



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.

May/June 2014

Hello Dear Nature Friends

1,500 copies of the Rattler are sent! I want to celebrate this mile stone with you. I have seen the number of copies slowly creeping up. All but 30 are on PDF version so no paper is being used.

Heidi Webber and I have been working hard for 16 years to make this happen so we are proud. Most of the copies are local but some go out of state and one goes to France (grant you, it is for my sister) but I guess it makes us an international publication!

These last 2 months have made family ties at Placerita even stronger because we went through two important events. The passing of Bob Moss was very painful, we loved him so much and he was a pillar at Placerita that we are going to miss terribly so we grieve together. A large part of this issue is dedicated to him. If you did not know him, please read about him; he was a character, funny but strong and with golden principles to lead a good life which influenced many people.

Last month we welcomed 14 new docents with a graduation party, introducing the class of 2014. It is hard to remember such an enthusiastic new crop of docents; they took us by surprise when we saw a few ready to audit the school tour on the trails after just a few weeks of training.

Ruthanne Murthy found herself ready to take over an existing program and some are almost every day at the center. Mona Ruberry has taken over the position of Membership Chair. Chris Miller has joined the team at the Gift Shop and also has joined the Outreach Team. This is a delight to see and you can imagine that we are all very pleased to see them in action with so much pleasure.



Also, in passing, we really had some rain...still not enough but we keep our fingers crossed that the tadpoles are going to survive.

An important event at Placerita is coming up on Saturday, May 10. Open House is not a fund raiser, it is our way to give back to the community, open our door and hope all our visitors, big and small, will have a good time.

Check the flyer for more information and put the date on your calendar and be sure to come on that day. You won't regret it!

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.



Olivia Miseroy

I am pleased to announce that I will be taking over managing the taxidermy at Placerita. For those who don't know me, my name is Olivia Miseroy and I'm a Recreation Leader and am usually working on the weekends.

I've been interested and involved with helping with the taxidermy at the park and am excited to be working on getting new specimens ready for our new museum. While I won't be doing the actual taxidermy there's still a lot of work involved in preparing and maintaining all our animals that are not alive.

My job will consist of cataloging and organizing specimens brought to us and finding ways to utilize them for educational purposes as well as keeping them in good condition. In addition to taxidermy, I would like to expand into making other displays from animal remains such as preserving wings and feathers for our touch table and outreach program as well as cleaning skulls and bones.

We are one of few nature centers to have our own dermestid beetle colony, bugs used by museums to clean bones. They've already cleaned a few skulls on display at the park and I'm now starting to use them to clean complete skeletons which I'm learning to articulate.

If any docents are interested in helping me keep the taxidermy clean or even learn to work on putting bones together any help



The Rattler

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

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or you can email it to Evelyne at 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.

A big Thank You goes to those generous souls who thought of Placerita's residents when making their donations.

Gault St. ES	Jennifer McCann
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Live Oak ES	Wiley Canyon ES
Sue Mayhew	

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. Sunday, May 18th at 2.00 pm - Chaparral presentation by Richard W. Hasley from the Chaparral Institute. Sunday, June 8th at 2.00 pm - History of Placerita Canyon By Ron Kraus
- SPECIAL EVENT** Open House, Saturday May 10 from 10am-3pm. Check the flyer in this issue.

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



Reg Fear, a PCNCA Superman

First Huge Accomplishment--Strategic Planning

In 2005 Jim Southwell as President of the PCNCA saw a need to have a strategic plan. Ian Swift was instrumental in deciding the mission statement and information was gathered from the PCNCA members. Objectives were decided under each topic and members would sign up during the meeting to accomplish each project.

Reg Fear, who volunteered to head this huge project has monitored each objective, reporting to the board quarterly and when it was completed, that objective would be identified in the Procedure Manual.

Pam Koch was in charge of keeping the Procedure Manual updated, which she would do annually. Pam did a fantastic job, linking each item so the references are easy to control back and forth from Strategy plan to Procedure Manual. Fred Seeley has taken over this responsibility.

Most of the objectives at this time have been accomplished but the biggest projects in the future will be the museum, the classroom, the patio, and the Braille trail. Most of it is under item 2 in the Strategic Plan and progress is noted on a quarterly basis.

Right now we do management by objectives and the board makes sure it is accomplished. We have completed 42 objectives with only 11 yet to do. Thus 79% of all actionable items have been accomplished. I am very pleased to let you know that Jim Southwell will take over the job of Strategy Planning.

Second Huge Accomplishment--Taxidermy

Around 2004 Bob Moss, Maxine New and Reg started the taxidermy committee. They interviewed three companies and selected Art Craft because of the quality of their work and their prices.

Maxine had to drop out so Bob and Reg have done it ever since. They had to determine what animals the board wanted to have taxidermied and then would get a price. Art Craft had a whole catalogue with various Styrofoam shapes so they could pick what particular position they wanted.

The length of time each item took would depend if it was during hunting season or not. If it was hunting season, it would take longer. The pelts were sent to San Francisco to be treated so they would be soft and supple to work them onto the forms.

Bob and Reg ordered all the animals that are in the classroom (bobcat, raccoons, red tail fox, great horned owl, red tail hawk, coyote, etc...) and the board paid for them. The skunk and some birds were done by another taxidermist.

The taxidermy in the museum will be supplied to us but we have to make sure that all the taxidermied animals are going to be well maintained and stay clean. It is very important to keep our exhibit in optimum quality. Olivia Miseroy has taken over that job.

Having enjoyed managing both projects, Reg now believes it is time to pass the baton to someone else in the organization.

Thank you Reg, you have been invaluable in managing both of these huge and important projects.



Open House

Every year on the second Saturday of May, Placerita Canyon Nature Center puts on a big gala as a gift to the community in the form of an Open House. Each year I choose a theme to focus on. Last year the theme was the YEAR OF THE SNAKE and the year before that was DISCOVERING THE TREASURES IN NATURE where Captain Wildflower welcomed you to the park.

It is a day full of fun and discovery with activities for children and adult "kids".

The goal is to invoke that sense of wonder and discover the great treasures of Nature that we are all a part of. Many fears are based on myths or a lack of understanding. We hope to educate you and open up a new way of seeing the world and how all things in Nature are vital to our existence.

Come and discover the AMAZING ARTHROPODS as our theme this year. Look for the Doodlebug to welcome you.

Deb Clem

Chairperson of Open House

Docent/ Naturalist



CPR Class

This is supposed to be a very serious and worrisome topic with concerned students scared to make the wrong move? Not so when Linette Brammer is your teacher.

It was a very popular class with a large attendance but Linette managed to make it fun. Lots of laughing was heard and that is good because the class is very long with many topics to cover. Thank you Linette for doing such a great job, your students sure appreciate your talent as a teacher to make this difficult class more pleasant.



Natural Delight

(published in The Rattler January /February 2006)

Bob Moss taught arctic survival and lived with the Eskimos for a while. A special occasion in every culture means special food.

In the spring, the Eskimos would catch a flock of very small birds, kill them, stuff them in a seal and let them macerate for many months. The fat of the seal would pickle the birds. When the feast day came, Bob was offered this delicacy. The most work was in removing the feathers and the insides—which would be removed easily—before the bird was gobbled up. Bob said it had a nutty flavor, not unpleasant. (Tastes like chicken?)

If somebody gives you a very special meal, you have to reciprocate, so Bob somehow managed to have watermelons brought to camp. The Eskimos had never seen watermelons and they loved them; they ate every part of them, even the skin and seeds disappeared.



Remembering Bob Moss

By Ron Kraus

When I started docent training in 2002, Bob was one of the first of the senior docents I met. I was a little intimidated by him at first—kind of a big, gruff guy—I thought he was the bouncer! One day I saw him on the steps of the nature center holding a California Sister butterfly and quickly learned that he was a nice guy who really cared about nature.

Over the years I served on the PCNCA Board and worked with him on other projects and events—the taxidermy collection at the nature center, the Open House, and the Holiday Craft Faire. He was our beloved Santa Claus every year at the Craft Faire and everyone enjoyed his portrayal of Saint Nick.

He also helped every year with docent training—he was our “Dean of Docents,” whose main job was to make sure the new students felt at home in the Placerita Canyon program. He was very good at following up with students who drifted away, bringing them back into the fold.

His passing leaves a void in our hearts and in the Placerita family of docents and volunteers. He will be missed, but not forgotten.



Can't I Take a Nap in Peace?

Bob Moss had to clean up his blue Volkswagen bus before the campout. He was folding the blankets neatly inside the van, saw the mailman, got distracted and went back into his house leaving the back door of the van open.

Later in the evening, he remembered and went back to his van and slammed the door closed. Immediately, he heard screeching and scratching and knew somebody very mad was inside. Their neighbors' cat is very large and constantly in a bad mood and Bob thought he had locked the cat in the van. “I do not want to have a mad cat jump at me.” Bob thought, so he went carefully to the passenger door, opened it up and stood behind it.

An extremely annoyed bobcat almost flew out of the van, screeching and growling, landed on the driveway, turned around and gave a good, long look at Bob through slit eyes full of fury. Bob was very relieved to have chosen to hide behind the passenger door at this point.

A Trip to Sima's Garden:

Sima started her native plant garden 5 years ago. She took a 2-level class of landscape design at the Theodore Payne foundation and had plans drawn for her plot. She buys plants in gallon size and native trees like manzanita (she has a beautiful pink one and a white one) which grow very slowly but her blue ceanothus is gorgeous right now.

She waters very lightly by hand and her garden reseeds itself. She opened her garden to the docents of Placerita to give them an idea of what a native garden can look like and we thank her for her initiative. Charlotte Clark, 2 year old, came to do an inspection and declared that it was very pretty!





A Farewell to Santa Clause

No children, you haven't lost your beloved holiday gift giver, but the Placerita Nature Center Docents have lost a beloved friend and character! Bob Moss was Mr. Santa Claus at our Holiday Craft Fair every year of his service to the Nature Center until his recent illness. Bob was the perfect character for the playful role having the natural beard and belly for the costume and the jolly disposition! Bob also was known as the "Dean of Docents" having volunteered to see to it that newly trained docents found us to be a friendly group and welcomed to the docent family. In his professional life he actually was a Dean of Students for many years! Bob served on our Board of Directors until his illness would no longer allow him to participate.

As President of The Board I would watch Bob's expressions to know when the Board members had exceeded his patience with idle chatter and that I should get on with the business at hand. Bob also had no patience with me if I let the meeting exceed an hour and fifteen minutes and would promptly pack up and leave the meeting at 2:15 (meetings starting promptly at 1:00) Bob also was serving on our Taxidermy Committee with his close friend Reg Fear whom also served with Bob as volunteers at the Sepulveda Basin.

Bob had a keen sense of humor which he displayed at one of our off-site holiday parties by "Roasting" any and all members of the Board who may have exhibited a bit of self-importance! Ron Krause has this bit of theater on video and maybe he will share this with all of us in the future as a tribute to Bob. Most of all, I remember a very pleasant vacation trip with Bob and Linda and Reg & Jan on a 14 day Viking River Cruise across Europe from Amsterdam to Budapest. These were most pleasant traveling companions with Linda and my wife Diane sticking together on shore excursions since they both had knee and hip disabilities and could not climb many stairs. Viking served excellent evening meals which we all enjoyed at the same table. This included sampling many bottles of local wines which Bob seemed to especially enjoy!

We have learned in our nature studies the life cycle of all the animal species, but when it came to our own species it is hard to accept the end of friends and loved ones. Bob called me a few days before he died, as he did with some others of you, to say with resignation, that he would be moving on and just wanted to say goodbye while he still could. We talked and agreed that if it was possible we would meet again. Until then, farewell Santa Clause.

Jim Southwell

On the Road with the Rattler



Denny H. Truger and Charita Eragoda with a nice sugar bush background (on the road with the Rattler)



Evelyne took the Rattler to the Sea of Cortez where she was checking out a rockery of brown and blue boobies.



The Rattler made it to the top of the Coyote Loop at the Quigley Canyon Open Spaces. With Irene Heerlein, Jan Nichols, Maria Elena Franicevich Christensen and Charitha Eragoda.



This one escaped being published but it cannot hide this time ! The docents went on a trip planned by Lanita Algeyer in October 2012. The past is catching up with all those smiling faces.



Once again the Rattler rocks at Switzer Falls. with Bill Algeyer, Robert Grzesiak, Richard Donner, Maikel Summy, Andrea Donner, Maria Elena Franicevich Christensen, Jan Nichols and Dan Kott.

RuthAnne Murthy Says

My love affair with Placerita Canyon started almost thirty years ago when I moved to the Santa Clarita Valley. I was raised in Orange County and was a “beach girl”. I loved being out in our family boat observing the seaweed, fish, and other sea animals. One of my fondest memories was coming eye to eye with a 6 foot sunfish floating lazily on the ocean surface. As we approached the sunfish swooped down into the water with great velocity. Its power amazed and shocked me.

My parents were great nature lovers. We camped all over California, especially in the Sierras. Lundy Lake was a family favorite. We fished until we caught our limit of trout and then headed out to explore trails, mines, streams, and anything that was new and exciting.

After graduating from Long Beach State University, I moved to Oregon for a few years. My love of the great outdoors continued as I hiked with my young nephews. We investigated banana slugs, skunk cabbage, waterfalls, lakes, rivers, and seashores. To this day, my nephews talk about our explorations.

I moved to the Santa Clarita Valley in 1985 because I accepted a teaching job. I didn’t know a living soul and so I started investigating the area. It wasn’t long before I discovered Placerita Canyon. I often hiked there alone on a Sunday afternoon. I wanted to learn more about the canyon and its biodiversity. It was a new experience for me to see the Oak Woodland, the Chaparral, and the Riparian habitats.

Years later I was invited to attend a summer-long training on teaching local history. After extensive lectures, our group traveled by coach throughout California visiting both natural and historical places of interest. When I returned home, I was excited to extend my knowledge and worked on writing the third grade local history curriculum for my school district. That is when I wrote my book And the Years Went By as well as a short text called Our Valley.

From there I began to learn about the plants and animals that live in the Santa Clarita Valley. I did research and then began taking small groups of my students to Placerita Canyon on Saturdays with Frank Hoffman leading the way. Each group chose a habitat to study, and we presented the information to parents at Open House. The students were so enthusiastic that it kept me motivated to learn more and more.

I retired from teaching last June. One aspect of my “retirement plan” was to become a docent at Placerita Nature Center. I just completed the training and am excited to instill a love for nature to the community. I jokingly say that I know just enough to be dangerous. I have a lot of learning to do, but I love to learn so it is just a perfect match for me. I hope you will come and learn with me as we seek out the Blooms of the Season.

Graduation Party

This was an important evening because we were going to introduce the new class of 2014. Many of the new graduates invited family members to share in their glory, and about 80 people gathered around the tables. The room looked very pretty decorated with white tablecloths, purple plants and white candles on the tables. It looked very festive, so a big Thank You to Sue Wallander for that beautiful "designer look".

Evelyne Vandersande, in charge of the party, is grateful that so many docents came ahead of time to help set up the room. The room was used for other purposes until 5pm, so with only one hour to be ready, all that help was extremely important.

Our parties always start at 6 pm, but there is an appetizer table so people have chance to nibble, have a drink, socialize and greet each other. This also allows the late arrivals a bit of time to organize their dishes on the buffet table. It's always a pot luck dinner, the food is plentiful and delicious as every



body brings their best dish or buys something fancy and tasty. When our M.C. Ron Kraus gave the signal at 6:20 pm to move to the buffet, nobody was dragging their feet! Many docents print their recipes and leave copies, so the other volunteers have a chance to learn new dishes. This is how the Placerita cookbook was created and all was delicious. Thank you to all the cooks who did such an excellent job.

After dinner, the ceremony started with Ron Kraus giving credit to the committee in charge of docent training. It is a fantastic team effort, and they well deserved the applause.

Deb Clem came to introduce Open House and explained what her vision will be for this year. Irene Heerlein asked for your help with the treasure hunt. Teresa Jacobs explained the new rules for the gift shop, which are going to take effect very soon.

Olivia Miseroy told us that she is taking over Taxidermy, and asked if

some docents would be interested in helping her.

Then it was time for the awards: RuthAnne Murthy got a gift certificate for taking over the program "Blooms of the Season".

Bill Kahl got a gift certificate in recognition of all the work he does with the animals, including the alligator lizard, on a very regular basis.

Teresa Jacobs got a gift certificate to thank her for taking over the gift shop in the middle of all those many changes.

Then it was time to welcome the class of 2014. Jill Goddard had prepared some caps for the students who had perfect attendance. They received their

diploma, name tags and volunteer-Naturalist field guides to provide help on the trails.



Some could not be there that evening, but 14 students graduated in the class of 2014. Our warmest congratulations to all of them!!!!

Ron Kraus was surprised and very pleased to receive a big hug and a plaque from the class with their picture on it. Again, this new class of 2014 is a great success and we have been happily surprised by their eagerness to serve and their enthusiasm. They are here to stay!

Bob Moss

This is the interview the Rattler had with Bob in December 2005.

Where were you born? In Colorado, in a tiny town called Alamosa, a valley between mountains, then we moved to Trinidad, at the base of the mountains. It is a railroad gold mining town and my father ran the theater.

What was your education? I joined the Air Force and for 4 years I was a medic in Canada and Greenland where I taught arctic survival. I lived with Eskimos for a while and learned their ways. Then I went to college on the GI Bill at UCLA. I have a Master's degree in Spanish. While I was in college, I would drive an ambulance to pay the bills.

What is your work experience? I was a teacher and worked for L.A. Unified Schools for 27 years. I would teach Spanish and English as a Second Language. Then I became a counselor and Dean of Students.

Are you married? Yes, with Linda.

How did you meet? I was an interim school principal for night school for English as a Second Language classes. I needed teachers and I interviewed Linda, she was funny and we hit it off right away. She got the job and we got married. I also have two grown sons from a previous marriage.

When did you come to Placerita for the first time? In the spring of 2000, I saw an ad in the paper about Placerita. I came to the center and Ian was at the desk. I thought he was just a kid but he gave me all kinds of information and told me to come back in September.

What is your title with the PCNCA? I am a docent, I was on the board for 3 years and I am a member of the taxidermy committee. I am also Santa Claus during the Crafts Faire.

What do you like the most about your job? Taking inner-city kids for their first experience in nature. To me, it is fascinating to watch that.

What don't you like about your job? It was difficult to deal in changing my whole approach to the program after the fire. Things I used to talk about are not there, so I had to change and adapt.

At Placerita, is there a special accomplishment that makes you feel proud? The taxidermied animals. Most of the animals are there because we took that job and the result is very gratifying.

What is your favorite food? Chicken-fried steak.

What is your favorite color? Blue because it is restful.

What is your favorite TV show? I almost never watch TV, perhaps the news because this is all I watch.

Do you have a passion? Since I was a kid, I have loved nature. I have had more pets than you can name: I have had a bear, a turkey vulture, a crow for 5 years and any kind of snake including a rattle snake.

I would read any kind of book about nature, I had a whole encyclopedia set and in the arctic I was taught by the Eskimos. In the Air Force Academy, we looked for a gyrfalcon because it was the mascot of the academy. It is the largest falcon, almost the size of a Red-tail hawk. For 3 days, we looked and the Eskimos helped us to find the falcon, they knew where it was and I learned as I went along.

I am also a docent at the Sepulveda Basin and I give tours to school children. I like to study the birds there because you can see 25 to 30 species of bird in one day.

Oh, I almost forgot to speak about being Santa Claus at Placerita. It is an unusual experience that not too many people go through. I love to see the little kids. They either want to talk to you or are too afraid to come close. They tell you what they want for Christmas and you see the parents listening. I really love doing it.



Bob Moss, Docent of the Year 2008

The Rattler, November/December 2008

Bob Moss is a big gentle guy with a smile that comes from the heart. He has a low-key way of doing things, gently and quietly, but he knows what he wants and how to make it happen. He always gets results in the end without fanfare and always sees what needs to be done. For example, during the last docent training, Bob noticed that the new docents needed a sponsor. He did not plan meetings and agenda, but came to every class, quietly developed friendships, providing help, advice and words of wisdom to reassure them and make their experience more comfortable.

We have a great birder's program in place but Bob noticed that some novices did not dare to ask questions during the bird walk because they were afraid that their questions would be too basic or sound stupid. Again, Bob started a program where children were welcomed, giving the beginner birders a perfect opportunity to start from scratch. The classes were not intimidating, were full of information and very much hands on. It was such a tremendous success that the classes are repeated on a regular basis.

Bob has been our Santa at Placerita for many years, a job that he loves and you have to watch the sweet interaction that develops with the children to understand what a soft heart Bob has. He told me "I love to see the little kids. They either want to talk to you or are too afraid to come close. They tell you what they want for Christmas and you see the parents listening."

Bob's knowledge of the animal kingdom is impressive. What is special about Bob is that all this information he so quickly can give you comes from books but also from personal experience. That makes a very interesting combination. As a young man for example, Bob had a bear for a pet. He has been seen reading different books on scat during long plane rides to the great puzzlement of his fellow passengers...

At Placerita when we have a question about an animal, we have learned to ask Bob and we can always rely on his knowledge about birds, scat, animal tracks and animal behavior at different times of the year.

Bob received professional training and that helped him to become the expert he is now. He joined the Air Force and for four years was a medic in Canada and Greenland where he taught Arctic Survival. He lived with Eskimos, learned their ways to endure the climate and be safe.

Since he was a child, he has read every kind of book about nature including his own encyclopedia set. He is also a docent at Sepulveda Basin where he received training and gives tours to school children there as well as at Placerita.

PCNCA would like to warmly thank Bob for his many years of teaching the children and the docents and helping us to grow as a more friendly and scientific organization.

Bob, thank you for sharing your knowledge—always with a gentle smile.



Would You Like to Adopt Some Wildlife?

I sure hope you have no problem slicing into a dead rat, if you want a raptor. Also, their enclosures need to be constructed according to Fish and Wildlife recommendations and yes, they are very large, so that is going to take a good portion of your backyard. They need to be cleaned every day, and there is also the matter of the permit. You will need one, and that will demand months of training, inspection and very frankly, your chance of getting one is extremely thin.

To think of it, food for snakes, turkey vultures and tarantulas can also be a little bit dicey. Are you disappointed? Don't be--there is a way at Placerita Canyon Nature Center to adopt an animal without going through all this endless work.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center is not a zoo, but they do have many live animals on display in their museum. Visitors can get close-up views of desert tortoises (when they are not hibernating), live snakes (including rattlesnakes), as well as turtles, lizards and toads in their terrariums.

Trained docents present other animals to the public at 1:00 PM, including tarantulas, various snakes, an American kestrel, and larger birds.

Have you ever seen a barn owl or turkey vulture up close and personal? Orion, the nature center's great horned owl, is always a big hit with young and old. The larger animals at the center cannot be released into the wild, as they have either been sick or injured, or have imprinted on humans. That's really why there are there.

Now, many of these animals are adoptable! No, you can't take them home with you, but you can help the nature center by providing financial support for their food, veterinary care and the supplies necessary to ensure these animals receive the exceptional care they must have. The animals at the nature center need that special guardian who wants to help with their care and feeding. It's the Adopt-An-Animal Program, and you can get more information from a brochure available at the nature center or by calling the center at 661-259-7721.

There are five different financial packages, starting at just \$25 for a one-year adoption. Some of the perks you'll receive include a photo and fact sheet about your adopted animal, a certificate of appreciation, and recognition galore! And, of course, you can visit your adopted animal any time you wish!

These adoptions have been very popular with schools and Scouts. Some families have adopted several animals every year since the program began. The nature center can even personalize these adoptions for birthdays, anniversaries or any other special occasion. They make great gifts for a nature lover! So, I hope you'll come to hike in the natural area and then stop in at the nature center and adopt an animal!

Perhaps, like so many other people in this valley, you have no idea where or what is the Nature Center! We have been here for more than 30 years but we are in a quiet and beautiful part of this valley, so maybe you missed us before.

Placerita Canyon Natural Area is a hidden gem within our community. Easily accessible--take Sierra Highway to Placerita Canyon Road and drive two miles east to the entrance. Here you will find ten miles of hiking trails, gorgeous scenery and a tranquil setting that will make all your stress and worries disappear.

Within the natural area is Placerita Canyon Nature Center--a building that always seems to be bustling with activity. School children arrive for special programs during the week, and on Saturdays you can visit and take a nature stroll with a docent in the morning or attend a live animal presentation in the afternoon.

There are bird walks, wildflower walks, and one Sunday a month there is a nature lecture series that is fascinating for all. No parking fees, no entrance fees - what could be better! All this information and more can be found on our website: <http://www.placerita.org/>

Maybe you are not interested in animals, so I kept the best part until the end: Placerita is a beautiful place to hike, stroll, look at wild flowers or just relax, sit on a bench and listen to the birds.

Have a great spring.

Bird Nests

By Bob Fischer



Early in April my neighbor very excitedly stopped me to tell me he had hummingbird nest in a bush alongside his house. It reminded me of the time years ago when a hummingbird built a nest just outside my daughter's bedroom window and we spent hours watching it when the eggs were laid and the babies hatched.

More than 700 bird species breed in North America, and the variations in their behaviors are fascinating and complex. Different species find mates, build nests, lay eggs, and raise their young in incredibly different ways. Nests provide a safe place for eggs and young birds to develop. Bird nests are extremely diverse, although each species typically has a characteristic nest style. Some birds do not make nests at all laying their eggs in a simple scrape in the ground. Other birds construct nests from natural materials, such as grass, leaves,

mud, lichen, and fur, or from man-made materials like paper, plastic, and yarn.

Nests can be found almost anywhere – on the ground, in trees, in burrows, on the sides of cliffs, in and on man-made structures, etc. Females typically build nests, but sometimes both parents or just the male will build it as part of the effort to attract a mate. The size of the nest generally depends on the size of the bird though some small birds build very large nests. The size of the nest may also relate to the number of eggs usually laid.

The total number of eggs that a female can lay in one nesting attempt varies widely depending on the species. For example, many tropical birds lay clutches of only 2 or 3 eggs. Waterfowl, such as Wood Ducks, can lay up to 15 eggs in one nesting attempt. Clutch size can also vary widely among individuals of the same species depending on food and calcium availability, latitude, age of the female, weather, and time of year.

The American Robin, which nests throughout the United States, usually locates its nest in the fork of a bush or tree. However, robins will often nest close to humans on building ledges or other well supported sites.



Bluebirds nest in cavities in open woodland, orchards, or meadows. Bird boxes have greatly helped this restore this species, as their natural nesting cavities have become scarce and their numbers were declining. The nest is loosely built of grasses and other plant materials. Finer grasses and sometimes fur are used for the lining.

Though wrens naturally nest in cavities, they adapt well to nest boxes, tree crotches, or human altered surroundings, such as in a potted plant. Wren nests typically have a nice domed structure to it. The nest itself is made of plant materials and lined with fine grasses, hair, and feathers.

Typical breeding habitat for House Finches can be diverse. Preferred habitats are cultivated areas and around buildings, but they may be found in desert, marsh land, or forested

habitats. The House Finch will utilize a variety of nesting sites. These can include tree branches, cacti, rock ledges, vents, street lamps, hanging planters or in cavities such as nest boxes.

Though most hummingbird species nest in a variety of wooded habitats, many will nest near human habitation. The nest is typically a tiny, tight cup that saddles the nest site. Nest sites can consist of trees, shrubs, or other horizontal surfaces. Nest cups might be made of several materials. Fine plant material is held together with spider silk and lined with even finer material. Then the outside of the nest may be covered with moss or lichen.

House Sparrows were introduced to North America. They breed readily around human habitation, especially in cities, and even farms, as there are many crevices for them to nest in. The nest is typically a domed structure made of straw, plant stems and trash such as paper, plastic, string, or cloth. It is then lined with finer materials.



Bush tits, a very small bird, are a common bird here in our valley. Their nest is a 6 to 12 inch elongated pendulous structure with an entrance on one side near the top. The bushtit is typical of several species of small birds the build a hanging nest by weaving strands of grass or other materials both natural and man-made into some type of usually long hanging basket.

Barn Swallows often breed in a variety of habitats though they particularly prefer being near water and in open country. Their nest is a shallow cup of mud pellets mixed with grass and hair. It is attached to a vertical surface and can have very little support underneath. The swallows returning to Capistrano are cliff swallows with almost identical nesting habits.

A Canada goose nest, usually placed close to water, is nothing more than a structure built on the ground with plant material and lined with plant down and feathers. However, it can occasionally be found on raised





locations such as rock ledges, tree stumps. Canada Geese lay about 6 large, white eggs. The chicks are precocial, meaning they are covered in down, can walk, and can feed themselves soon after hatching.

Kestrels can be found in a variety of habitats. Preferred areas can include forest edges, orchards, pastures, and even deserts. Kestrels may use several different sites for nesting. Natural tree cavities, nest boxes, or crevices in cliffs, dirt banks, or even buildings may be utilized. Kestrels typically have some height to their nests. Thus, they can be found nesting up to 30 feet off the ground.

Ever try to weave a basket out of grasses or palm fronds? It's a bit difficult, right? Takes a while to get the hang of it? Well what if you tried to weave a basket using just your mouth and starting out with one piece of grass? It'd be really tough, right? But

it's nothing for the weaverbird! Weavers are small birds related to finches. There are an incredible 57 species of weavers and all have their own styles and strategies for building elaborate nests, but no matter the various styles or materials used, all are mind-blowing. Typically it is the male weaver bird who builds the nests as a way to woo females. The better the builder, the more likely he is to find a mate. Many species start out with just a single strand of plant fiber and begin the seemingly miraculous project from there.

These are just a few examples of the many bird nest we can see almost anywhere in here in our valley.



Geology by Eric Indermill;

On Sunday March 16, Eric Indermill, Docent at Placerita, gave a lecture about Geology and managed to make the topic fun and easy to understand.

Geology is important to understand because at Placerita we have oil, gold, earthquakes and fossils.

The formation of the Transverse Mountain ranges and the Santa Clarita Valley was discussed and explained as well as the differences between sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rocks.

Thank you Eric for sharing your knowledge.



A Published Author in Our Midst?

RuthAnne Murthy is a new docent from the class of 2014. She is now leading the botany walk called "Blooms of the Season" starting in March. Our gift shop also carries a book she wrote "And the Years went By". The illustrations were done by Pat Saletore from the Historical Society.

It is quite interesting and deals with many local topics: the Tataviam, the Santa Clara River, Antonio del Valle, the gold rush, the railroad, and the start of Valencia. It is all done in simple terms and it is kind of nice for adults too if you want to have a refresher course on all those past events. RuthAnne is a woman of many talents.

DOCENT TRAINING 2014
Synopsis's of the Class of 2014 Reports

A Historical Gold Mine for the Third Graders of the Santa Clarita Valley: by Michelle Dearing

This is an overview of the people of Placerita Canyon. Michelle uses the Nature Center area as a perfect place to bring children tasked with the assignment to create a scrapbook. In this case she offers a great history of the park location and its prior inhabitants. The report takes the reader through periods of Tataviam Indians, the European explorers, and a narration of gold discovery and the history of the Frank Walker family and their relationship with the area. She ends with an interesting comment: "That is your charge and gift as a docent of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center. You get to be the shovel in that young prospector's hand – digging up treasures of history and nature."

Michelle also provided a sample report prepared by a 3rd grade child on this subject.

Poison Oak by Marilyn Matlen

This is a good overview of poison oak and an interesting collection of home remedies for symptomatic relief if exposed to poison oak. The paper also included a good selection of photographs.

Anna's Hummingbird by Mona Ruberry

The report provides a historical perspective of the Anna's Hummingbird, how it got its name and who first collected it, and its habits. The information highlights the bird's unique characteristics, of which most people don't know, like the fact they are Omnivores. Our Docent Cardiologist is impressed that the heart rate can be over 1200 beats per minute.... And Mona even answers the perplexing question..... why do they hum???

Pocket Gophers by Mara Cohen

This was an excellent overview of the roll that the gopher plays in the ecosystem including increasing soil fertilization by bringing decomposing materials from down deep to the surface, increasing soil aeration, decreasing soil compaction, increasing water infiltration (when it does rain) which in turn, decreases water runoff. All of this also increases the diversity of the plant community. Almost makes one want to have a family of gophers in their back yard!!!

The American Badger by Christy Cregut

This is an overview of the badger's life style, habitat, diet and description. Includes some good original photos. This member of the weasel family can be found in Placerita Canyon but is not commonly seen. Christy has first-hand experience in successfully rehabilitating a badger and returning to the wild.

Three Birds Common to the Riparian Ecosystem by Jennifer Galasso

This report is a brief description of three of the birds that are likely to be seen by most visitors to Placerita Canyon's Riparian ecosystem area and adjoining ecosystems. The three birds are the Raven, the Acorn Woodpecker and the Red Tailed Hawk.

Southern California Native People and Native Plants by RuthAnne Murthy

This is an excellent very brief synopsis of 14 local plants, with photos, and in many cases, discusses their medicinal and nutritive properties as used by the original Indians living in Placerita Canyon. The plants include the Coast Live Oak, Scrub Oak, Poison Oak, Yucca, Sycamore, Holly Leaf Cherry, Toyon, Chamise, and California Buckwheat.

Symbiotic Relationships in Placerita Canyon by Gary "Dov" Gertzweig

This report is an excellent presentation on the relationships between various plants as well as plants and animals in various symbiotic relationships. He also provides definitions of the different type of relationships. He makes a very interesting analogy with respect to symbiotic relationships suggesting that lichen is akin to a family living in a single family home. When they go away for a period to time, the house is dormant. The utility use is minimal if not off and nothing is happening in the home like when the weather is dry, the lichen is virtually dormant. The family returns similar to the rains coming, the house become active again. Further, each member of the family contributes to the welfare of the entire group like the algae and fungus both contribute to the viability of the lichen. He also suggests that symbiosis is equivalent to networking which is necessary to maintain a balance between personal and professional lives.

Discovery of Gold in Placerita by Chris Miller

Chris provides a descriptive history of the area that became Placerita Canyon leading up to the events surrounding the initial recorded discovery of gold in California. The historical events beginning with the Spanish explorers, ownership changes by families and countries (Spain to Mexico and ultimately to the United States) are covered leading up to the March 9, 1842 gold discovery by Jose Francisco de Garcia Lopez, or Francisco Lopez, as we know him.

Dudleya at Placerita Canyon by Bill Algeyer

The report is an analysis of the 3 local species, out of 45 species in California, of the genus of succulent perennials called Dudleya. Bill explains the derivative of the plant name and he describes the physical attributes of the Dudleya. Their need for rock and cliff outcroppings and their ability to manage water for survival are detailed.

Bill then describes in detail the three common Dudleya found in the Placerita Canyon, Cymosa, Lanceolata, and Pulveranta. Excellent locally shot photographs by Bill and descriptive diagrams of the plants in different stages of the growth cycle are provided. Also included is a map of some of Placerita Canyon NC's trails and a written description of where Dudleyas might be found in their native locations.

Native Bees by Roxanne Correa

Roxanne's report focused on information about the 1000 or so native bees of California. This important group of pollinators includes many species including the Carpenter Bee, the Metallic Bee, Mason Bees and Bumblebees. Not a lot of research has been done on them compared to honey bees as they are mostly small solitary creatures. On the plus side, as they are not hive bees living in large groups like honey bees, they are far less likely to pass on diseases that affect bees.

Potential Strategies For Removing Non-native plants from Placerita Canyon by Jackie Mayfield

"Come visit Placerita Canyon Feast your eyes upon the vast expanse of invasive grasses, thistles, and mustards..." Non-native invaders can adversely impact the ecosystem in many ways. It's written in a light style with a note of humor on a very important topic. Two trees that are invasive and non-native include the Tamarisk, an ornamental tree from Asia and the Black Locust which comes from the SE United States. Removing these species is very difficult and every method has both positive and negative effects on native species. Attention to invasion protection, physical controls, chemical controls, and competition/restoration cannot eliminate this problem, but can help manage the problem to preserve Placerita Canyon for the future.

Plant Poisons and Poisonous Plants by Veronica Solache

Veronica's report focuses on two very poisonous invasive species to Placerita Canyon that are poisonous to both humans and animals; Tree Tobacco and Jimson weed. Tree Tobacco is from South America but has become a common invasive species throughout California. It is the only member of the Nicotina genus that doesn't actually nicotine as found in cigarette tobacco. Jimson weed got its name from a mass poisoning of British soldiers in 1676 in Jamestown; the word "Jimson" coming from various pronunciations of "Jamestown. It seems that it would be a good idea for all our Docents to be able to identify these poisonous invaders.

Mammals of Placerita Canyon Nature Center by Bruce Wahl

This report covers some basic facts about many of Placerita Canyon's mammal species. Particular attention is focused on our predators including the Mountain Lion, the Bobcat, and the Coyote.

Regulatory Requirements for Obtaining, Possessing, and Exhibiting Wildlife by Dan Duncan

In this case you "can judge a book by its cover" because Dan had gone through Placerita Canyon Nature Center's actual permits from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They are very exact as to the species and actual number of wild animals that PCNC is permitted to have. The permits also very clearly outline the Center's, and therefore the Docents' handling these animals, responsibilities and rules for handling and exhibiting our wonderful creatures. All Docents should review their responsibilities in this area.

Fungi by Darrell Wanner

Darrell presents an informative and entertaining response to his own question, "Fungi? Why bother?" He provides some background about fungi going all the way back taxonomically to which Kingdom, Plants or Animals, apply to fungi-- they may be their very own Kingdom!

The report then focusses on the fungi we often see in our park, like shelf fungus and toadstools – all a part of the "FBI" part of the food web. He points out the positives and negatives of fungi's relationship to man, including the fact that many are poisonous to man. Who would have guessed that, when one has the name "Destroying Angel"?

Black, White and Purple Sages by Claudette Newman

Claudette's report reviews how many plants in our Mediterranean climate zone have adapted to low water conditions and then reviews the characteristics of Black, Shite and Purple sages. The descriptions are accompanied by photos she has taken here in Placerita Canyon.

Deer, Oh Dear



If you are very lucky, and you come early in the morning, you might see an occasional deer in Placerita - but it does not happen very often. In our case, it really is true that the grass is greener on the other side.

The property on the west side of the park is Disney ranch. They have meadows, they grow corn and fruit trees, they even have a tiny lake, and they irrigate their property so the deer have plenty of sweet and juicy plants to eat. Most of this landscaping is used for decor in the movie industry. The tiny lake becomes a raging ocean in a storm...you can do wonders with lights, large air blowers and a fake horizon.

From Placerita road, you can see fronts that have been assembled to form a generic downtown so you have country and city scenes available. The grounds are large, and a little group of deer have made it their home for many years.

Sometimes they grace us with a visit, but they return promptly to the other side of the fence when the school buses arrive and the noisy hikers take over the trails.

If you want to see one mule deer, you do not have to go far. Come to Hart Park. Behind the barnyard, there is a young one waiting for you (just behind the horse and the mule).

The visiting hours are from 9am to 4pm.

The deer that are found in Placerita are called mule deer because they have large ears like a mule. One other detail that tells you it is a mule deer is that the tip of their tail is black. Another thing to look at, if it is a buck, is the antlers: their antlers are bifurcated, meaning they grow like a fork; they do not grow from a single main beam. As a very general rule, they lose their antlers around mid-February (shedding), and the new antlers start to grow right away.

Something else that is very specific to mule deer: they run but sometimes they are seen stotting (another word is "pronking"). This means that when they run fast, all four feet hit the ground at the same time. That is so lovely to see, and I have had the pleasure to witness that. The deer is running fast and suddenly to escape immediate danger, there is a sequence in their running where they seem to fly off the ground with all 4 feet in the air. It is a very graceful move to see, they are such gorgeous creatures.

I read that stotting is also done by fawns, just for the sheer pleasure of playing. On the other hand, very often child's play is a way of learning behavior that can be useful later on in life. Gazelle and lambs also do the stotting behavior.

I have not read any specific details about their eyes, so I am just basing this on personal observation: they have large eyes and you seem to be able to see their feelings and mood through those large eyes. I have seen fear and contentment, curiosity and mild annoyance.... OK; I will stop there not to freak you out.

They eat more grass during winter, but it is only 10 per cent of their diet. They prefer to munch on woody bushes, they like berries, twigs of deciduous trees, sage, they love acorns and apples and they adapt well to eating about any plant in your garden.

In Ventura, we have the pleasure of observing deer in our garden on a regular basis and we are still trying to find what plant they won't eat. At this point (and after many trips to the garden center to replace what gets eaten) we can bravely announce that they do not eat oleander, birds of paradise, very spiky cactus and bougainvillea. I thought they did not like the thorns on those last 2 but they love roses and lemon trees that have plenty of thorns, so that can't be the answer. Of course that list could change at any time, because I've been fooled before.

They seem to prefer a hilly area; an oak woodland is perfect, but they need to have a source of water available at about 2 miles distance from their bedding area.

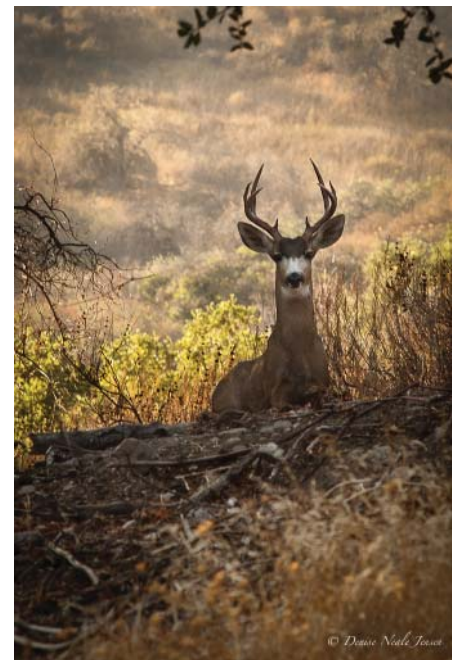
They can also eat California buckeye leaves, even if they are toxic to other animals. They eat poison oak with delight and without any problem (do not even think about trying that). Does and fawns eat together, and bucks stay on their own or with other bucks. They are usually more visible in the evening, but I have seen many in broad daylight. In agriculture areas, they sometimes come at night when they know nobody will be around.

They usually rest during the day in a protected area. If it is a place they use over and over again, it will about the size of a bath tub and you can observe many scratches around the area, otherwise it is just a space where the grass is flattened down.

The mating season starts in the fall. The gestation period is from 60 to 75 days; the fawns are born in the spring and spend the summer with mom. They are weaned after 60 to 75 days. The doe usually have 2 fawns, but if the food supply is small or if it is their first year, there will be only one birth.

As usual, one main predator for deer is human beings, plus coyote and mountain lions. Bobcats and black bears usually attack fawns or sick animals or will eat a deer that have died of natural causes.

Deer are one of the most enchanting animals you can see on the trail, their gracefulness is difficult to explain, the curve of their neck, those large expressive eyes, those fragile long legs, those big ears...I just wish for each of you that at some point you stumble upon them in the light of the early morning or evening, and can marvel at their beauty and keep that image in your heart.





Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

and Family Festival

May 10, 2014
10AM to 3PM

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

Many fun activities for the whole family!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall

(661)259-7721

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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.

Changes at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Over the years, there have been many different needs at the center that the docents have stepped in to fill. Many of these needs were forms of communication, fund raising, or just keeping the ship that is the PCNCA going in the right direction. Many of us have held various and concurrent positions for several years and as we have aged, or our family dynamic has changed, we have looked to the many new and eager docents to take over some of these very important jobs. It is this wide variety of jobs that make Placerita so enjoyable to both the docents and park visitors. They may not be readily visible to an outsider or a very new docent, but each and every one of them is vital to keep the gears in motion.

Recently we have had changes that many of you may or may not know about. Some of these changes will be occurring in the next year or so, others are happening as I write this.

First, and sadly, all of you know that we lost our wonderful Bob Moss. He was the “Dean of Docents” and helped to keep us all together and engaged in the center, contacting us if we seemed to be drifting away. He wanted to know if there was a particular reason for this or simply no reason at all. He was also our beloved Santa Clause. We still need a new “Dean” to try to fill his shoes, but Fred Seeley debuted this year as Santa to high praise.

Secondly, Reg Fear, who has guided us over the last several years with our Strategic Plan, has turned that job over to Jim Southwell. The Plan is our map, our recipe for success. It was said that it couldn’t be done, but Reg took this huge job on and succeeded along with help from Pam Koch. There is an article about his efforts elsewhere in this issue. Jim also has big shoes to fill, but I know he will be fine. Fred Seeley has taken over Pam’s spot in assisting Jim. Reg was also partnered with Bob Moss as the Taxidermy Committee, and Olivia Miseroy has taken on this job.

Heidi and Bill Webber ran the gift shop for around 10 years. Since they both wear so many hats at the center, it was way past time to turn this huge and very important job over to someone with fresh ideas. Fantastically, both Teresa Jacobs and Chris Miller have formed a team and will take on this responsibility along with several other docents.

Evelyne Vandersande started emailing everyone her Trails and Nuggets, aka T&N about 12 or 13 years ago when it was decided that the Rattler, being published monthly and then bi-monthly, wasn’t able to keep up with some fast-changing news around the park. So T&N was born to keep everyone up-to-date with the latest news. This is the pipeline where people who need to make announcements for committee meetings, county events, etc. flowed. She has realized that she needed to let this go, and Nikki Dail has offered to continue with this vitally important source of information.

RuthAnne Murthy has taken over Blooms of the Season hikes from Bob Fischer.

As you can see, there are many changes at the center recently and expect to see more in the future. The great thing is that there are so many untapped minds and talents associated with us that we will only continue to grow and blossom.

Heidi



My Years in the Gift Shop

Heidi Webber

Around 10 years ago I seem to have inherited the running of the Gift Shop. This is a very important income source for the Associates in helping meet the stated goal of animal care, program funding and getting the museum built. At the time, it seemed like a logical move since I am also the treasurer and have control of the credit card. How can you turn down a deal like that? Who doesn’t love to spend someone else’s money? And I had the perfect partner in this adventure, Bill.

There have been many changes to the gift shop over the years. We started with the little counter in the building before renovation. Then we got to move out to the trailer for a couple of years while the main building was renovated. We then moved into the present location and had the fun of buying new counters, slat wall and accessories.

We enjoyed finding new items for the gift shop, visiting other shops wherever we went and finding new sources for our offerings. Other docents often found something they thought would sell well and brought it to me. Bill and I discovered the Toy District in downtown Los Angeles and started buying from shops there.

All good things must come to an end, or the “passing of the baton” etc. I wear many big hats at the nature center and it is past time for me to pass this baton. Evelyne put out a Trails and Nuggets looking for someone to take over and I was thrilled to have Teresa Jacobs and Chris Miller respond. They have formed a team, and with each having their own special talents, the gift shop at Placerita will continue to grow and develop. The county is requiring many new changes to the way things are handled there, and so this is a perfect time for the new team to step in and start their own way of handling the gift shop at Placerita.

Condors are Soaring Above California Skies

Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel

California Condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*), once were on the brink of extinction, can now be seen soaring the skies above California, Arizona, and northern Baja California. In prehistoric time, they ranged all across America. Their numbers were greatly reduced in the late Pleistocene, along with the demise of many large mammals. The last remaining colony survived in the Western USA. By 1982, there were only 22 condors in the wild, and all of them were in California. Out of this meager number, there was only one breeding pair left.

Without a captive breeding program, the condors would surely have been lost to us forever. Several dedicated individuals and organizations set out to capture the remaining 22. DNA testing was done and it was found that all of these condors were interrelated, but that there was DNA of 3 distinct clans. Using this information, the condor breeding programs were successful. Currently there are a few hundred living condors, and Santa Clarita has been blessed to have the first breeding pair in over 60 years nesting in the local mountains.

The goal of the recovery programs is to have at least 2 wild populations with 150 individuals in each, with at least 15 breeding pairs. The colonies must be self-sustaining with a positive population increase. The population is getting very close to this goal, and biologists have high hopes for the future of the condor.

With a wing span of almost 10 feet across and up to 31 pounds, they are the largest flying birds in North America. Condors are scavengers that feed primarily on carrion. They do not have a good sense of smell, so they locate carcasses with their keen eyesight. They prefer deer, cattle, and sheep, but they will also eat rodents, rabbits, fish, and other animals. There has been one case reported of a condor eating live mussels. They will eat 2 to 3 pounds of meat at a time. They are able to go several days without food until they locate another carcass. Researchers have found that condors bathe after a meal and spend hours grooming themselves and drying their feathers.

Despite their huge size, condors can travel up to 50 miles per hour, and up to 100 miles a day while searching for food. They can soar on thermals up to 2 miles high. The best way to identify them in flight is to look at their under-wings. You will see a white, triangular pattern that is very distinctive. Vultures may look similar in flight to the novice, will not have these distinctive white feathers. All condors are also tagged with a number, and also have a transponder on their wings.

Condors can live up to 60-80 years in the wild without man's negative influences. Unfortunately they succumb to micro-trash, lead bullets that are left behind in carrion and entrails, loss of habitat, illegal egg collection, high transmission wires, eating poisoned carrion, and being shot. Education of the public is an important part to every condor recovery program.

Condors are monogamous and mate for life. They are sexually mature at approximately 5 years old. Juveniles under 3 will have grey/black beaks, which turn ivory after age 3. Upon sexual maturity, their heads will turn pinkish/orange. Condors do not build nests, but prefer to build nests in caves, on rock ledges or in cavities in trees. Both male and female birds care for the chick. The chick will fledge at approximately 6 months, but may stay near the nesting site for up to a year.

Condors are among the most endangered birds in the world were placed on the endangered list in 1967. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service started the captive breeding program in conjunction with the Los Angeles Zoo and the San Diego Wild Animal Park, among other locations. We should all be eternally grateful for their efforts with this incredible bird. The hope for their recovery lies in their capable hands. The lives of the wild condors are in the hands of the caring or careless humans who inhabit the same areas as the condors. Teens and adults who break beer bottles along the roadside because they think it's cool, or they're too lazy to take the bottle home for recycling are the biggest problem. Countless environmentalists pick up this micro-trash, but it is almost impossible to keep up with the abuse of our wild lands. And, it only takes one shard of glass, or one bottle cap to kill a condor.

Chicks hatched in the breeding programs are fed by condor puppets to help prevent human imprinting. They are trained to avoid landing on high tension wires. And they are given proffered food to avoid lead poisoning from eating carrion tainted with lead bullets. Recently, a law was passed to outlaw the use of lead bullets. This is great news for the condor population.

In my many hours of observing the condors, I find that they are extremely social birds. They spend a great deal of time together. They soar together, roost together, and play together. They are also very curious birds. Several of them visit me whenever I am in their territory. One of them follows my car off of the mountain and soars over my head for hours while I am on the mountain. One of them has landed near me, coming within a few feet, and "talking" to me. While they don't have vocal cords, they do make hissing, growling, and honking sounds.

Habitat is extremely important to the condors. They prefer mountainous areas, hillsides, gorges, and cliffs that provide updrafts and good soaring conditions. California Chaparral provides the condor with ample scavenging opportunities. Unfortunately, California Chaparral is one of the fastest disappearing habitats on earth. It is important that we realize that California Chaparral is important to our ecosystems and should be protected as much as the pine forests and pristine mountains. We need to be wiser in our development, keeping animal corridors and animal habitat requirements in mind before it is too late for all the earth's creatures, including the condor.



The Rattler Reached 1500 Issues!

I have been waiting to reach this number for a few months and I am very proud and excited to be able to announce this big number. The Rattler is sent to the docents and volunteers at the Nature Center and people visiting the park who have signed up to receive it. So, you know that those readers are truly interested. I have even heard of people who print all the interviews and collect them in a book to be able to see who's who at Placerita!

The first issue of the Rattler written by Evelyne Vandersande and published by Heidi Webber was done on February 1998 so 16 years ago....At that time it was a 4-page publication and I would write my articles long hand for Heidi.

Things have changed a lot but the spirit of the Rattler remains the same. We use this publication to give you the news of what is going on at the nature center and we try to give recognition to the people who make a difference there. One year ago, Mari Carbajal joined our team when sending the PDF version and keeping the lists up to date became too time consuming for me.

We are very proud of The Rattler, it takes a lot of work each time to gather the news and all the details, to be accurate, to make sure we do not gloss over the achievement of any docents, to collect the photos, to find docents who are willing to write about a topic they love and to remind them of the dead line.

I want to thank Pam Koch who so efficiently does the proof reading (English is my third language so it can be daunting for both of us). A last thank you goes to Bob Fischer who faithfully writes a bird article for each Rattler since January 2004.

I hope you enjoy reading the Rattler; we will keep working hard at it.



The Rattler

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

NATURE CENTER ASSOCIATES OF
LOS ANGELES COUNTY