secrete a sugary solution called “honeydew” that attracts at least a dozen species of ants. The ants tend the larvae and protect them from predators; for their efforts, they receive nutrients from the honeydew. Butterfly larvae also benefit from being able to go into ant nests to pupate.

But when they change into adults, they must escape or the ants kill them.



What is the difference between a butterfly and a moth?

One of the best ways to distinguish butterflies from moths is by their antennae. Butterfly antennae have club-shaped or rounded tips, while moth antennae are featherlike. Generally butterflies fly in daytime, moths fly at night. Butterflies are usually larger and more brightly colored than moths. Butterfly

caterpillars eat voraciously for two weeks or so, while moth caterpillars feed for weeks or months. Moth chrysalides are wrapped in silk cocoons, but butterfly chrysalides are hardened protective cases without silk. These distinctions blur, however. For example, the skippers are butterflies that exhibit some moth-like characteristics, and some subtropical butterflies are active at night.

What is the range of sizes among butterflies?

The American western pygmy blue may be the smallest butterfly with a wingspan of about 1/2 inch. The largest butterfly in the world is the Queen Alexandra’s bird-wing of New Guinea. The female’s wings stretch to nearly a foot wide.

How long do butterflies live?

Life span depends on the species. In summer some may live as briefly as a day or a week or two, long enough to breed and for the female to lay all her eggs. Adult fritillaries, checker-spots, and others from the brush-foot family, last for months. Mourning cloaks win the award as possibly the longest-live butterfly. They can live for 10 to 11 months. Adult mourning cloaks rest in summer, feed in the fall, spend the winter under tree bark, and mate the following spring.

Reference : Frequently asked questions about butterflies by Rose Houk



Back from the Galapagos Islands

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change”

Those were the words of Charles Darwin. He did not spend much time in the Galapagos Islands but collected many specimens and observed this unique environment very carefully. It is home to an



abundance of wildlife. Isolated from the mainland for millions of years, it is one of the rare wildernesses where animals have no instinctive fear of humans.

How does this adaptation work? I am going to take the case of marine iguanas because it is very easy to see the differences. By the way, marine iguanas are an endemic species on the Galapagos Islands. That means that the animals came from somewhere else but through adaptation, it became a different species that can only be found on the island.

A few things helped this iguana along the way: First: it is a reptile with a very slow metabolism. It can live for long periods of time without food and water. When you are trying to adapt to a hostile environment it is a very good thing to be. Second: A male and a female were needed as a starting point to populate those islands and when reptiles mate, there is no problem with inbreeding. Right away, this is a very helpful situation for generations to come.

How did the first iguana come to the Galapagos Islands? The islands are surrounded by a strong current called the Humboldt Current. It is thought that the first land iguanas came on a mat made of vegetation, trees and branches, which were pushed to sea by the current. When they arrived, they found a very harsh island covered by black lava rocks and with very little vegetation and no water. The little vegetation to be found was around the shore line and consisted mainly of seaweed, lichen and plankton in the water. They had to adapt to survive or rather to say that the one that survived somehow could adapt to this kind of food so their offspring already had a better chance to live.

When you eat plants that are covered with sea salt, your kidneys cannot last too long, so another adaptation was done. When the amount of salt becomes too much for their body, the sea iguana sneezes the salt out in a very impressive spray.

I am adding a photo of a land iguana taken in Guayaquil, Ecuador in a city park. You can see that it is a lovely shade of yellow. It is not useful to be of this color if you are surrounded by black lava fields and so the marine iguana became darker in order to blend with their environment.

It was interesting to learn that the Asian visitors to the Galapagos Islands enjoy seeing all the animals but were especially excited in seeing the marine iguana. Their culture reveres the dragon under many shapes. They grew up watching the Godzilla movies. The first fairy tale read to children always invokes a good or a bad dragon and for them, seeing a marine iguana is the only chance to see a dragon alive. If you look at the picture I included in this article, you can see why. It is not a cuddly face but a true dragon's.

The land iguanas did not have any choice in landing on the Galapagos Islands, but they adapted very well and you can see piles of them. They really lie on top of each other forming a few layers and keeping warm in the process. They are a great success story.

Pirates did not have any choice landing in those islands either. They called them the Islands of Hell and they did not survive until they found two islands with water and tortoises. Those animals were a good source of food because they could load them on the ship and kill them for meat and use the oil from the blubber. They almost eradicated the giant Galapagos tortoise from the islands; it is a relief to see the Darwin foundation at work with their breeding program being so successful.

It is heartwarming to travel to the highlands and roam the moss-draped landscape where wild tortoises often forage. The last picture has nothing to do with adaptation, but I had to laugh at this opportunistic sea lion who found out that by coming to the fish market you are bound to get lucky. By the way, this is a little trick to remember what is a sea lion and not a seal. A sea lion has little ear flaps—easy to remember. As you have guessed, this was a fantastic vacation in a unique place.



North American Bears

By Ron Kraus

On our recent Alaskan cruise we stopped at the “Fortress of the Bear” in Sitka. This is a non-profit education and rescue center that currently houses two orphaned Brown bear cubs in old clarifier tanks associated with an abandoned lumber mill. Before this facility was established, orphaned and rogue bears were simply shot and killed by authorities in the area.

During the tour I got into a discussion with one of the guides which revealed my ignorance about bears in North America. I didn't realize that the Brown bear is a separate species from the Black bear. So here is the information I picked up from the guide, supplemented by some Internet research.

Black Bear

The most common North American bear species is the Black bear which lives in 80% of the states as well northern Mexico and throughout almost all of Canada. This is the bear we have in California. The name is deceiving because it comes in shades of brown and even blond, although most have black fur with a white chest. The typical adult male is 5 or 6 feet in length and stands as high as 7 feet when it rears up on its back legs. The average weight is between 200 and 300 pounds.

They are omnivores and eat a diet that can include insects, fish, carrion, small mammals, fruits, berries, and nuts. They can live as long as 25 years in the wild and the estimated population in North America is 600,000.

Brown Bear

The Brown bear is much larger than the Black bear and is found in the northwestern US, Canada, and Alaska. They can weigh up to 1,500 pounds and stand ten feet tall on their rear legs. There are a number of subspecies found throughout the world, and in Alaska three types are the coastal Brown bear, the Kodiak bear, and the Grizzly. Grizzlies are named for the gray hair found in their fur that gives them a “grizzled” look, but they are still Brown bears. Brown bears eat a lot of salmon which apparently helps them grow really big.

Polar Bear

Polar bears are an offshoot of the Brown bear and are the largest bears on Earth. The biggest specimens ever recorded weighed close to 2,000 pounds. They are distributed around the Arctic Circle so we didn't see any in our cruise through Southeast Alaska.

Telling the Difference between Alaska's Bears

The Black bear is the most common bear in Alaska and is found just about everywhere except for the Seward Peninsula. Since Black bears can be brown and Brown bears can be black, it helps to know a little bear anatomy to tell the difference between the species. Black bears have a straight profile, large ears, short curved claws, and no shoulder hump. Brown bears have smaller ears, a dish shaped profile, long straight claws and a hump on their shoulders. Some locals say that Black bears can climb trees and Brown bears can't—others are not so sure.

A funny story one of the guides told was that a large Brown bear (probably a male) was spotted walking through downtown Sitka early in the morning a few months ago. Some folks followed it through town to see what it was up to. Before it wandered back into the woods, it broke into a women's clothing shop and grabbed a dress. So now everyone is looking for a bear in the woods in drag.

So the next time you see a news story about a brown bear spotted in a Southern California neighborhood you will know that it is really a Black bear, not a Brown bear.

References: fortressofthebear.org, Trails.com, ezinearticles.com





Annual Reptile and Amphibian Exhibit

When: Saturday, October 10
What: The Southwestern Herpetologist Society was co-sponsored by Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation for this event.



There was an incredible display of live reptiles and amphibians from around the world with all kinds of shapes and colors, from the longest to the smallest. It was very interesting because you could ask all the questions you wanted about their habits, their food and their longevity, so a fantastic learning opportunity was had for all ages.

There was also a rattlesnake awareness presentation and a barbecue. The weather was perfect and the event was well attended. We used to have this exhibit in March but it is usually too cold for those animals to be very active, so we might decide to do it always in the fall.



Keep Pussy Cat Off Father's Green Spinach

by Pam Koch

Keep Pussy Cat Off Father's Green Spinach. When I was in elementary school, that's how I learned the classification of everything on the planet. Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species. At the time, everything was divided into animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdoms. Scientists have since added Fungi, Protist and Monera and have yet to figure out where to put viruses. (Why not a virus kingdom?)

Once again, I got to thinking. I have never seen rocks divided into phylum or class or... etc. This kingdom thing must be a way to sort out organic life. Maybe the first way to classify something should be - is it organic or inorganic? If it's inorganic, then it's off to the mineral "kingdom" and then further split into Igneous, Metamorphic, or Sedimentary. It gets too complicated for me after this point and I turn my thoughts to organics.

Kingdoms get all the press and I want to take a look at phylums. If there were 3, now 5 Kingdoms (and it looks like the mineral "kingdom" got the boot), how many phyla are there? I tracked down various websites and came up with 36 animal phylum; only 36 that split out into some 1,250,000 animal species.

Turning my attention to plants, I located scholarly sites that list 11 plant phylum and no one could agree on the name of one of the phylum. These 11 phylum split out into 375,000 currently known species of plants.

Fungi look like plants to me, yet they are their own Kingdom. They are subdivided into six phyla that split out into 75,000 species.

What are Protist? Protists? Oh - protozoa. I remember those. Five phyla splits into 1000 species alive today. Counting the fossil records puts the species count up to 250,000. Some scientists have decided they're not a separate kingdom, but a loose grouping of disparate phyla. Are they animal or vegetable? Neither? It depends on who your information source is. This is getting way too complicated.

That leaves us with Monera. These are the bacteria; the good, the bad, and the ...blue-green algae. Four phylum split into 10,000 species according to one website while another says 45,000 species.

And viruses? These mutant things skip kingdom, phyla, class and jump to Order, currently seven that split out into an indeterminate number of species since, as I said, they mutate.

Fortunately this is not a scholarly article; I'm just a gal trying to get a handle on my co-creatures. If scientists can't agree on who's who, I don't stand a chance but this gets it quasi-organized for me.

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 **Miami blue** is a small butterfly (*Cyclargus thomasi bet-hunebakeri*) native to coastal areas of southern Florida. Once very common throughout its range, it has become critically endangered, and may be the rarest insect in the United States. Its numbers have recently been increased by a captive breeding program at the Florida Museum of Natural History.

The Miami blue was described in 1943 based on specimens found near Miami. In the mid-twentieth century the Miami blue was common throughout a range that ran from Daytona Beach south around the tip of the peninsula and up to the Tampa Bay area, and throughout the Florida Keys to the Dry Tortugas. Its habitat includes the edges of tropical hardwood hammocks, scrub, and pine rocklands. The Miami blue is the only subspecies of *Cyclargus thomasi* found in the United States.

Miami blue adults are short lived in the wild; females may live five days, males about two days. Adults typically stay within thirty feet of their birthplace. Miami blues were known to lay their eggs exclusively on balloon vine (*Cardiospermum corindum*), but the last known wild population uses grey nicker bean (*Caesalpinia bonduc*).

The range of the Miami blue was reduced in the second half of the twentieth century due to the loss of habitat to urban development. It had disappeared from the mainland of Florida and from the barrier islands along the peninsula by 1990. It had become confined to a few spots in the Florida Keys and was becoming rare there. Hurricane Andrew appeared to have wiped out the species in 1992. Searches were made, but no Miami blues were found.

In 1999 some Miami blues were spotted in Bahia Honda State Park. It was estimated that fewer than fifty of the butterflies were left. Acting on a request from the North American Butterfly Association, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission temporarily listed the Miami blue as endangered on an emergency basis in 2002. The 'endangered' listing was made permanent in 2003. In the meantime, searches had found no other colonies of the Miami blue.

In 2003 the Entomology and Nematology Department at the University of Florida began raising and breeding Miami blues, starting from about 100 eggs collected in the wild. In 2004 they released 2,500 of the insects at selected locations. However, the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season caused damage to all of the release sites as well as at Bahia Honda. The Bahia Honda colony has recovered, and the University continues its breeding and wild release program.

In November and December 2006, more colonies were discovered on other islands in the Florida Keys.
Reference: Wikipedia



Volunteer-Naturalist Training Placerita Canyon Natural Area



Become a Volunteer-Naturalist!

- *Learn about the natural environment*
- *Teach children about nature*
- *Make a difference in your community*

No special background needed,
just a willingness to attend training and to volunteer at least twice a month.

Training Starts Tuesday, January 12th, 2010
Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 12 Noon

Volunteer-Naturalists attend a 9-week training program. Topics include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history, and interpretive techniques. Instructors include noted professionals in the various fields. The cost of the training is \$45, which includes County insurance and all training materials (instruction manual, field guide, T-shirt, and related items.) Visit our website (placerita.org) for further information regarding the Volunteer-Naturalist program.

Other volunteer opportunities are also available at Placerita Canyon Natural Area that don't require the 9-week training program, such as office helper and trail maintenance team member. Bilingual (English/Spanish) volunteers are especially needed.

For further information call or visit:
Placerita Canyon Natural Area
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall CA 91321
(661) 259-7721
Email: ron.kraus@placerita.org



The Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Presents its Annual

Holiday Craft Fair

Saturday, December 5

10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

at

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall

1 1/2 miles east of the 14 freeway

Create and decorate your own holiday wreaths, centerpieces, candles and ornaments using a large assortment of fresh-cut greenery, pine cones and other beautiful natural treasures.

Supervised candle dipping for the kids

**The Nature Center Gift Shop will be open to help you
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A Blooming October in Placerita

If you think that no flowers are blooming in Placerita in the fall, you are sadly mistaken. It is time to go on the trail and open your eyes to look for those precious little jewels that are opening up in spite of the long dry summer. Fall is always a time for quiet little surprises along the trail. Those pictures were taken by Ron Kraus who walks the trails on a regular basis always keeping his camera handy. Thank you so much Ron, your photos make plant identification so much easier. If you want to see more of Ron's photos, please visit our web site at Placerita.org. Ron is also our web master, does a wonderful job and makes constant changes so it might be time to check it again.



Golden Eardrops--Just a few flowers are left on this plant--they have a wonderful fragrance.



California Brickellbush--The flowers have a beautiful aroma in the evening to attract nighttime pollinators



California Fuchsia--A favorite with hummingbirds



Twiggly Wreath Plant--This is a tall annual in the sunflower family



The Rattler

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