



Hello Nature Friends,

We wish each of you a very happy New Year: health and happiness to all!

2017 was a year with a few difficulties for Placerita. We had the Placerita fire that came very close to the cabin, but the firemen stopped it and all was well.

In the spring time, the unusual amount of rain, flowing down the hills and through the stream, destroyed part of the Canyon trail, the Waterfall trail and Los Pinetos trails. All those trails had to be closed to the public because they were not safe but the phone started ringing, every day, a few times a day "When is the Canyon trail going to be reopened?"

This trail is very popular with our visitors. It is mostly flat so it can be used by families and joggers, it is along the stream so it is really pretty in every season, it has many majestic oaks and beautiful view of the mountains.

The visitors were getting frustrated and they were getting impatient!

Permits to work in a stream bed are not easy to obtain so, for about a year, different approaches were proposed in vain and we were told permits were going to take a long time. However, to our delight, recently the reconstruction of the Canyon trail was considered as "replacement or reconstruction of an existing facility."

We are very optimistic that the complete project description will be easier to obtain, and that work will begin sometime in 2018.

That will be a nice present for all who use the park!



The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
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www.placerita.org (661) 259-7721

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Over 50 Years of Nature Education

January-February 2018

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Holiday Craft Fair 2017

When we say "Holiday Craft Fair" some people think in terms of vendors selling goods like Holiday T-Shirts, ready-made jewelry, ornaments, candles, and the like – all geared for the Holidays. But our Craft Fair is very unique, and extremely far from any other event you can imagine!

The Holiday Craft Fair is always held on the 1st weekend of December from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. This year our Fair was held Saturday, December 2nd, and Sunday, December 3rd, on two pleasantly mild and sunny, beautiful days.

This event is so special. It brings family and friends together to create unique wreaths, and Yule logs, while children create their own amazing crafts. People come from far away to join family and friends. Some consider this an annual event and tradition for their families.

Our docents and volunteers gather many types of greenery, including pine branches, juniper, rosemary, coyote brush, dehydrated fruits, pods and seeds, and many other trimmings from various types of bushes, to provide a variety for your wreath's look.

If you've never created a wreath or Yule log before, we have instruction tips to help you get started. You get a box top, gather the greens you want and create, create, create... and when you're done, our special bow maker will let you choose from a wide variety of ribbon and will make a very professional bow for your craft.

And while you're busy creating, children can participate in many crafts to surprise mom and dad. Well supervised by our docents and volunteers, your child can dip candles, create a bird feeder from peanut butter, seeds and a pine cone, paint a cheery holiday rock, decorate a wooden bird house, or create an owl from a pine cone.

100% of the proceeds from the event go to Placerita Canyon Nature Center to provide for the animals at the Center. This includes feed, veterinarian care, and safe housing. The animals at Placerita Nature Center come to us rehabilitated from injuries that prevent them from continuing a life in the wild, as they would not survive. These marvelous creatures are used to educate the public, who would otherwise never see them up close. So we thank the Park's County Staff for providing such loving care, and all of the docents and docents who volunteer at the Park.

On behalf of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates, and Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation staff, we graciously thank all of the visitors who attend this important event to support our wildlife.

See you in December 2018!!

Mari Carbajal
Event Chair, Holiday Craft Fair 2017



Bulletin Boards

Have you looked at the bulletin boards on the nature center patio lately? There's quite a bit of information for everyone-- visitors and docents alike.

The bulletin board just outside the kitchen window near the gift shop door is divided into two sections - one for information about our monthly bird walks and beside it is information about our wildflower walks "Blooms of the Season". Each month we post what birds and wildflowers we have observed on these walks, the date of the next walk, pictures and other items of interest..

The bulletin board in the center of the patio welcomes our visitors and gives them an overview of all our activities. Fliers of upcoming events and maps and information about our hiking trails are posted for all to view. Hope you'll take a look at both these bulletin boards often!



The bulletin boards outside of the patio area in the process of being repaired and will be updated very soon. Thank you to all the docents who have been involved in this project.

How Does Publicity for Our Events Happen?

Linda Kopatz contacts many newspapers, magazines and radio stations, Evelyne Vandersande writes the articles and between the two of them they can spread the word in many publications. We were very pleased to have been nominated non-profit organization for the week of November 10 by the Santa Clarita Gazette, and we felt very honored to get a special congratulations card from Kathryn Barger, Supervisor for the Fifth District of LA County.

After reading our press release, the editor of the Santa Clarita Gazette asked to rush an article and photos about our organization and we were very pleased to be able to use part of the Rattler for that purpose.

Publicity does not stop at articles! For example, publicity for the Craft Faire is as follows: Ron Kraus updates the flyers, which are distributed to all the libraries by Judy McClure which are also available to visitors. The docents participating in outreaches have given the flyers to persons at various venues since September so they reached many hands.

The banners, updated by Evelyne, were hung in a very professional manner at Green Nursery (thank you for letting us do that every year) and in front of the Nature Center by Denny Truger and Robert Grzesiak, with the help from county employees. Placeritas Face Book page always advertises our events and many docents share these flyers on their own FB page. Of course, it can also be found on our web page. Word-of-mouth is always a very successful way to spread what is happening at Placerita....and the job gets done!

Docent Enrichment

by RuthAnne Murthy

A field trip to the newest Nature Center Associates park, Stone View Nature Center, was enjoyed by an enthusiastic group of docents in October. The docents enjoyed a V.I.P. tour of the color-coordinated gardens, the vegetable garden, and the extraordinary professional-level kitchen. The center hosts classes on yoga, cooking, and gardening. They have a full schedule of programming. After the tour, we enjoyed a tasty Mexican lunch. We always love visiting over food.

The November Docent Enrichment Training was a requested review of three skills. Vicki Cunningham and Jim Crowley led a session on the Energy Cycle Board. Ranger Frank Hoffman reviewed handling of snakes and tarantulas. Lastly, Andrea Donner introduced our up-and-coming Saturday preschool program starting on January 13. She also reviewed the school field trip early learner program. Thank you to the presenters and to those docents who brought treats to share!!

Our next Docent Enrichment Training is on January 22nd. Please reserve the date and watch for the Trails and Nuggets flyer in the New Year. We'd love to see you!!

Invasive Plants Removal

by Robert Grzesiak

We just completed the December weeding task of removing Tamarisk in the Creek. We pulled out 11 fifty-five gallon bags of weeds.

While we focused on Tamarisk (a very invasive weed known to suck creeks dry), we also pulled Smilo grass and spiny wild lettuce and mustards. But more significantly, we pulled up the visually dominant Tobacco



Trees as well.

I think we were all surprised by the number of young Tamarisk that had taken deep root. The joke of the day was the word bifurcation. We tried our best to pull out the roots to the depth where the Tamarisk bifurcated to insure no regrowth.

For the November weeding we had started from the Nature Center and weeded going up Placerita Creek. The Creek was moist and actually running in spots. It was much easier to pull the Tamarisk; we got 5 bags worth of mostly 3-to-12 inch plants. By consensus, we will continue to focus on the Tamarisk in the Creek in the future.

Hey! it is very rewarding; join Dan K, Maria Elena, Ingrid, Vicki, Mark H, Denny, Roger, Helen, Allan W, Bob J, and the new kids Jim Bloch, Lori Wolfe, Mike Maloney.

P.S. Thanks Park personnel for the co-operation.





The Amphitheater – Update

By Fred Seeley

Well, the last update was titled “The Final Chapter” but it hasn’t turned out that way...

The stage is complete and looks very nice. It is clear that the County’s carpenter takes a lot of pride in his work! It seemed like the days he was available to us were the hottest days of the year but he there on time and worked through the heat.

The County’s concrete forming and finishing team has also really been a pleasure to work with. They did an excellent job on the new walkway from the handicap parking to the connection between the new Heritage

Braille Trail and the bridge and the other smaller concrete projects.

As of Thanksgiving this year, we have the concrete forms for the protective seating bench virtually complete. When they are ready, the concrete will be poured and finished. This will be the largest pour we’ll be having and it will be fun to see the results. We’ve chosen a slightly different color than the 52 greenish benches so hopefully the contrast set off the entire project.

With the seating bench we should be able to seat about 300 patrons to our events! We’re thinking of adding a few concrete slabs for picnic tables up the hill behind the seating bench so folks can enjoy a picnic while watching events on the stage.

A final, but very important thank you to the County’s Designer and Project Manager for the time and effort he’s put into our joint project. Just like us, he is very excited to see the final results!



Holiday Party at Placerita

It is always a fun event, a time to chat with the other docents and to get to know each other a little bit better. 57 docents showed up, so it was a nice crowd and everyone came with great dishes to make a delicious buffet table. We even had to quickly add another table for the desserts because one table was not enough! (Thank you Frank Hoffman for your help.)

Thank you to the docents who came early to help with the set up, and thanks to all of you who went into action so quickly and thoroughly for the clean-up. That is always a wonder to see how fast that gets done!

After dinner, we had a little ceremony to recognize a few docents who have been very active and helpful at Placerita: Lori Wolfe, Sue Wallander, Jill Goddard, Rick Brammer and Jim Wyrozzumski. Lanita Algeyer gave them all a gift certificate.

Jim Crowley received the Bob Moss cup which is a very prestigious award and Linda Ioerger received the Paul Levine cup for her outstanding bird presentations. You all make Placerita a better place.

Ron Kraus made a PCNCA “2017 Year in Review” movie which was just incredible to watch. It was a very full year and to be able see it all pulled together into 7 minutes was amazing. It had some fun parts and sad parts which reflect the reality of our year. Ron posted it on YouTube, so even if you didn’t get to enjoy it at the time, you can see it now (or see it again!). Ask Ron for the link.



Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

Miner's Lettuce, Claytonia perfoliata

After a long, dry summer, the winter rains are much anticipated at Placerita Nature Center. One of our early bloomers is Miner’s Lettuce. Miner’s Lettuce grows in shady, moist areas such as along creeks. It is in the purslane family.

Miner’s Lettuce is an annual. It is a fleshy succulent that grows up to 12 inches tall. The plant has two types of leaves. The basal leaves that form along the ground are narrow on long stems. The upper leaves are orbicular, shallow cups around the stem. The leaves grow from 3/8” to 3 1/4 “ in diameter.

The tiny white or pink flowers are in clusters called racemes. The flowers bloom in February to May, but have been seen in Placerita Canyon in January. Each flower has 5 tiny petals. The stem of the raceme is unique because the stem perforates the leaf--hence its botanical name.

The seeds and leaves were eaten by California native people and later by miner’s and other pioneers.

One will be able to see Miner’s Lettuce along Placerita Canyon’s watersheds after the rains. It is a lovely Trail Treasure.





Placerita Nature Tots

Exploring Nature with Young Children

Ages 3-5 and one adult companion for each child

Placerita Nature Tots is a free program.

You may register for one month at a time.

Registration opens the 1st of each month for that month's program.

To ensure a quality experience, the program is limited to 15 children

Please register at: nature_tots@placerita.org

Programs for early 2018 - Saturday Mornings from 9:30-10:30

January 13: Spiders

February 10: Trees

March 10: What's Wild

April 14: Ants



Pre School

by Andrea Donner

In September, a group of docents got together to discuss the possibility of a Pre-School program. The concept was for a monthly Saturday event. Packed into a one-hour program would be fun stories and songs, a short animal presentation, a simple craft and a short hike.

Many things needed to be discussed and approved at the meeting, but first they needed the resources and knowledge to plan it properly. After the Board okayed funding for up to 15 people to attend the "Growing Up Wild" program, Lauren Bergh from the Santa Ana Zoo was contacted to arrange a date and time for the training.

Growing Up Wild is a wonderful pre-school program for children ages 3-7. Fifteen of our docents and three visitors from another Nature Center attended the training on November 6th from 10:00-3:00. It was a great day of hands-on training. We learned many fun activities and included in the price, everyone was given a wonderful resource guide.

If you are interested in helping with this new program, please contact Andrea Donner. We hope to begin our new pre-school program on January 13th, 2018.

Go to Sleep!

90 degrees for Thanksgiving? Many people ended up eating their turkey on the patio, or even took a dip in the pool on Thanksgiving day.

It was different weather than is typically expected, and that was a problem for some animals. The nights were getting cold a few days before, and many tortoises were in the process of starting their hibernation. This was going on with Speedy and Turbo at the Nature Center.

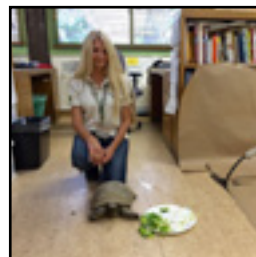
This picture was taken the last day that Turbo wanted to eat a few bites. Speedy went to sleep first and did not change his mind, but Turbo was restless for a few days when the temperature went up. As soon as the nights were cold again, Turbo settled down to sleep and all was good--they are resting peacefully in their large boxes in the Nature Center.

How do you check if an animal who is hibernating is still alive? We rub their feet from time to time during the winter to make sure they move slightly to the touch...Do not try this with a bear!

Tortoises usually wake up by mid-March. What do you do if they are not waking up on time? You do not want to let them sleep too long as they need food and moisture by that time, otherwise they might become too weak.

You open the box, try to wake them up, and then you follow that by a warm bath which is an excellent way to make sure they are hydrated gently and thoroughly.

Many tortoise and turtle owners were having some anxiety because the hibernation process was a little bit delayed this year, and there were quite a few concerned owners on the phone with their veterinarians. But a few days later, all went back into the normal order. Have a good winter, Turbo and Speedy!



How Are They Doing?

Teresa Jacobs and Sue Sutton both had surgeries, they are doing well but are going to need much physical therapy to recover completely.

Linda and Bill Kopatz survived a terrible car accident. Bill has one broken rib. Linda injuries are more incapacitating but she is getting better each day with Bill's help.

If you want to give them a call or send a card, I am sure they would appreciate it.



Getting to Know Jim Wyrozumski

Class of 2017

I was born in 1952 in Sherman Oaks CA where I grew up attending Sherman Oaks Elementary, Van Nuys Jr. And Van Nuys Sr. High schools. Growing up in the 50s and 60s in the valley was the best! Best music, best movies and lots of surfing, hiking, ball playing and enjoying all the best of being a kid. Thankfully I had the greatest mom who overlooked or forgave a lot of my misadventures.

My main passion back then was going to the car races at Ascot Park in Gardena watching the greats like A.J. Foyt and Parnelli Jones drive like madmen around the dirt oval.

In 1971 I was just leaving my cousin's house in Canoga Park when the cutest little girl ever jumped onto the hood of my car so she could introduce herself to me and just a year later I

married the best girl a guy could ever want, my sweetie Barbara, and have been thoroughly enjoying that for the last 45 years.

During that time we raised 2 of the greatest kids a guy could have--my sons and best friends Travis, 41 years and Aaron, 39 years.

Also during those 45 years we have done a lot of traveling to some very fun places, my favorite being a 10 band tour with an Irish rock band in Ireland, can you say Guinness!

I also raced Sprint cars and motorcycles while participating in basketball and softball leagues and coaching my boys in both while continuing my surfing with them.

I've retired twice now, the first being after almost 32 years with the Los Angeles city of Department of Animal Services and the second being 8 years with the Lovington Illinois school system when we lived in Illinois for 12 years. I have 2 beautiful granddaughters back there, Paige who is 15 and Kenadi who is 10.

I've always had a love of the outdoors and have enjoyed a lot of backpacking and hiking starting as a kid with trips up Mt. Whitney and the Sequoias with my lifelong friends Lee and Doug.

Being a docent at Placerita is really a very rewarding experience which I am very grateful for. I have and continue to learn a lot from all the knowledgeable people at the center and hope to continue working there for as long as I am able.



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.
- NATURE EDUCATION** An exciting new program at Placerita. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA 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, 21st : Brent "The bug Guy" Karner is presenting Arthropods (insects, bugs, spiders and their kin) Sunday, February 18 : Florence Nishida, nationally known mycologist, will be giving her presentation on fungi.
- 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.
- DOCENT TRAINING** January 9th (see flyer)
- PLACERITA NATURE TOTS** Age 3-5 and one adult companion for each child. Saturday from 9.30 to 10.30. Registration open the 1st of each month, program limited to 15 children. Register at nature_tots@placerita.org

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 9th, 2018
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 needed.

**For further information call Placerita Canyon Natural Area, (661) 259-7721
or Email ron@placerita.org**

The Hummingbird Garden Restoration Project, et al By Fred Seeley

As most of you know from previous Trails & Nuggets, the Board has set aside a considerable sum for further improvements to our beloved Nature Center. The Board also set up a sub-committee to review projects suggested by our membership and the County staff.

Prior to the last Board Meeting, the sub-committee met and voted to pass two projects on to the full Board for approval. Both projects were approved and funds were committed for the project completion. The projects were adding significant taxidermy to the Museum, especially the Chaparral ecosystem exhibit, and to restore the Hummingbird Garden to its former glory.

The order for taxidermy has been placed and we look forward to receiving each item as it is completed. Sue Sutton and Judy McClure are coordinating this project.

The HGR project (I get tired of typing long words like Hummingbird) committee have had two meetings and have established a written schedule of things to be accomplished to get the project completed. Judy McClure, Omar Pena, Ron Kraus, and I make up this committee, and we welcome anyone who would like to get involved!

The plans call for a bird friendly solar powered water feature, a tranquil place to sit and listen to the birds and splashing water, and lots of flowering native plants that attract Hummingbirds.

With the success of our last round of improvement projects, momentum is on our side so please let us know if you think a good project!



A Night Visitor in the Gift Shop by Marietta Ewing

We have a wonderful gift shop at our Nature Center. It's very popular with our school groups and our park patrons, especially around the holidays.

During Thanksgiving week we had found evidence of animal "scat" in the park office and in the gift shop. We knew it was not from a rodent, but we didn't know for sure what kind of animal it came from. Maybe a Long-tailed Weasel? We just weren't sure. The mystery creature was setting off the alarm in the middle of the night and upon arriving to work we found gift shop items, trail maps and various papers all over the floor. The small vases identifying some of our native plants were found broken as well.

We set a live trap on Thanksgiving evening and with great anticipation I arrived to work the next day only to find the trap was empty. As I was picking up a few items off of the floor I wondered where he could be hiding. I glanced into the large basket in the corner which held some stuffed animals and saw something curled up that appeared to have real fur.

As I got closer he woke up and turned toward me. It was a young opossum!! Opossums are nocturnal omnivores and are North America's only marsupial. This one appeared to be about seven months old.

A short time later, with the help of Jack Levenberg, he was in an animal carrier happily eating his Thanksgiving meal!

