



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
May-June, 2017

Hello Dear Nature Friends

The last Rattler was sent to you two months ago, and since then two big events have been at the forefront in Placerita: the Lucifer storm which changed the map of the park in a drastic manner, and the graduation of the Class of 2017 took place. We are delighted to welcome 22 new docents to our family. Also, the rain has stopped...would you believe? Spring is here! In spite of having fewer trails to enjoy, we still can still see spring magic at work. Enjoy the new season and this new Rattler.



Photo by Charitha Eragoda



A New Queen in Placerita

We lost our bees to a nasty fungus, but the beehive is clean now and we have a new queen. The queen is coming from Hawaii so we can be sure she is not Africanized. She is marked with a red dot so she is easy to identify. At first, the hive was kept outside for a few days allowing the bee's time to get accustomed to the area and then was brought into the classroom. Our visitors are always excited to learn more about the bees.

Our sincere thanks go to Jack Levenberg for keeping an eye on the situation as well as Chip Vanoy who owns the bee farm on route 126 and who shares his expertise and knowledge freely with us. If you drive by, stop to sample the honey and thank him for his help with the bees at Placerita. It's a fun place to visit and you'll get a new appreciation for the real taste differences in the various types of honey!

Open House

Open House on Saturday May 13! Thank you so much Joan Fincutter for being in charge of this big day at Placerita. Open House is not a fundraiser, but a way to thank the community for their support and to show them a good time. There are many new activities this year: a microscope table with water samples, rock and face painting, story time, tables with games, displays of the future projects at Placerita like the Braille trail and the Amphitheater, a table for coloring and answering quizzes, another one with ideas about making a good habitat in your back yard for insects, birds and mammals. We will have snow cones and Smokey the Bear; we will have herpetology displays and so much more! The sky is the limit. This year we will start at 9:00am and finish at 2:00pm. Be there and have fun!



President's Message

By Ron Kraus

The last time I wrote a President's Message for the Rattler was for the September-October 2016 edition and we were mourning the damage done to Placerita Canyon Natural area by the huge Sand Fire that started in July. After the fire was finally, totally extinguished (in November, believe it or not!), heavy rains followed in January and February. Massive flooding and mudflows washed out several of our most popular hiking trails and also affected many of the park features in the nature center area—the picnic area bridge, parking lots, walkways, and the interpretive trails used for our school tours. It seems we just couldn't catch a break.

But as usual, the docents, volunteers and County staff pulled together and repaired enough of the damage so that park programs were minimally affected. We were able to offer almost all of our continuing events and also to begin our extremely popular school tours right on schedule. I'm extremely proud of the spirit of cooperation and the "can do" attitude that makes Placerita such a special place.

January through March is a favorite time of the year at Placerita Canyon Nature Center because of our annual docent training program. It's always such a joy to see the new faces eager to learn about nature and the environment, and how to interpret the information to the public. This year we graduated 22 new docents! They are already leading school tours and involving themselves in many other projects around the park.

Speaking of favorite Placerita Canyon things, our annual Open House is coming up on Saturday, May 13. This is our opportunity to share with the entire community our wonderful park and the great programs we offer. Our hard working Open House committee has planned some really special events this year and I can't wait for the fun to begin!

We are also partnering with County Parks to complete several improvement projects funded by generous donations from a local family foundation and the estate of Paul Levine, our beloved "butterfly guru." The list includes a new outdoor amphitheater, new drinking fountains, restoration of the history mural, a Braille trail for visually impaired visitors, and a new museum display case for seasonal exhibits.

So, as spring turns into summer, I'd like to thank everyone involved with the operation and programming at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. Despite a challenging few months, we have continued to make it a valuable destination for outdoor recreation, education and fun!

A Few Things about Ingrid Brown, Class of 2010

I was born in Glendale California and lived there until five, and then we moved to the Santa Clarita Valley in 1963, where I grew up. At that time it was part of Saugus, not much was out here, but we always found something to do. I have seen this valley grow a lot; I do miss the rolling hills. My love nature started in Girl Scouts. We went camping about 2 or 3 times a year. We learned a lot about nature and how to be prepared for anything. I have also grown up with dogs, cats, rabbits, rats, birds. I also use to catch horned lizards and blue-bellies in our backyard.

I graduated from Canyon High School. Then I went to College of the Canyons where I earned an Associates of Science Degree in Child Development. After high school I started working as a teacher at Pinecrest preschool where my mother worked. I worked there for 5 years with 3 to 4 year-olds and ended with 2 to 3 year-olds. Then I

worked as a nanny for 3 years for a mother of two. I worked for another preschool Kettle Day-Care with 2-year-olds. I was there for 5 years and then I thought I would like to do something else. So I helped my mother clean Sierra Preschool, where she was working at the time, on the weekends. I am not sure how it happened but I started teaching there too, with the two year-olds and taught there for 4 years.

After that I left teaching for caring for animals. I worked for 6 years with Weatherwax, I trained dogs, and I cared for Lassie and the other dogs there and helped a friend with her animal rescue.

Right now my family life is just my cat and me. Lenny is a ginger and white cat, he is about 14. My sister Diane lives in Ventura near her daughters, my older brother (I'm the oldest child) lives in Burbank. My mother passed away in 2007, my father 4 months later in 2008. My youngest brother passed away three years ago.

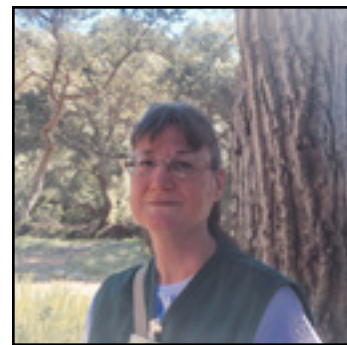
I do not remember the first time I came to Placerita but do remember coming here with the Girl Scouts and the Cub Scouts many times (my brothers were in the Cub Scouts). I remember hiking the trails; I also remember some trails a little differently. The title I have at Placerita is Docent-naturalist. I help in the gift shop, in the museum, helped put together a nature box and was on the open house committee.

I really love being out there in nature, teaching the kids and adults, letting them see nature in a new way.

My special accomplishment at Placerita is getting over my fear of working in the gift shop and making a lot of mistakes. With a lot of practice and positive support from everyone, I feel a lot better.

My favorite foods are fruits, vegetables, eggs, salmon, quinoa, and other good health foods and of course dark chocolate.

My favorite colors are purple and pastel colors. I like listening to music from the 50s, 60s, and 70s--the music I grew up with, gardening, hiking, arts & crafts, oil painting, and pet sitting.



Getting Ready for Mating Season

by Fred Seeley

Every year, in preparation for our local tree frogs and California toads getting romantically involved each Spring, we do a major pond clean up to get rid of leaves, sticks and excess growth plus a partial water change. With no outlet and constant evaporation, the water gets very "hard" and not as good as it should be for our amphibian friends.

After being forced to cancel two other dates for our annual pond clean up due to weather, we finally got a good forecast for a few days and the clean up was quickly scheduled for Friday afternoon on February 24th at 1.30 pm. Joining me initially were Vicki Cunningham along with her beautiful and funny Granddaughter Nora, Herb Broutt, Jack Levenberg and (very importantly because he brought the generator for the water pump) Jim Southwell.

We got off to a really good start and were making very good progress, when more help arrived in the form of Girard Cohen and his lovely and hardworking wife, Patty. Girard and Patty, I hope you accept my apologies as I forgot to take another photo after your arrival.

When the clean up was done and we started to refill the pond, we learned the hard way that there was a downstream pipe rupture and until that was repaired, we had no water service at the pond!!! With Frank Hoffman's help, we were able to locate 5 garden hoses and we strung them together from the Nature Center all the way to the pond! We relaxed with cold water and snacks while the pond was refilled.

Thanks to everyone who helped out, and now we need everyone to hope that we will have lots of tadpoles in a few weeks to show our visitors.



Docent Enrichment Training

By RuthAnne Murthy

Each 4th Monday of the month, our enthusiastic docents gather to learn more about Placerita Canyon. March was all about botany! Helen Sweeny presented Botany 101. She told us about 8 plant families, leaf shapes and attachments, and shared tips and a handout about identifying plants. Robert Grzesiak gave us an in-depth review of the Plant Nature Box. What great resources are available for us to utilize. Fred Seeley detailed other jobs at Placerita. There seems to be something for everybody. We need all of you! A big thank you to our presenters.

Monday, April 24th, the docents will be going on a field trip to the Devil's Punch-bowl. Olivia Miseroy, our taxidermy expert, will be our guide. If you please, wear your hiking shoes so you can experience the trail. We will eat lunch under the trees. Sounds perfect!



Perezia Acourtia microcephala

Trail Treasures

by RuthAnne Murthy

Perezia, also called Sacapellote, is a native perennial herb. It often grows over 4 feet tall. Its main stem grows upright until the large, ovate leaves weigh the plant down until it droops. The leaves are up to 8 inches long with finely toothed margins. After the plant blooms, the leaves

turn brown and papery, but stay on the plant.

Even though Perezia is part of the sunflower family, it has asymmetric flowers, and that is quite unusual. The light purple flowers grow in showy clusters that can be up to 10 inches in diameter. Each flower produces one single-seeded fruit that is covered with white bristles that are spread by the wind. Its response to fire is to re-sprout from its roots. Perezia abounds after fires because the open space provides more sunlight and space. You will see this Trail Treasure on the Ecology Trail from June to August.



New Museum Display Case

The new display in the museum was a team effort: As Chairperson of the Museum Committee, Sue Sutton did the research and found the cabinet. Purchase was made as part of the Family Grant. Jim Crowley made a gorgeous cabinet base that blends beautifully with the museum design, and Denny Truger installed interior illumination. The first part of the display was lent by Sue Wallander. Thank you all, it looks so good.



Lucifer in Placerita

They give names to hurricanes and tornados, but rarely to storms. The storm that came on Friday, February 17 was predicted to be the worst in the last 10 years. We sure were not disappointed. Four inches of rain fell in Newhall in relentless sheets.

The Sand fire last summer burned much of the area, so none of the vegetation we usually count on was there to slow the path the runoff took. The stream became a furious river and even left its normal bed, invading areas where it had never been before.



As the Canyon, Waterfall and Los Pinetos trails are officially closed and have been ripped apart, I will tell you what happened around the Nature Center building because it is traumatic enough. The stream crossed over the inside road, flowing all the way to the next parking lot. The regular parking lot was covered with water, tree trunks and huge piles of roots. A large mud slide crossed the road and County Employee Marietta Ewing's car got stuck in the mud at the end of her working day.

On the Heritage trail, the water went across the trail, leaving debris behind. Under the bridge, you can easily see how high the water went. Though it was high enough to leave marks, we were lucky the rushing water did not damage the mural. Huge tree trunks were carried by the current, and one tree went through the bridge crossing to the picnic ground. The bridge was closed for a while but was quickly repaired by the County. The Nature Center was closed for two days. A very large oak tree close to the back side of the building was split in two, the result of the very strong winds and the fungus that had damaged the inside of the tree.

Trucks have been working every day cleaning up large piles of mud and debris, as well as the tree trunks and piles of roots that were tangled everywhere. We are very grateful that we are all safe and that the building is intact. In past, during strong storms we have seen the stream changing course, so this is not unusual. This year, we had two events that made the situation rather unique and pretty devastating: the Sand Fire and the Lucifer Storm. Those two so close to each other took us right over the edge.





Graduation 2017 by Andrea Donner

After 9 weeks of lectures, docent walks, class projects and a challenging final exam, Placerita Canyon's Docent Class of 2017 graduated with pomp and circumstance, on April 1, 2017. It was well attended by both families and friends, and fellow Docents from Placerita. There was a good variety of food for all to enjoy. After a great meal, Ron began the ceremony by thank-

ing those people who helped with Docent Training, including the docents that gave lectures, helped with the food, helped write and correct the final exam, and many more people that were involved.

Lanita honored four experienced Docents for their work at Placerita. Glenda Perl, Fred Seeley, Andrea Donner and Claudette Newman.

Ron then proceeded with the Graduation inviting each docent up to the stage to receive their official badge. Being a Placerita Docent is hard work, and everyone was proud of our graduates. Some of the Graduates brought their own cheering squad. George Fierro had his adorable grandkids and daughters cheering him on, and holding signs. Ryan Reynoso was so proud that he wore his cap and gown, and moved the tassel in the correct direction when he graduated.

Those who had perfect attendance also received a Placerita hat.

It was a fun evening for all, and we congratulate and welcome all our new Docents to the Placerita Canyon Family. We are so glad you have joined us.

A Rare Find

Caprlinopsis picacea (common name Magpie Inkcap mushroom) is uncommon in California. It is native to Britain, but also found in North America. It is poisonous. The wonderful patterning of white or silvery grey on a shiny dark-brown background makes this one of the most beautiful mushrooms to photograph.

Charitha Eragoda has a great eye for noticing interesting details, and this one captured his attention. As soon as he put it on FaceBook for identification, all the mycology groups became very excited! It was part of the plant list for Placerita, but it remains a rare find. Thank you for sharing it with us Charitha!



Board of Directors Elections

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center Board of Directors elections will be held in accordance with our By-Laws on Jun 3, 2017. If you are a current board member or a PCNCA member and are interested in running for office, let one of the board members know or contact Jim Crowley at (661) 755-7377 to discuss the opportunities or have any questions.

A great way to understand how our Board of Directors operates is to attend a board meeting held each month on the first Tuesday at 1:00pm. Guests are welcome. All members in good standing (paid dues) are eligible for board membership and to vote. The voting will taking place over a short period of time prior to a general meeting on Jun 3, 2017.



Cookie at Placerita

A few years ago, Marc Alva's grandson, Sean, asked him to take care of his pet tarantula. "Of course, no problem" was Marc's answer and he gave the best of care to this female tarantula for a long time.

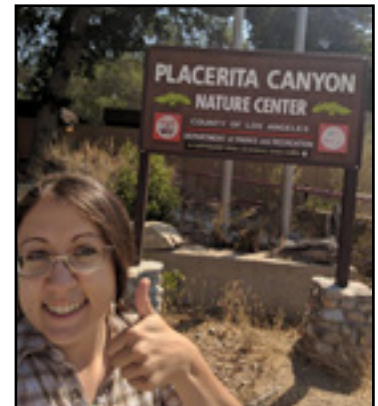
Feeding and cleaning was fine, but as Marc's schedule became more hectic, he realized that the tarantula was not handled as often as it should be. What could he do? The answer was close by because Marc knew that Placerita needed a new tarantula to show to the school groups and for the animal show on Saturday.

In the photo, you can see Marc bringing Cookie to her new home on Tuesday, April 4. She is about 6 to 7 years old. Thank you so much Marc for this new addition to Placerita. Sean and you can visit her any time

What is Olivia Doing?

Olivia Miseroy attended the California Association of Taxidermists Annual State competition in March 2017. She competed in the professional division with a California Whiptail replica and a Southern Pacific Rattlesnake replica (same as the one in Placerita's museum) and won blue ribbons with both as well as the Polytranspar Award and an award for the most artistic presentation of reptiles.

In May 2017 she will be attending the World Taxidermy Championships in Peoria Illinois. It seems that we are in good hands...Olivia is in charge of the maintenance of the taxidermy at Placerita.



Have a Happy and Safe Summer!

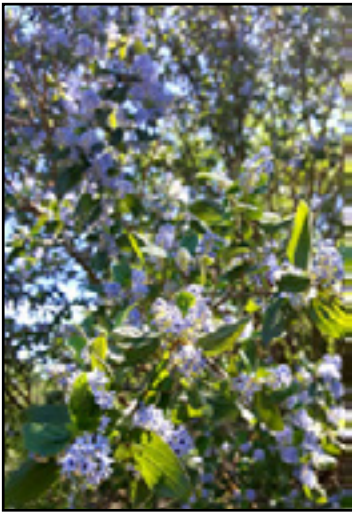
Tataviam Indian Outreach Program

By Sue Wallander

Placerita has an outreach program for third grade classes in the Santa Clarita and San Fernando Valleys. It is a one to one-and-a-half-hour program. There are three parts to the program. The first part tells a story, using a series of slides, about the Tataviam Indians who lived in the Santa Clarita Valley. There is a mini-museum of artifacts from the Southwest Museum and from classes that I have taken through the National Park Service. We set up the museum and the children can walk through and examine the artifacts. We have added another component, the Nature Box. The Nature Box contains 4 hands-on activities that the third grade classes can participate in.

The program was started by Phil Rizzo, a former docent at Placerita. He had been a docent at the Southwest Museum and when he moved to the Santa Clarita Valley, he brought the program with him. I had done the program with Phil for a number of years and then took it on about 12 years ago. We can keep the artifacts for as long as we use them with children.

The program is generally requested in spring when the classes are studying the Tataviam.



Famous Quotes from Little Folks

At Placerita Canyon Nature Center, our main objective is to provide Nature Education, and our core program addresses children who come on school trips with their class. We start from the earliest age with the kindergarten tour, but most of the time children are from 2nd to 5th grades. We try to coordinate our education with the topics they have studied in class, to reinforce their knowledge. In order to do this well, we talk with their teacher before the start the program.

When they are back in school after the trip, we send an evaluation packet so we can get feedback to know if we accomplished our goals, to find out how we can improve and what interested the children most.

A personalized way to do this is to ask the children to write us letter and to make a drawing of what they remembered from the trip. It forces them to spend some time thinking and putting their experience into words.

I will tell you that their letters are pure gold, and the docents enjoy them dearly. They stay on the docent desk and we read them over and over again. The innocence, interest and little details that emerge in those drawings and letters are an endless source of joy and help us to focus on what is really important.

2/10/17

Dear Jim and John,

Thank you for the wonderful trip. My favorite part was when you were talking about the rabbit's habitat and how it is alive and how they have a bedroom and entertainment room. I liked it when we were inside and outside talking about the animals. When you said how the fire go started 12 years ago and how it affected all of those trees.

Thank you for such a wonderful trip.

Sincerely

Ethan

Dear Placerita Canyon Nature Center,

I loved the part when we looked at the sugar bush. I also liked how you brought out real animals! I loved the owl and the birds. I loved this field trip and I loved how we hiked in the rain, I love nature, creatures and animals. When we were on the sand, I found a piece of quartz. It was awesome! Your student helper

Andrew



Dear Clodette,

Thank you so much for explaining like every interesting thing like the oak tree, the cabin, it was so cool. I really love the hike; it had so much plants like the cowboy calone. I also liked the black sage, it smelled like mint. I also love the soap made out of plants. Once again, thank you so much. I hope to come again with my parents. I had a great time.

Sincerely

Deja

Ps: I was in a white shirt.



Invasive Plant Removal/Restoration

by Robert Grzesiak

For March, six of us removed weeds along the Ecology trail near the mulefat sign. For April, again six of us removed weeds along the Hillside trail. Omar, Bob J. and Violet from 2017 class showed up to help pull grasses and stayed along with Ingrid Brown to produce a list of natives less than two feet tall growing on the trail- 28 plants. The work gangs sing fest was a flop, apparently it helps to have music accompaniment to hide off key voices. But, five 20gallon bags of invasive annual grasses were removed. Update: The Jan/Feb transplant to the Butterfly garden has a 90% success rate and weeds are under control. And WOW! Check out the completed puddling soil plot complete with plastic butterflies decoys. Thanks Denny Truger and Dan Kott.



Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

May 13, 2017

9AM to 2PM

- Animal Presentations
- Panning for Fools Gold — \$2
- Face Painting — \$2
- Rock Painting — \$2
- Caricatures — \$1 (per person)
- Vendors & Exhibits
- Gift Shop

Many fun activities for the whole family!!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road

(661) 259-7721

www.placerita.org

Sponsored by

Placerita
Canyon
Nature Center
Associates



The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial District of Kathryn Barger. 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.

Each student needs to write a report. Please see what topics were chosen and learn the names of the new docents from the class of 2017

First Name	Last Name	Report Subject
Cebrina	Dieli	Raptors of the Night
George	Fierro	Tataviam Indians
Kara	Franklin	Evidence of the long term influence of cattle grazing
Lora	Hawkins	Baja Tree Frog
Bob	Joyce	The Tataviam People's Origin & Movement through their Land
Casey	Kerylow	Turkey Vultures
Mike	Maloney	Geology & Microclimates
Carol	Mercado	Incorporating an Early Learner Curriculum into Nature Programs
Mary	Oien	Coast Live Oak: Quercus Agrifolia
Violet	Paley	Native American Healing with Medicinal Plants
Omar	Peña	Botany Trail Restoration Plan
Kristian	Punches	A Brief Geologic History of Placerita Canyon
Ryan	Reynoso	California Tarantula
Tina	Rodriguez	Placerita Canyon List of Snakes and Lizards
Elizabeth	Sanderson	Placerita Canyon Biodiversity and the Pacific Tree Frog
Spencer	Schwartzbach	Termites, Order Isoptera
Stacy	Stroup	Scat and Tracks
Dave	Taylor	Coyotes -- Southern California
Caitlin	Trepp	Unique Plant Communities of Placerita Canyon
Sirine	Turki	Tataviam
Tamara	White	Cooper's Hawk
Jonah	White	California Toad
Jim	Wyrozumski	Striped Racer

Spring - Summer 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	An exciting new program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. Sunday, May 21 - Rattlesnakes by Frank Hoffman and Dave Stives June 18 - Large Raptors by Frank Hoffman and Friends July 16 - New Zealand by Nikki Dail
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.
OPRN HOUSE	May 13 from 9.00am to 2.00pm. Many fun activities for the whole family (see flyer)
END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR PARTY	Saturday June 3rd 6.00pm at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. All the docents are invited. We will have a short general meeting, election of the board, then we will share a nice pot-luck dinner and enjoy each other company before the long summer.

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