



# The Rattler



## In This Issue:

- ◆ Donations Listings
- ◆ On the Road with the Rattler
- ◆ New Board Elected
- ◆ Bikers on the Canyon Trail?

---

## *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.*

**September-October 2012**

---

### Dear Nature Friends,

Summer is usually a quiet and lazy time at the Center but it was very different this year: the weather was cool in June and July and our natural area was busy and alive with many hikers and families coming to discover the trails and our new Nature Center.

For the first time in many years, we had children's summer camps to the great delight of many kids who enjoyed this new experience.

The heat came back in August but already we are seeing the first signs of the fall coming around the corner. The early morning air has a renewed crispness and some leaves are changing to gold and red. The squirrels and woodpeckers are gathering acorns.

Come, take a hike in Placerita and look carefully, you will welcome the signs of the new season coming up, fall is on its way and it is a good thing to savor each new pleasure of a new season, for example: did you know that it seems to be a very good year for the acorn crop?



Sandra, Fred, Jack, Bob, Rick and Bill  
Not shown: Deb and Jim

### **Congratulations to Our New Board Members**

Each year, there is an election for half of the board members who are elected for a 2-year term. Here are the new board members for the year 2012-2013: Sandy Balaram, Rick Brammer, Jack Levenberg, Bob Moss, Fred Seeley, and Bill Webber. The individuals with the highest number of votes in the seventh and eighth positions, identified as Alternate Board Members, were as follows: Deb Clem and Jim Harris.

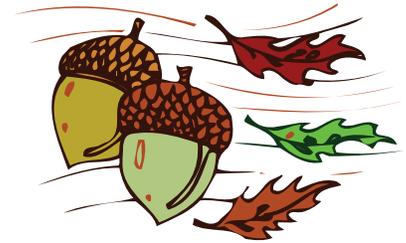
We want to thank the PCNCA Election Committee: Jim Crowley, Carol Rush and Dan Kott who did an outstanding job planning this election and we had a very high percentage of docents who took the time and interest to vote. Thank you again to all of you for your dedication and desire to serve PCNCA.

---

**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.**



**Before and After**  
 Ray Orloff has been working on the Trails.  
 If one photo is worth a thousand words, 2  
 photos show a big difference on the trail!  
 Thank you Ray



## The Rattler

Editor:

**Evelyne Vandersande**

661 254-2972

Publisher:

**Heidi Webber**

661 251-7978

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

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

or you can email it to Evelyne at [evandersande@gmail.com](mailto:evandersande@gmail.com).

Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

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

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



## Board Members

President:

**Jim Southwell**

Vice-President:

**Ron Kraus**

Recording Secretary:

**Debba Barroso**

Corresponding Secretary:

**Fred Seeley**

Treasurer:

**Heidi Webber**

Directors:

**Bob Moss**

**Evelyne Vandersande, PR Chair**

**Bill Webber**

**Rick Brammer**

**Teresa Jacobs**

**Jack Levenberg NCA Rep**

**Sandra Balaram**

Alternate Directors:

**Deb Clem**

**Jim Harris**

The Rattler is printed by  
 Valencia Printers on Recycled Paper

### 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



The Castaic Lake Water Agency celebrated 50 years of service on Saturday May 5, 2012 by having an open house at their facility above Central Park and varied information booths in the park itself. They had booths set up to promote water agency services and wise water use through conservation.

In addition, our own Park Supervisor Frank Hoffman and his wife Mary setup a booth to promote Placerita Canyon Nature Center by showing families and children a Harris Hawk, several other live animals and discussed animal awareness in nature.

Thank you Frank and Mary



Traditional Japanese haiku focused on a season of the year and a strict juxtaposition of images or situations; modern haiku allows a broader range of subject matter although tends to still be poetry of 'nature'. The poetic art form, not necessarily, but typically uses three lines of 17 (or fewer) syllables with a standard 5 syllables in the first and third lines and 7 in the middle line. Naturally, 'poetic license' is allowed. Do you 'haiku'? If so, please submit them to the Rattler – your poem might be chosen for publication. Here's a sampling written by Pam Koch:

Cool ocean breezes  
Sift and swirl, lapping each step  
On warm canyon trails.

## FALL-WINTER 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.
- JUNIOR RANGERS** Third Saturday of every month from 9:30 to 11:00 am, for children between the ages of 6 and 12 years old. Learn about different natural wonders both in our science lab and in the field. Each month explores a different topic and we always hike. Call the park office for more information at [\(661\) 259-7721](tel:6612597721).
- COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB** A non-profit organization that invites all members of the SCV and community at large to: Join weekly planned hikes; Attend monthly nature series educational presentations; Participate in community outreach programs such as Calif Condor micro-trash clean-ups and maintenance of trails and native garden; Partner with groups such as Boys and Girls Club to introduce youth to nature. For more information, go to the website at [communityhikingclub.org](http://communityhikingclub.org)

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



For the first time, the Board of the Nature Center Associates presented an Outstanding Volunteer Award for service to NCA, as a whole. We chose Nikki Dail, our NCA Treasurer, for this honor because without her, we would be in over our collective heads.

Her great sense of caring and fair play go far in working with volunteers, Her conscientious attention to detail, her willingness to patiently work with various differences in accounting from the different centers and pulling them all together in a useful format and then doing the tax returns, which none of us could do, make her invaluable. This past year, the tax returns have become way more involved due to welcome and fortuitous funding given to a couple of our nature centers, This funding put us in a different and more complicated category of tax reporting and Nikki has taken on the task with grace and professionalism.

Over the years she has worked with each of the treasurers and this past year she has gotten them all together for the first time for a meeting to streamline, simplify, and assist reporting from each center.

Without Nikki's careful reporting to the California Franchise Tax Board, the California Board of Equalization, and especially the IRS, on behalf of NCA and all the County Nature Centers, we would not be able to retain 501c3 charitable non-profit status.

She is a joy to work with and we are forever grateful to her.



### A Wall of Photos

We have had many new docents in the class of 2011 and 2012: learning and remembering all those names can be confusing. Discreetly checking the wall of photos prevents you from calling somebody the wrong name and we have found it very useful.

New displays where the photos are protected by clear Plexiglas help them to stay on the wall where they belong.

Thank you Jim Crowley and Debra Barroso for completing the photo wall project in the Placerita Canyon Nature Center docent room. And thanks again to Collette Lash for taking all of those great photos.



### Buddy, the New Raven

We have a new bird at the Nature Center and we called him Buddy. He is a baby raven and was placed here because he was imprinted and had been deemed non-releasable. They are very intelligent and special birds and we are learning more about his ability on a daily basis. Rachael Komulainen, who volunteers at the Nature Center on a weekly basis, enjoys handling him.

First Twilight Hike of the Season: Marietta Ewing, from the Docent class of 2012, sent me a little report: I went on the Twilight Hike and took this photo of Rattlesnake Rock as the sun was setting. I am not sure how it got its name but that seems an ideal spot for rattlesnakes to hide as it is mostly in full sun during the day with shade behind the rocks. I won't investigate too closely however....

We took the Canyon Trail to the Hidden Trail up to the water tank. Frank Hoffman was leading the hike with the help of a few docents and a nice-size group of people. We even saw a Gray Fox!



**On The Road with the Rattler**  
Placerita Canyon in our hands and in our heart.

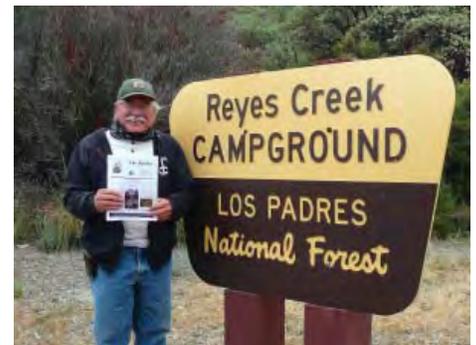
By the sheer volume of On the Road photos submitted to us, it appears that our docents and volunteers had a wonderful summer! See what they did...



Deb Clem took the Rattler on Safari



The Rattler visited Emmanuel College on The Fenway with Abby, one of the first open parks in the US, designed by Olmstead.



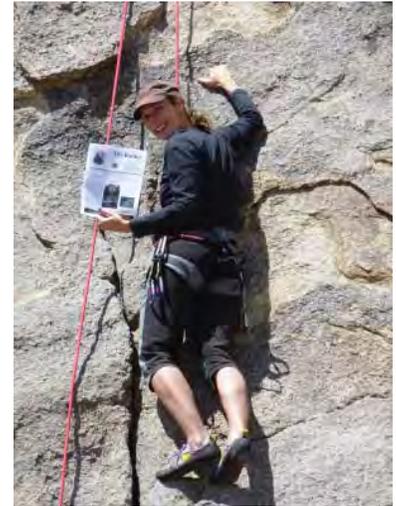
Denny Truger took the Rattler to the Sespe Wilderness Reyes Creek Trailhead on Memorial Day Weekend about 50 miles North of Ojai off of Lockwood Valley Road. The Rattler Rocks



The Rattler went to the Kuril Islands, Russia, to count sea otters with Bill Kahl and Linda & Steve Ioeinger.



Evelyne took the Rattler to Monaco, a few days before the Grand Prix.



Irene Heerlein and the Rattler in a perilous position at Alabama Hills, near the base of Mount Whitney



The Rattler attended the 33rd Annual Scientific Sessions of the Heart Rhythm Society in Boston, MA.



Don, Rosemarie Regis and their family went to Santa Barbara's Sea Center to see the Jellies Exhibit



Irene Heerlein took the Rattler under the Ocean at Refugio State Park,

Paul Levine went to Western China (Szechuan and Yunnan provinces) for butterfly photography.



The Rattler sure gets around! Laura Skorich took the Rattler to the San Jose El Mogate ruins in Oaxaca, Mexico



Laura Skorich and Denny Truger took a beautiful hike in Big Tujunga Canyon. Denny got his shoes wet for the shot!



Placerita Canyon Nature Center's Dave Stives is

### **The Falconer**

By Jim Harris

When Zippo and Jack twist and turn like F-17s across the desert floor just feet above a pillar of dust, Animal Keeper Dave Stives knows his two hawks are about to close the deal.

A jackrabbit is dodging and zigzagging throwing up dust beneath their winged shadows. When the rabbit leaps into a pile of bush, the circling hawks take positions, Zippo up on a cactus behind the bush and Jack Sparrow into the brush to flush out the prey.

Stives hunts his Hawks, Zippo and Jack Sparrow or Jack, every day they are not molting new feathers. However, Dave Stives is more than a hunter.

Stives is also a "Rehabber" because he rehabilitates wild animals like Zippo and Jack Sparrow. "Dave is excellent," says Regional Park Superintendent Russ Kimura, Placerita Canyon Natural Area. "We have our animal program because of him."

Indeed, Stives has state certifications in animal care that allow Placerita Canyon Nature Center to rescue, keep, retrain, and show wild animals to the public.

But, his first love is Falcons, especially training them.

Soon he will receive an "eyas" or baby Hawk from a Hawk breeder. "It's always exciting to take a new baby bird and mold it like clay. The more you work with the animal the better the bird and its disposition," says Stives.

When the Eyas, a young bird trained especially for Falconry, is 16 weeks old Stives will begin training the young Hawk. Like Zippo and Jack Sparrow the baby bird is known as a Harris Hawk.

It's a good bet that it will look a lot like Stives' birds. The two birds have feathers of dark brown, chestnut shoulders, with beautiful white tipped tail feathers. However, Stives is less concerned for his bird's beauty than for their safety.

For this reason, Stives keeps his bird's weight at about 600 grams or about one and one half pounds. "More experienced birds I can let get heavier. Jack can fly effectively at 700 grams."

"Keeping their flight weight right can save their lives. Sometime out there they can get into trouble with other predators," says Stives.

In nature, Hawks keep their weight as high as they can because of the very different lives they lead. "A wild hawk faces a very different set of circumstances. They don't just hunt. They are also hunted," says Stives. "They use up a great deal more energy than my birds."

Hawks are part of a group of animals known as Raptors, and Stives is certified to work with and train Kestrels, Red Tailed and Red Shouldered Hawks, Falcons and Harris Hawks—in fact, any kind of Raptor. Raptors are a general name for these birds, and Zippo and Jack Sparrow are called Harris Hawks within the Raptor family of birds.

A Harris Hawk was saved by Dave five years ago. The Hawk was caught in the engine of a UPS airliner and UPS called the Nature Center to ask for help in saving the bird. Stives pulled the fierce bird out of the engine of the airplane.

Finding it dangerously underweight, Stives rehabilitated the Hawk, but because of its condition could not release it back into the wilderness. Now it is shown regularly at the Nature Center to the public and school children. In the Nature Center education program, hundreds of school children learn facts about Hawks and their history.

Training falcons is an ancient tradition, dating back 2000-3000 years ago, starting in China. "Falconing spread to the Middle East, Europe, and fairly late in the United States," says Stives.

In the New World, Harris Hawks live in marshes, woodlands, and semi-desert areas. They hunt in mangrove swamps in South America. They are not migratory, but rather permanent residents wherever they live. They are not native to Santa Clarita.

Besides rabbits and other mammals, Harris Hawks dine on birds, lizards, and large insects. They are able to capture large prey like Jackrabbits who weight up to eight pounds because they hunt in family packs. "Zippo and Jack Sparrow are 'wolves of the sky'," says Stives.

### **Adopt-An-Animal**

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

Tania Campos (a gift from her kids) - Daisy, the opossum

Linda P. Goddard - Apollo, the turkey vulture

Jennifer Perez - Moon Shadow, the king snake

Santa Clarita Valley International Charter School - Sandy, the alligator lizard; Turbo, the desert tortoise and Daisy, the opossum

Ethan Rozow - Miss Muffet, the tarantula and Daisy, the opossum

Tutor Time, Castaic (funds raised by a recycling drive) - all the animals

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Granada Hills, Vacation Bible School - Catori, the barn owl and Daisy, the opossum

Many thanks to all of you for your generous support!

## Open House, 2012

Deb Clem was tagged to be the Open House 2012 coordinator and what a job she did! Her theme was Discover the Treasures of Placerita and she and many of the volunteers dressed accordingly. Argh Matey!

Often overheard were comments that this was the best Open House ever. It included a great Treasure Hunt developed by Irene Heerlein, gold panning, face painting, log sawing and hikes, among many other events.

Deb put an enormous amount of effort to pull this off and it was certainly successful. Thank you so much, Deb. Hmmm, the Crafts Fair is just around the corner...

We were very pleased to have a visit from our L.A. Co Parks Deputy Director Hayden Sohm. He checked out the different exhibits and when he came to the Walker cabin, he rolled up his sleeves and decided to show the log who was the boss. He and Allan Wallander attacked the log with gusto the good old fashioned way.

Allan gave Hayden Sohm a sharpie to write the date and the place on his prize: 5/12/12 Placerita

Hayden Sohm commented "The Open House was an outstanding event where the park visitors, Placerita volunteers and county staff all had a great time".

We were honored by your visit and we do greatly appreciate your support.



### A Comment from Russ

I would also like to thank all the PCNCA volunteers for doing such a great job on this wonderful family event. I heard from so many park visitors, volunteers, vendors and county staff how much of a great time they had at the Open House Event. I would like to acknowledge how well the planning and operation of the event went so smoothly. The most rewarding compliments that I heard were from new docents from this year's class. They were amazed how well the community attended the event and how efficient the experienced docents worked the event. Good job to all of you! Thanks, Russ.

## Ed Walker Passed Away

This article about Ed Walker was sent to the Rattler by Bob Walker when Ed Walker passed away.

This wonderful family photo circa 1930 was also sent and I want to let you know that you will find Ed, standing in the middle of the top row.

Thank you very much Bob Walker, your family is very dear to our hearts at the nature center and we are so sorry for your loss.



Walker Family

## Second Twilight Hike

Again, it was very well attended by about 35 people and Frank Hoffman, the leader of the hike, was pleased to have a few docents attending the hike to help him along the way. Many frogs were seen and heard, and that is always such a lovely sound of the summer nights. They were also happy to see many bats, especially in the picnic ground.

Irene Heerlein could not come on the Saturday night so she decided to have a "make up" twilight hike at Walker ranch on Sunday where she took this beautiful photo of a bobcat. Thank you for sharing Irene.



## Member of founding family dies

Edward Walker, 98, grew up in Placerita Canyon and was an avid gold miner

By Karen Jonas  
Signal Staff Writer  
kjonas@the-signal.com  
661-259-1234 x538  
May 1, 2012

Edward Walker, an avid gold miner and member of one of Placerita Canyon's founding families, passed away last month at age 98, his family confirmed Monday.

Walker grew up on the family ranch in Placerita Canyon and spent most of his spare time prospecting and testing gold ores, said his nephew Bob Walker, of Ojai.

"He was more interested in gold mining than anything else," said Richard Walker, of Chico, Edward Walker's youngest brother in a phone interview Monday.

Edward Walker passed away from natural causes April 19 at Windsor Chico Creek Care in Chico.

Edward Walker was born Feb. 8, 1914, to Frank Walker and Hortence Reynier Walker. He had three brothers and five sisters and helped raise his younger brothers and sisters after Hortence Walker passed away in 1931, Richard Walker said.

"He was really easy-going, and very nice," Bob Walker said. "He was a well-liked guy."

One of Richard Walker's favorite memories of his brother occurred around 1940 when Edward Walker was searching for gold in Placerita Canyon, about a mile and a half from the main ranch house. Edward Walker got someone to help him roll over a small boulder in his quest.

"(They) got a hold of a boulder and rolled it over," Richard Walker said. "There was a nugget lying there."

Edward Walker loved to work with his hands at a time when machinery wasn't available, and did most of the work making sure that the road to the family's house was passable, even though it washed out every year during the rainy season, Richard Walker said. The family's summer cabin — now called the Walker Cabin — can still be seen in the main part of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center and has been recently restored.

"We'd have to rework 2.5 miles of road to the upper main ranch house," Richard Walker said, adding that the work was all done with picks and shovels. "Edward did most of the work."

In addition to his life and work on the family's ranch, Edward Walker also served in the Army after he was inducted in July 1942.

Edward Walker served in the 24th Field Hospital as a medic until he was discharged in November 1945.

During his time serving, Edward Walker said he "walked halfway across Africa, and earned several badges and medals.

After Edward Walker was discharged from the service, he went back to Placerita Canyon to help his father and eventually moved to Sand Canyon, where he mined clay. He moved to Chico in 1971 with his wife, Ruth Lydia Barnfield.

Ruth passed away in 1997, and Edward Walker moved to Windsor Chico Creek Care in 2005, where he was well-loved by the nursing staff, Richard Walker said.

"That was his home," Richard Walker said. "The nurses really loved him."



### Attacked by a Raccoon

Dave Stives is the Park animal keeper and he is in charge of animal supervision at the different parks. His knowledge on how to handle all kinds of animals ...and I really mean all kinds, is astonishing. He has the experience and knows the scientific angle. He also has a feeling for the situation and knows how to deal with emergencies and daily care, a knowledge that you can only acquire by a lifetime of experience. So, we were very surprised and a little bit horrified when we heard he was bitten badly by a raccoon.



There was a potent skunk smell at the center that day and this little guy just wanted to have a free lunch. Dave showed him the way out in a very unceremonious but effective manner. He has to find his food on his own. I do not recommend this to anybody without Dave's experience!

He was working with animal control handling a raccoon, a big one, who was able to bite him through welder gloves. A wild animal is always dangerous to handle and we want to make sure this message is very clear to all who read the Rattler.

Dave was taken to the hospital, the wound was cleaned up, his finger was splinted to prevent swelling and infection. He received a tetanus shot and he is getting 4 more shots for rabies prevention. He is doing fine...and does not hold a grudge against the raccoon.

Dave is also well known at Henry Mayo Hospital for his numerous snake bites...

### A trip with Jim Crowley

Bob Moss and Reg Fear are docents at the Sepulveda Basin and they provided constant answers to explain the habitat features of the area.. Sepulveda Basin is a very diverse place in that it has a lake and rivers running through it with the LA River being the largest. The lake provides a habitat for numerous birds, water fowl and water creatures. The lake is totally recycled water fed by the Tillman Water Treatment plant next to it. It is a perfect spot to do bird watching and we saw many different species that day.



### Wishtoyo Docent Trip



On June 11, 35 docents went to Wishtoyo Chumash Village. That is off Nicholas Canyon County Beach Park, along Pacific Coast Highway. This trip was planned by Ron Kraus after Helen Sweeney made the suggestion. We were very impressed by the Indian Huts that were built and we took part in a purification ceremony with the smoke of burning white sage, singing with drum music, storytelling. We were reminded to live in unison with nature and how to better preserve the earth for future generations. It was a very nice trip that ended up with a visit to a beautiful beach "El Matador Beach" with massive rock formations. Thank you Ron, for planning this trip.



## Well-Deserved Awards Given at the End of Year Potluck



### VICKI CUNNINGHAM

She did a fantastic job planning the snacks during docent training, she came early for each class and stayed late to clean up. She presented each food donation on plates and always had her own supplies at hand if the donation was not enough for the day. She did not panick but came prepared. That is a commitment of time and anticipating what needs to be done.

Thank you Vicki.

### ANGEL

#### MACDONALD

Angel is a quiet hero keeping all the school trips organized. This is a CORE job and the main reason we are at the Center. As she is stepping out from this position the end of June, we want to express our deep gratitude for the excellent job she has been doing all these years, her dedication, her attention to detail, and her time commitment. This has been a great gift to the center which has made PCNCA much more effective.

We will miss you dearly in that position Angel and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.



### FRED SEELEY

Without his expertise and guidance, we would not have Board insurance for our Directors. He stepped up to accept the Corresponding Secretary position, which is an ongoing responsibility and

includes handling inquires coming through our website, Placerita.org. He has been helping with the new NCA/County Operating Agreement; he organized and is Chairperson for the "Volunteer Service Committee" and he started a fund rising project to have a protective enclosure built for our Grizzly bear.

Thanks, Fred

### BILL WEBBER

Bill took on the alarm system. Without him there would not be any gold panning at Open House. He has built mews; taken care of the supplies to decorate the wreaths at the craft faire and always sets up the room covering the floor with plastic. He handles the outreaches. He is

always ready to help to build something or make repairs and has the expertise to do it in a professional manner and always with a very pleasant mood. He is also on the Museum committee. Bill is an unsung hero, always ready to help. He is always busy, does it quietly, does not say too much but we want him to know that we notice what he has been doing for the Center since 1996.



### MILLIE BONAZZOLI

Millie has been a faithful docent since 1998. She remembers the time where there were very few docents and when a job needed to be done, you took the full responsibility and did the whole thing from beginning to end without having any support or help. Millie oversaw the job of publicity for PCNCA until this spring, expanding the range of promotional programs. We just took for granted

it would be done properly and efficiently. Millie works at the gift shop on Sundays, as well as volunteers for the special events. She's best known as the kitchen docent, making sure the volunteers are well fed, keeping the kitchen sanitary, yet taking the time to be friendly and welcoming. Thank you so much Millie, PCNCA want to recognize your efforts.

## About Jim Harris



When I gazed at the blind, colorless fish, I knew I wanted to be a ranger like the fellow who was guiding our boat tour of an emerald green underwater lake 60 feet below the entrance to Kentucky's Mammoth Caves. I could picture myself wearing a Smokey-the-Bear hat and a park service uniform just like the ranger.

Someday.

But, someday never came and it seemed the older I got; the further away from nature I got. I spent thirty years working with urban kids, inner-city and middle class, smart and dumb, motivated, not motivated. It was meaningful, fulfilling, and important.

But it didn't hit the spot, not quite.

However, the first time I walked the Canyon Trail in 1987 at the Nature Center, something was reawakened in me; memories of my father's family tours of national parks, my childhood roamings through the Ohio woodlands, building rafts and poling them through Akron's now decimated swamps (Davey Crocket style), constructing forts and tree houses, remembering that I wanted to be like the knowledgeable rangers in those national parks, and "Spin and Marty."

I remembered books I'd read about rangers heroically standing guard over our forests in remote fire towers on faraway mountains, a book on smokejumpers, Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir, National Geographic, my Boy Scout adventures, my super activity as an Explorer Scout to Rice Lake in Canada. With these thoughts, I savored the Canyon Trail as I slowly returned to the Nature Center.

There I noticed a sign for docent training, and I was ready to jump at the chance. But, it was not to be. I was young. I had a family. The training was during the day, and this much hooky I couldn't play.

I had to wait.

So after 30 years with Los Angeles Unified School District at Nobel Junior High, Van Nuys High School Performing Arts Magnet, Monroe High School Law and Government Magnet, and as an administrator developing history curriculum for the district, I retired and...I did it!

Finally, something for me: Docent Training.

But, I was thrown by the professionalism of what amounted to a college course in a field for which I was not trained (I taught English and history). Ron Kraus' leadership was...shall I say...not what I expected. Instead of a rinky-dink volunteer course, Ron provided me with a first-class learning experience that utilized experts in various fields of ecology. It was adult learning theory at its finest; lecture, reading, field observation related to and just after the lectures.

I guess for the above reasons, my passing this course was more important than the part-time classes I teach. More important than making a few more bucks.

So I am proud to have been elected as an alternate for the PCNCA Board and to sit on the Disney Ranch DEIR committee. The people running the volunteer and professional operations at the Nature Center are impressive; their mission unselfish, important. What this association of volunteers has done is invaluable and long term for Santa Clarita and to Los Angeles County.

To end on a non-sequitur and at least one cliché, I have four children, one boy and three girls. I've been happily married for 27 years to a fellow educator who just retired from teaching herself and who has spent over 10 years in animal rescue work, something for which she has great passion. In fact she has a growing pet setting service, "Kyle's Custom Critter Care."

For her volunteer efforts and her expertise on dogs she has been featured in local publications and radio programs. She works closely with Castaic Animal Shelter and has saved hundreds of animals from being "put down." I am proud of how many worthy, fine animals my wife (with her friends) has placed in good homes for animals.

Oh, yes—one more important family member: Kara.

Kara is a rescued Pit-Bull who is featured by our friend Michelle Sathey in her book *Pit Stops II*. Last summer Michelle traveled around the country with Kara, signing Michelle's first book, *Pit Stops I*. Michelle is a writer for *The Signal* and "Angel Dogs," an animal rescue operation. Kara sat by the author's side in Barnes and Noble book stores throughout the country as Michelle signed her books for the public. Michelle's mission is to show that Pit-Bulls are a misunderstood breed and that, contrary to popular opinion, "Pitts" are sweet natured pets and companions. Gentle, loving Kara was living proof to Barnes and Noble customers of Michelle's mission.

Should I mention that Kara once sat in a kissing booth at a county fair and earned a great deal in donations for the cause of rescue?

Kara also educated a lot of people that day.

*Kara is a rescued pit bull who is featured by our friend Michelle Sathe in her book Pit Stops II. Last summer Michelle traveled around the country with Kara, signing Michelle's first book, Pit Stops I. Michelle is a writer for The Signal and "Angel Dogs," an animal rescue operation. Kara sat by the author's side in Barnes and Noble book stores throughout the country as Michelle signed her books for the public. Michelle's mission is to show that pit bulls are a misunderstood breed and that, contrary to popular opinion, "pits" are sweet natured pets and companions. Gentle, loving Kara was living proof to Barnes and Noble customers of Michelle's mission.*



Summer Camp

Placerita Canyon Natural Area enjoyed its first Nature Camp in several years, enlightening children between the ages of 5 and 12 years old the weeks of 7/10 through 7/13, 7/24 through 7/27 and again 8/07 through 8/10.

All had a great time learning from Animal Tracks Inc., the L.A. County Fire Department, the Southwestern Herpetologists Society, our own Ingrid Brown, Sue Wallander and Paul Levine, L.A. County Vector Control and The Local Group Astronomy Club to name a few.

We had a real cool guy lecture on the fur trade as well with about 40 animal pelts and furs (including bison, musk ox, otter, foxes and more) and everyone enjoyed lectures from Professor Laurie Solis (from C.O.C.) about the early California Indians too, this after Sue did the Tataviums and Paul did butterflies and moths.

Special thanks to Judy McClure for handling registration and to Ji Kim, Garret Denise, Emily, Taleen and Michael (volunteers) Dave, Debbie, Chris and Jeff (park staff) for all their help in preparation, guidance and take down as well.

I also want to give thanks to Sasha Ridenour for helping out with the kids whose mother used to work here and at Vasquez Rocks a few years ago, and who once upon a time came to camp herself.

We were entertained with the capuchin monkey from *I bought a Zoo* and *Night at the Museum*, an alligator, tons of snakes and lizards, a baboon, a kookaburra, a ferret (the one found abandoned here at our pond) birds of prey and plenty more. We took hikes, learned about West Nile virus and completed several crafts too.

All in all we had a great time and look forward to reinstating this worthwhile year 'round program again.

Thanks to all who participated and those who made it the success we've all come to know here at Placerita.

Frank Hoffman

Recreation Services Supervisor

Placerita Canyon Natural Area



### Mountain Bikes on the Canyon Trail?

A sign mistakenly posted on Placerita Canyon trail has led to a public meeting Thursday July 12 to determine whether hikers and horseback riders can peacefully co-exist with mountain bikers.

The trail was always off limits to bicyclists but a multi-use trail sign was mistakenly posted at the trailhead in 2007, according to the draft trail assessment report prepared for the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Following a study, county staff members recommended mountain bikes be allowed on the trail, although the county would have to make improvements first for safety.

Some of the safety improvements would include installing signs, installing “pinch points” and adding sign warning mountain bikers to slow speed zones. The county would also look at re-grading the trail, trimming vegetation, protecting an oil seep,

installing railing and making other trail improvements.

If the Parks Commission does approve the plan, it would still have to make preliminary cost estimates, prioritize improvements, identify funding sources and complete the initial safety improvements before bicycles would be allowed on the trail (ref : The Signal by Karen Jonas)

The PCNCA Board of Directors met on July 10, 2012 and adopted different comments explaining why there was no need to allow mountain biking on the Canyon Trail as there were many other alternative routes

Also it mentioned that the entire Canyon Trail is an interpretive trail that is used by PCNCA and other nature-related agencies to teach thousands of children and adults about the natural environment in Southern California. Allowing mountain biking on the trail and constructing the required improvements would seriously degrade and disrupt these interpretive programs.

It explained that environmental constraints have not been adequately addressed in the report, as evidence of the incomplete list of Special Status Species. Mountain biking or trail improvement should not be considered until an adequate environmental review is conducted that assesses the full and complete impact of such activities.

The mission Statement of PCNCA was mentioned “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” so it was very clear what our position had to be, after reading the information provided by the report.

We mentioned also alternative routes what would make more sense and that are in close proximity to Los Pinetos Trail used by the mountain bikers.

At this time, we are waiting for a decision about this situation.

I apologize for giving you a short version from the response of the Board of Directors.

If you have a special interest in this topic and would like to have the full version, please contact me at : [evandersande@gmail.com](mailto:evandersande@gmail.com)

### Drama in Lisa’s Backyard

This photo was taken by Lisa Parch Merkord in her backyard near Fillmore on July 11th.

She saw the female tarantula hawk dragging that spider for 40 feet; taking it down her hole where she would lay one egg on the live tarantula. Here is the rest of the story in all its gruesome detail:

The female tarantula hawk captures, stings, and paralyzes the spider, then either drags her prey back into her own burrow or transports it to a specially prepared nest, where a single egg is laid on the spider’s abdomen, and the entrance is covered.

When the wasp larva hatches, it creates a small hole in the spider’s abdomen, then enters the spider’s abdomen and feeds voraciously, avoiding vital organs for as long as possible to keep the spider alive.

After several weeks, the larva pupates. Finally, the wasp becomes an adult, and emerges from the spider’s abdomen. The wasp emerges from the nest to continue the life cycle.

The tarantula hawk is relatively docile and rarely stings without provocation. However the sting, particularly of *Pepsis formosa*, is among the most painful of any insect, though the intense pain only lasts for about 3 minutes.

Commenting on his own experience, Justin Schmidt described the pain as “...immediate, excruciating pain that simply shuts down one’s ability to do anything, except, perhaps, scream. Mental discipline simply does not work in these situations.” In terms of scale, the wasp’s sting is rated near the top of the Schmidt Sting Pain Index, second only to that of the bullet ant and is described by Schmidt as “blinding, fierce and shockingly electric”.

Because of their extremely large stingers, very few animals are able to eat them; one of the few animals that can is the roadrunner (*reference Wikipedia*)

That is a very impressive photo and an interesting experience....it pays to have always a camera handy Lisa, thank you for sharing.



## A Tour of Rancho Camulos with Gordon Uppman

On July second, I conducted a tour for Placerita docents at Rancho Camulos. Although we have done this tour before, the docent training classes for the last two years have been large so we felt it was time for another tour. About 20 docents came, some directly and others carpooled from the Nature Center.

There is mutual interest with Placerita regarding the discovery of gold in 1842 by Francisco Lopez, a relative of Antonio del Valle's second wife. Antonio received the Mexican land grant in 1839. Ygnacio del Valle, Camulos' founder, was Antonio's oldest son and administered the gold mining in Placerita.

I was able to show the docents our small adobe which will become our Visitor Center as well as touring the historical buildings at Camulos. Thanks to Sylvia Altamirano for suggesting this and coordinating the car pooling at the Nature Center.

Gordon



### The Founding of Camulos

The present 1,800 acre Camulos Ranch, established by Ygnacio del Valle in 1853, was carved out of the 48,612 acre Rancho San Francisco, granted in 1839 to Ygnacio's father Antonio del Valle, majordomo and administrator of Mission San Fernando. Camulos was located at the western boundary of the rancho and was originally a Tataviam Indian village known as Kamulus.

Antonio del Valle and his family lived at the eastern edge of the ranch near Castaic in the former San Fernando Mission granary adobe building. After Antonio's death in 1841, the land was divided among his second wife and the children from his two marriages.

Ygnacio's first wife died in childbirth in 1842. He was married a second time to Ysabel Varela of Los Angeles, who was only 15. They settled in Los Angeles near the Olvera Street plaza. The following year he built

the first four rooms of what became the main adobe at Camulos, which was at first occupied by Ygnacio's majordomo (foreman).

Ygnacio and Ysabel lived in Los Angeles for almost a decade, during which time Ygnacio held a number of elected positions. Between 1853 and 1861, five children were born to them.

After the birth of their fifth child, Josefa, in 1861, the family moved permanently to Camulos and added three new rooms and a basement to the original adobe. Many of the Kamulus Indians continued to live and work at the ranch and helped to make the adobe blocks used in the construction. Some of these Indians are buried in the del Valle family cemetery.

Between 1862 and 1870, seven more children were born at Camulos. Of twelve children total, only five lived to adulthood.

The drought of the 1860s took its toll on del Valle cattle and crops, forcing the del Valles to sell most of the Rancho San Francisco in 1865. However, Camulos continued to evolve into a diverse agricultural operation. By the time of Ygnacio's death in 1880, the ranch had grown from a few hundred head of-cattle in the 1840s to a thriving, virtually self-contained ranch. It consisted of approximately 1290 acres of citrus, vineyards, almonds, grain and vegetables, and supported close to 200 residents.

In addition to the del Valles, large numbers of Mexicans and Indians were employed on the ranch. The single four room adobe, built in 1853, grew into a twenty room adobe surrounded by numerous other buildings, including a brick winery, chapel, barn and workers' housing. The isolation of the Santa Clara Valley was broken with the arrival of the stagecoach in 1874 and the railroad in 1887.

Throughout its long history Rancho Camulos has had a diverse and rich agricultural history. The first oranges grown and shipped commercially from what is now Ventura County were from the Camulos Ranch in 1876. In addition, the rancho produced annual crops of citrus, almonds, walnuts, apricots, peaches, wheat, corn and barley. Grapevines were also cultivated at Camulos for the production of wine and brandy. It was the wine grape that brought the first real commercial success for the del Valle family in the 19th century. Camulos wines and brandies enjoyed a good reputation throughout Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. During the 1860s, ninety acres of wine grapes were planted, a brick winery built, and a license obtained for brandy distilling.

In 1908 the ranch was incorporated as the del Valle Company by Ulpiano and his remaining brothers and sisters for the purpose of raising crops and livestock, acquiring water rights, and developing oil resources. Eventually, friction within the family and the death of several family members forced the sale of the ranch in 1924 to the August Rübel family.

The Los Angeles Times wrote: An era in the history of California closed yesterday. The del Valles of Camulos bade farewell to the homestead where they have lived in successive generations since Antonio del Valle. It was the passing of the old regime. They are said to be the last of the old Spanish families who held in unbroken succession to the ancestral acres. [Los Angeles Times, August 11, 1924.] (edited)



### Olivia Miseroy Redid the Condor

We had a paper mache condor at Placerita hanging in the classroom for many, many years. There were a few problems with this old bird: the position of the wings was wrong, the wings were bowed down and the head was cherry red: wrong color and the head was also much larger than in real life.

Olivia Miseroy saw this bird as a valuable project and she knew she could make a difference. Her background in the movie industry was helpful and she knew she could handle this project from start to finish.

First she sculpted the head in Super Sculpey, a sort of pasty media easy to sculpt to add tiny details. The scale of the head was accurate now and texture and wrinkles were added. A resin cast was made, from the sculpture in Super Sculpey, and this is the one on the final model. The head needed a few layers of paint air brushed on: first yellow, then pink and purple, more yellow and red and little hair were painted on the head. The eye openings were drilled out and glass eyes were glued in. The head needed washes of white to dull the bright colors and give the skin a flaky look. At last, the beak was painted.

The feet needed a makeover too: the color of the old feet was not accurate and not enough of the leg was showing. Olivia pulled out the old feet and found the legs embedded inside the body. Texture was put on the feet and were repainted.

Then it was time to repaint the body but condors are huge birds.... She was able to do that in a professional paint booth and the result was perfect.

Now, the condor in the classroom is totally accurate, it is a professional job and we will be very proud to show him to our visitors.

Thank you so much Olivia for doing this project from beginning to end, for your dedication and all the many hours of talented work it took you to bring us a new and much improved condor.



### What? Another Mockingbird!

by Bob Fischer



Yes! Besides the Mockingbird, there is a related species found in California's chaparral regions that can imitate the songs of other birds. But unlike the Mockingbird which spends much of its time in the open and is very easy to see, the California Thrasher, *Toxostoma redivivum*, generally hides in and under dense shrubbery as it scratches and searches the leaf litter looking for insects and other small prey. It is especially fond of beetles. Fruits and berries, when available, are also important foods. The easiest way to find a California Thrasher is to listen for its enthusiastic singing. When singing, it can usually be found sitting at the top of the highest bush or small tree you can see. That's the way I have seen them on the hill behind my house. Their song is series of long, scratchy, whistling, chuckling not very melodic phrases, sounding a little bit like a Mockingbird with a sore throat. Though it is in the same family as Mockingbirds, Family Mimidae, and is supposed to imitate other birds, I haven't heard it do that.

The California Thrasher is one of eight species of thrashers in North America. It is a year around resident found only in the chaparral regions of California where there is very dense shrubbery. Placerita Canyon is the ideal home for it. The literature says they stay very close to their nesting area year around. None of the other Thrasher species overlaps its range. The Cal Thrasher is a big bird, twelve inches from the tip of its very long, slender, down curved bill to the tip of its

long round-edged tail. It runs, not hops, often running long distances between cover in preference to flying. It runs fast and as it runs it holds its tail up at an almost forty-five degree angle, resembling a miniature Road Runner. Color is dark gray-brown over-all, with a pale throat, dark cheek, dark eye and a patch of brick red under the base of its tail similar to the California Towhee. You could almost confuse it for the California Towhee except for that long, dark down-curved bill and its larger size. It's fully three inches longer than a Towhee. Males and females appear the same.

Cal Thrashers pair up during winter. Both sexes work to build a bulky stick nest lined with grass and rootlets and hidden in dense shrubbery or low trees. Two to four pale blue eggs with pale brown spots are laid in February or March. Incubation lasts 14 days then both parents brood and feed their young by regurgitation for the first four days. They then feed their nestlings large insects whose legs and wings have been removed. Young leave the nest between 14 and 17 days but cannot fly until several days after leaving the nest. Shortly after the first young have fledged, and while the male is looking after them, the female lays a new batch of eggs for a second brood and after that even occasionally a third.

References for this article include the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, "Lives Of North American Birds" by Kenn Kaufman, The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology web page and "The Birder's Handbook" by Paul R Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye, Wikipedia and Cody, M. L. 1998. California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*). In *The Birds of North America*,

Many thanks to those who donated to the health and welfare of our nature center animals  
and to the continuing projects that make the nature center so great.

It is greatly appreciated.

Allan and Sue Wallander  
Bethel Baptist Church  
Bill and Heidi Webber  
Brighton Es  
California Retired Teachers Association  
Carpenter Community ES  
Castaic Es  
Cynthia Haggart  
Daniel Campos  
Dixie Canyon ES  
Fred Seeley  
Gault ES  
Girl Scout Troop 4992  
Golden Valley Charter School  
Grace Community School  
Haskell ES  
Jack Levenberg  
Jennifer Perez

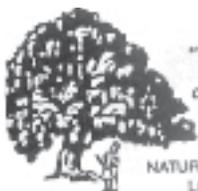
Joshua Hills ES  
Justice ES'  
Lanita Algeyer  
Lassen ES  
Linda Goddard  
Malabar ES  
Michael Elling  
Miss Sophie's Preschool  
Monte Vista ES  
Nestle Ave ES  
Pam and Frank Koch  
Paul Levine  
Peachland ES  
Pinecrest Schools  
Plainview Ave ES  
Rancho Vista ES  
Santa Clarita ES  
Shirley Morano

Skip Newhall  
St. Nicholas ES  
Steve and Linda Ioerger  
Stevenson Ranch ES'  
Summerwind ES  
Sunnydale ES  
Thrive Preschool  
Vintage Magnet ES



## 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