



The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
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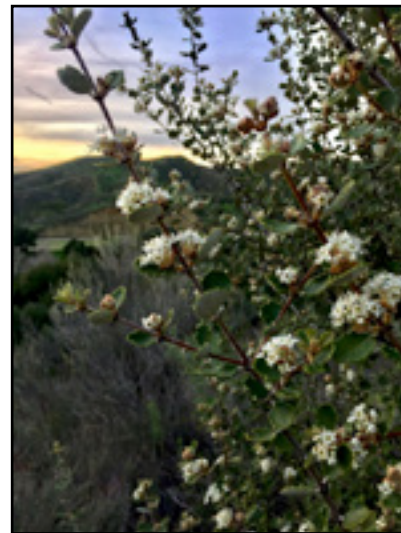
Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Over 50 Years of Nature Education
March-April, 2017

Dear Nature Friends,

The big news at the Nature Center right now is that we are in the middle of the Docent training sessions. It is always a very exciting and busy time of the year, where all the docents roll up their sleeves, getting ready both to help and to get to know the new students. We welcome with pride and delight the class of 2017. We were so pleased to open the class with 26 new students, a pretty nice number and many of them have perfect attendance! Our publicity efforts were rewarded and people learned on time that the class was starting at the beginning of January.

Since then, many topics have been covered, and the enthusiasm has even grown. It is a joy to see the new students starting to establish friendly contact with the docents and becoming a group of their own, exchanging stories, questions, and comments around the snacks and coffee at break time. Learning to work together is also a part of becoming a docent!

The topics have been challenging and the depth of information is always wonderful. Ron Kraus has been giving direction and support to the docent training class and does a fantastic job every year. Thank you Ron. Thank you also to all the docents who are providing support to the docent training. The list is too long to mention all of you (also I am afraid to forget one name). We notice your work, we know of your effort, we see what you are all doing, and you really are a terrific group of docents. We are also very impressed how many topics are now taught by docents who were experts or have become experts after years of research. Thank you all for making Placerita such a uniquely wonderful and stimulating place!



Hoary ceanothus
Ceanothus crassifolius
Photo by Ron Kraus



The Adventures of Fixing a Leak in the Placerita Nature Center Gift Shop

Russ Kimura

Back in January 2011, when I first started to work here at Placerita, I noticed we had a major water leak in the gift shop. There was always a large amount of water that pooled up against the outside of the gift shop after each rainfall. I contacted the maintenance crafts section to see if they could fix the leak. The concrete crew stated that they knew the problem and could remedy the situation by building a decorative concrete wall with river rock that would prevent rain water from entering the building. We thought we had fixed the leak problem but we were in a period of drought and could not test the new wall to the elements of rain.

On January 6th, 2016, we received rainfall at Placerita, and the water flooded into the gift shop. We proceeded to sandbag the window area of the concrete rock wall with several layers of plastic and sandbags to prevent water from entering through the walls of the gift shop.

In November of 2016, we experienced only light drizzle, but a tremendous amount of water entered the gift shop. How can this be? Park Maintenance Worker Jeff Crosby evaluated the situation and determined the water was entering through the 2x4 wooden dividers under the wall.

Jeff dug out the wooden 2X4 and replaced it with a cement waterproof patch.

In December of 2016, we got more rain, and water was observed in the gift shop again. Jeff Crosby concluded the water was entering through a different wooden 2X4 that is closer to the office door. Jeff dug out the wood and replaced it with cement waterproof patch. What else can go wrong?

We were finally experiencing real rainfall in January 2017. The leak was fixed, right? Not quite, not as bad as before but there was a small pool of water in the gift shop. Jeff, exhausting the last of his ideas about where the leak might be coming from, dug under the support beam and discovered the support beam was merely cosmetic and did not have a concrete foundation supporting the beam. In went 5 bags of concrete. Also, we noticed that the drain for the entire roof was quite near where the gift shop leak was occurring. So Maintenance Worker Agustin Hernandez devised a temporary flexible drain pipe to divert rain water away from the building. It is now February 8th 2017 and within the last two months we have experienced the most rainfall we have had in the last ten years - and finally not a drop of water in the gift shop!!! Who ever thought fixing a leak could take 6 years to resolve? But fixed it is, at last.

Amphitheater Story, Episode II

by Fred Seeley

After meeting on the site of the new Amphitheater with the assigned County Parks and Recreation landscape architect and planner, the new amphitheater story has moved along as we now have a County provided design concept. (see below). The plan calls for 52 heavy concrete benches, probably similar to the eight benches currently in our Courtyard. (I didn't realize there were so many until I actually counted them!!!) I personally like their one-piece design and in trying to lift one, I know they will be difficult to steal!

The next step is to have the area graded to the finished footprint we want. The County has agreed to grade the space and to provide the labor to build the stage, etc. with PCNCA paying for the materials and benches. The County may also be able to get electricity to the site for sound equipment and other uses such as Summer movie nights. We are very pleased and appreciative of the County's support!

At this point, we hope the County will be able to fit us in their grading schedule as soon as possible so we can order the benches and other materials. I'll keep you posted as to our progress.



Trail Treasures

by RuthAnne Murthy

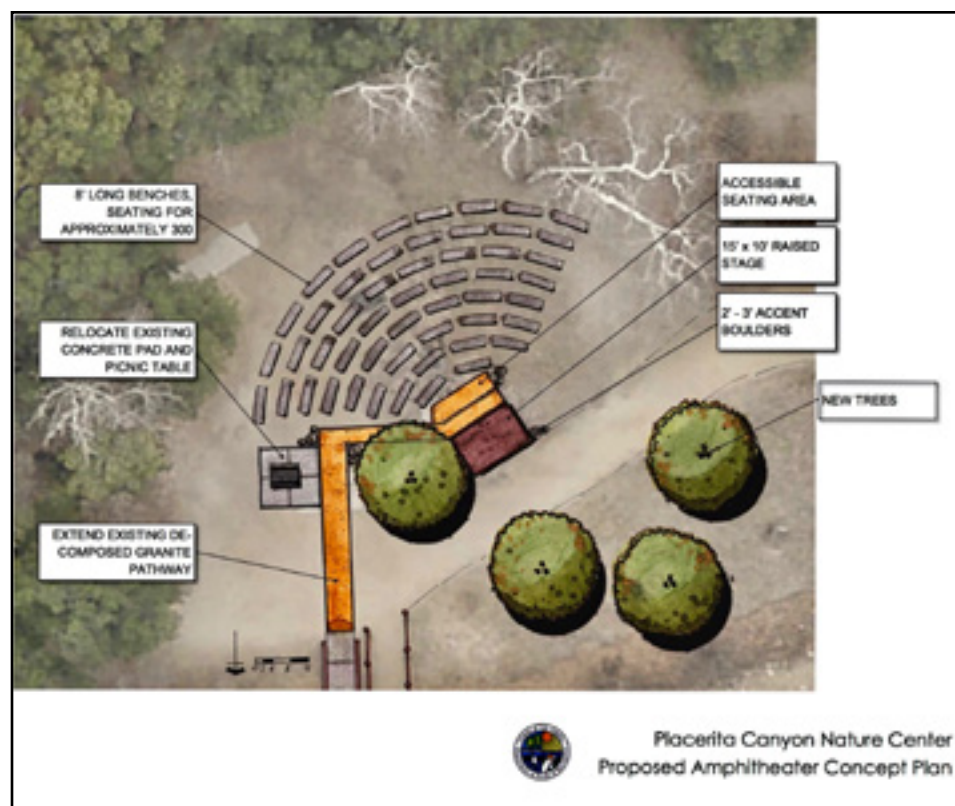
California Peony

Paeoniaceae californica

Placerita Canyon's "plant lovers" are anticipating a bumper crop of wildflowers this spring. One of my personal favorites are springing forth from their dormancy. The California Peony is endemic to California, it grows in no other place in the world. They are fairly uncommon and so when you are lucky enough to find them, it is exciting.

The California Peony is a perennial that grows up to 2 feet tall. The bright green leaves are highly lobed and herbaceous. The plants survive by "dying back" after they bloom. The maroon flowers are about 2 inches wide and bend on their stems because of their weight. Inside of the bloom there is a bright yellow disk. The flowers produce a large seed pod that is about 1 1/2 inches long. Each pod produces several large black seeds. California Peonies grow in shady areas often as part of the understory beneath trees. Be sure to look for them on the trail now because the flowers do not last long.

Our new Blooms of the Season Bulletin Board has additional photographs of this beautiful wildflower. I think you will agree, California Peonies are truly a trail treasure.



Thank You Fred Seeley and Good Luck Jim Crowley

Fred Seeley has passed the task of processing the PCNCA By-Laws document and Procedural Manual to Jim Crowley who will organize and maintain them in a binder located on the Docent Desk at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

It will have copies of older releases and an index with dates of revisions. Anyone can then have access to them. However, the binder must remain at the Docent desk. We want to thank Fred Seeley for his past efforts to assure the documents were modified and maintained accurately.

Jim is also asking that anyone who is a member in good standing with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates to please let him know if you are interested in running for a Board of Director Position. A board office position term is for two years. The board meets on the first Tuesday of each month and members are encouraged to attend the meeting to see how our nature center operates. Please contact him at (661) 755-7377 to discuss the position or if you have any questions. The election will be held Saturday, June 3rd 2017.



Photo by Denny Truger



Canyon Trail

Eight inches of rain fell on the Santa Clarita valley in January, more than double the monthly amount of precipitation the valley normally receives. After the Sand fire, the Canyon Trail was left with little vegetation to retain the soil, so there are many mud slides along the trail. The soil being soft, many rocks are tumbling down onto the trail so the situation is dangerous. With the increased water, the stream flowed completely over the trail in one spot. This is nothing unusual, as it

happened previously in the same spot when we had the last El Nino.

However, during the previous El Nino, the trail could remain open because we were not recovering from such a serious fire. The situation is much more precarious right now, and the trail has to remain closed for safety reasons. A rock could tumble down onto a visitor, which could be disastrous. Many visitors call the Nature Center to ask "When is the Canyon Trail going to be reopened?" We are very flattered that is such a popular trail. In a mountainous area, we do not have too many trails where the whole family (including young children) can participate in the hike. The Canyon Trail is an easy trail that can be taken as a stroll or as a training exercise according to the speed you choose. We are deeply sorry to have to make clear that the date is not yet determined for when the trail can be reopened.

Any cleanup crew won't be able to operate until the rainy season comes to a complete stop – enough time for the hills to dry up so the falling rocks no longer pose a danger. You know very well, as well as I do, that such conditions won't come before May at the earliest. The trail along the stream will need to be rebuilt and reinforced. The rocks and mud slides will have to be cleared up. The fence system for the bicycles will have to be rebuilt. All the trees lying on the trail will have to be cut. We do not really know what other obstacles may be found, so it is going to be a lengthy process of discovery and action before this trail will again be safe for the public. When all the work is done, I am certain we will also have some county inspection to make sure that the trail is safe indeed.

I know it is not the news you wanted to read, but I try to be as honest as possible and to explain the situation, so that you can better appreciate the task ahead of us in the months to come. Again, the Canyon Trail, Waterfall Trail and Los Pinetos Trail are closed. But you still have great hikes available on the Botany Trail, Manzanita Trail, Heritage Trail and Hillside Trail! If you are looking for a good workout, the Manzanita Trail won't disappoint you. Come and take a hike, you have many choices still available to you. The rain has brought forth some beautiful new natural sights for you to enjoy.



Nature Box Update

by Ron Nichols

Exciting things are happening with the nature boxes this year. We currently have 8 boxes that are actively being displayed. Two new boxes are expected to come on line sometime this year. Work is beginning on the Reptile/Amphibian box and possibly a Water box. Several boxes are updating and enhancing their offerings. With the fire still fresh in our minds we also are looking to introduce an area on Placerita Fire Recovery to one of

the boxes. Boxes are currently being introduced to the new docent class as part of their program and of course we continue to expand usage with school groups. We look forward to continuing nature box presence at all major PCNC events.

All docents are welcome to participate in our Nature Box program. There are definitely many opportunities to lend your expertise or enthusiasm. If interested you can contact Andrea Donner.



Bird Walks

by Rosemarie Sanchez-Fraser

I've truly enjoyed my past 10 years at PNC, especially leading the Bird Walks each month. Although, I don't consider myself to be an expert, I've been a bird watcher ever since I moved to the Santa Clarita area in 1976.

It all started with putting up a Hummingbird feeder and then having Hooded and Bullock's Orioles trying to steal the sweet sugar water from the Hummingbirds. I then found there are special Oriole feeders which are more accommodating for them. This new awareness opened up a curious need to know more about the birds I encountered from then on.

I bought my first bird identification book, by "Roger Tory Peterson," on a recommendation of a fellow workmate.

My new interest in birds opened up new friendships with many fellow birders right in my own workplace! Instead of staying in the office for our lunch, a few of us went walking to spot and identify birds around our area and soon vacations always included finding and identifying new birds. This was also a great relaxation technique for us; working in a highly stressed environment, a Mental Health Clinic

If you've never been on a bird walk you must come and walk with us on any 2nd Saturday of the month. We start at 8:00 a.m. and assemble in front of the Nature Center.

Remember, you don't have to be an "expert birder," to join us on our Bird Walks! We get many beginners and we do get long-time birders, some of them coming from other states or even other countries. Hope to meet you soon...



Santa Clara River, Oh My!



Something about Me

by Mark Hershey

My father was in the Air Force until I was 12 years old, and we relocated every few years. His last assignment was in Tennessee where he was stationed for five years. We lived on the base with forty other families, the base being about 15 miles from the town. Our village was next to a large lake with several perfect spots for fishing, a beach for swimming, and a pond full of turtles. Almost every year, the lake would freeze over and we could skate on it. I took frequent hikes into the woods and saw many different species of plants and animals. One day I was able to catch a young meadowlark because it could fly only about 20 feet before it got tired. I kept it for about half an hour and then let it go. That was a very cool experience. Our bus ride to school included a ten mile stretch of road through the middle of a beautiful pine forest. I would stare out the window looking for animals that came to the edge of the forest to graze on the grass. I saw animals on

almost every trip, including a pair of albino deer that ventured out of the forest every now and then. It was beautiful, and a great place for a kid to grow up.

My father left the Air Force in 1970 and we moved to Saugus, California. It was a very different climate and environment from where we had come. Prior to all the houses being built, my dog and I would hike in the mountains behind our house. My dog loved to chase the rabbits and the squirrels, and there were plenty of them. She never caught one, but it was fun to watch. I even saw a badger one day on our mountain. Until then, I didn't know they lived out here.

I always loved gardening. Our family had a plot on the Air Force base where we grew vegetables, and my grandmother had a small garden at her house in North Carolina. I would stay with her for a couple of weeks each summer and work at her store and help her with her garden. My aunt also had a huge garden that I would just marvel at. I always wanted to be a farmer. For the past two and half years, I have had a plot at the Santa Clarita Community Gardens in Central Park. It is very fun to grow my own vegetables and learn from the other gardeners. We are lucky in California to have two different growing seasons and can garden year long. I enjoy the winter vegetables just as much as the more popular summer vegetables.

In 1980, I graduated with a BA degree in biology from Cal State Northridge. I wanted to pursue a career involving nature, but never found an opportunity in the field. Instead, I found a career in law enforcement with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department that I really enjoyed. I retired in July, 2014, and within a few months, I saw an advertisement for docent training at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. I registered immediately and graduated in 2015. It was and continues to be a great learning experience about all forms of nature. I particularly love the plants and birds. I really enjoy and admire all of the people at the PCNCA. The staff is wonderful and it is amazing how devoted so many of the volunteers are. It is a tremendous privilege and pleasure to be a member of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center family.

The Way it Was...

Shirley Morano is 95 years old and still an active volunteer at Placerita. She drives each Tuesday from Winnetka to answer the phone, and right now almost every phone call is the explanation of why the Canyon Trail is not yet open to the public!

Shirley came to participate in the recent docent training class "History of Placerita" to provide the class with memories about how PCNCA started. Hearing those memories made me think it was time again to publish the article sent by Diane Klein, one of the founding mothers of Placerita, explaining how it all started. Thank you Diane and Shirley for keeping those memories alive.

"In the summer of 1995 I was in charge of a class of twelve-year olds at the Peninsula School in Menlo Park. One of our field trips was to a local junior museum, a positive experience that I deposited in my memory bank.

After my husband, Richard, and I moved back to the Los Angeles area and settled in San Fernando Valley, I joined the American Association of University Women. The question I personally confronted was why did we not have a similar facility for children in the Valley? In the early 1960's I presented my concern to the organization and found other AAUW members who were interested and willing to explore the concept. They were Patricia Goodrich, Margaret Myers, Betty Senf and Gloria Van Gieson. At some point we came in contact with the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department and there evolved an even better and more exciting concept: a Nature Study Center at the state park Placerita Canyon.

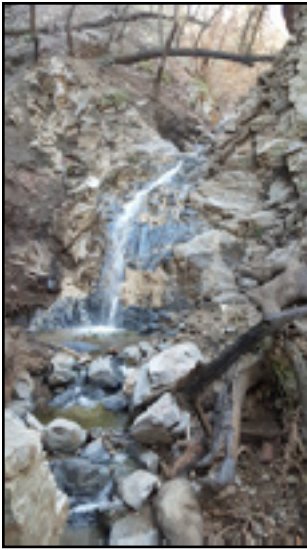
The mutual goal was to work together to establish a Nature Study Center with ecology exhibits, trails and a volunteer and docent support organization. The County would build and staff the Nature Study Center. Our PCNCA would participate in the planning and raise funds for the ecology exhibits as well as develop the volunteer program.

Because of our working relationship with the County, we had the opportunity to participate in the search for an architect for the building. I contacted Richard Dorman, A.I.A., who had been featured on the cover of the LA Times Home Magazine. He was interested and we recommended him to the County. Mr. Dorman was selected for the job. Bruce Burdick, an accomplished exhibit designer, was hired to design the ecology exhibits. Our campaign to raise funds commenced. I knew I was not born a fundraiser, but I intended to give the task the "ol' college try" Somehow, we managed to raise \$35,000 including about \$2,000 from the sale of serigraphs designed by Corita Kent (formerly sister Mary Corita). One Parks and Recreation staff member, with whom we were working very closely, offered to try to obtain funding from the State license plate fund. He succeeded and the exhibits became a reality.

Ruth McCorquodale developed the docent program at the Center and worked on the creation of the countywide Nature Center Associates. Nick Anderson was the first Placerita Canyon Nature Center director and he led memorable programs for the Associates in addition to developing school field trips with the LA City Schools. Two naturalists who were key to our programs were Dr. Elizabeth Hone, educator and naturalist, California State University at Northridge, and Barbara Hopper, biologist, Pierce College.



Special comment by Dan Kott: I was pleased and not surprised to find the name Barbara Hopper in the historical PCNCA papers Shirley Morano brought with her presentation Tuesday. Mrs. Hopper had a positive impact on my life. She was the instructor of a required biology class I took at Pierce College in 1972. It was pretty difficult but she was one of those teachers with the enthusiasm and talent to make learning fun. That biology class, with its great field trips and particularly excellent teaching stirred in me a lifelong interest and enjoyment of plant and wildlife identification and behavior.



The Waterfall Trail

Yes, there is water in the waterfall. No, you cannot go there!

After the Sand fire, all the debris from burnt vegetation piled up at the bottom of the trail.

When the rain started to fall, the stream became very powerful and carried some of the debris downstream. The narrow valley is like a letter U with a narrow base. Do you remember the passage near the waterfall? It was lined with very large boulders. In some places, you had to climb over those boulders. It appears that many of those boulders were retained by the roots of large trees. Those roots burned during the fire and the boulders were loosened by the heavy rain. Many of those rocks were carried away by the stream. Are you getting a better idea in your mind about the situation? It is dangerous, the trail is gone, and the boulders are unstable. Charitha Eragoda did an exploratory hike, walking in the stream, and these details are his observations.



KHTS Interview

On Monday January 9th, the always lovely and gracious Janis Murray did an interview with our own Ron Krauss and Jack Levenberg. We are extremely grateful to KHTS for that, because each year they let Placerita have the first interview of any non-profit organization. The timing is very strategically placed just before the start of docent training, so we can enjoy this publicity effort to the fullest. The interview was conducted in their new studio on Main Street in downtown Newhall. Thank you, KHTS AM 1220; you really are our home station!

Invasive Plant Removal and Restoration Committee

by Robert Grzesiak

Butterfly Garden: Act 2. Three cheers for the restorers! Butterflies, I am sure, got the word. There will be lots of flowers in front of the pond to nectar on all year round and plenty of caterpillar food too. Thanks to Rob, Rodger, Sue and Allen W, Vicky, Denny, and Michael S, we transplanted 15 Deerweeds, 11 Sand Asters, 5 Pine Goldenbushes, 7 Calif. Stages, 1 Toyon, 1 Everlasting(Maple Syrup) from the Ecology Trail. Some got anti gopher cages and protection from browsing deer. If Sue is able to find seeds for Asclepias California (our other milkweed specie native to Placerita), she agreed to turn on her nursery grow light. And as in the days of old, Denny couldn't contain his nostalgia for the rotary push mower and cut the grass around the Cabin.

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.

NATURE EDUCATION

Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and Community Hiking Club will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please call the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. Sunday, March 19 "Placerita's Non-Venomous snakes". Sunday, April 16 "Wildflowers of Placerita Canyon."

TWILIGHT HIKES

This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 7pm and runs for about an hour. 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!

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.

GRADUATION CEREMONY

and Dinner Party: 6.00pm at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. The Class of 2017 will receive their certificate and all the docents are invited to share the happy pot-luck dinner celebration.

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