



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 2015



Hello Nature Friends,

What a joy to be able to show you in this issue of the Rattler the dedication of our new Interpretive Center. Wednesday, February 25, 2015 is a very important date at Placerita and we were honored to have a remarkable group of officials from Los Angeles County, from the city of Santa Clarita and from many organizations close to our heart, coming to participate in the official opening of the new Museum.

You learned in the previous Rattler, the dedication of the interpretive center was the pièce de résistance to be offered but many more updated exhibits and features were ready to be enjoyed. The patio has been upgraded, the animal enclosures are new and constructed to the latest codes, the observation deck has 2 telescopes, and the Frank Hovore classroom is a renewed space with great potential as a nature learning center. The gift shop is totally transformed offering a variety of nature-themed merchandise.

Much of the financial help needed with these projects came from L.A. Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich so it was with great joy, gratitude, and pride that we welcomed him to the Nature Center for the opening ceremony. Refreshments were served after the official functions and we were really happy to be able to chat, cake in hand, and share our joy of this special day.

We warmly invite you to pay us a visit and check out all the new changes; we know that you will be very pleasantly surprised.

It is the best time of the year to come walk the trails as so many spring flowers are in bloom. We are also very proud to introduce our class of new docents of 2015; read about them in this issue.

Enjoy the spring season, full of first miracles, new nests, fresh green grass and cool dew in the morning. See you at the Nature Center!

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.

Museum duty by Sue Sutton

After many years of planning and hard work, the doors to the new museum are open to the public! While the official opening comes at the end of February, visitors are already enjoying the wonderful exhibits. Our initial plan is to staff the museum with docent interpreters on the weekends. Docents will interpret, as well as care for, the amazing museum exhibits.



Nature Station

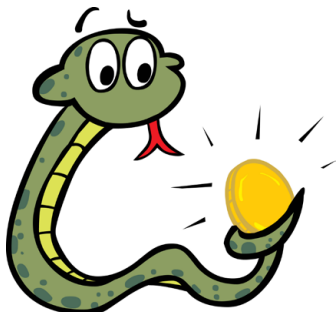
A new program is being born! Andrea Donner and Sue Sutton have started a committee to create "hands-on" activities for children who do not wish to hike, or are incapable of hiking.

A Nature Station Box will consist of a variety of themes from plants to mammals, to early 20th century toys, etc.

This program will also help give Senior Docents who do not want to take children on trail hikes, or Volunteers who are unable to participate in trail hikes, a different approach to teaching about nature.

This multi-generational activity could be held during school tours as well as the Open House, Holiday Craft Fair or during weekends.

The committee intends to create at least two Nature Station boxes to test-run prior to presenting the concept and program to the new 2015 docents. Funds have been allocated and the project is moving forward.



Adopt-an-Animal

PCNCA gratefully acknowledges Larry and Nancy Nikolai for their continued dedication and financial support of our animals at the Nature Center by their adoption of Squirt, Rosie, Cricket, Turbo, Catori, Chester, Buddy, Apollo, and Lady. Many thanks Larry and Nancy!

The Rattler

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If you have an article you feel would follow the interests of this publication, please feel free to submit it. The deadline is the 10th of every other month. Mail your article to:

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

or you can email it to Evelyne at evandersande@gmail.com.

Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

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

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



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Disclaimer

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

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

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

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates

Thank You!

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

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

Send your donation to:

PCNCA
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213

Thank You Green Nursery

Once again this year Mr. Richard Green of Green Landscape Nursery on Bouquet Canyon Road (near Kmart) graciously allowed us to hang our Docent Training banner on the nursery's fence where it received lots of notice.

Mr. Green is a wonderful supporter of all that we do at the Nature Center. Stop in to say "Hi" as he loves to hear the latest happenings of PCNCA. His plants are wonderful too!



Photos by Denny Truger

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. March 15: Journey Down the Santa Clara River. April 19: The World of Wolves from the project Wildsong Wolves, with Damu and Cael.

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

Weeding /Trail Enhancement Update

by Robert Grzesiak

It's like magic. We had 12 participants for the December meeting of Weeders and Seeders. We spent 23 total volunteer hours weeding out Smilo grass, and 9 volunteer hours reseeding the meadow. In a very casual manner the weeders achieved a lot.

Smilo grass (*Stipa miliaceum*, formerly *Piptatherum* genus) is a bunch grass that is a perennial grass. It is a native of dry lands of Mediterranean Region. In Southern California Smilo grass is recently spreading into riparian and canyon areas and is rated as Invasive by the California Invasive Plant Council. Not only can this invasive take over a canyon, but it also hybridizes with Indian Rice Grass that our native Tataviam Indians would have harvested for a grain food. This hybridization may eventually totally replace and eliminate Indian Rice Grass as a specie and its value as a food source for all creatures in the overlapping ranges.

Smilo grass grows to 3 to 5 feet high, can spread by rhizomes, and produces thousands of seeds. Its leaf blade is intermediate between our two native perennial bunch grasses, Coast Range Melic and Giant Wild Rye grass. Coast Range Melic bunch grass is most recognizable on the Ecology Trail next to the Woolly Blue Curl bushes and is more petite than Smilo. A stand of Giant Wild Rye bunch grass is just around the corner on the next switchback up (seed-head stems used as arrow shafts at times).

Well, in December we pulled or dug out 10 fifty-gallon bags of Smilo along the north facing bank of Placerita creek in the picnic area. We probably achieved 80 to 90% clearance right into the bottom of the creek in this recent highly infested area. In January, we had only 4 participants, but with a total of 10 volunteer hours, we were able to pull out 5 fifty-gallon bags of Smilo along the Hidden Trail. Both efforts made a huge visual impact especially on the Hidden Trail which had bunches up to 3 feet wide and 5 ft. high. In both areas Small Flower Melic bunches were discovered and now have a chance to reclaim these areas. I am especially pleased with clearing the Hidden Trail because it is a great trail for our school kids hikes. It has a lot of plant diversity there with an intense chaparral feel to it.



Next, it is on to the Hillside trail, where we will attack the invasive non-native annual grasses. The north-facing bank of the trail can be and is a great flower area. By pulling out the annual grasses we will expose the flower seedlings and allow full development and punctuate their existence in time for spring. Despite the continuing drought, the rain pattern should make for a great annual flower display this spring.

Hope you can join us, 1st Monday of every month, 9am. If there is some community interest, perhaps we can establish an early morning weeding on Saturday for family amusement (in a rewarding way) and edification (call the Placerita Nature Center and request a Wild Weeder Hike Experience program, 661-259-7721).



Please Visit Our Wonderful Gift Shop Soon!

You May Not Recognize it

There have been many changes and up dates going on in Placerita Nature Centre's GIFT SHOP.

A great team of docents worked tirelessly changing the environment. If you had visited the gift shop months ago, you may not recognize it. The gift shop has come into the 21st century and joins in the dedication of all revisions going on at the Nature Centre.

There are new items for purchase

in supporting our animals. Check it out. Gifts for all occasions...so be sure to visit our revised, updated, fabulous, chic gift shop.....



Ingrid Brown is minding the store

Introduction to Birding

a seminar given by Judy Bass

The Nature Education programs were started to give the general public and the docents an opportunity for continuing education on a wide variety of topics. Each month we have such a program on the 3rd Sunday at 2pm and it lasts one hour. In January we had a very interesting and timely topic for this time of the year: Introduction to Birding.

The mating and nesting season has started so there is plenty of bird action to observe and the room was filled up with people who wanted to have some direction in learning what is the best way to become a birder. Judy gave us a class checking all the most basic steps that we need to be aware of and it was a delight not to feel overwhelmed by too much highly technical information right from the start. We need a field guide to learn to identify birds and she recommended a few. That information is gold and they change from time to time so I wanted to make sure that we all have access to them.

The first basic book to start with is "Birds of Southern California" By Kimball L. Garrett, Jon L. Dunn and Bob Morse. It is excellent for beginners; this is a local guide and any bird that appears in your back yard will be in this book.

Another one that Judy likes is "The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America" New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

The book list was long and I am giving you just a taste!

If you travel, you will want to order a bird book from the area that you are going to visit and the internet will be the best way to order such a book.

I have done that for years and those books become charming memories of your trip. When you see one of the birds in your travels, write on the page where you saw it, then later on, you can review and remember more clearly about your birding milestones.

You will need good binoculars. I will give you two web sites that Judy recommends, however she told us the best way to find the perfect binoculars is to go on bird walks and ask your fellow birders what they are using, if they are happy with their binoculars and if so, why. The binocular needs to fit in your hand, it should not be too heavy for your size and it is different from one person to the next so you need to try out many before finding the one which will become yours. Check out: www.BetterViewDesired.com for all optics including reviews of many types and www.EagleOptics.com which is a great place to buy online as well as learn about optics.

Then Judy recommends joining organizations to further your bird education: National Audubon Society www.audubon.org, America Birding Association www.aba.org or Cornell Lab of Ornithology - All about Birds www.allaboutbirds.org.

That is a lot of information but it is always good to have this somewhere so you can refer to it later on if you need it.

The most important thing to remember when watching birds is to have fun, enjoy their songs and behavior. A simple way to learn a little more about them and to understand what you are looking at is to join a bird walk. There, somebody can guide you and share their expertise. I want to remind you that we have a bird walk at Placerita led by Rosemarie Regis on the second Saturday of the month from 8am to 10.00 am. It is for all levels of birders. Bring your binoculars, water and a field guide. If you cannot be there, check the web page of most large parks in your area to find out when they have a bird walk.



DO YOU KNOW

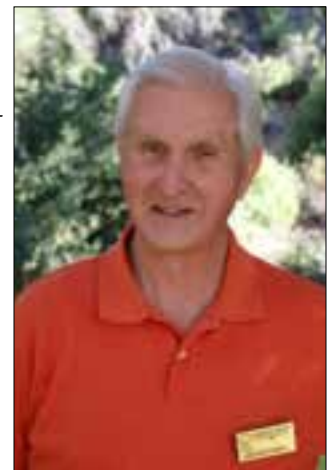
By Jim Southwell

This new column will test your knowledge about the Who, What, Where, and When of the Placerita Canyon Natural Area and the Placerita Nature Center. As an example: Question - Do you know who originally owned (held title to) the current park acreage. Answer - The Frank Walker Family.

Now, let's try some you may answer:

1. Who now owns Placerita Canyon Natural Area?
a) City of Santa Clarita b) L.A. County Parks c) California State Parks
2. What is the name of the Nature Center's Mascot?
a) "Sweetpea" the Skunk b) "O.J. the Owl" c) "Wiggles" the Snake
3. What is the meaning of Crepuscular?
a) A discharge from an animal wound b) An animal blood cell c) An animal activity period.

See back of the publication for correct answers





A Visit to the Monarch Grove in Goleta

On the east coast and mid-America, the Monarch butterflies migrate in the fall to central Mexico and their migration is famous all over the world. On the west coast, those Monarch butterflies growing up in the Rockies, in the Sequoia National Forest and the Sierra Nevada migrate west to Eucalyptus groves along the Pacific coast. The closest one to Santa Clarita is just north of Santa Barbara in Goleta, CA. The Monarchs rest here over the winter, being protected by the Eucalyptus trees which also provide a nectar source as they are flowering in December and January. They begin to arrive in November and by mid-February, they are returning to the mountains. Thus the prime time to see the Monarch is in December and January.



On Thursday, January 22, the new Docent Class of 2015 had their session on Arthropods. Insects are arthropods and butterflies are insects. Multiple different aspects of butterflies including the Monarch migration were reviewed. As part of this class on a purely voluntary basis, a field trip was planned for Saturday, January 24 to the Monarch Preserve in Goleta, CA. This is the largest

collection of Monarch butterflies this far south

in California. Over the past 3 years, there has been a steady decline in the number of Monarch butterflies that were seen in the grove. This year, however, more Monarch butterflies were seen generally including in Placerita Canyon so we were optimistic that this year would be better than last year. Indeed, there were almost twice the number of butterflies in the grove this year compared to last year (approximately 5000) and the City of Goleta estimates that there were 10,000 altogether in the local area. The trip was also planned for a weekend day as the City of Goleta has docents who are very knowledgeable about the Monarch butterflies there to discuss their migration and life cycle. Five of the members of the 2015 class came, some brought friends and as this was open to all docents, others came as well also with family. In all we had about 15 people on this trip. The weather was perfect and we were all impressed by the butterflies.



Map showing Monarch Migration (from USGS)



Trail Treasures by RuthAnne Murthy is a new column in the Rattler. Thank you RuthAnne for taking the time to write these very important (to naturalists) and informative articles.



Trail Treasures

The "Waltz of the Flowers" has begun at Placerita Canyon. The early bloomers are a promise of things to come.

One of our early bloomers is Chaparral Currant, *Ribes malvaceum*. The erect plant grows to about 6 feet tall. It is early deciduous losing its leaves in the summer heat. The leaves are a medium green with a lighter underside. The leaves are wrinkled, hairy, and slightly sticky. Chaparral Currant is found throughout the park, but I have noticed the most blooms on the Ecology Trail.

The pretty rose-pink flowers of the Chaparral Currant are blooming now. They grow in drooping bunches called racemes. There are about 10-25 blooms in a raceme. Each slender floral tube is about 1/4 inch long. The flowers provide nectar for Anna's Hummingbirds and other birds as well. The Tailed Copper and Hoary Comma butterflies lay their eggs on the leaves of the Chaparral Current, and provide nectar for butterflies including the Tiger Swallowtail.

In early summer 1/4 inch dark purple berries form. They are dry and bitter to the taste, but provide food for canyon birds and other animals. At times you can see the remains of the berries in coyote scat (droppings).

Be sure to come out to Placerita Canyon often as the waltz continues. If you'd like, join me on the Blooms of the Seasons hike on the 4th Saturday of each month at 9:30. You never know what you will see!

"On the Road with the Rattler"



Paul Levine: Not everyone got into the photo as some arrived after this was taken. We had a great time and the Rattler was particularly intrigued by all the butterflies.



Irene Heerlein and Denny Truger took the Rattler to check the Hoary Ceanothus in bloom.



Ron Kraus took the Rattler to the Hawaiian Bakery and Restaurant in Torrance.



Photo by Denny Truger



Ron Nichols, Robert Grzesiak and Denny Truger took the Rattler on their Santa Clara River expedition.



Going on the trail during the Botany class with the Rattler



Sue Wallander spent one week in Key West and another one in Key Largo in Florida and she took the Rattler during her visit.



End of the class "County Regulations and Emergency procedures" with the Rattler in hand!



Sara Vincelli is a new student in docent training and while her mother, Carole, was camping in Carpenteria, she asked her to hold a Rattler. It is nice to see the whole family getting involved. Thank you.



Diane and Roger are Married

Diane Henry and Roger Gibson met each other during docent training in 2004. It was very sweet to watch a friendship of a few years turn to attraction and to see them falling in love. We were all so delighted for them. They are not teenagers so eventually they moved in together but Diane kept her condo “just in case!”

Now many years passed by and Roger started to get impatient. It was really time to get married and how could he make that happen? The end of December seems like a lovely time of the year. As family gather together, it should be easier to organize a surprise wedding for Diane! It seems that for the last six months Roger has been planning this and he was able to keep this big secret and preparations from Diane. Diane had no clue that her family was in town for a wedding. She thought they were here for the holidays. Roger and Diane went for one of their normal walks at the park, wearing hiking clothes and hiking boots, of course, so do not let the fancy photo mislead you. That was taken for another event and there was no fancy photographer either to take wedding photos.

Coming out of their car for their hike, Diane was surprised to run into all her family, his family, and his daughter, an ordained priest. Now isn't that just the most romantic thing? After the ceremony they went to City Hall and got the marriage license.

Of course, for Roger and Diane there was no other place to get married than Placerita where they met each other during docent training. We are delighted and very proud and we send them our warmest congratulations. They are a strong and a loving couple, they rely on each other and their love of nature is one of the strong bonds they share with each other. Hurrah for Diane and Roger!

A new name tag was quickly ordered for the new Mrs. Gibson and the list of docents is also being altered as Diane Henry is now a brand new Diane Gibson. We are so very happy for both of them and we send all our best wishes to the new couple. A few weddings have taken place at Placerita, it is a wonderful place to get married and have the reception, but I think this is the first surprise wedding that ever happened at the park. Fun and sweet memories are made here.

You never know what may happen when you join Docent training. I have often said it is a life changing experience but in the case of Diane and Roger, that absolutely exceeded all expectations.



SCV Founding Family Member Dies at Age 98

Jim Holt

Melba Walker Fisher, one of Santa Clarita Valley's original pioneering homesteaders, has died at age 98, leaving behind a legacy of local history preserved inside her family's tiny cabin at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

She died New Year's Day.

Fisher was sixth among the 12 Walker children. Her father, Frank E. Walker, who owned land in Placerita Canyon and eventually deeded it to the state for a park, had relatives in Los Angeles, and wife Hortence V. Reynier Walker had relatives in Sand Canyon.

The family's cabin remains a big draw for the Nature Center, attracting those curious about early homesteading in the Santa Clarita Valley, center spokesman Chris Mowry told *The Signal* Sunday. Fisher, who lived in Newhall, regularly joined the scores of center patrons at the cabin she called home, Mowry said, though in the last couple of years her visits became less frequent.

The last surviving member of Frank and Hortence Walker's children is Richard Walker, who currently lives in Chico.

A little more than a year ago, Fisher talked with *The Signal* about the early days growing up in the Santa Clarita Valley.

She described what would seem a harsh life by today's standards for the youngsters growing up on Walker Ranch in Placerita Canyon.

Her father put the kids to work at a young age raking leaves, repairing seasonal damage to the then-unpaved road up Placerita Canyon, mining for gold in the stream that flowed across their property and caring for livestock on the ranch.

“If we wanted some milk, we'd walk down to the corral and milk a cow,” Melba Walker told *The Signal* in October 2013. “We'd walk down to the spring to get water.”

“Mamma would store the milk in a cup in the cupboard,” she recalled. “I'd sneak in and spoon the cream off the top. Momma would always wonder who took the cream.”

The Walker family actually had two cabins in Placerita Canyon — a summer and a winter cabin. One of them is at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center, where visitors can see first hand, Mowry said, the type of harsh living faced by the Walker family in the early 1900s.

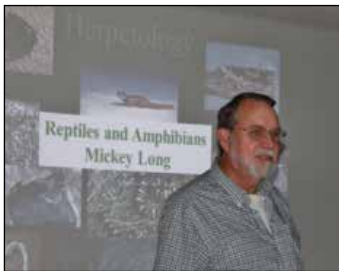
Resource: The Signal
jholt@signalscv.com



Mari Carbajal, Recording Secretary

This is her official title but behind the scenes, Mari's responsibilities have expanded greatly as she seems to embrace many different projects. She brings her sense of organization and attention to details in many directions. We have noticed all she has taken on and we want to recognize her for her devotion to Placerita. Here are a few items that have become part of her job lately:

- Working in the Gift Shop and trained on the new procedures.
 - Assist with purchases.
 - Assist visitors wanting information about trails, maps, guides, etc., and address any other questions asked.
 - Assist county staff in updating trail maps and guides.
 - Provide typesetting and development of graphics as needed.
 - Maintain the database for the Rattler publication of approximately 1700 recipients
 - Update the database with new e-mail addresses, remove cancellations, and research/process undeliverable e-mails.
 - Respond to e-mails as necessary.
-
- Distribute the Rattler bi-monthly.
 - Provide an on-going report to the Rattler Editor.
 - Recording Secretary for the PCNCA Board.
 - Attend the monthly BOD meetings.
 - Track attendance.
 - Create and distribute minutes to the Board, and forward approved Minutes for distribution to PCNCA members.
 - Chair of the annual 2-day PCNCA Holiday Craft Faire.
 - Coordinate the event; create a committee.
 - Ensure each detail of the event is addressed appropriately with delivery on time.
 - Track inventory (existing/what's need for next year).
 - Docent Training Program Administrative Coordinator.
 - Sign up potential trainees.
 - Obtain accurate information from each trainee (address, phone, e-mail, etc.)
 - Track each person's attendance for each class and determine perfect attendance.
 - Make sure that the trainees are checking out DVDs for any classes they missed.
 - Gather initial membership fees and ensure each gets a PCNCA T-shirt, a copy of Windows Into the Wild, and a Docent Patch.
 - Provide the T-shirt inventory (sizes and colors) to the Gift Shop manager for re-order.
 - Ensure each trainee has completed and submitted the County form required for Volunteers.
 - Keep a record of Live Scans completed, the trainee's choice of Docent Report title and whether they have been submitted.
 - Track the 6 required training hikes (audit 3 hikes and lead 3 hikes).
 - Track if the trainee has taken and passed the Final Exam, and track the number of hours (including hours that are extra from what is required during training).
 - Assist the Training Director during class, for anything that might be needed, including ensuring the trainees receive any hand outs from an instructor during a class.
 - All information is provided to the Training Director for their records.
 - In charge of the new guides for the Interpretive Center. I will do the graphic design and take pictures to update the drawings that we have.



Class of 2015

The final count is in and the class of 2015 has 18 students who are immersed in rigorous training to become docents at Placerita. We are delighted to welcome this group and senior docents and staff have been providing support to help them to be successful. The students have started to write their reports, they have followed senior docents on the trails, given talks to different schools, and prepared for their audits.

They have followed all the classes and they know that if they could not attend a class, they are required to watch the DVD of the class so no topic will escape their understanding.

An examination will be taken at the end of the training and those notes taken during the classes will need to be studied and reviewed.

A graduation ceremony will be held on Saturday, March 28 at 6pm at Placerita following a dinner where spouses and families are very much welcomed. Each student who has completed all the requirements will receive a diploma, their name tag and will become a docent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. 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 L.A. department of Parks and Recreation.

We are all very impressed by the commitment of the class of 2015, their enthusiasm and their desire to learn. The level of instruction they are getting is college-level degree and the many hands-on experiences they received completed a very interesting program.

Here is the Class of 2015

Sandra Cattell
Erica de Poor
Brian de la Torre
Clarissa Greene
Karen TS Gubert
Mark Hershey

Al Hofstatter
Kathie Hovore
Gini Lomerson
Dan Lorsch
Jake McCoy
Lola Micu

Koreen O'Connell
Glenda Perl
Tom Schmidt
Barry Schmitt
Robert Starks
Sara Vincelli



You Learn Something New Every Day

A commentary by Mari Carbajal

Being a Docent/Naturalist for the Placerita Canyon Nature Center, I've been trained to know about most of the animals that make their homes in our local chaparral, mountains, high deserts and rural communities. Some species are brazen and make themselves known in a community-like coyotes. Yet others are more secluded and elusive, not often roaming about until dusk, dawn or somewhere in between. The sad part is, as a Naturalist, you're trained to know the local flora and fauna, but you don't always get to witness "first hand" some of the more discreet wildlife.

Driving Northeast on Escondido Canyon Road on my way to Acton one day in January, I noticed a small rodent-like animal in the road. My first impression was that it was a squirrel. It ran off into the chaparral as I cautiously approached it. It looked like a squirrel. It ran like a squirrel. But I'd never seen a squirrel with a dark milk chocolate coat and light tan patches around its face and neck. I was almost convinced that it was a squirrel, but the squirrels in this area are Fox Squirrel, Grey Squirrel, or Ground Squirrel – all of which have bushy tails. This animal was rather slender and had a long tail, but it hardly could be called "bushy."

I looked online for "Southern California Squirrels" in hopes of identifying what I had seen, but to no avail. So I questioned our experts at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center and found that what I saw was a "weasel!" I was so thrilled, and even one of the county staff employees admitted that she was jealous because it's an animal that she always wished to see in the wild, but hadn't seen it as yet. I guess you could say it was on her "Nature Bucket List." She told me that there was a taxidermied weasel in our new museum. When I went to see it up close I was amazed at how small it was. I always thought weasels were bigger – like a Ferret. They're little guys; even smaller than a squirrel.

It turned out that that was not the only discovery I had made. In researching the squirrels online, I was shocked to find something most incredible!! – READY? We actually have flying squirrels in the mountains of San Bernardino!!

I was so fascinated that I knew I had to spread the word. Only a couple of my friends said they had heard about them, but most said they had no idea that we had Flying Squirrels in Southern California!

There are 44 species of flying squirrel around the world, and two of those species are in the State of California; the Northern California Flying Squirrel and the Southern California Flying Squirrel. The local flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus californicus*) is a rare and smaller cousin of its northern relative. They were thought to be a subspecies of the northern flying squirrel, but the gray-brown San Bernardino flying squirrel has been shown through testing that it is genetically different.

The San Bernardino Flying Squirrel is medium sized, slightly gray-brown in color, with furry parachute-like skin under each arm that stretches from its wrist to its ankle. This gives the squirrel the ability to fly from branch to branch and glide between the trees. It doesn't actually fly like a bird, but it uses its wings (skin) to glide in the air, giving it the capability of escaping prey.

This adorable creature lives in high elevations of mixed conifer forests that are dominated by Jeffrey Pine, black oak and white fir, at approximately 4,600 to 7,550 feet altitude. They thrive in forests with large trees that have closed-canopy cover, and provide the capability of finding snags for nesting. Truffles and fungi are their main diet. Now I'm finding out we have truffles?!

The bad news is that due to climate change, forests are dying, and truffles aren't producing as they should, so the flying squirrels are becoming grossly endangered.

Environmentalists have petitioned the U.S. Fish and Game Service to put the San Bernardino Flying Squirrel on the endangered species list. Per Margot Roosevelt, writer for the L.A. Times (margot.roosevelt@latimes.com), "this squirrel was thought to have disappeared from the San Jacinto Mountains in recent decades, and the remaining population appear to be confined to the higher peaks of the San Bernardino Mountains." Truffles and fungi, which are the flying squirrel's primary food source, depend on wet and cool conditions that are being altered by climate-induced drought. Air pollution along with urban development and the clearing of forests affect this animal's habitat. It is estimated that if the current carbon pollution trends continue, scientists predict that climate change may commit one-third of the world's animals and plants to extinction by 2050, and threaten up to two-thirds with extinction by the year 2100."

It is every Naturalist's wish to preserve the habitat for all creatures, but for those animals who are on the endangered list, it becomes much more critical.

Be strong. Be vigilant. Be part of the fight to keep these creatures, and any others, from going extinct. It is important for all "nature loving" people and Naturalists to support the fight against extinction of all animals, but this little guy is fighting to retain his place on earth!! And if you didn't know they existed in Southern California, now you do. So please help in the effort to keep our ecology strong and secure for generations of endangered species of all kinds to thrive in the future.

And keep your eyes open out there... you never know what you might see or find.



Sue Sutton



Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

and Family Festival

May 9, 2015
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

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.

1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I was born in Luverne, Minn. and raised in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I spent the first seven years of my life on a small farm outside of town. I was blessed with wonderful parents and two brothers that kept me connected to the world.

2. How did your love of Nature start? I contracted polio at the age of three and have been unable to walk since then. One of my earliest memories was of my brothers pulling me in a little red wagon out into a meadow next to our farmhouse. I can vividly recall the feel of the sun, the smells of grass and soil, the breeze in my hair and the sound of mourning doves and meadowlarks. I've loved the natural world ever since. The fact that I was seldom outside made this kind of experience even more profound. When I was 18 I found a kindred soul in my husband, Bill, who loved the natural world as much as me. We spent

almost 50 years together, exploring State and National parks together and made our best memories there.

3. What was your education? I attended Pierce Junior College, Cal. State Los Angeles and California State College Northridge. I received B.S. and Masters Degrees in Communicative Disorders.

4. What is your work experience? I was Speech & Language Specialist for 30 years serving preschool - 6th grade students in the Sulphur Springs School District. I was incredibly fortunate to have had a wonderful career.

5. What is your family life? My husband Bill and I had one child, our daughter, Erin who lives in Juneau, Alaska with her family. Bill, a fellow docent at PCNC, passed away last May.

6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place?

Bill started docent training the year before I retired and when I saw how enthusiastic he was about the park I knew that I wanted to be part of it too. The challenge for me was finding a way to contribute as a docent, since hiking the trails was not open to me. As it turns out, I found that there are many ways I could be of use here at PCNC.

7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center? I am heading up docent training for the new museum and I am also co-chair with Andre Donner for the fledgling "Nature in a Box" project. Both of these projects bring together two of my passions, nature and teaching. Finally, I volunteer at the Gift Shop.

8. What did or do you like most about your job at the Nature Center? Where to start! Probably the best part of spending time at PCNC is my fellow docents. It's truly inspiring to see such talented, caring people giving so freely toward making our little corner of the world a better place. I love the visitors too. Their openhearted enthusiasm for learning about and experiencing this place is life affirming.

9. What did you or do you not like about the job? I can't think of a thing!

10. What is your favorite food? Chicken Piccata and Kung Pao Chicken. Black licorice and caramel.

11. What is your favorite color? green

12. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? or pastime? I love just about anything PBS, I sing with COC Voices of the Canyon Choir, bird watching and nature study, read a great deal, volunteer at Valley View Elementary School and quilt.

13. Is there anything else that describes you that we should know? Is there any passion or special events in your life that you would like to tell us about?

PCNC has been a place of real healing for me. The ebb and flow of life here, the changes that come with seasons have been a source of comfort to me since the passing of my husband last May. Contributing in the ways I can continue the work he was doing here.

Lyon's Oak Timeline By Jim Owens



When you take groups out on the Heritage Trail you always stop at the Lyon's Oak and talk about the tree rings, the age and why the tree was cut down to widen Lyons Avenue. Most people look at the Lyon's Oak and think that's interesting. I thought we should create a time line and show how big the Lyon's Oak was at certain times in history. I went to the board and purposed this timeline idea and it was approved.

I tried to pick times in history that would spark interest in all age groups. Next to the Lyon's Oak will be a sign like the one next to the pond. Below is a sample of a short version of the sign in a 3X5 card for the docents.

The large trunk section of the "Lyons Oak" moved here after the tree was removed to widen Lyons Avenue in the early 70's. Match the colored dates with the colored dots on the trunk and see the approximant growth of the tree over time.

1826 – The trees beginning

1842 – Oak of the "Golden Dream". To learn more follow the Heritage Trail to the end.

1850 – Following the Mexican-American war, California was admitted September 9, 1850 as the 31st state.

1876 – Southern Pacific bought Newhall California from founder Henry Mayo Newhall,

and decided to name the town "Newhall" in his honor.

1903 – The Wright Brothers make the first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk North Carolina.

1928 – St Francis Dam collapsed killing nearly 600 people.

1949 – Frank E. Walker and his Family moved to Placerita Canyon in 1905, and continued to live here until the 1940's and sold his property to the State of California.

1955 -- Disneyland Opened

1971 -- Placerita Nature center constructed

Some of you might want to know how I came up with the dates. In our Heritage Trail guide we say the Lyon's oak was cut down in the early 70's. So I picked 1973 as my starting date. We also state the Lyon's Oak was about 147 years old. From there I did the math. This is an approximant timeline.



Blooms of the Season

by Fred Seeley

On a beautiful spring like day, February 16, approximately 20 docent and docent trainees attended an "In Service" training session studying early blooming wildflowers in Placerita Canyon. RuthAnne Murthy began by leading the group on a complete circuit on the Ecology Trail, stopping to observe and discuss about 20 species in flower or about to flower. RuthAnne was very well prepared, giving an explanatory spreadsheet of the species to be discussed to all attendees and offering magnifying loupes to all who wished to use them.

Following a brief rest stop back at the Nature Center, Ron Kraus led the group up the Canyon

Trail for about a mile and a half to view and discuss another list of about 25 plants. Ron is, of course, very knowledgeable about our local wildflowers and he presents the information in a very informative and entertaining way. As Docent Training Coordinator, he also worked in several ideas and techniques to help provide more successful school group nature hikes.

We are indeed very fortunate to have two capable wildflower experts in our midst and we look forward to mid-season wildflower walks and the annual "Nuts and Seeds" In Service after most of the wildflowers and finished their show!





Museum Debut

At Placerita Canyon Nature Center

An eager crowd of more than 150 people turned out for the Feb. 25 opening of the revamped Placerita Canyon Nature Center, as a set of visually striking, museum exhibits made their public debut at the California state park managed by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Made possible in large part by a \$1 million grant from California State Parks, through the Prop. 84 Nature Education Facilities Program, the \$1.4 million project represents a significant overhaul of the nature center first built in 1971.

The upgrades — which add new and exciting dimensions to a facility devoted to educating the public about native animals, plants and natural resources — include large diorama displays depicting Placerita Canyon's three primary ecosystems; a wall-sized freshwater aquarium; a specially-designed bird-viewing area, featuring an observation deck and viewing scopes that allow visitors to watch wild birds along a nearby hillside; informative interpretive displays on native flora and fauna; renovated bird enclosures with a natural soil base; a room dedicated to native mammals; and the wall-to-wall mural "Daylight to Nocturnal," which serves as a colorful backdrop for a collection of lifelike taxidermy animals that include a mountain lion.

Among those appearing at the grand opening was Los Angeles County Mayor Michael D. Antonovich, whose office provided \$465,000 toward the improvements. "In addition to providing our Santa Clarita Valley residents with a vital resource for learning and appreciation of wildlife and the environment, the \$1.4 million in improvements at the nature center help highlight the vital role Placerita Canyon plays in our efforts to preserve our County's diverse natural heritage," said Mayor Antonovich.

Additional improvements to the park property, which is owned by the State of California and managed by Los Angeles County, include a new roof and exterior restoration for historic Walker Cabin; new potable water system at Walker Ranch Campground; and Americans with Disabilities Act-accessibility for a pedestrian bridge.

As part of the grand opening event, representatives of the Tatavium Band of Mission Indians provided a traditional blessing of the land — which was inhabited by their ancestors beginning in ancient times, and has long been central to the region's cultural and natural history. It was in 1769 that the Portola Expedition arrived in the Santa Clarita Valley — helping to bring about the mission era, which transformed this state in so many ways. Less than 100 years later, Francisco Lopez discovered gold in Placerita Canyon, ultimately leading to a rush of fortune-seekers throughout the state who gave birth to modern California.

Other speakers at the Wednesday morning gathering included Placerita Canyon Nature Associates President Jim Southwell, whose volunteer organization contributed close to \$30,000 for completion of conceptual and master plans for the renovations; and L.A. County Department of Parks and Recreation Director Russ Guiney, who said the new-look nature center "tells a compelling story about the animals and plants that make L.A. County such a unique place to experience the beauty of the natural world. We look forward to welcoming visitors of all ages who can embrace these new opportunities for learning and fun."



A Welcoming Entrance

The wheels are starting to turn; we are getting ready to have this area spruced up and fresh looking for the Dedication of the new Placerita Canyon Nature Center Museum. I will remind you once again that it is going to take place on February 25 at 10AM and you are all welcome to share this proud moment. It is going to officially take place on the steps before the Nature Center. Rows of chairs will be arranged to welcome all the guests, microphones will make speeches easier for all to hear and we are making sure that the whole area looks clean and pretty.

New native plants are being planted on the right of the steps replacing native roses which did not survive and the channel around the oak tree on the left has been cleaned up. Rocks will be added around the oak.

As you read in previous articles, the docents had made all the ground work preparation to plan a new Museum in Placerita but without the generosity of LA County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich and the help of the County Parks, this new Museum would have not been built. We are extremely grateful to have a beautiful Museum which exceeds all our expectations.

Come with us to celebrate this event and if you cannot be there on the big day please come and visit any time, you will be pleasantly surprised.



A New Native Plant Garden in the Courtyard

A native plant is one that occurs naturally in a particular region, ecosystem, or habitat without direct or indirect human intervention.

A easy way to understand what is a native plant is to find out what used to grow in an area before any Europeans came to this area, as Native Americans were using only native plants.

Of course, in a Nature Center where we try to protect this fragile ecosystem, planting a native garden is the perfect thing to do.

You will be pleased to see the new project in the courtyard; the concrete has been cut, the big flower pots removed and a brand new native plant garden has been prepared and planted by Kim Bosell, Regional Superintendent III, Dave Stives, Park Animal Keeper, and Roger McClure, Docent at Placerita.

Here is the list of the native plants that found a home in this new garden:

- Mountain Mahogany
- Toyon
- Blue eye grass
- Golden Yarrow
- White Sage
- Monkey Flower
- Penstemon
- Manzanita.

Give them a few weeks to get established but spring is just around the corner and you will be able to see some in bloom very soon.



KHTS AM1220 Introduces Placerita

Each year, beginning the first week of January, our very own Hometown Station starts a new series of interviews called 'Non-profit Spotlight.' They welcome many non-profit organizations and give them a chance to explain what their objectives are.

We have the great privilege to be the first scheduled non-profit organization to be interviewed and by a great stroke of luck, it usually takes place just before docent training so it is a perfect opportunity to get great publicity for the Nature Center.

This year Ron Kraus and Jack Levenberg did part of the explaining, getting much support from Denny Truger. Janice Murray of KHTS is always a delightful host and shows the same enthusiasm year after year.

The interview is always conducted in a very professional and friendly manner and we always have the opportunity to outline the different goals at Placerita and all the projects that are happening at the Nature Center. This year, we were very pleased to be able to announce the completion of the Interpretive Center, all the work on the patio and inside the Frank Hovore Classroom.

We never miss the opportunity to outline in detail what is happening during docent training and we really appreciate the opportunity to explain the program and maybe attract new students. The conversation is always lively, fun and very informative but let's face it; speaking about Placerita Canyon is one of our favorite topics. We are very grateful that KHTS gives us this great publicity and opportunity at the perfect time of the year - just before docent





Olivia Miseroy in Action

In addition to the new taxidermy coming to the center, some of the old ones are getting a "facelift". Olivia Miseroy is pictured here dusting the Golden Eagle that hung in the classroom.

She will also be grooming his feathers and repainting his feet a more accurate color.

Thank you so much Olivia, we appreciate the care you give our taxidermy. We know they are in good hands and that they are accurate once they leave your care.

1. (c) The Walkers sold their acreage to the State of California in 1949. However, the L. A. County Parks and Recreation has managed the Park and built a Nature Center under agreement with the State since the 1960's.
2. (b) O. J. the Great Horned Owl was raised from a juvenile to an adult bird at the Nature Center, and was shown to thousands of visiting school children over about a 30 year career of animal shows. O. J. stood for "Owl Junior" since the center already had an adult Great Horned Owl when he arrived. The logo of O.J. seen in our publications and on our uniforms was drawn by volunteer Jill Goddard.
3. (c) There are three time periods when various animals are awake and actively seeking their food. "Diurnal" is day-time active. "Nocturnal" is night time active "Crepuscular" is dawn and dusk active.



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