

The Rattler



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Placerita Canyon Nature Center Over 50 Years of Nature Education

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.

January/February 2014



Hello friends,

We are starting a new year and we want to send you all our best wishes for 2014, may you be happy, healthy and have time to enjoy the outdoors to your hearts content. The trails at Placerita are ready to be explored from sunset to sundown so take the opportunity to come and visit.

The beginning of the year at Placerita is always a very exciting time because this is when we open our doors to the new students. The docent training starts on Tuesday, January 7th at 9am. This is a 9-week training program designed to teach about the natural environment, to teach children about nature and to make a difference in our community.

The topics covered include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history and interpretive techniques. The instructors are noted professionals in their various fields. The cost of the training is \$45 which includes all training material (instruction manual, T-shirt and related items)

This is a wonderful opportunity to be able to better understand your surroundings and to meet a fantastic group of dedicated docents who will welcome and help you. Working with children and nature seems to attract a very special and wonderful breed of people, give it a try, I can assure you

won't ever regret it and the level of the education you will get will astonish you.

Here we are starting a new year full of hope and promises. One of those promises is that our new interpretative center will be ready by the end of the year, it will replace our old museum and we are pretty excited to see the result of years of research and planning.

Another promise is that we are supposed to enter the rainy season; we hope the rain will come very soon and that the stream will be full and running this year. Fresh news grass is poking up everywhere and buds are forming....all sorts of promises for the weeks and months to come. Come and share this joy with us.

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.

Many Thanks to our donors who thought of Placerita Canyon Nature Center. Our residents greatly appreciate it.

3rd St. ES
Beverly Phillips
Castaic Lake ES
Christian Virtual Academy
Emek Hebrew Academy
Girl Scout Daisy Troop #7192
Girl Scouts of Greater LA Troop
#1672
Highland Hall
Jill Goddard
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Monticello Prep
Mt. St. Mary's College
North Hills Co-op Preschool
Ocotillo ES
Prime Time Preschool

St. John Baptist de la Salle School
St. Martin School
Seventh Day Adventist Church of
San Fernando
Shepard Christian School

Shirley Morano
Sima Bernstein
Valley Christian School
Vineyard Christian School
Wilshire Park ES



Lisa Peach Merkord

Lisa Merkord could not be with us during the Holiday Party because she has been busy taking care of her Dad who is going through chemo treatments. We need to keep him in our prayers.

Lisa is one of the quiet people who stays in the back ground, helping out here at the center. She has been driving in from Fillmore a few days a week after taking her son to school in Ventura to be one of Buddies handlers. Buddy is the raven that we keep at the Nature Center.

Then she has to rush back to Ventura to pick her son up from school.

To me this takes a lot of love and dedication to do all this driving to help the center.

Thank you Lisa for your dedication to the animals and Placerita.

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

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

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

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Disclaimer

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

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

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

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates

Thank You!

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

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

Send your donation to:

PCNCA
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213

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:

Seventh Day Adventist Church of San Fernando - Cricket, the American kestrel
Girl Scout Daisy Troop 7192 - Squirt, the Western pond turtle
Girl Scout Troop 3042 - Daisy, the opossum
Golden Oak Community School (2013 Wise Owl Day celebration) - Catori, the barn owl & Orion, the great horned owl
Laura Murray (a Christmas gift from Mom and Dad) - Catori, the barn owl
Victoria Murray (a Christmas gift from Mom and Dad) - Daisy, the opossum

Many thanks to all of you for your generous support
and
Happy New Year!



Winter/Spring PROGRAMS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| FAMILY NATURE WALK | Every Saturday from 11 to noon.
An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history. |
| ANIMAL PRESENTATION | Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.
See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area. |
| BIRD WALK | Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide. |
| BIRD WALK, CASTAIC | The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at Castaic Lake Recreation Area on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM. |
| BLOOMS OF THE SEASON | Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832. |
| COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB | A non-profit organization that invites all members of the SCV and community at large to: Join weekly planned hikes; Attend monthly nature series educational presentations; Participate in community outreach programs such as Calif Condor micro-trash clean-ups and maintenance of trails and native garden; Partner with groups such as Boys and Girls Club to introduce youth to nature. For more information, go to the website at communityhikingclub.org |
| NATURE EDUCATION | An exciting new program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please contact the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. January 19, 2014: California Condors with Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel. February 16: Placerita Canyon's Tatavium with Laurie Solis. March 16: Geology of Placerita with Eric Indermill. |
| DOCENT TRAINING | Starts Tuesday January 7, 2014. Training consists of 9 weeks college-level training on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9-12. See docent flyer in this issue. For more information and to sign up, call the office at 661.259.7721. |

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

The 2013 Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates - Holiday Craft Faire

by Mari Carbajal, PCNCA Docent

It was time to begin organizing the 2013 Holiday Craft Faire at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center. It was my first experience with this event and I wanted to dive in headfirst, so I volunteered to be the Chairman. I had no idea what the event was, what to expect, or what it entailed other than it was a fund-raiser to help feed and care for the non-releasable animals under the PCNCA and L.A. County's care. I was told people would come in and make wreaths, decorate wooden candleholders, dip candles, and that there would be crafts for kids and a White Elephant sale. Experienced docents said, "Oh people come from miles around and look forward to this every year." But I had NO idea what to expect!

So off I went into the world of the unknown. During the first day, I realized that all of our wonderful volunteers and docents who had participated in this event in prior years made it so incredibly easy for me to be Chairman because they all knew what needed to be done in order to accomplish the tasks they wanted to volunteer for. All I did was direct traffic, periodically check on my Elves, and run around with a blinking Reindeer nose on my face to spread that Holiday Cheer!!

Both days were amazing. I began to see the most beautiful and creative wreaths and candleholders coming out of the workroom... pine, juniper, dried fruit, berries, coyote brush, mistletoe, pods and seeds... an amazing display of talent and work by people, some of which had never performed these crafts before. Traci Stockhausen-White volunteered her time to make perfect bows that topped off these gorgeous creations with that special "Ribbon Lady" touch.

In the meantime, the other room was buzzing with excitement as children (of all ages -- seriously) painted rocks, made snowmen, pinecone angels, pinecone birdfeeders, and dipped candles, all guided and supervised by our PCNCA docents and volunteers.

Despite the cold and rain, and a slight breeze now and then, everyone appeared happy and excited about the event. I stood out front as patrons left, thanking them for their contributions and they seemed so pleased with what they had accomplished. No two wreaths were even close to being the same. Candleholders were magnificent, and it was obvious that all of the children enjoyed making snowmen and dipping candles in the different colors. One little boy even made a candle "specifically" to give to his mother for her birthday!

And talk about creativity -- the Acton Market provided meals for sale to our guests. They made pulled pork and Tri Tip sandwiches, BBQ pork ribs, an array of salads, unbelievable BBQ beans, delicious desserts and drinks for those who wanted a much needed break for lunch. It was so incredibly good that some people even purchased food to take home for their dinner. Acton Market is the BEST!! The next time you're in Acton, stop and visit the Acton Market... Lunch available every day, but BBQ is always available on the weekends.

The White Elephant Sale was quite the success. Our docents and volunteers generously donated items to the sale and we thank everyone who purchased the items since the proceeds will support the animal's wellbeing at the Center. "Thank you" to Teresa Jacobs who organized the sale and made it a huge success.

We conducted two raffles... So congratulations to our raffle winners! Saturday's winner, our very own docent Jack Levenberg, won the exquisitely quilted "Quillo" (a quilt that folds into a pillow) handcrafted by our fabulously talented docent, Annette Uthe. Thank you Annette for a beautifully crafted work of art!! And Sunday's winner, patron Matt Mare, won the Winter Wonderland candleholder, expertly designed and decorated by Traci Stockhausen-White.

Linda Ioerger, Rick Brammer, and Marietta Ewing, a few of our animal handlers, took advantage of a shot of sunshine here and there and displayed some of our treasured raptors, along with Buddy the Raven, so the guests could get a close-up look, and a little history, of just a few of the animals that are supported by their donations.

We would like to thank Deanne Cattermole for making the snowman kits, and also for maintaining the wax pots for candle dipping. A special thanks to Santa Claus for coming from the north during such a busy time of year to greet the children and offer them candy canes... a job that was very well done! And to an unidentified Elf who found the wonderful background Holiday Carols. Our beloved Millie Bonazolli ran our kitchen for the volunteer's lunches, always bringing cheer and keeping us fed with Heidi's delicious food creations! And I personally want to thank my BEST FRIEND Shirley Morano who manned the phones -- ALL day -- BOTH days, so the county staff and our volunteers could tend to the event (... and Shirley, thanks for watching my glass of water to keep Chris S. from hiding it! At least he didn't put it in the Rattlesnake enclosure). Paula Parr and Richard Norton generously dedicated themselves to handling the Gift Shop during both days of the event. Sue and Bill Sutton were busy little Elves collecting money and supervising the pinecone birdfeeders, amongst other things -- You guys are awesome. And Sue Wallander who bravely manned all of the greenery on the back patio did a fantastic job of keeping everything organized and recycled!

My personal "Thanks" goes out to Bill and Heidi Webber, Fred Seeley, and Teresa Jacobs, who gave me the support and "low-down" of the mechanics that helped me keep things in perspective. And also to the staff of the L.A. County Parks and Recreation department at Placerita Canyon Nature Center -- We couldn't do anything without you!! So THANK YOU to all of my Elves (you know who you are even if I haven't mentioned you by name), Santa, the county staff, docents and volunteers and to all of the visitors who so generously gave their donations! You all made my job non-existent!

From a Novice to a Chairman, here's what I learned: By contributing to the annual Holiday Craft Faire at Placerita Canyon Nature Center, the animals will continue to be supported, fed, maintained and cared for, through the efforts of the PCNCA docents and volunteers, the L.A. County Parks and Recreation staff, all of which would not be possible without the generous donations of our visitors. With your help and support, we will continue to provide both current and future generations with the education and awareness of Placerita Canyon's history and its precious ecosystem.

Wishing you a very Happy Holiday!!

Mari Carbajal, Chairman of the 2013 Holiday Craft Faire Event



The Head Elf, Pretending to be Rudolph





A very imaginative and tasty dish: Candy Sushi made by Brian Miller

Holiday Pot Luck Dinner

On December 14, one week after a very successful Holiday Crafts Fair, the docents got together for a fun evening of socializing, sharing dinner and remembrance of good times at the Nature Center while looking forward to exciting events in the future. Thanks to the efforts of Russ Kimura and Chris Mowry, we were also able to serve wine although no one took this to excess as all were responsible docents for the Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

Evelyne Vandersande, usually a stalwart at this affair running around with her camera

had to delegate that responsibility to others while she showed off the latest in holiday fashions, a red fiberglass cast on her arm, the color most appropriate for the season.

Mari Carbajal received special recognition for the herculean effort that she has expended on behalf of the Nature Center since completing her docent training with the 2013 Class. She has become the Recording Secretary for the PCNCA Board of Directors, she is a regular in helping to lead visiting school children on hikes and other activities, she chaired the recent Craft Fair which was the most successful ever in helping the Center to raise money to support our animal residents and she has taken on an active role in putting out the bimonthly Nature Center newsletter – The Rattler.

It was announced, with a degree of sadness, of the loss of Pam Koch to the Nature Center in that she and her husband are moving to Arizona in early 2014. Pam has been a major force not only at Placerita but in the L.A. County Nature Center Association where she had been Vice President of the NCA Board of Directors resigning earlier this year in anticipation of her move. We all wish her well and continued success. We are sure that she will find a nature center near her new home that will certainly benefit from her knowledge, talent and enthusiasm.

Also a special toast was given to Paul Levine and his fiancé Susan who first met at the Nature Center in December 2012 and will be married in August 2014. Paul also received the newly created President's Award from the Nature Center for his contributions to the activities of the Center over this past year. Fittingly, it was a mounted butterfly as he is also known as Dr. Monarch however it was a Morpho species (the large brilliant blue iridescent butterflies found throughout Central America extending into the Amazon region of South America) from Costa Rica and is not native to Santa Clarita.



Evelyne showing off her stylish cast while talking with Jim Crowley.

The food is all provided by the docents. Some was purchased while other docents, particularly those with culinary talents, demonstrated their skills and love for the Center by creating very unique and always delicious contributions. One dessert was crafted in the shape of a fish surrounded by sushi.

All in all, it was a great evening with a wonderful group of people. For anyone

interested in nature, in getting to know a large number of individuals who enjoy working with others and appreciate the environment around us, please become active as either a volunteer or docent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. The 2014 Docent training class begins in January and if you cannot make that, then volunteer and in future years, participate in a subsequent class and become a docent.



Mari Carbajal showing the book on Birds that she was given by Jim Southwell on behalf of the PCNCA.



A gift to Butterfly Guy Paul A. Levine from the Associates.



Do You Smell That ?



We are extremely pleased to let you know that the County has installed a nature-education panel next to the oil seep on the canyon trail. Also a puncheon (a sort of boardwalk made out of wood) was built over the trail so that the oil seep can trickle underneath.

This is a clear oil seep and there is only one in the US. This very rare geological feature of translucent petroleum has been filtered by nature. We are happy that our visitors walking along the trail will have a chance to educate themselves about one of the treasures of Placerita.



Nature Education Program

We had a presentation made by Wolf Totem Ambassadors who came to Placerita with 2 males wolves. The presentation was very successful and more than 150 people came to the center to see them. We went to the amphitheater outside to be able to accommodate the crowd and it was a very interesting presentation. Lise Meyers came and this is what she learned:

They are shy. You don't usually see them, but they see you. They are an important part of the ecological system. What they kill feeds many other animals besides them. They also take out sick animals, therefore inhibiting the spread of disease among herds of animals they eat. In captivity, they eat a vast variety of foods they would not eat in the wild. This group feeds their animals every day. In the wild, they would eat perhaps twice weekly. These wolves are wolf dogs. High percentage wolf, small percentage dog, and are often bred with Huskies, Malamutes, German Shepherds and other breeds of dogs that would have similar traits as wolves. Whew - this is only a small amount of the information that was given. It was quite interesting. Oh, and P.S., it is extremely rare for a wolf to attack a human - and as one child asked, they DO NOT eat humans!

A Trip with Lanita Algeyer

A large group came with Lanita to visit the animal farm at Hart Park and the Mansion. It was really nice to get much information from Rachael Komulainen who left Placerita to be in charge of the animal care at Hart Park and who could give us a special tour of the animal facility. For many

docents it was their first time at the park and they were very surprised and delighted by their visit to the Hart Mansion, they did not expect so much history so close by.



The European (Common) Starling

By Bob Fischer



In early November Rosemarie and Don were driving along Newhall Ranch Road in the late afternoon and to their amazement saw a phenomenon known as a murmuration over the river. What is a murmuration? It's a swirling, swooping, mass cloud of starlings as they gather to roost for the night. I have never seen it, only videos of it found easily on the internet. It consists of thousands of birds, maybe tens of thousands. We see only a few starlings in Placerita Canyon, usually small flocks, and Starlings were seen on the last bird walk here in Placerita in November. I have seen flocks of a dozen or less on my morning walks in Friendly Valley.

Starlings are native to the Old World, from Europe, Asia, Africa to Australia. There are over 50 species of Starlings Many of which are brilliantly colored. Starlings are small to medium-sized passerine birds in the family Sturnidae. Many Asian species, particularly the larger ones, are called mynas, and many African species are known as glossy starlings because of their iridescent plumage. The Common Starling from Europe has been introduced to North America, where they generally compete for habitat with native birds and are considered to be an invasive species. The starling species familiar to most people in Europe and North America is the Common Starling. The Starlings we see in Placerita Canyon are about the size of a Robin with a short tail.

Starlings have strong feet, their flight is strong and direct, and they are very gregarious. Their preferred habitat is fairly open country and they are found throughout North America. They are omnivorous eating mainly insects and fruit. Plumage of many species is typically dark with a metallic sheen. The Common Starling nests in holes thus competing with our native cavity nesters.

Starlings have diverse and complex vocalizations, and have been known to embed sounds from their surroundings into their own calls, including car alarms and human speech patterns. The birds can recognize particular individuals by their calls, and are currently the subject of research into the evolution of human language.

The plumage of the starlings is often brightly colored due to iridescence; this color is derived from the structure of the feathers, not from any pigment. Some species of Asian starling have crests or erectile feathers on the crest. Other ornamentation includes elongated tail feathers and brightly colored bare areas on the face.



The European (Common) Starling was purposefully introduced to North America in 1890–1891 by the American Acclimatization Society, an organization dedicated to introducing European flora and fauna into North America for cultural and economic reasons. Eugene Schieffelin, chairman at the time, allegedly decided all birds mentioned by Shakespeare should be introduced including the

European Starling. It took several tries, with birds being released in Central Park in New York, but eventually the population took off. Today, more than 200 million European Starlings range from Alaska to Mexico, and many people, especially farmers, consider them pests. The starlings are generally a highly social family. Most species associate in flocks of varying sizes throughout the year. This sociality is particularly evident in their murmuration and roosting behavior; in the non-breeding season some roosts can number in the thousands of birds



Starlings imitate a variety of avian species and have a repertoire of about 15–20 distinct imitations. They also imitate a few sounds other than those of wild birds. Starlings have also been known to imitate other, man-made environmental sounds, such as phone boxes and cars.

Starlings lay 3 to 6 blue or blue white eggs and are sometimes parasitic laying eggs in other Starlings nests.

On the Road with the Rattler



Start of Ron's Hike Nov 30. With Charitha Eragoda, Maria Elena Christianson, Helen Walker and Dan Kott



Later in Ron's Hike Nov 30. Note: This hike was in part for Ron to do another video masterpiece.



Dan Kott took the Rattler last summer to Circle, AK at the Yukon River.



The whole gang went to Switzer falls and took the Rattler with them.



Paul was walking as a member of Olive View UCLA Medical Center, specifically the Cardiology team called Hearts and Soles. and he took the Rattler with him.



Sue and Allan Wallander took the Rattler to the Hollywood bowl.



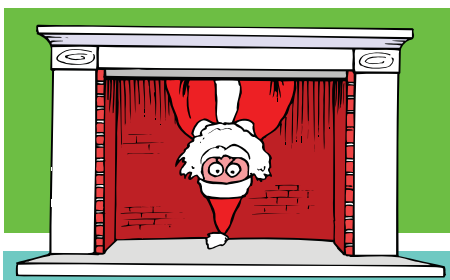
Larry and Nancy Nikolai, parents of our well-loved Jessica, took the Rattler to Uluru (Ayers Rock) at the Red Centre of Australia.



Susan and Paul took the Rattler to the Al Hirschberg Theater to see Kinky Boots, the 2013 Tony-award winning musical.



Mike Elling visited Valley of Fire State Park in Nevada (55 miles north east of Vegas). Saw amazing rock formations and petroglyphs!



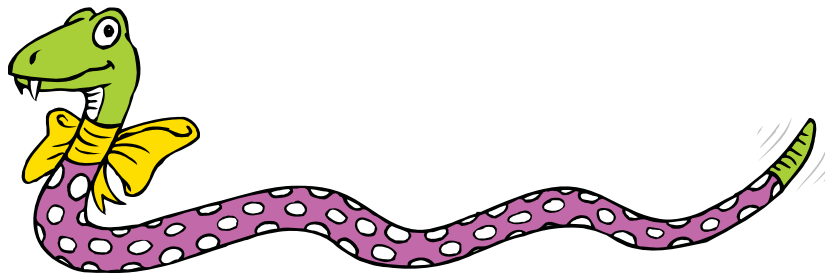


What Michael Elling did on his Vacation with the Rattler

After we left Nevada we headed south to Arizona. There we found the Hassayampa River Preserve near Wickenburg. Beautiful natural riparian area, teeming with birds, insects and a few cows. Nice, well-maintained trail system, too. It is situated on the site of one of the first dude ranches established in Arizona. Lots of palm trees were planted and thrived alongside the mesquite and other native flora. Also, there was a U.S. Navy ship (oiler/supply) named Hassayampa in commission during the Viet Nam war.

On the way to see my family in Tucson, we stopped at Biosphere 2 (named after Biosphere 1 - planet Earth) near Oracle, Az. It was established in the 1980's to find out what it would take to colonize another planet. Most people remember it as a failure but they learned a lot of things that could be used in future space colonization. It is now operated by the University of Arizona as a living laboratory where many scientific experiments are performed.

How could one go to Southern Arizona and not stop at Kartchner Caverns, one of the finest examples of underground geologic formations anywhere. The stalactites and stalagmites are fantastic! It is well preserved, open to everyone and kept as natural as possible. Much monitoring and many experiments are constantly performed to maintain the pristine environment and observe man's effects on the cave system. It was only discovered in 1974 and kept secret for 14 years! It was never exposed to harsh usage by humans.



Thank you, Placerita Canyon

Paul A. Levine

This is a very personal and very happy story that also happens to be true. I was happily married for 40 year and would still be happily married if my wife had not died unexpectedly now a little more than 3 years ago. For the first year, I functioned but was often in a fog. My wife had, some 10+ years previously, encouraged me to return to an original "love" – namely being in the field and photographing butterflies because some day, I might want to retire and I would need something to do. She was right. In doing so, via a convoluted series of events, I met people who, about a year after she passed, put me in contact with the team at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. I had always loved nature and being outdoors. I participated in the Docent Training Program and in March

2012, graduated as a Docent-Naturalist at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. Life was definitely looking better. I enjoyed interacting with the other docents and staff, I enjoyed working with the visitors and particularly the school children, I even enjoyed just being outside again photographing nature and boring anyone who would listen showing them my butterfly and other buggy pictures. But Placerita Canyon was yet to give me even more.

In December 2012, I was asked to give a presentation on Butterflies of Southern California on a Sunday, the presentation open to anyone who was interested as is the current monthly Community Nature Series sponsored by the Park, the PCNC Associates and the Community Hiking Club. I had hoped that I might meet someone at Placerita Canyon who shared my interests and indeed, I met many wonderful people but not that special someone. One of the other docents (thanks, Andrea), brought a friend and introduced us after the presentation. Susan was not into hiking in the fields nor did she get all excited about spiders, bugs and other creepy-crawlies although walks are nice and I have since gotten her on to the Canyon Trail wearing our very special hand-painted butterfly T shirts.

On October 31, Susan and I went to NY City to attend a couple Broadway shows. On the flight to NYC, I proposed and she accepted. So Thank You Placerita Canyon for giving me back happiness on many levels and making my life meaningful again.



The Audio Tour

The Canyon Trail audio tour has been updated by Jess Nikolai and was uploaded by Ron Kraus. You can stream it or download it here: http://placerita.podomatic.com/entry/2013-10-27T16_19_58-07_00

You can take your phone to Placerita and follow the explanation as you stop in front of the different stations along the Canyon Trail.

Technology is always helpful and we want again to thank Jessica for all the work she put in this project. Her voice is clear and upbeat, her comments are knowledgeable and we recognize and enjoy even her small giggle at the end. This information is so interesting and our visitors will enjoy knowing more about the Canyon Trail. Thank you again Jessica Nikolai for bringing this project to completion.



Docent In-service

Two training sessions were held in the fall to review the information given by the docents on the trails. It is always useful to do this from time to time so that all the docents feel prepared to take the school children on the trails.

The topics that need to be addressed on the trail were sent to all, plant and animal facts where brushed up



on by Ron Kraus, who took the large group on the trails to have hands-on experience.

The second session was to get reacquainted with the rules of animal handling so that all the docents felt confident to show the animals in the safest way and without any stress for the animal or the participants.

Fall is well under way, schools are coming on a regular basis to Placerita and we are all ready to welcome them.



Pinch Points and Split-rail Fencing

Last spring, after a petition presented by mountain bikers and much work done on the trail to accommodate their need, the Canyon trail was open to the mountain bikers. The many pinch points that were established to control their speed proved to be a life saver.

The experience was very positive and few accidents were reported until.....a dark day indeed! 11 pinch points were vandalized, the large rocks were pushed into the canyon and mountain bikers started to use the Canyon trail full speed. Many hikers were upset, scared and voiced their displeasure on Facebook.

The news reached county officials who decided to act very quickly, understanding that this was a safety hazard for the trail users. A meeting was held between the Trail supervisor, Ralph Beltran and the Superintendent Russ Kimura to determine the best approach to repair the pinch points and to prevent additional vandalism. On October 31st, the crew quickly began re-establishing the pinch points by positioning split-rail fencing at strategic locations on the trail to slow any high speed traffic.

On November 6th, Dwight La Croix, facilities Operations and Crafts manager for Parks and Recreation visited the site to evaluate the crew progress and was very pleased to see the pinch point modifications were already completed. He mentioned that he spoke with some hikers at that time who thanked him for the quick action from the county to bring back safety on the trail. Even the bikers seem to be content with the split rail fencing which is more effective than the boulders were.

The mountain bikers appreciate the opportunity to be on the mountain trail and they did not like that the actions of a few vandals would damage their reputation. Most of the time, their behavior has been respectful and careful and they resented those few bad apples. However, the vandals are out there.

I want to make very clear that all incidents should be reported to the Nature Center. If you see any suspicious or dangerous situations, please report it to Russ Kimura, Park Superintendent at Placerita 661-279-7721. You can also report problems using the form linked: <http://www.placerita.org/documents/TrailIncidentReportcopy.pdf> Completed forms can be returned to the park office or emailed to Russ at rkimura@parks.lacounty.gov

The effectiveness of the pinch points need to be monitored, and it is important to keep a close watch on the trail to make sure that the pinch points are working smoothly, that the hiking experience is pleasant and safe and that our hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians can co-exist on the trail in harmony.



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 7th, 2014
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 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: info@placerita.org

Where do Frogs go in the Winter?

This fall has been so warm, I long for some rain. I'd love to see a flowing stream at Placerita, and that made me think about the frogs. Where do they go in the winter? What happens to them when we have such dry weather for so long?

This year, no water in the stream meant that the frogs were not reproducing, so no tadpoles were growing, and we lost one frog generation. Sometimes, it is good to pause for a minute and to observe what is going on around us and see, really see, what is happening. Fall will always happen, the trees will lose their leaves, and the temperature will get colder. However, there are some events that do not always happen the same way each year. We have many acorns this year, and it might not be the same next year. We are in a drought period and the stream did not flow through the creek. In 27 years at Placerita, this was the first time I saw the stream totally dry. However, there was some water at the waterfall and in the small pond, so a few frogs were able to reproduce. The Santa Clara River had some moisture in its bed in different locations so tadpoles could grow in Valencia and Fillmore. Where do frogs go in the winter? They bury themselves in the humus and leaf debris. Their tissues and body fluids are protected from freezing by glycerol, a type of alcohol made in the frogs' cells.

The mating season can start as early as January and strangely enough the sound of heavy rain is like the marching drum to let them know it is time to look for a partner. Some experiments were done where the noise of heavy rain and the drumming vibration were reproduced, and the frogs went into mating behavior. That was done in an enclosed facility where the temperature was controlled.

Outdoor, even a heavy winter rain is not going to have the same result because though they need some water to mate, they also need warmer temperatures. They remain dormant when the temperature is below 50F. Above this temperature, they emerge and look for water. They prefer warm water and will lay their eggs if the water temperature is from just above 50F to 60F. They cannot even call for a mate when their body temperature falls under 50F or rises above 70F.

This all seems to indicate that we will have to wait until spring is well on its way to hear mating frog calls.

The whole mating process is rather fascinating: Our Pacific tree frog is part of a larger group called chorus frogs, they are quite social and use calls to attract a mate. If an intruder is seen, they will stop calling but start again as soon as the coast is clear. Vibrations, loud noises and thrown objects do not interrupt the chorusing. During the breeding season, males are territorial and will produce a different call to warn another male to leave the area; it is a single croak "bit" as opposed to "rib bit." Sometimes, the males have calling fights doing those warning calls, while the female walks to another male because they are not attracted to macho fighting...well, not quite like that but the warning call is not interesting to them. They also like males with a darker throat color. All that puffing of the skin creates lots of friction, which causes it to get darker because when calling for a female, the male extends its vocal pouch on its lower jaw like a balloon. This species is polygynous which means that males have multiple partners.

The females just need to be fertilized by one male to protect the species and have eggs.

The high pitch "rib bit" from the courting male is the typical noise chosen by Hollywood to describe "woods at night". It is nice to know that they are the most common frog in the United States, west of the Rocky Mountains, but a movie happening on the East coast should not include their calls. Go tell that to the producers!

I guess we will have to wait until the temperature gets a little warmer for this chorus to be heard. But I sure hope the rain, heavy sheets of rain, will be something we hear very soon and the stream will be filled up again for our friend the frogs.





Meet Dave Stives (and Apollo)

Dave Stives is an “animal whisperer” at Placerita, a rare and incredible human being who knows how to handle and care for any wildlife, especially if it is injured and needs help.

He has a special sense of the need that an animal has, even without seeing it directly. He seems to know in advance what its reactions will be and how one should approach it, and he never fails. I have deep appreciation and admiration for him. Many times after I asked a question on the phone, I hang up and say softly. “Dave you are a god!”

I had the opportunity to talk with him about this, and would like to share some of what I learned with him.

How did you develop this ability, Dave?

I was born in Pennsylvania, in the small town of Bradford, known for making Zippo lighters. I grew up on a farm, with horses, cows and chickens. We were also surrounded with woods, where I would escape as soon as I was free. The closest house was three miles away, so there were no other kids to play with. I caught every creature you can imagine, and learned how to care for them if they were injured.

My twin brother and I got into lots of mischief. We found a bear cub that we raised and a deer named Peanuts that we kept for many years. I had my first hawk when I was 8 years old. My dad and uncle raised red-tailed hawks, and I learned from their experiences. I was absorbing everything I saw and learning along the way. My whole family was involved with animal rescue, starting with my grandmother. I learned the ability to care for animals by being around them all the time and observing them. My education was hands-on, and it was an easy decision to start to do rehab for different veterinarians.

I became a plumber to be able to support myself, but I have always had animals at home, often hawks and snakes. On the East Coast, we all had hawks to hunt but certifications did not exist. When I came to the West Coast, it was the beginning of licensing, and I became a master falconer. You have to study the written material then you take a test with Fish and Game. If you succeed, you get a permit to trap the bird.

I trapped my first bird, a red-tailed hawk, in Palmdale. It has to be a young passage bird with its first plumage. Mine was female, about 6 months old. The bird needed to be trained every day and released to hunt wild game.

How did you come to Placerita for the first time?

I had to do some plumbing work there, and I saw the way they were handling the hawks and the equipment, and I thought, *Maybe one day, I could make a difference here.* Meanwhile I started to work at Vasquez Rocks for two years and Hart Park for eight years as an animal keeper. It took a few years, but I finally got the job at Placerita 15 years ago, and now I am in charge of animal care for seven parks.

I travel from one facility to the next, making sure all are in compliance with state and federal laws governing everything from the diet of the animal to their educational use including permits, handling, housing and first aid. This is all my responsibility as the Park Animal Keeper.

How do we get the animals for the parks?

I work with wildlife animal rehabilitators. If some wildlife cannot be released, they will be euthanized except if they can be placed in a park for animal educational purposes, where they will be properly cared for.

What do you like about your job?

Working with animals is always interesting.

What do you not like about your job?

I sometimes have problems understanding people when it comes to their ideas about animals.

You are really an animal whisperer. You know how to approach every animal and have them trust you. How is that possible?

It comes down to how you hold yourself. I learned that as a kid, you have to watch for this non-verbal language. That is how you learn to communicate with animals – the way you hold your posture, the way you look at the animal. They recognize and react to those cues, and it is different with each species of animal. So you have to be close to them and observe their behavior.

I get many calls for assistance from Animal Control, county and city parks (departments) and animal rehabilitators when they have a problem. Injured wildlife is a liability, so you have to remove the animal safely and in the best way possible.

I also have a personal life. I have been married for 28 years. I have two daughters and just celebrated the arrival of my first grandchild, Joslin. I also have two dogs, five chickens and three hawks that I train every day. I like country music, and I am a meat- and potatoes kind of guy.

I keep my rabies shot very up-to-date, and they know me on a first-name basis at the hospital because I have been bitten by rattlesnakes 14 times. In the 1980s I brought many rattlers to a college research program so they could extract the venom. They would pay me back by giving me rats to feed my hawks. It was a good deal and we all benefitted from this partnership.

I have rescued any animal that you can think of, and even some that seem dangerous. The baby bear rescue was easy. Baby bears are taught by the parents to climb in a tree if there is danger and to stay there until the parent comes back. But this time, the parent did not come back. The baby bear was on top of a tree on a golf course, and people were starting to feed him sandwiches. That was not good. The baby was small, so we used a catch-pole to lift him out of the tree, and it was sent to Lake Tahoe to a bear rehabilitating facility.

The bobcat rescue was not as easy. It was caught in a live trap. I had to get him out of the trap to put him into a crate. I used a catchpole



to do that, but there was a certain amount of screeching involved – some was mine – and he was not a happy camper.

The story of Dave and Apollo is well known and loved in Placerita. Apollo is a Turkey vulture that had been hit by a vehicle in Virginia. A tendon in Apollo's wing had been damaged, bringing her flying days to an end. Apollo was shipped west for treatment at a private facility in the Antelope Valley, where Dave helped with her care and training.

Two years later, when the private facility went under, Apollo was moved to Placerita where she was reunited with Dave. It was love at second sight.

“She remembered me and trusted me, and she still follows me like a puppy dog,” Dave said of the black-feathered, red-headed vulture. “She has a serious crush on me. She works herself into a hormonal tizzy when I am near her enclosure during mating season. The rest of the year, she spins in circles and flaunts her tale doing a courtship dance.”

As you can guess, Apollo was misnamed and it was found much later that she was a female.

Why do you do this job, Dave?

To me that is part of my every day goal: to rescue wildlife and to put it back into the wild. We always have to try to rescue a wounded animal. You can never give up. If you save one animal that can breed next year, then you have done your job. They spend their life trying to survive to be able to reproduce and keep their species alive. We are not playing God; we are just trying to help them along so they can accomplish their mission.

I hope there still are children living close to the woods who are in the process of learning all that Dave did as a youngster.

Dave was a precious asset to Placerita but has recently been transferred to Vasquez Rocks to our great sorrow. He still stops in on business and a visit to Apollo and we are grateful for the lives he saves and for sharing his gifts with us.



Happy New Year



Who is Eating Whom on the Food Web?

Janet Kubler gave a very interesting presentation in October as a part of the new educational programs that are taking place once a month at Placerita on Sunday afternoon. Please check the catalogue of events to see the topics being covered in the next few months (placerita.org)

Janet is a docent volunteer at Placerita Canyon Nature Center and a Biology professor at California State University of Northridge. She helped us by doing an exploration of the fascinating relationships in the Placerita ecosystems.

We saw skulls of different animals to better understand how they can eat the food they do and how their digestive systems operate. We looked at different pelts and went into more depth about food needed for the future generations and how the interaction between animals and food supplies occur.

Janet is also one of the teachers who come to do one of the classes during docent training. Her classes are always very well attended with standing room only. We are very lucky to have such a wonderful teacher with so much enthusiasm and knowledge. She always gives clear and simple answers to all questions and is another one of those treasures at Placerita. Thank you Janet.

Frank R. Walker
1923-2013

Born May 26, 1923 to Frank E. Walker and Hortence V. Reynier Walker. He grew up on the family ranch in Placerita Canyon. He worked with his brothers and father mining gold in Placerita Canyon and mining clay in Sand Canyon.

Frank was inducted into the army in 1943. He was assigned to the 273rd Field Artillery Battalion and was deployed to Liverpool England in July 9th, 1944. His artillery battalion arrived at Utah Beach on August 27th, 1944 (Normandy France). They joined and fought with General George Patton's Third Army. They entered combat on September 5th, 1944, firing their first rounds. On November 8th, 1944, the 273rd directly supported the mighty winter offensive of the Third U.S. Army. On December 21st, 1944, the 273rd began movement with the Third Army to Luxembourg to attack the flank of the German offensive (Battle of the Bulge). On March 2nd, 1945, they crossed the German border and proceeded to their new position at Welschbilig, Germany. They crossed the Rhine River on March 24th, 1945 and went into position at Wallerstaden. They fired their last round on April 13th, 1945 at Lichtentanne.

After the war was over, Frank was transferred to the United States and was stationed at March Field, California. It was here that he met his future wife, Jackie Peckels in 1946. They married on October 3rd, 1946 at Colton, California. After he was discharged from the military, they moved to Sand Canyon and started their family. They had three children together, Teri, Bob and Lori. Frank and his brother Tom with the help of their father, Frank Sr. (Papa) started a grading business. They built many of the home sites in the area.

Frank and Jackie lived and built four homes in the Canyon until they moved to Oregon in 1971. They bought a motel and cafe in Chiloquin, Oregon and worked and lived there for many years. In 1996 they decided to move to the Oregon coast and live in Brookings, Oregon. They lived there until around 2007 when they decided to move to Winnemucca, Nevada to be closer to their daughter, Lori. In 2010, their son, Bob and daughter in law, Carrie built them a home on their property in Ojai, California. Frank enjoyed his time here playing with the dogs that he loved and soaking up the sun on his front porch. That came to a sudden end when he became ill and passed away from natural causes on Friday October the 18th, 2013. He is survived by his brother Richard Walker his sister Melba Fisher, his wife Jackie, his children Teri, Lori and Bob five grandchildren and four great grandchildren. He was well liked and loved and will be missed by his family and friends.



The Rattler

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213



*"We exist so children
and oaks
can grow together."*

NATURE CENTER ASSOCIATES OF
LOS ANGELES COUNTY