



# 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.*

**March/April 2012**

#### **Hello Dear Nature Friends,**

Spring is coming, this winter was very mild and we are still wishing for some rain in March as we did not get as much as we would like. However there is water up the stream and everywhere tender new grass is poking through. This morning two Western bluebirds were perched next to the cabin and in a flash; I realized that the courtship season has started. Soon, we are going to see birds flying with twigs in their beak, working on their nest. It is so comforting to be able to expect these events every year, but it is still with wonder that suddenly we notice all those buds on the branches or hear those baby birds calling to be fed. Come and take a walk on the trails, smell all those scents in the cool morning and enjoy your first hint of spring discovery.

#### **NCA Docent and Volunteer Recognition Ceremony**

This is the official recognition ceremony for docents and volunteers from the various Los Angeles County Nature Centers.

The Nature Center Associates of Los Angeles County invite you to an award and recognition ceremony and continental breakfast on Saturday, April 28, 2012 at Eaton Canyon Nature Center from 9:30 to 11:30 am. Casual dress, ties are optional.

The event is sponsored by NCA; the nature center boards; and the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, Natural Areas.

You will get a personal invitation in the mail and will be asked to RSVP in a timely manner, please, so we have a generous amount of breakfast available to start your day. Your invitation will include an insert if you are to receive personal recognition.

If you are from this year's new class of docents or are getting a special award do not miss this lovely ceremony and please bring your family to share in the honor of your day. It will also give you the opportunity to meet the members from the other Nature Centers and management from the Dept. of Parks and Recreation.

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**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.**



Photo by Collette Lash

### Trails at Placerita

We have many trails at Placerita, some are short and some are more demanding. If you want a list, please go to [Placerita.org](http://Placerita.org) where you will find a more complete description for each so you can make a choice for your next hike.

One trail that is very popular is the Canyon trail, which follows the stream bed and offers different points of view of the canyon, the rocks, the plants and of course, the stream which always brings flowers and birds. It is a lovely place to go on a warm or cool day and there is always so much to see.

It is a two-mile long trail from the main trailhead and it follows the Placerita creek upstream to Walker Ranch. It is rugged in places and traverses the creek bed at several locations. It also has a natural oil seep where you can observe “white oil” bubbling up out of the ground. Poison Oak is very common in the canyon so stay on the trail! Allow about one hour and a half for the hike from the main trailhead to Walker Ranch and back. Do not rush too much and take time to look around you. When the weather warms up a little, look for tadpoles in quiet little pools of water.



### 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:evelynvandersande@gmail.com). Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

Visit our Internet site at [www.placerita.org](http://www.placerita.org)--Ron Kraus is the webmaster.

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

### Board Members

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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

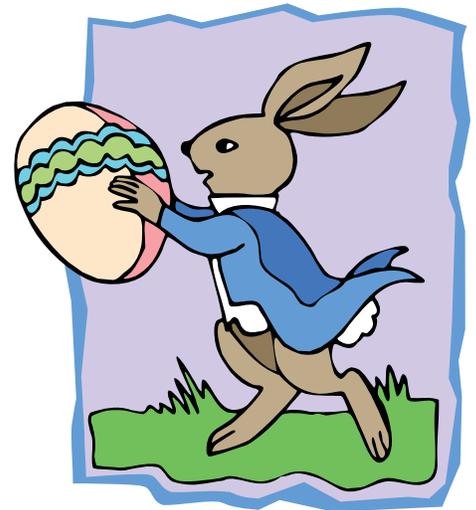
Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, has designated an ADA Coordinator to carry out this Department's compliance with the non-discriminatory provisions of the ADA.. For more information you may contact the ADA Coordinator's 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
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- 

Your tax-deductible donations are needed to help fund programs provided by volunteers.  
Send your donation to:

PCNCA  
19152 Placerita Canyon Road  
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**A trip with Jack Levenberg and Fred Seeley**



PCNC Docents recently took a trip up to Goleta to view the Monarch Butterflies. We met at PCNC at 9:45am Feb 3 and car-pooled up the coast. We were joined by two new Docents-to-be Silva and Lanita. Upon arriving at the preserve we were greeted by many butterflies so we knew we had arrived at the right spot. After walking a short distance to the preserve we could observe the butterflies en mass, many in the Eucalyptus trees and many on the ground especially on the wet mud. It was a perfect day to view the butterflies as they were very active. After the viewing we left for lunch in Ventura and then back to Placerita.

## 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](http://communityhikingclub.org)

**For more information, please call 661.259.7721 or visit our website at [Placerita.org](http://Placerita.org).**

## Docent Training 2012

This class is breaking all records because it started with 31 students. For the first time this year, we are also training the future docents for Vasquez Rocks who do not have an official docent training class. They will learn the basics at Placerita Canyon Nature Center, and then will have a few classes at Vasquez Rocks to go into more detail about the plants, animal, geological events specific to their area. We are delighted to welcome them and wish them good luck.

The students have been told their responsibilities: they will have to attend all the classes during the docent training. If they cannot be there for one class, they will have to watch and learn from the DVD. All our classes have been registered so all the information is available at all time. They have been shown where the library is so that they can have access to all the material at hand. They know that they will have to write a report about a topic of their choice but it has to be pertinent to our natural area at Placerita. They understand that they will have to audit 3 trails with different docents to be able to gather enough information to be able to be on the trail on their own and to develop their personal style. An exam will be taken at the end of the training and those notes will need to be studied and reviewed. A graduation ceremony will be held on Saturday March 31 followed by a dinner where the spouse and families are very much welcomed. Each student who has completed all those requirements will receive a diploma, their name tag and will become a docent for Placerita Canyon Nature Center or Vasquez Rocks. The new docents have been introduced to the County Staff. They know that they will have to comply with all rules and regulations, policies and procedures from the County of LA, department of Parks and Recreation.

We are all very impressed by their commitment, their enthusiasm and their desire to learn. We are also very pleased because the level of instruction they are getting is college-level degree and they will also have many hands on experiences which makes it a very complete and interesting program. We are ready to make the class of 2012 a very positive learning experience for all.

## Class of 2012

These students have been attending classes, learning and showing great interest. Many of them still have to audit the trails, do their report and pass the examination.

We are very impressed with their dedication and wish them well. It is the very largest class that we have ever had. For the first time, we are also very pleased to welcome a few students who are training to become docents at Vasquez Rock and are following the training at Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

We want to celebrate their accomplishment so we will have a graduation party on Saturday March 31 at 6pm at the Center. It will be a pot luck dinner so we will ask you to bring a dish to feed a crowd! The docents will provide drinks, paper goods and utensils.

Let's have a good time together and celebrate our new class of 2012!

Lanita	Algeyer		
Marlena	Balvin	Lora	Owens
Sarah	Brewer	Scott	Pascoe
Heidi	Crook	Cathy	Peatross
Jim	DeLill	Kathleen	Ritner
Andrea	Donner	Pedra	Sage
Michael	Elling	Leah	Schulman
Marietta	Ewing	Laura	Skorich
Vi	Godwin-Tipton	Lisa	Smith
Robert	Grzesiak	Veronica	Solache
Jim	Harris	Sharon	Sorensen
Irene	Heerlein	Lorraine	Stewart
Doug	Holm	Marnye	Summers
Paul	Levine	William	Sutton
Lisa	Merkord	Ethan	Tratner
Bryan	Miller	Denny	Truger
Dolores	Olson		



## Vicki Cunningham

I grew up in beautiful Marin county, which surely started me on the path to nature-philia.

My father has always loved to share the unusual or the beautiful. In my childhood, he terrorized my mother by pointing out various flora and fauna along the roadsides as he drove, bringing home assorted animal strays, and planting odd things in unorthodox locations. My mother had a tenuous relationship with hands-on nature, but was fascinated by the science behind it. When an errant steelhead came gasping up the tiny creek in our backyard, Dad let us thoroughly examine its fishy glory, while Mom helped us find an encyclopedia article on trout life cycles. It was the perfect combination to nurture a Nature appreciation.

I graduated from San Rafael High School and earned a BS in Food Science from BYU...and a Naturalist certificate from Placerita Nature Center.

I had the typical pre-degree work experience with lifeguarding, food service and janitor-ing. As a Food Scientist, I started my career in Quality Assurance, monitoring the insect count in dried potatoes. Later, I moved into my specialty of Research and Development, working in the lab and in market evaluation. When my kids began arriving, I became a professional mother and eager volunteer.

My five kids and husband are the best thing about me. My supportive husband monitors polar ice from JPL, while the kids are spread across the country from Florida to the single chick left in our Canyon Country nest.

I came first to Placerita shortly after I moved to Southern California upon hearing about the waterfall trail. The Ceanothus, (which I could not identify), were brilliantly blooming and I was hooked on the place. In subsequent years, I came back with my little children and with my cub scouts. I came as a school group chaperone, as a scout project worker, and as a post-fire-clean-up volunteer.

I am a volunteer naturalist docent. It was exciting to make my relationship with the park official through the docent program.

There is a lot to like about working at Placerita. I love the geology, the plants, the animals and the history. I love the interesting people who radiate their enthusiasm for nature. Mostly, I love the chance to share the excitement of discovery with the kids, to try to plant an ember of environmental respect in the next generation.



These photos were taken during the Health and Wellness event planned by the county for the second year in a row to promote fitness for their employees. Taking a walk on the many trails at Placerita served the purpose well, in a pleasant environment.

We were very much honored to have the visit from L.A. Co. Park Deputy Director Hayden Sohm

who came to the event.

When upper management attends park special events, it allows them to work hand in hand with docent volunteers and be supportive of park activities. He enjoyed the snake presentation done by volunteers Jennifer Ball and Georgia Sears. The L.A. Co. Mosquito and Vector Education Mobile Lab staff were so impressed with the event that they offered to set up the mobile lab at upcoming special events at Placerita during 2012.

Thank you so much, Hayden Sohm for coming to Placerita. We understand that your high-level position does not leave you much free time so we really appreciate when you come to the park to participate in our activities.





## All About Juncos by Bob Fischer



When I came to the Nature Center on January 17th to have my I.D. photo taken, I was one of the earliest visitors to the Center. Parking along the road approaching the Center was nearly empty. The ground where cars park

seemed almost to be moving. Looking closely I could see hundreds of small birds pecking at the ground. Looking more closely I saw that nearly all were Juncos. They were feeding on the acorns mashed by cars usually parking along the road. If you visit Placerita Canyon Park anytime during the colder months it's almost impossible to miss seeing Juncos on the ground feeding on bits and pieces of acorns and other seeds.

The Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis*, is a flashy little sparrow that flits about forest floors of the western mountains and Canada, and then floods the rest of North America during cold weather. Most commonly at Placerita we see the sub-species, Oregon Junco, but in the east it's the Slate Colored Junco. The Oregon Junco has a black head and black tail without white feathers, a white breast and a mostly brown body with dark wings. There are several other subspecies ranging over North America including several in the west that we could see in Placerita. I'm certain I've seen the Pink Sided Junco at Placerita. Oregon Juncos are easy to recognize by their crisp (though extremely variable) markings and the bright white outer tail feathers they flash in flight. One of the most abundant forest birds of North America, you'll see juncos on woodland walks as well as in flocks at your feeders or on the ground beneath them. This time of the year I see Oregon Juncos frequently, often making their chip call, on my morning walks in Friendly Valley.

Dark-eyed Juncos are primarily seed-eaters, with seeds of chickweed, buckwheat, lamb's quarters, sorrel, and the like and as I mentioned the mashed acorns under our oak trees. At feeders they seem to prefer millet over sunflower seeds. During the breeding season, Dark-eyed Juncos also eat insects including beetles, moths, butterflies, caterpillars, ants, wasps, and flies. When foraging, Dark-eyed Juncos typically hop (rather than walk) on the ground, pecking or scratching at the leaf litter or flit very low in underbrush gleaning food from twigs and leaves. They sometimes fly up from the ground to catch insects from tree trunks. In flight, they flap continuously and pump their tails so the white outer tail feathers flash; flight is very agile as the bird maneuvers through its tangled environs. Male juncos are very territorial in summer, chasing off intruders in rapid flights accompanied by excited call notes. When males court females, they fan or flick open their wings and tail, hop up and down, and pick up pieces of nest material or moss; females seem to prefer males that show more white in the tail. During winter, Dark-eyed Juncos form fairly large flocks and where wintering ranges overlap you may find several subspecies in a single flock. Juncos also forage with other sparrows and bluebirds.

Females build the nests, using her beak to weave together materials and her body to give the nest its shape. Nests can be quite variable depending on where they are built. Sometimes ground nests get just a fine lining of grasses or pine needles. Other nests may be built on a foundation of twigs, leaves and moss, then lined with grasses, ferns, rootlets, hair, and fine pieces of moss. The nests usually take 3-7 days to build, and when finished they are 3-5.5 inches across, with an inner diameter of 2.4-2.8 inches and depth of 1.6-2.8 inches. It's rare for a junco to reuse a nest. The female chooses the nest site, typically in a depression or niche on sloping ground, rock face, or amid the tangled roots of an upturned tree. Around people, juncos may nest in or underneath buildings.

Normally two clutches of 4 eggs are laid during the breeding season. The slightly glossy eggs are grayish or pale bluish-white and heavily spotted (sometimes splotched) with various shades of brown, purple or gray. The spotting is concentrated at the large end of the egg. The eggs are incubated by the female for 12 to 13 days. Young leave nest between 11 and 14 days after hatching.

Come to Placerita during the colder months and look for these little black, brown and white birds seen mostly on the ground under oak trees in the picnic area often in the company of Oak Titmice and White-crown Sparrows.

*References for this article include the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, "Lives Of North American Birds" by Kenn Kaufman, The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology web page and several other pages on the internet under Dark-eyed Junco*



## Rattlesnakes

The days are getting warmer and the rattlesnakes will be seen in this valley, the climate and the food supply is adequate, so they are here to stay. Rattlesnakes are feared but I hope that by learning a few facts about them you will be able to respect them and even be able to appreciate them for the wonderful creatures they are. Remember also that they are useful by killing many rodents.

Every time a rattlesnake sheds its skin, it adds a new section to its rattle. For this reason, some people say you can tell the age of a rattlesnake by the number of sections in its rattle. But the sections often break off so you really cannot use them to tell age.

A rattlesnake can strike prey that is very close to its head from almost any position. But to strike an animal that is more than a few inches away, it throws the front half of its body forwards, and then sinks its fangs into the prey. The fangs of rattlesnakes are hollow. They have sharp, pointed tips that can break through skin.

Venom is pushed through the hollow fangs into the prey. The amount of venom that is injected depends on the size of the prey. In general, a rattlesnake will use less venom for smaller prey and more for larger prey. The fangs of a rattlesnake are usually folded inside the mouth. The fangs move forward when the snake strikes and the snake begins to inject the venom. In general, a rattlesnake can strike out for half of its body length. However, a rattlesnake that is up on a ledge may be able to strike farther.

How they hunt: All rattlesnakes are pit vipers. That means that they have special openings called pits on their faces that can feel heat—even in complete darkness, the pits can “see” the heat that is given off by the bodies of warm-blooded animals.

To smell, a rattlesnake uses its tongue. The moist tongue is flicked out to pick up smells from the air and ground. The tongue carries the smell into the mouth where it is “tasted” by a special organ called Jacobson’s organ.

The ears of a rattlesnake are inside the head, there are no ear openings on the outside. Different senses are used to find prey at different distances. When an animal is far away, the snake can hear the vibration through their jaw bones, resting on the ground. At close range, the snake can use its tongue or its pits. They can see short distances, up to 15 feet. They have large eyes with pupils that can open very wide so they can see in the dim light. They do not have eye lids.

When they hunt, they move slowly and carefully or may wait in one spot for a prey to come along. They poke their heads into holes using their tongue and pits to see if warm animals are inside. When they strike, they lunge forward at a speed of 10 feet per second.

Snakes have to swallow their prey whole. They use the muscles in their neck to pull the food down into the stomach. This is a slow process and it may take hours for a snake to finish swallowing a meal.

If you see a rattlesnake on the trail, freeze in your tracks and move away slowly without turning your back. Do not chase after it or do anything that might get the snake excited. Parents, please always walk first on the trail. You will see the snake first and will be able to make the right move. Keep in mind that the snake does not want to bite you, you are not prey and do not ever try to kill the snake, which is often the time you will get bitten.

Dog owners, you know your dog should be on a leash on the trail. If you live in an area with many rattlesnakes, be aware there is a vaccine that can be given to your dog before disaster happens.

Always look where you put your hands and do not reach into holes or dark places where a rattler could be hiding.

Never pick up a snake, even if it looks dead. It might just be pretending to be.

Try to stay off tall grasses but be careful if you have to walk through it.

If you are bitten by a rattlesnake have somebody else drive you to the hospital to prevent your blood from pumping faster allowing the venom to spread. They are well equipped to deal with this emergency, especially in our area.

*Reference : Zoobooks*



### **Ron Kraus, Docent par Excellence**

Ron Kraus was chosen by the county to represent the Docent organizations from the different nature centers. He will be our go-between during meetings to explain the docent points of view when the County is making decisions regarding the Nature Centers.

They could not have chosen a better docent for this new responsibility and we are very proud for you Ron.

Here are some articles that were written for the selection process explaining Ron's background, his interest in our natural areas and his job as a docent.

#### **Why Is Ron Kraus at Placerita?**

Most of us who were lucky enough to grow up appreciating nature have great childhood memories of creek walks and knapsacks full of a days' food. If we are really lucky, we carry these feelings we cherished into adulthood and seek to find a place we can relive those experiences as an adult. Here at Placerita Canyon Natural Area we are fortunate enough to have over 100 volunteers who find this park the perfect place to explore, learn, and rekindle those feelings.

Ron Kraus, after retiring from L. A. City Department of Recreation and Parks came here in 2002 to take the Docent Training. He has boyhood memories of the Walker Ranch fireplace and Placerita Creek as his mother allowed him to join his friends on hikes over from his home in Sylmar. Ron is very involved here. He has held the position of Vice President of the PCNCA board for 7 years and with that he coordinates the docent training program - arranging the lectures, hikes and materials. Along with those official duties he acts as the park's unofficial historian and in-service coordinator. Every year Ron makes a year end video for the holiday party which is loaded with great pictures of the docents and staff-all of which are poked fun at. He has a contest called "Are You Smarter than a Placerita Fifth Grader" for the summer Breakfast of Champions.

Where does Ron go for his daily walk? Placerita of course! Every evening he comes for his daily exercise in or around the park. He takes pictures of plants to post on the website that he keeps updated with events and park information. A photo Ron shot at Walker Ranch graced the cover of one of the local phone books. His fellow docents awarded him volunteer of the year in 2005.

Placerita is lucky to have Ron. The volunteers and staff appreciate and enjoy his interest and enthusiasm. It may be said that Ron is lucky to have Placerita too-it appears he really loves this park.

#### **Talking with Dave Stives**



"This is a fantastic photo of you and this bird but what are you doing?"

"I am doing rehab and I already released this bird. Somebody brought this bird to the Nature Center. It was hit by a car, the left wing was swollen, not broken, there was some muscle damage so I trained him to come to my glove, to get some exercise and get his wing back in shape. When that was done, I took him into the field, threw a live sparrow up in the air and he was able to catch it and eat it so that was a good sign that he was ready to go."

"What kind of bird was it?"

"It is a small male Cooper Hawk"

"What is your job Dave?"

"I am the park animal keeper and I am responsible for 6 nature centers. I do an inspection every month of each nature center to make sure that they are in compliance with the state and federal regulations, make sure that the animals are on a proper diet program, warming program, veterinary care and basically look over all the animals and train the staff how to take care of each animal".

## Thoughts on the County Natural Areas

*By Ron Kraus*

What makes the County natural areas special to me is that they simply exist. When you look at the Google Earth aerial photos of Placerita Canyon you can see how it is a peninsula of wilderness surrounded on three sides by encroaching civilization. It's amazing to me that in less than 10-minutes from my house this pristine natural area is available for exploration. It's like entering a time portal into the Southern California of thousands of years ago. I love the change of seasons and being able to watch the succession of wildflowers from winter, though the spring and summer, and into the fall. I have a standing bet with my nature center friends that if I can't find at least five wildflowers blooming any time of the year within 30 minutes of entering the gate I will buy them lunch. I have yet to pay off on that bet.

The history of Placerita Canyon also fascinates me, from the Tataviam Indian days up through the gold rush of the 1840's, the oil explorations of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the ranching and farming period that followed. It seems people have been drawn to Placerita Canyon for it's natural resources, but once they spend any time there it's the natural beauty that compels them to stay. I have an old saying I use to discourage the occasional modern day gold miners I see along the creek: "It's no use to hunt for treasure in the park, because the park IS the treasure."

But what really makes the natural areas special is the people—the staff, volunteers, docents, and patrons. It makes it easy to be a happy volunteer when you have great support from the staff. The docent organization is a great place to connect with like-minded people who love nature and sharing that love with the public. Leading the nature hikes for the school groups is immensely satisfying, especially when you have those golden moments when you can sense that the students are "getting it." Like when they stop complaining about being hungry and start asking, "You mean the hike is over already?"



### An Interview with Our Hometown Station

Each year, KHTS AM1220, starts a segment called "Non-Profit spotlight Discussion". Most of the time Placerita Nature Center is interviewed on the air just before the new class of docent training starts which is a fantastic opportunity for us to get publicity for this event. Again this year, the Nature Center was asked to give an interview on Saturday, January 7. The docent training class started on Tuesday January 10 so it was perfect timing.

The interview was conducted mainly with Ron Kraus, Jim Southwell who are docents and Frank Hoffman who is the Park Supervisor. Jack Levenberg, Collette Lash were able to speak briefly, Jim Crowley and Ingrid Brown were there to show support, to the great delight of Janice Murray from KHTS and her producer who were happy to see so much interest.

During the interview, many topics about Placerita Canyon Nature Center were covered: History of the property from the time of habitation of the Tataviam Indians in the area, from AD450 to 1797AD - Oak of the golden dream (1842) Francisco Lopez - Discussion of Frank Walker, his wife, Hortence, and their 12 children and how they occupied the area from 1910 to 1959 - Eventual sale of the land to State of California as Placerita Canyon State Park. Further discussion took place regarding the programs offered to the public.

The balance between Ron, Frank and Jim is a delight to hear, they are full of information and they are fun, lively and they were obviously having a great time speaking about one of their favorite topics. They are asked to come back every year and the lovely Janice from KHTS was having a good time too.

Thanks go to KHTS, our Hometown Station for doing this great service to us and giving us such a great exposure just before the docent training starts.





## **What is NCA?**

*By Pam Koch*

The Nature Center Associates of Los Angeles County is a volunteer nonprofit corporation, organized and founded for educational and scientific purposes, whose primary concern is to develop in children and adults an awareness and appreciation of the natural world.

The NCA, through its chapters, creates and operates interpretive programs at nature centers or natural areas administered by Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (PCNCA) is a chapter of NCA and we docents are, therefore, members of NCA. Other chapters are Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates (ECNCA), San Dimas Nature Center Associates (SDNCA), Vasquez Rocks Nature Center Associates (VRNCA), and Whittier Narrows Nature Center Associates (WNNCA).

NCA has a board just like PCNCA has a board. The board officers are voted into office by you, its members. The NCA officers must be members of any of the various nature centers plus each nature center has a representative to NCA.

The NCA board meets once every other month. They are responsible for proper handling of financial records and filing of taxes for all the chapters. They host the annual Docent and Volunteer Recognition ceremony, usually held at Eaton Canyon Nature Center since that is the most centrally located center. They interface with the County management on issues of concern to all the chapters. They are responsible for the uniform application of docent training. That means they assist each nature center with access and updates to our 'Windows into the Wild' training program.

Recently, NCA provided Directors and Officer's insurance for all the boards. Since the treasuries of a couple of the nature centers have received sizeable endowments, insurance has now become necessary along with increased tax return reports.

NCA is currently working on updating our operating agreement with the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation. NCA is a separate corporation working by written agreement with the County. The last agreement was written in 1989 and has been renewed year to year.

## **Who's Who at NCA?**

Now that you know what NCA is, let's find out who's running it. Did you know any member of any of the nature center chapters may run for a seat on the board of NCA? You do not have to be on the board of PCNCA to hold a seat as an officer on the board of NCA.

Cliff McLean from Eaton Canyon serves as President of NCA. Cliff taught our botany class at docent training. He has created a wonderful CD of plants of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Pam Koch from Placerita Canyon serves as Vice President of NCA. Pam is working on the details of the upcoming Docent Recognition Ceremony. Last year, she helped secure board insurance for all the nature center boards.

Nikki Dail from Eaton Canyon serves as Treasurer. Her skills and dedication keep us in good standing with the IRS and all the required tax reports. We could not function very well without her!

Alice Clark from Eaton Canyon serves as Recording Secretary. Her board meeting minutes become the required corporate record of our non-profit corporation. Alice also serves as badge chair for the upcoming Docent Recognition Ceremony.

Ninarose Mayer, also from Eaton Canyon, serves as Corresponding Secretary. She is a long time NCA board officer who has served in several officer positions and is instrumental in the smooth operation of the upcoming Docent Recognition Ceremony.

Those are the people you voted for. The next election comes up in June. Perhaps YOU would like to be on the board?

But wait! There's more! In addition to board officers, each nature center chapter (PCNCA, as well as ECNCA, SDNCA, VRNCA and WNNCA) sends a representative to NCA to serve as a director on the NCA board. The representative from PCNCA is Jack Levenberg, who shares the responsibility with Pam Koch. The representa-

tives from the other nature centers are currently: Ninarose Mayer from Eaton Canyon; TwilaKetterman shares the responsibility with Donna Petrokowitz, from San Dimas Canyon; Grace Allen shares the responsibility with Mireya Parravicini, from Whittier Narrows NCA. Vasquez Rocks will join in as soon as their new nature center building is up and running.

### **Who's Who at the County Nature Centers and Natural Areas?**

Now that you learned about NCA let's find out who's in charge at the various nature centers and natural areas.

First, the Natural Areas Administrator who is the boss of the Superintendents at the various nature centers and natural areas is Kim Bosell who keeps an office at Eaton Canyon Nature Center. Her boss is Kimel Conway, Regional Operations Manager. Kimel's boss is Hayden Sohm, Deputy Director, Parks and Recreation. Hayden's boss is Director, Parks and Recreation, Russ Guiney. Russ reports to County Mayor Mike Antonovich. Kimel, Hayden, and Russ keep offices in Baldwin Park.

Now for the Superintendents at the nature centers:

- ECNC: Helen Wong
- PCNC: Russ Kimura
- SDNC: Roddy Gregory
- VRNC: Sandy Dininger
- WNNC: Colleen MacKay

Did you know there are some natural areas that do not have docents? They are under the same administration as the nature centers and if they ever decide to have a docent organization, they would become a chapter of NCA. Those areas and people in charge are:

- Deane Dana Friendship Park in San Pedro run by Laura Jones.
- Devil's Punchbowl in Pearblossom run by Dave Numer.
- High Desert Wildlife Sanctuaries run by Chris Mowry.



Monday, January 2nd, an SUV rolled from Placerita Canyon Road around 4pm onto the Ecology trail. 4 young men were inside the car, one was taken to the hospital. Nobody in the park was hurt and the trail was not damaged either



### **Placerita HSI: Historic Scene Investigation**

*By Ron Kraus*

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011, a group of 11 people interested in the history of Placerita Canyon took the Historic Scene Investigation hike sponsored by the Community Hiking Club (see picture.) I had gathered up some old photos dating to the turn of the twentieth century of houses, barns, gold mining operations, oil wells, Walker Family dwellings and other features of the canyon and we attempted to find the locations of where each photo was taken. We were successful in finding 14 of the 15 locations I had identified, but ran out of time to reach site no. 15 (the Walker Homestead house.) If there is interest, we'll do it again this spring.

*First Day of Docent Training  
(a pictorial)*





Bill and Heidi Webber took the Rattler to Bodie Ghost Town



Maria Elena Christensen took the Rattler to the Plaza San Martin in Buenos Aires, Argentina when she went home for the holidays.



Bill and Heidi Webber took the Rattler to the Boron Mine  
Photo: Greg Langewisch

### On The Road with the Rattler



Collette Lash took the Rattler in Kansas City Missouri for the Chiefs vs Raiders game December 24th 2011 at Arrowhead Stadium.



The Easter Bunny took the Rattler on his rounds.



Fred Seeley took the Rattler to Buttonwillow Raceway, northwest of Bakersfield. This is the adrenaline side of his life and he is standing next to his race car. Way to go Fred !



Interview about Placerita Canyon Nature Center done by our Hometown Station KHTS AM 1220. They took the Rattler with them, thanks! Ron Kraus, Jim Southwell, Frank Hoffman, Collette Lash and Jack Levenberg were all interviewed about our favorite place. Ingrid Brown and Jim Crowley came to give moral support.



Jack and Doreen Levenberg were in Oberlin, Ohio for their Grandson's Baptism. They brought the snow with them and the Rattler too.  
Thank you.



Sue and Allan Wallander took the Rattler to Molokai.



Placerita Canyon Nature Center

# Open House

and Family Festival

May 12, 2012  
10AM to 3PM

- Animal Presentations
- Panning for fools gold
- Guided Hikes
- Face Painting
- Food & Drink
- Free Parking & Admission

Many fun activities for the whole family!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall  
(661)259-7721  
[www.placerita.org](http://www.placerita.org)

sponsored by

Placerita  
Canyon  
Nature Center  
Associates



The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area 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.



Evelyne and Grandson Cyrus

## Equipment to go Hiking

This little hiker is not going to get much help from the tiny walking stick but they have become very popular on the trail, they will spare you knees, help you going down a steep slope, crossing a stream or going over rocks.

The number one item you need when you go hiking is a buddy. Going alone can become a problem with something as simple as a twisted ankle. A cell phone is helpful as long as you have a good reception and as we are surrounded with mountains, it is not always feasible.

Strong hiking boots are a must, do not rely on sneakers, your ankles will tell you the difference. Good heavy socks are something most people do not think twice about and if you are allergic to wool, it is better to find out before the rash develops after a 2-hour hike. Sometimes, cotton becomes wet by sweat or water and starts rubbing on your feet, a great way to develop blisters so try different things, synthetic blend seems to work better for many hikers but may be not for you,

A light back pack is handy to keep your supplies: water should always be with you, a hat against the sun (too many hikers develop skin cancer, keep that in mind), sun glasses, sun cream might be a good idea if you are sweating a lot, a granola bar is a good source of food if it is without chocolate chips that would melt. A light sweater or jacket, depending of the length of your hike and the elevation could be a good precaution to have. If you are on a new trail for you, having a map of the area could save you from being lost. According to your interest, you might want to pack a pair of light binoculars. A tissue to blow your nose is something that you should have; strange allergies sometimes develop in a new environment.

Stay on the trail, look where you are walking (snakes are around and scat is on the trails too). Do not reach into plants as poison oak might be part of the bush. Do not pollute and enjoy your walk.

It is customary to greet other hikers: hello, a smile, a little nod is enough and the rule is that the hikers going uphill have the right of way so stay to the side when they are coming if there is room for only one person on the trail.

With all this in mind and a few precautions, the hiking opportunities are endless and beautiful in Southern California; enjoy the view, the fresh air, and the camaraderie. It will be good for your body and your mind. Happy trails to you!



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## The Search for the Source of Placerita Creek – Part 2

*By Ron Kraus*

I ended Part 1 of this story in a previous edition of *The Rattler* saying our small group of explorers had been turned back from finding the source of Placerita Creek last winter by heavy rains that had filled the creek bed to the point of making it impassable. We gathered again on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, to make another attempt to make the journey. It was a cool, sunny day and the water flow was down to a level that made hiking up the

creek feasible.

Fortunately on this trip there were no suspicious characters in the canyon that appeared to be involved in illicit farming operations. Our hike up the creek was uneventful and included several nice surprises, like discovering a huge amount of large Canyon Oak acorns covering the ground on an isolated bend in the stream.

When we reached the waterfall that had stopped our progress previously we were quickly able to find a route around it and continue the journey (see picture 1.)



Beyond the waterfall the vegetation grew dense, particularly the wild blackberry. The blackberry was thick and thorny and slowed our progress considerably. Another large waterfall was encountered, but we were able to climb up its side and there it was—the basin that forms the headwaters of Placerita Creek. Dan Kott scampered down the steep slope to assess the possibility of continuing further into the basin (see picture 2) but we all agreed the blackberry was too thick to hike through.

So we declared success and took a group picture (see picture 3.) We did it! The source of Placerita Creek was discovered.

## ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

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

Lisa Renella (a gift from Laura & Hal Kliegman) - Cricket, the American kestrel

Max Pollack - Apollo, the turkey vulture

Luke J. and Nolan D. - Moon Shadow, the kingsnake and Daisy, the opossum

\* Larry and Nancy Nikolai - Cricket, the American kestrel; Daisy, the opossum; Apollo, the turkey vulture; Orion, the great-horned owl; and Lady, the red-tailed hawk

Girl Scouts Brownie Troop #6412 - Daisy, the opossum and Turbo, the tortoise

Girl Scouts Daisy Troop #50172 - Daisy, the opossum and Squirt, the western pond turtle

Many thanks for your support!

(\* Larry and Nancy Nikolai have generously supported this program each year since 2006 when it began!)

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## Just for Fun

*I was thinking that spring was fast approaching, and realized that it actually will be March 20, less than a month away. So I thought I would search for an odd or funny spring tradition. I believe I succeeded. Enjoy.*  
*Heidi*

### Old tradition for Spring Equinox 2012: Burning Socks?

Pagan festivals or Stravinsky's 'The Rite of Spring' come to mind on the Spring equinox, but one little-known tradition brings a little foot freedom to the first day of Spring.

Call it what you like – the vernal equinox, the Spring equinox, or merely Saturday – March 20 marks the first day of Spring for folks in the northern hemisphere.

Spring's arrival and its sense of renewal have been marked in many ways over the millenniums – pagan festivals, solemn religious rites, Igor Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring," balancing an egg on its narrow end.

But for sheer sartorial renewal, few Spring-equinox celebrations top (or, perhaps, bottom) the Annapolis Maritime Museum's annual Sock Burning ceremony.

First, a few words about the seasonal transition prompting the pedalian party.

Astronomically, of course, the Spring equinox (and its Fall counterpart) marks the moment when the center of the sun's disk appears directly overhead at the Equator. This year, the vernal equinox will occur at 17:32 coordinated universal time (1:32 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time) March 20, 2010.

The event is welcome for earthlings. It's spectacular on other planets.

Saturn, for instance, experiences an equinox once every 15 years, compared with six-month intervals on Earth.

The Cassini spacecraft, currently orbiting Saturn, gave scientists a remarkable set of images during the planet's equinox last August. Its fabled rings, with only the reflected light from the planet's cloud tops to illuminate them, glowed faintly on the sunlit side, where they cast a razor-thin shadow across the giant planet's face. On the night side, they appear to virtually vanish.

The equinoxes should not be confused, by the way, with a day experiencing virtually equal hours of daylight and darkness. That day has been given the somewhat vacuum-cleaner-like title of equinox.

Now, back to sock burning.

The yachting set, or so the story goes, tends to wear deck shoes sans socks between the vernal equinox and winter. Allowances are made for those sensitive of foot on days when temperatures fall below 30 degrees Fahrenheit and winds top 17 knots (about 20 miles an hour). They call it the "wimp-chill factor."

As Maritime Museum Director Jeff Holland recounts it, the tradition began in the mid 1980s thanks to Bob Turner, who managed the Annapolis Yacht Yard.

"He spent winters working on OPBs – other peoples' boats," Mr. Holland explains. At winter's end, Captain Turner would end up with socks home to a variety of debris and dried varnishes and fiberglass goop. One day, which happened to be the Spring equinox, he shed his socks, headed out onto the pier with a paint-roller tray, put the socks in and doused them lighter fluid, and tossed in a match.

The rest is history.

The tradition faded for a bit once Capt. Turner moved away. But about 10 years ago, the museum resurrected the event. Crowds tend to be small. And a barrel of oysters and a shucking knife have been added to the activity.

Over the years, the tradition has expanded up and down the east and west coasts – and in between. Holland says he received a query from a marina on a lake in Kansas, where some mid-continent mariners were interested in picking up the tradition.

And if you aren't on the email list? You can always break out your Equinox and do some Spring cleaning!

*Reference: Christian Science Monitor*



### **The Story Behind Gini Shadwick's Plaque**

You might have seen Gini's plaque on the patio and wonder what this is all about. Let me go into the past to explain.

Frank Hovore was Placerita supervisor and Gini was a docent, they both went to the same high school and they were friends. Gini started as a docent and quickly became our president at PCNCA, then was hired as a county employee first at Placerita then at Hart Park. If Frank Hovore was our teacher and mentor, Gini was

enthusiasm and laughter at the Center. She was a funny and warm woman, a true "people person" with a radiant personality and we all loved her dearly.

Frank and Gini were united in caring deeply for the Center, keeping the place together in spite of cut backs in the budget and the docents felt they were in good hands.

So, when Frank Hovore decided to start his own business, we were suddenly like lost orphans. Those events were happening in the 90's.

I remember Gini coming to the board meeting, agitated; "We have to put a plaque about Frank between the 2 oak trees that he planted on the patio. We need to leave a mark of his importance here." The board eagerly agreed and started to make plans but Gini became distracted during the meeting and at the end, she announced "You know what? I have changed my mind. It is hard to start your own business....may be in a few months, Frank will be back, looking for his old job. So, may be, it is better to wait a while"

We were all secretly hoping that this new job was just a passing fancy. However, Frank Hovore's business was flourishing and our fears evaporated as he still found to time to come to the Center on a regular basis and was always very generous with his advice, help and expertise.

A few years later, Gini became very sick with breast cancer and we were all heart-broken.

I remember Frank Hovore coming to the board meeting, agitated by his grief and saying "We have to put a plaque on the patio between the 2 oak trees for Gini"

I interrupted him, saying this spot had been reserved for him and I told him the story. He had not known and was moved that Gini had wanted to do that. He was the one who composed the lovely message on the plaque, straight from the heart. Frank was a scientist, a mentor, an inspiration to us all and he was also a very gifted writer as the old Rattlers can attest.

Gini was still able to attend the unveiling of her plaque during a fun party we had for her on St Patrick day, on March 17, 2000.

She passed away a month after that but her spirit still remains with some of us. Her family comes sometimes to visit the plaque around Mother's Day. Often you will see a spray of flowers laying on the plaque. Recently her son Jon asked us to look in our old photos album to gather all the photos we had from his mom and we were very happy to be able to do that.

Evelyne





### A Trip to the Butterfly Preserve in Goleta

On Sunday, January 22 Maria Elena Christensen, Dan Kott along with Paul Levine who is currently training to be a Docent at Placerita had a very special trip. They went to the Coronado Butterfly preserve in Goleta, CA. While Paul has a major interest in butterflies and gave a well-received presentation at Placerita on Saturday, Jan 14, none had been to this site before. Maria Elena had her daughter Victoria with her and this was a great outing for young children.

This is one of the sites where the Monarch's migrate to each fall. The day was perfect - it was warm (probably in the high 60's), sunny with a minimal breeze. Viewing was perfect. The butterflies rest in large eucalyptus trees although these are all non-native (according to the internet, there are a total of over 600 species of eucalyptus trees, most in Australia and 248 have been transplanted to the US) but the butterflies have taken to them. They are also in bloom at this time of year providing a nectar source - other plants were flowering as well and we saw some being used as a nectar source. One Common Buckeye made an appearance. He was very cooperative allowing each to get close and takes its picture.

For the Monarch butterfly, the upper or dorsal surface of the wing is a deep orange and very apparent. The under or ventral-surface is much paler and with the wings closed, the butterfly is easily mistaken for a dead leaf, particularly from afar and as they are only resting in the upper levels of the eucalyptus trees thus for us humans, they are far away. A good suggestion for anyone going to see these butterflies is to bring a good pair of binoculars or a camera with some degree of telephoto capability. While one can view them with the unaided human eye, they are more impressive when also being able to look closer."

When you read the Rattler, it will be already too late to go a visit because the Monarchs start to fly away in mid-February and are usually gone by early March although there may still be some stragglers. However, this is such an incredible sight that I will write more information about this and may be some of you will keep this Rattler in a drawer somewhere and be ready for next year.

From our past experience, January and February is the best time to go. It is a pretty incredible place; the amount of monarchs you will see is like something from the National Geographic magazine. Try to go on a sunny day, bring kids and friends with you and you won't believe your eyes. If at first you do not see the butterflies, look on the branches. They hang making brown clusters, like a sort of fur. If you want more details, enter Coronado Butterfly Preserve on the internet and check their web site. Take a walk on the bluff and you will have a beautiful view of the Ocean, take your lunch with you and enjoy a memorable outing.

### Coronado Butterfly Preserve

The Coronado Butterfly Preserve is a beautiful natural space open to the public every day of the year from sunrise to sunset. No reservations or admission fees are required—they rely on your visitor donations. Monarch butterflies migrate to the preserve for their over-wintering time (a winter resort for Monarch butterflies) which is typically from November through February, with peak numbers usually visible in December and January. It's difficult to predict wildlife behavior, and every year is different due to a wide range of factors. Even so, the first butterflies usually arrive in late October with almost all butterflies gone by the middle of March.

The Monarchs are most easily seen during the middle of the day. They usually hang from eucalyptus branches in amazing clusters when the weather is cool, and then flutter around when directly warmed by the sun. Look up in the trees of the Main Monarch Grove for unusual clumps of "leaves". They just might be butterflies! A count was done in mid-December 2011 and it was estimated that there were 55,000 butterflies present at that time. Paul tells me that he, Don and Maria Elena did not attempt to verify that number but there were lots!

Directions to the Preserve:

From Santa Clarita, take the 5 north, then the 126. The 126 leads into the 101 north.

Pass Santa Barbara, the exit is in Goleta (North of Santa Barbara, around Isla Vista)

From Highway 101 North, exit Storke Rd. /Glen Annie and head south (away from mountains). Turn right on Hollister Avenue, drive about 1.2 miles and take a left on Coronado Drive. Entrance to the Preserve is at the end of Coronado Drive.





### What is That?

Collette Lash took this beautiful photo at Placerita but then we were left with the problem of trying to identify this “mushroom”. I asked a few people who scratched their head a little bit perplexed. I did some research on Google but I was left more confused by the many mushrooms and fungi and checking on so many photos. Finally, I asked Dianne Erskine Hellrigel, president from the Community Hiking Club. She had the right answer from the start, however she checked first with a friend of hers, Florence who is a fungi specialist to make very sure her answer was correct. Here was the answer:

“Well, the good news is that it’s a good edible mushroom (caps at least, stipes are kind of tough), and called the **“Honey Mushroom”** for its color I think, not flavor. The bad news is its other name is the **“Oak Root fungus”** and is the parasitic mushroom that can kill oak trees as well as a variety of other trees (citrus, acacia, rhododendron, stone pit fruit trees, even oleander). There’s not much you can do - fumigating the soil there won’t really get rid of it. The mycelium is down in the soil, and probably dispersed. If it’s at the base of the oak tree, you should be sure not to water during the summer. Not anything you can do about the natural rain. Collect the masses of mushrooms in a large bag, try to get out as much of the visible mycelium (though not sure that does much good), cut off the caps for cooking, wrap up the rest and put it in the trash bin, not the city green waste. They are heavy sporulators (note the heavy, white spore deposit), that’s why I suggest collecting it with a large bag over it and carry it out of where you found it.”



I want to impress on all our readers that it was difficult to make a proper identification and I had to ask the help from a few specialists on the topic so **DO NOT EAT MUSHROOMS** that you find on the trails. The danger is just too great and you do not want to take a chance.

The honey mushrooms are edible and seems to be a delicacy in Ukraine, however they look similar to another kind which is deadly poisonous.

Wikipedia helped me with more details about this interesting discovery:

**Honey fungus**, or *Armillaria* or *openky* is a genus of parasitic fungi that live on trees and woody shrubs. It includes about 10 species formerly lumped together as *A. mellea*. *Armillarias* are long lived and form some of the largest living organisms in the world. The largest single organism (of the species *Armillaria solidipes*) covers more than 3.4 square miles (8.8 km<sup>2</sup>) and is thousands of years old Some species of *Armillaria* are bioluminescent and may be responsible for the phenomena known as foxfire and perhaps will o’ the wisp.



As a forest pathogen, *Armillaria* can be very destructive. It is responsible for the “white rot” root disease (see below) of forests and is distinguished from *Tricholoma* (mycorrhizal) by this parasitic nature. Its high destructiveness comes from the fact that, unlike most parasites, it doesn’t need to moderate its growth in order to avoid killing its host, since it will continue to thrive on the dead material.

In the Canadian Prairies (particularly Manitoba), the term “honey fungus” is unknown to many; due to the large presence of Ukrainian Canadians in this area, the fungus is often referred to as *pidpenky* from the Ukrainian term, “beneath the stump”.



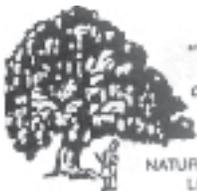
### What a Difference a Year Makes

January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011, it was cold and the snow started to fall... it kept on falling thru the day and the night. We ended up with close to 2 inches the next day which was a very rare event in Placerita. We even had a short snow ball fight. By noon, all the snow had melted but the photos remain.



## 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