

Dear Nature Friends,

The year is coming to a close, and we want to send all our best wishes to you and your family for the New Year 2017. We hope it will bring you joy and good health, and allow you to enjoy many blue skies and happy hikes. 2016 brought destructive fire to Placerita, but we are able to continue and even increase our educational program (Junior Rangers), so we are extremely grateful for that. Some of our trails are still closed, but we are hopeful they will reopen after a few heavy rainfalls, once we deal with the inevitable mud slides. Docent training is starting (January 10) and that always brings a lot of excitement to Placerita. Check out the flyer!. And one reminder: winter in the Chaparral is really spring time. The few winter showers bring all the spring blossoms, so the time to check the trails is now! Enjoy!



Marietta Ewing

Frank Hoffman, Recreation Service Supervisor at Placerita, recently nominated Marietta Ewing for Recreation Service Leader for Regional Facilities Agency and Employee of the Month for Parks and Recreation.

Not only did she merit that first award, but more important was Departmental Employee of the Month as well. That's a bigger deal, as she beat out everyone else nominated throughout the entire Department in that category!! We are very proud of her!

Marietta is responsible for three main assignments: daily and weekend operation of the Nature Center, daily responsibility for animal care and some administrative duties.

During the Sand Fire, Marietta played a key role by assisting with the evacuation of all the parks' live and preserved (taxidermy) specimens, irreplaceable park awards, plaques and commendations, as well as important office equipment, enclosures and paperwork.

Marietta is a great asset to Placerita, a lovely woman who does her job quietly but efficiently. She is always friendly and courteous and she is quite reserved so please go out of your way to let Marietta know how much you appreciate her.



The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91321
www.placerita.org (661) 259-7721

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Over 50 Years of Nature Education
January-February, 2017

SIERRA

By Linda Ioerger

At last! The Nature Center again has a Great Horned Owl (our mascot) to show our visitors. Her name is Sierra. She weighs in at three and a half pounds and is over six and a half years old.

She came to us in March of 2016 after it was determined that she would never be able to fly again and take care of herself in the wild because of a severely damaged right wing (and possible other damage to her right side as well). With months of patient care by Marietta Ewing, Frank Hoffman and Dave Stives, her wing finally healed. But in the meantime, she came down with a bad case of bumble foot (a serious, hard-to-treat infection on the bottom of her feet). That, too, healed with treatment, and Sierra was finally ready to be handled and gotten ready to be part of our educational program.

Jack Levenberg, Rick Brammer and I have been working with her since last summer, getting to know her and giving her a chance to know us. She was quite unsteady sitting on the glove at first, but has gotten much better as she has gained strength and confidence. She seems comfortable with us now. She also had trouble at first coordinating her feet when getting on and off the glove or the scale when we weighed her. That, too, just keeps getting better.

Bating (trying to fly off the glove) is still somewhat of a problem for her, but getting much better. At first she didn't know what to do after she bated; she just sort of hung upside down till she was helped back up to the glove. With her bad wing, it's hard for her to get back up, but more and more she does it without our assistance.

We've been showing her to the school groups since the beginning of the school year. She's still a little skittish outside when people come up to her, but inside in the controlled situation of the classroom, she does wonderfully well. Everyone who sees her, inside or out, is just amazed by her.

Welcome, Sierra. We're so very glad you're here!



Three Broken Beams

You might remember a branch fell on the corner of the roof of the Walker cabin a little while back? The damage was quickly repaired but the oak tree shading the cabin did not look very healthy and Russ Kimura, was concerned. But trimming was not allowed because the oak tree had some green regrowth.

Russ' suspicion was right because a large branch fell on the roof of the cabin, this time breaking three beams. The repairs have started but the cabin is out of commission for a little while.



Meanwhile, a permit was secured for removing the oak so it was cut. We will miss it. If you still want to see it, rent the old black and white movie "The Hard Hombre", it is there.



Junior Rangers

by Frank Hoffman

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center is once again offering its educational Junior Rangers Program under Park Supervisor "Ranger Frank". Having begun a few months ago, program topics have already included Fire Ecology (where Smokey Bear and his U.S. Forestry friends visited the park), local Birds of Prey and Falconry, the Bats of Santa Clarita and our local Reptiles.

Held on the second Saturday of each month and starting at 11:30 am, this program is free, runs for about an hour and doesn't require advance reservations. Children should be at least six years old to be able to interpret these sessions and should expect an occasional hike as well. See you there !



I have felt a connection with nature from as far back as I can remember. As a child, growing up in a small town in Connecticut, my fondest and most vivid memories are of exploring the forests, ponds, and streams surrounding my home. My bond with all living creatures was evident early on from the orphaned baby rabbits that I rescued, raised, and set free to my demanding the release back into the water of the flounder I caught the first time my father took me out in our fishing skiff on Long Island Sound. Understandably, I was banned from future fishing expeditions.

During the summer before my senior year of high school I traveled to South America as an exchange student. This sparked my interest in travel and cultural diversity, inspiring me to major in Latin American Studies at American University in Washington D.C. and to spend a semester studying in Mexico. It also afforded me the opportunity to experience the wonders of the Peruvian rain forest.

After my family moved from the east coast to Arizona I transferred to the University of Arizona where I completed my BA in History, Spanish, and Education. One of my favorite pastimes while at U of A was hiking and horseback riding in the majestic Sonoran Desert.

After graduation, I taught social studies in middle school and high school while earning my MS in Counseling. I went on to a rewarding career as a middle school counselor until I retired in 2015. During the time that I was a counselor in Sylmar, I became acutely aware of the serious need to help unwanted and uncared for animals; I became the "go to" person for stray dogs that wandered onto our campus, helping to place them in homes or with rescues. One of my passions, now that I have retired, is to continue to fight for the rights of voiceless animals.

I first experienced Placerita Nature Center nearly twenty years ago as a brownie leader with my daughter and her troop. I remember the excitement of the girls as we crossed over creeks and explored the habitat on our hike and then got to see and learn about the animals up close. After that, I often returned on weekends to hike and experience the serenity and beauty of Placerita Canyon. One day, shortly after retirement, I noticed the sign for docent training as I entered the park. It hit me that with my background, coupled with my love of nature, this might be a perfect fit.

I consider it a privilege to be a part of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center community and have learned a great deal from the training, as well as from the many docents who so generously give of their time and knowledge. Since this is my first year as a docent, I am still learning and exploring the many diverse areas in which I can become involved. When I started the docent training, I was determined to conquer my fear of snakes, and now I enjoy handling them and teaching the children about them. I love leading the school hikes and sharing in the enthusiasm of the children as we make new discoveries together. In my role as a docent, I believe that I can continue to make a difference in children's lives by contributing to their appreciation of and connection with nature. I look forward to the opportunity for continued learning, growth, and exploration as part of this wonderful community of nature lovers.

Rabbit Skins

by Denny Truger

Our Tataviam Village has a drying rack that had faux fish on it. They were there to show how the drying rack would be used by the Tataviam. The fish looked good, but fish were not something the Tataviam in this area would have used because there were no fish in the Placerita stream.

Ever since the drying rack had been built I wanted to change out the fish to rabbit skins which are more appropriate. I got the PNC board approval, but I kept putting it off. After the Sand fire the fish were gone. Not sure what happened, but luckily our village was saved. With the board approval I purchased rabbit skins and installed them the Monday before November's PNC board meeting.

I believe it's a nice small addition that makes our village look more authentic. I've gone to many Parks and Nature Centers in this area and none of them have a Native American Village as nice as ours.

Brown Bag Training by RuthAnne Murthy

November's Brown Bag Training was led off by Andrew Lasken's lecture about the history of the Grizzly Bear in California. It was extremely informative. He traced the Grizzly from before man to 1924 when the last California Grizzly was sighted. Sandra Cattell then shared her worm "farm". She told us how she cares for it and how worms are useful to plants. Ron Kraus took us on a "walk" through the placerita.org website and showed us the website's extensive resources. Lastly, RuthAnne Murthy presented a PowerPoint on the Early Bloomers of the canyon.

We hope you will put January 23 on your calendar now so you can attend our next Brown Bag Training. Vicki Cunningham will present ideas of how to tell a story on the trail. We would love to see you there.



Randi Andrews

Class of 2016



Holiday Party

Each year the docents get together for a pot luck dinner. The food is abundant and delicious, and the company is even better. This year, a few of us brought their own wine and some tasting and comparison took place!

Lanita Algeyer had prepared recognition for docents who have been very involved in different projects. Andrew Lasken received an award for his interesting Bear presentation. Herb Broutt was recognized for organizing the Rudi Mural Presentation. This inspired the

docents to plan for mural preservation. Jackie Thomson was congratulated for constant and very active participation on the school field trips. We noted that Charitha Eragoda cares about the other docents, always finds out if they are in difficulty and gives them support. He also participates with enthusiasm in all the programs and Dan Duncan has been a great source of information about the invasive plants in Placerita.

To all of you, we want to give you a very special thank you and we recognize the special support and care you give to Placerita.

Two cups were given by Jim Southwell during the evening: The Levine Cup is awarded to recognize docents who excel in Interpretation. At first, it was given to Vicki Cumnnigham. Her 6 months of owning the cup had expired and she chose RuthAnn Murthy to be the next recipient.

The Bob Moss cup is awarded to recognize a docent or volunteer who works to support the PCN-CA organization. It was awarded to Lanita Algeyer who will keep it for 6 months before passing to the next recipient.

Our warmest congratulations to both.



The Invasive Plant Removal and Restoration Group

By Robert Grzesiak

The group met on December 5: Ingrid, Denny, Fred, Charitha, Mark K, Roger and Robert. We focused on the pond and butterfly garden. We hoed and scraped the invasive filaree and annual grass seedlings using hoes and shovels.

The filaree covered 80% of the surface. Its removal will prevent shading of native seeds and prevent the drying out of the first 6-8" of soil. It is always surprising to me how much surface area we are able to deweed as a group.

With additional rains, more invasives will grow, but it will be manageable now with just a 15-minute touch-up at each future monthly meeting. We also spent half an hour on pulling perennial Smilo grass from the Placerita stream bed and banks near the picnic bridge. We ended up with 6 50-gallon bags!

Trail Treasures

by RuthAnne Murthy

Big-Leaf Mistletoe



Phoradendron macrophyllum

With the holidays behind us, we can leave the romance of mistletoe behind in favor of botany. Big-Leaf Mistletoe is a perennial hemi-parasite. Even though they are capable of photosynthesis, they take water and nutrients from their hosts which weakens the trees. In Placerita Canyon Big-Leaf Mistletoe can most easily be seen on the bare Western Sycamores after they drop their leaves. The leaves and berries are poisonous.

The woody "roots", called haustoria, grow into the stems of the trees. The leaves are thick, fleshy and about 1½ inches long. The stems can grow over 3 feet long. The plant has tiny, inconspicuous spikes of flowers from December to March. They are a yellow-green with no petals. Male and female flowers are on separate plants. The berries are white tinged with pink. They are less than 1/4 inch in diameter. The seeds are extremely sticky allowing seeds to stick on branches. The seeds are spread primarily by bird excrement.

California Indians made tea from the leaves as a form of birth control. They also chewed the leaves for toothaches.

So, don't forget to look up as you are hiking along. You may see this fascinating trail treasure.



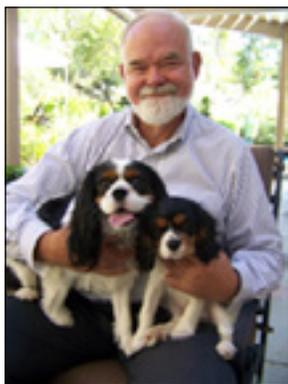
Community Lecture Series

by Jack Levenberg

On November 20, we learned of an amazing community that operates in complete harmony year round. One where everyone has a job and knows what to do for the good of the community as a whole. For the most part males and females live about 6-8 weeks, females do all the work, males' sole purpose is to procreate. Only one female is allowed to lay eggs, if she does not do her job properly the community may replace her. She is the Queen.

This story is true and was presented by Sue Sutton, Docent Naturalist. The "Life of the Honey Bee" was enjoyed by a full house in the classroom. The audience composed of many families enjoyed the lecture and slide presentation followed by a question and answer period. The audience was so moved by the presentation that many bottles of honey were sold by the gift shop. Thanks Sue for a great presentation

Many students from C.O.C. attended the presentation and we were very proud to find out that students from COC get credit if they come to a Nature Education Program at the Nature Center! That says a lot about the quality of our education if we get recognition from the college professors.



What do I do?

PCNCA's Corresponding Secretary - Fred Seeley

One of the officer positions that PCNCA's By Laws require is a "Corresponding Secretary". We also have a "Recording Secretary" to handle the Board Meeting Minutes and other record keeping responsibilities; Mari Carbajal is currently serving in that role.

The responsibilities of the Corresponding Secretary are evident in the name of the position, which is, handling the official correspondence duties on behalf of the PCNCA. Individualized "Thank You" letters with our Tax I.D. number are sent for all donations over \$25.00 and for other activates done on our behalf. Another more modern duty is to answer all the inquiries that come to us through our website placerita.org. All the questions that go to info@placerita.org come to my computer and smart phone.

Right now we are getting a lot of questions about what trails are open and when the Canyon Trail will be fully opened, and questions about our upcoming Craft Fair. In the spring and early summer we get a lot of questions about baby birds falling out of their nests and snakes in the yard. In the fall we get questions from parents of children going off to college about whether we'll take the child's snakes and lizards off their hands!!! We always tell them we don't accept exotic animals and give them a contact at the Southwestern Herp Society.

It is a fun job (I wouldn't have kept doing it for 7 years if it wasn't!) because you keep very aware of what is going on at the NC and what our community is interested in. If you need official PCNCA correspondence sent out, please let me know.

Docent training

I am sure we can all agree a volunteer is somebody who does a job without being paid. But what is the difference between a volunteer and a docent? Docents also do a job without being paid, but they undergo an intensive training process to serve as guides and educators. The English word "docent" comes from the Latin *docere*, meaning to teach and lecture. Education about the environment is one of the goals of the docent organization at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center. Our mission statement is "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."

How are docents utilized at Placerita? The docents are in charge of the core program. Four mornings each week, school groups come on trips to Placerita. They are greeted by docents who give them a presentation in our classroom about the circle of life, explaining the interactions between plants, animals and why the food web is so important. The children are provided a simple as well as vivid explanation about how all living organisms depend on each other. A presentation with live animals is next. Then the children are divided into groups to walk on different trails, each group led by a docent. A parent or a teacher is at the end of the group to make sure all of the children are accounted for. Beyond the classroom presentations and walks, the possibilities of getting involved with other projects are nearly endless: doing outreach, patrolling the trails, fighting the never-ending battle against non-native plants, organizing special projects, fundraisers, parties, food supplies, taking part in educational programs, planning crafts for children, helping with animal care, organizing the docent room, planning trips for the docents, scheduling school trips, writing articles, documenting the plants that grow in Placerita or updating bird lists ... If there is nothing interesting to you in that list, present your ideas to the board. They have been known to get pretty excited by all kinds of new projects.

Life changer: What would make you interested in becoming a docent? The answer might start in a simple way – "I would like to work with children and Nature." What you might not understand at first is that you are going to learn so much yourself, and it is going to be so interesting, that this new thirst for knowledge is not going to be stopped easily. You are going to change the choice of books you read or the movies you watch, and you are going to look at different destinations for your vacations. The other docents at the Nature Center are going to become your friends and allies, helping to find answers to your questions or raise even more questions. You will suddenly have a great group of friends sharing so much with you. Ego disappears at Placerita; there is no competition because we are all trying to do our best with each other's help and support. Docent training starts Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2017. Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to noon.

We call our docents "docent naturalists," and they attend these classes for a 9-week training program. Topics include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history and interpretive techniques. Instructors include noted professionals in the various fields. The cost of the training is \$45, which includes all training materials (instruction manual, field guide, T-shirt and related items). Visit our website – www.placerita.org – for further information regarding the Docent Naturalist program.

Other volunteering opportunities are available at Placerita Canyon Nature Center that don't require the 9-week training program, such as office helper and trail maintenance team member. Bilingual (English-Spanish) volunteers are especially needed. Quite a program, right? What is not said directly but is apparent immediately is that we also have a good time working together; plus teaching little kids is a lot of fun. Think about it and come give it a try. I can tell you honestly that it will change your life, For further information call or visit:

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
19152 Placerita Canyon Road Newhall 91321
661-259-7721
Email: info@placerita.org

The Craft Fair

It was a great success this year, and we made a nice profit. From the bottom of our hearts, we want to thank Mari Carbajal, who took this responsibility while in the middle of a move. We also want to thank Heidi and Bill Webber who gave Mari lots of help and support. Most of all, we thank all the docents and volunteers who gathered greenery, came ready to help set up, worked like mad for two days and cleaned up too. It is a very much-loved event in this valley and we are extremely grateful that you are keeping it alive, and making it such a fun time for all. Thank you again.



Outreaches

By Heidi Webber

While the core program in nature education at Placerita Canyon are the field trips by schools from all over the Los Angeles area, there is another method that Placerita utilizes to get our "message" out.

For close to 20 years, Bill and I have been doing outreaches around the Santa Clarita Valley as a way to bring attention to Placerita and extend the educational program we are all devoted to sharing.

The main aspect of the outreach program is to take the birds, reptiles and spiders to those schools that are unable to come to Placerita for various reasons as another form of nature education and as another source of raising funds for the center.

The on-site program is so popular that all the available slots are filled rapidly. Also the younger grades such as Transitional, Kindergarten and First grades don't normally do this sort of field trip. Another reason is budget—those buses aren't cheap!

We also have another method of reaching the community. We take our show on the road to various community events such as the Sheriff's Chili Cook-off, Arbor Day, the Sheriff's Haunted House at Halloween, Kid's Day and the Family Literary Festival. We are also popular with the libraries in Los Angeles County during the summer.

These events are very important to get Placerita into the public eye. It never fails that we get comments such as "We've lived here for "x" number of years and never knew you were there!" or "We just moved here and am so glad to know you are there."

As you can see, we can keep quite busy throughout the year. Bill and I are very fortunate to have a fantastic team of assistants, or we wouldn't be able to accommodate the requests we have.



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.

NATURE EDUCATION

For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.
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 the center at 661.259.7721 to verify.
January 15 Urban Bear by Kim Bosell – February 19 Coyotes, Bobcats and Gray Foxes.

TWILIGHT HIKES

This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 6pm and runs for about an hour. This is Winter Hours. Park staff and the Nature Center Docents split groups and courses through the different trails in the dark. Come howl at the moon--if there is one that night!

DOCENT TRAINING

Tuesday, January 10 from 9am to 12 noon (see flyer)

JUNIOR RANGERS

Second Saturday of each month from 11:30 to 12:30 for children 6 years and above. Nature topics and a small hike, this new program is provided by Ranger Frank Hoffman.

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

Volunteer-Naturalist Training Placerita Canyon Natural Area



Become a Volunteer-Naturalist!

- *Learn about the natural environment*
- *Teach children about nature*
- *Make a difference in your community*

No special background needed,
just a willingness to attend training and to volunteer at least twice a month.

Training Starts Tuesday, January 10th, 2017

Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 12 Noon

Volunteer Naturalists attend a 9 week training program. Topics include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history, and interpretive techniques. Instructors include noted professionals in the various fields. The cost of the training is \$45, which includes all training materials (instruction manual, field guide, T-shirt, and related items.) Minimum age for Volunteer-Naturalists is 18. Visit our website (placerita.org) for further information regarding the Volunteer-Naturalist program.

Other volunteer opportunities are also available at Placerita Canyon Natural Area that don't require the 9-week training program, such as office helper and trail maintenance team member. Bilingual (English/Spanish) volunteers are especially needed.

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