

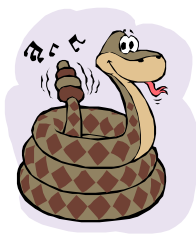
# The Rattler

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**

**March-April 2018**

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber



## Hello Nature Friends,

In the last issue of the Rattler, I was very excited to let you know that many of the issues surrounding the permits required for the work needed in order to reopen the Canyon Trail had found a solution with “replacement or reconstruction of an existing facility.” We were very optimistic that work might begin in 2018. However, since then, some major changes occurred with the County budget and it seems that reopening the Canyon Trail might be very costly, to an extent not planned in the existing budget.

However, more meetings need to happen, discussions are going on, and maybe a solution can be found. Time will tell. The Canyon Trail will be reopened at some point, right now it is impossible to predict a date. We were obviously deeply disappointed, but as you know, the docents do not give up easily. Our daily visitors to the park are also very concerned and want this trail to reopen. But obviously the trail needs to be safe to welcome visitors, including not just walking traffic but bikes and horses, as this is a multi-use trail. A little more patience will be needed and much hope too. Please, keep your fingers crossed for the Canyon Trail!

However, many spring flowers are starting to bloom on the Botany trail so come and check those out.



## First Big Rain of the Season: January 9, 2018

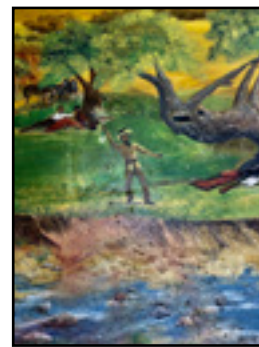
That was a big day at Placerita, because it was the first day of Docent training. In the afternoon, it started to rain very heavily. The main channel of the stream still remains full of silt, and the water could not go through there. But the stream along the Ecology trail quickly filled with water and was roaring along. The parking area became a big mud pie! It lasted only one day and we keep on hoping for more!

## 19 Students!

Docent Training is always a joy at Placerita, and this year we have a class with 19 dedicated students.

They have started to do their audits on the trails along with the docents, they keep on following and participating in the great classes. They have learned about diverse topics from birds, to arthropods, to American Indians, to botany - just to name a few.

Some have started their research for their report, and they are already fretting about the final exams. We have begun to get to know them, and before long we will celebrate all of them at the Graduation Ceremony and dinner on Saturday March 31st. They will receive their PCNCA name tags and certificates, and will become official Docent Naturalists. Our best wishes to each and every one!



## March is a Great Month for Celebration at Placerita

Placerita gold discoverer Francisco Lopez was born March 9, 1802. His son was born March 9, 1825. He discovered gold on March 9, 1842.

So this March might just be the perfect time to take a little hike to the Oak of the Golden Dream, to check out the new plaque that was installed next to the big tree. At the same time, recall the story of Francisco Lopez. And if you do not know the story, there is another plaque nearby that will tell you every detail of the big event.

This plaque was installed next to the tree on the Braille trail. Visually impaired people will have a chance to let their fingers glide over the plaque and will be able to understand what the tree looks like. This was the first display installed on the Braille trail, and a few more have just been installed. Come and have a look.



## Docent Training



Time and time again, we are reminded that Placerita is the very best Nature Center, one of the many reasons being that each year we offer such terrific Docent Training. The obvious reason for such success, year after year, is that it is an example of a group effort at its very best. So many docents share their energy, their knowledge and their time freely and happily - so how could the result be any less than fantastic?

We have 19 students this year, and we welcome them with open arms.

Of course, Ron Kraus, our president and leader, is in charge of Docent Training and gives us both great incentive and direction. His enthusiasm is shared by all the docents, and this is what they do.

Erica De Poor is in charge of administration and the sign up sheet.

Judy McClure in charge of the kitchen and setting up the snacks.

Roger McClure helps with the classroom set up and the coffee making.

Heidi Webber prepares lunch after orientation.

Irene Heerlein is in charge of updating all the various lists.

In charge of some of the classes are: Ron Kraus, Janet Kubler, Vicki Cunningham, Russ Kimura, Sue Wallander and Helen Sweany, Andrea Donner and RuthAnne Murthy, Eric Indermill, Frank Hoffman, Jim Crowley and Sue Sutton. Also teaching are Jackie Thomason, Fred Seeley (who also coordinates reading the reports), Teresa Jacobs, and Lanita Algeyer.

Jim Owens prepares the final exam and the field guides.

Jim Crowley takes all the new docent pictures.

Andrea Donner does the morning quizzes at each class.

Sandra Cattell will help with student retention.

If your name is not on this list, I know that you also brought snacks for a class because you know that a student well fed remains alert and learning! You also did your best to make the new students feel welcome, you talked with them and supported them.

Maybe you're only reading this newsletter and are not a docent - but I want to let you know that pretty amazing things are happening at Placerita. Come visit the people and the Park one day, you won't regret it.



## A Water Fountain for the Hummingbird Garden

by Omar Peña

Judy McClure first came to me, saying that she wanted to improve the Hummingbird Garden by adding a water feature.

I involved Ron, because about ten years ago he planted the gooseberry and other plants as a dedication to the passing of his brother-in-law.

We decided to create a pond as the feature, and so we brought Fred Seeley to the scene. He let us know that a pond would be very high maintenance, compared to the value for birds and other creatures. All of us concluded that a water fountain was easier to maintain. We decided to create the most natural-looking fountain we could.

Denny Truger drilled a hole in a concave stone, to be placed on top of other stones. Through the hole, water would bubble out and pool in the concave rock.

The plan was to place the fountain in the center of the garden. Denny and I had already dug the hole for the water sump. The pump sits in a tub and push water up through the center of the drilled stone.

The next stage in the project was to stack up stones, in a clean manner, creating a pedestal for the drilled concave stone. Denny and Dan Kott dug the hole for the solar pump array. Fred and Miles both made the concrete base for the fountain. Last, we will create a path into the area, plant some plants and shrubs that are attractive to native hummingbirds, and run drippers to all the plants.

That's the plan in a nutshell.



## Spring Makeover for the Lyons Oak

by Denny Truger

Jim Owens, Dan Kott, and myself refurbished the Lyons Oak. We scraped, sanded and oiled the top so the growth rings can be easily seen. Next week Jim will finish putting the dates of important events on the growth rings. It is looking nice and fresh again!



### No Bird Calls?

If you remember our old museum where many of the systems were broken and nobody could fix them, you become very nervous when something gets broken in our new museum. Of course, the bird calls are very attractive to little hands that keep on pushing on those buttons until something goes wrong and no more bird calls can be heard.

Here comes Steve Ioerger, to the rescue! What a coincidence that the bird call was coming from the owl box, because Linda Ioerger is our resident owl handler. Did that add some urgency to the situation? We will never know!

Steve Ioerger is an electronic engineer, so we were in good hands. At first, no signals at all were sensed from the box located under the deer display, so Steve brought the box home to investigate further. The manufacturer guided Steve through a few tests, but eventually the conclusion was that a new system would be the cheapest and more permanent answer. The bird call is on a chip and that was not changed.

Thank you so much Steve for your knowledge, your time and your expertise! We greatly appreciate your work to bring back the bird calls in the museum.



### Taxidermy Cleaning by Fred Seeley

On Monday February 12, 2018, one of the many behind-the-scenes activities took place--Cleaning and protecting or virtually priceless taxidermy. Olivia Miseroy and Judy and Roger McClure worked very hard all day dusting, vacuuming, and preserving our exhibits.

Please notice how wonderful everything looks and say "Thanks!" to Judy, Olivia, and Roger when you see them.

Great Job!!!

### Sierra and Jack Levenberg

"Hello, my name is Sierra, and I am a female Great-horned owl. I weigh 1800 grams (about 4 pounds), and I am 6 or 7 years old. I injured myself one night while hunting, and I was taken to a rehabilitation center when I was found. My injuries were very severe, and I needed a lot of care. The rehab center could not handle the very specific care that I needed. The Nature Center was willing to give me a second chance at survival. It took one full year of dedicated care, but I finally made it. When I was free of infection, I got to meet my handler, Jack Levenberg. I'll let him tell you more of my story."



When I was able to handle Sierra, I made sure to take her out every day for the first three months. It was important to maintain that regular schedule to be able to gain her trust, to build up her confidence and to socialize her. After 3 months being the only one to handle her, she was able to accept 2 other handlers, allowing us to split the work. At that point, it was important for her socialization to be able to connect with different handlers.

Now, I take her out of her mew 4 times a week. She always enjoys that very much, and is happy to get out. She does not like it when young children run to her, but she is fine if she is taken to a group of young children. She is fed 100 grams of rat meat every day. Her weight is carefully monitored and the amount of meat she gets varies as a function of her weight.

Right now she is a little bit plump, but that is quite normal in the winter - we give her a little more padding against the cold!

In the wild, a great horned owl lives only 5 to 7 years. It is not easy to fight for your life and find food every day. In general, Great-horned owls are most vulnerable in the early stage of life. If they survive the first 2 years, their survival becomes easier. Without banding the bird, it is difficult to know for sure.

We had another Great Horned owl at the Nature Center, named OJ, who lived to the ripe old age of 33 years, so I have great hope that Sierra will have a long and pleasant life being fed on a regular basis.

The feathers on her injured wing are starting to grow back the way they were intended to, and she tries to fly all the time. But that will never be possible because, due to her injury, she lost one quarter of her wing. She is getting stronger every day and has good muscle tone.

She is a great ambassador for Placerita, and people have many questions about her. The question I hear the most is "why is she here" so I tell her story of her survival. She is a beautiful bird, and we are all so glad she made it.



### A Plane in the Water Along Placerita?

Disney Ranch is the best neighbor ever for Placerita. They have helped us many times, especially when we were in a tight situation with parking for Open House and they keep lots of open space, which in turn provides habitat for many creatures.

However, sometimes you get a glimpse of their filming activity and it can be surprising. In January, you could see from the road the sudden appearance of a lake created using a large plastic liner. A few weeks later a plane was built, half submerged in the water. The topic of the series became clear!

Then we found out the title was going to be "911," and it was not going to be a pleasant flight! If you want to Google the title, you might recognize the plane but you sure won't see the familiar hills behind! This is where special effects and colored screens come into action. However, we still can be proud that it was filmed next door. Keep up the good work, Disney Ranch!

### Placerita Nature Tots

You probably read about this new program in the last Rattler, but maybe you don't know how it went? Well, it was successful beyond our wildest dreams! We did not expect that the news was going to spread so fast.

The program takes place on the second Saturday each month and designed for children from 3 to 5 years, plus one adult companion for each child.

The registration opens up the 1st of each month for that month's program. We take only 15 children to ensure a quality experience. Well, we were fully booked the first day of registration - so if you are interested be aware, and make sure to call the very first day of each month! On March 10, the topic is going to be "What's Wild?" and on April 14, it is going to be "Ants".

Please register at; [nature\\_tots@placerita.org](mailto:nature_tots@placerita.org)

Many docents got involved, they all helped each other and had lots of fun in the process. With little children you have to be flexible but a few activities were done, stories were read, the short animal presentation was a big hit, and everyone took a short hike.

This program is free, and what a joy to see so many happy little faces having a good time (docents and parents included)!

Thank you to all who made this great new program such a fantastic success.

This is what some of the parents had to say:

*My hubby and son went to the last class and they both really enjoyed it.*

*Thank you*

*He LOVED the class in January and keeps asking to go back. Hope he gets a chance to come again*



### Invasive Plant Removal/Restoration Committee

by Robert Grzesiak

Our February meeting at Walker Ranch Campground was our third there, and the fourth session devoted to Tamarisk removal in the Creek bed. Participants numbers have been great-from 9 to 13. There seems to be a real sense of the importance of Tamarisk removal.

Tamarisk (Salt Cedar) has the potential to devastate the ecology of the Creek. Of the two miles of the Creek along the Canyon Trail, we have about another quarter mile to go. Hopefully, our March session will complete the Creek. Thankfully the Tamarisk are young and small. Though we are not always able to get the full length of the root out, the first 8-12 inches probably contain most of the energy reserves; the removal of which should ensure plant demise.

Our appreciation go out to Henry Cuaz and Cindy Gold-docents in training, a Theodore Payne volunteer-James Kochan, visiting docent Sara Vincelli and the faithful: Ingrid, Maria Elena, Helen, Rob Stark, Roger, Mike Maloney, Dan, and a bonus, Jim Harris, who worked and is doing a weeding article that will include our group.

Happy Weeding



### Pond Spring Clean-up

by Fred Seeley

In spite of threatening skies on Monday morning, February 12, 2018, a small but hardworking crew set out to get our educational pond ready for the romantic adventures of our local Mama and Papa toads and frogs.

Jim Southwell volunteered his dependable generator to power a sump pump to reduce the water levels so that Cindy Gold, Maria Elena Christensen, Jim Crowley, Omar Pena, and the writer could clean things up.

We filled more than two and a half trash drums with dead cattails, leaves, moss, sticks by the dozens, and an Easter Egg! When we were finished, Miles Butcher (a great addition the PCNC staff!) and a young, strong, Community Service worker, loaded up the Gator and had the trash removed within minutes.

When you are out for a stroll, stop by the pond and let us know if you see toad or frog eggs, or the resulting tadpoles. Thanks again to Cindy, Maria Elena, Omar Jim S, and Jim C. for their very dirty but successful work!



### Amphitheater Update

by Fred Seeley

Wow, was Monday, February 12, of this year a productive day or what; not only were taxidermy cleaning, pond cleaning, Hummingbird Garden construction going on and Braille Trail exhibits being installed, but the County's plumbers were also there!

The plumbers were repairing flood damage to the main line crossing the creek, and they were running new lines to, and installing, a new ADA compliant water fountain right next to the amphitheater. When completed it will have a concrete pad surrounding it so that our mobility impaired guests will have easy access to it. We hope to have the final grading and cleanup done in the next few weeks.







**Jim DeLill**

A few docents went to the memorial for Placerita Canyon Docent Jim DeLil, Class of 2012. Jim was our Walker Cabin historian. A memory book was done by Sue Wallander and Evelyne Vandersande and was presented to his daughter. Many docents sent notes and pictures to be included in the book and this is what Ron Kraus, PCN-CA president wrote:

Jim was a valuable member of the Placerita Canyon family of docents and volunteers. He was a graduate of the docent class of 2012 and although his physical limitations didn't allow him to lead the school group hikes, he found a great job at the nature center that needed to be done—Walker family and Walker cabin historian.

Frank Walker moved to Placerita Canyon in the early 1900's and established a farm and ranch on the property that is today's park. He raised a large family on the land (12 kids!) and did many interesting things over the years. His main legacy is that he and his family left the land in it's natural condition and then sold it to the State for a park in 1949.

Jim took an interest in the Walker Family history and spent many hours going through old documents and photos to put together a compelling story of how the Walker's lived, worked, and played on the land. He established contacts with some of the remaining family members and their children to fill in a lot of details about the family legacy. He would then share these facts with park visitors at our special events, like the annual Open House.

I had a nice visit with Jim a couple of months before his passing and he still had the passion for Placerita history. I shared with him some Walker photos which he had been trying to obtain from a Walker family member in Oregon and he was thrilled to go over them with me. We had a good conversation and a few laughs, talking about how things were in the "good old days" at Placerita Canyon.

Jim will be missed at the park, but we have him to thank for filling in the blanks in a lot of our Placerita history pages. I personally will miss his friendship and the good times we had telling the Placerita Canyon story to park visitors.

Ron Kraus



*Western Jack-O-Lantern Mushrooms  
Omphalotus olivascens*

**Trail Treasures**

By RuthAnne Murthy

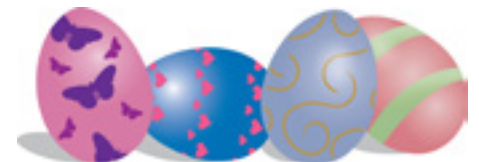
This month's Trail Treasure is the Western Jack-O-Lantern mushroom. These mushrooms can often be seen on the Ecology Trail after a rain. They grow on decaying hardwood trees such as oaks and eucalyptus. They fruit, produce the cap of the mushroom, from late fall to mid-winter. They cause white rot on the host trees.

The caps of these mushrooms range from 8-18 cm in width. They are bright orange with some olive-green tinges on their gills. The caps are orange in the interior as well as the exterior. They are wavy and upturned. It is said that they have luminescent true gills, however, some mycologists question this. The spores are a creamy color and oval shaped.

The stems are called stipes. They range from 5-15 cm long and 1-4 cm thick. Stipes are not necessarily in the center of the mushrooms. They are smooth and tapered toward the ground.

Jack-O-Lantern mushrooms are often confused with chanterelles which are, of course, highly prized by culinary foragers. Jack-O-Lantern mushrooms are toxic. They have an enzyme, illudin, that can cause cramps, vomiting, and diarrhea. Foragers need to look at the underside of each of the mushrooms to determine if they true gills like Jack-O-Lantern mushrooms or merely shallow ridges as on chanterelles.

Be sure to look for these beautiful mushrooms after the next rain, and you will see these Trail Treasures.



**A Little Bird With Three Names**

Our beautiful kestrel came from the organization "Animal Tracks" with a great big name; "Hercules". Placerita Docents made a total change and called him "Tidbit". That still did not win the heart of every body so a few docents call our little guy "Cricket".

Whatever you want to call him, his beautiful feather markings and his easy-to-handle size make him one the stars of the animal show



**Placerita Canyon Nature Center**

# Open House

May 12, 2018  
9AM to 3PM

- Nature Box Programs
- Animal Presentations
- Crafts & Fun Activities
- Panning for Fools Gold
- Hikes
- Informative Exhibits
- Caricatures
- Vendors
- Gift Shop
- Museum

Many fun activities for the whole family!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road  
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[www.placerita.org](http://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.

## Open House

Open house is coming up! It will be Saturday May 12 from 9:00am to 3:00pm.

Maybe you are wondering why this information is appearing in the Rattler so early?

Good question... This event is not a fund raiser, it is our way to thank the community for their support and in the hope they will come to Placerita on that day and will have a great time.

This is where you play a role. Publicity is done for this event, but it is always hard to reach everyone. Use this flyer to tell your friends about our Open House.

If they have kids, let them know they should come, and everyone in the family will have a fun time. It is a family event, low key, no pressure, but it always turns out to be a lovely day in a beautiful location discovering new things about the animals and about all the little treasures that can be found at Placerita. They will be surrounded by docents who are there to make sure the day will be a success. They will even learn a few facts along the way!

There will be hikes, Nature Box programs, crafts for all ages, panning for Fools Gold, informative exhibits on many topics, caricatures by the talented Jill Goddard (she always makes you look at least 20 years younger and I keep mine precious!), vendors, plus the gift shop and the museum. You can spend a few hours very easily, going from one attraction to the next.

Joan Fincutter, thank you so much for planning this fun day and thank you to all the docents who will be there to offer their support and expertise.

It is going to be a great day!

## 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

An exciting program at Placerita. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2:00pm, PCNCA 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 18 is Hiking 101 presented by Christofer Nyerges. Sunday, April 15 is about Nature Photography with smart phones by Ron Kraus.

### 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.

### CLASS OF 2018 GRADUATION CEREMONY AND DINNER

Saturday March 31 at 6.00pm pot luck dinner so bring a dish to share. All PCNCA members are invited to celebrate with the new docents.

### PLACERITA NATURE TOTS

Age 3-5 and one adult companion for each child. Saturday from 9.30 to 10.30. Registration opens the 1st of each month, program limited to 15 children. Register at [nature\\_tots@placerita.org](mailto:nature_tots@placerita.org)

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



### Sandra Cattell

I was born in L A, grew up in the San Fernando Valley, and spent part of my young adult life in Hollywood, a kind of city/suburban kid. My childhood contact with nature was the neighborhood park, but I was even more excited when my parents took me to Griffith Park. However, I became absolutely hooked on nature when, at about the age of 7, my family took a trip to Lake Tahoe. I can still remember riding a horse through the pine forest on a narrow trail overlooking that shimmering lake!

I worked my way through college, earning a B.A. and an M.A. and became a teacher. I taught elementary through college levels, all subjects, then math/science, then math. I had an award-winning middle school environmental club and became an expert on recycling, composting and environmental curriculum.

I first came to Placerita in the 60s, on a trail ride from Sylmar, and in the early 70s I came to the area to train for

backpacking trips. Years later, as a single mother with limited funds, I would bring my own children to Placerita, to hike, have picnics, and watch tadpoles in spring. There was a lot more water back then.

My passion? I would have to make that a plural, as there are so many. I love nature, and work with the Sierra Club to protect the environment as well as enjoy it. I am the local Sierra Club group chair and a hike leader, but also work on the chapter and state conservation and political committees, as well as on the National Wildlands and Wilderness Team. I'm also a docent at the Saugus Train Station for the SCV Historical Society. I was part of the committee for the open space preservation district. and currently have a seat on the Open Space Accountability and Audit Panel for the City of Santa Clarita. As part of a coalition, I helped save the area now called the Newhall Pass Open Space, and have worked for many years to halt the Cemex mega-mine.

My joy comes from the simple things, like watching the indigenous flora and fauna surrounding me. Ethnobotany and the medicinal uses of native plants throughout history in different cultures fascinate me. I am a star-gazer (the celestial type). I live with my cat and rescued horses on a mini-ranch, and love to garden and cook.

I am most proud of something that happened before I became a docent. Jim Southwell discussed with me the potential loss of trees in the proposed Disney Ranch development near the current entrance. Steve, the ranch manager, told me the County insisted on putting a debris basin there. I went to the County Planning, to plead the case. Disney was instructed to work with Public Works and the Sierra Club to work on a solution. We were able to save quite a few trees. I also monitor the progress of the already planted mitigation oaks.

I loved teaching, but looked forward to the day I could retire and fulfill a long-time desire, to become a Placerita Docent. The reality is that it is better than any dream. I'm in a beautiful place, with beautiful people, and have the opportunity to further my knowledge and share my love of nature with others.

### Docent Enrichment

In January, we were visited by Kelly Middleton of the LA County Vector Control. She gave a very interesting talk about mosquitos and other pests. She gave us information about how to reduce the pests in our yards and homes. She was entertaining and informative.

We have several exciting trainings coming. We are planning a trip to the Natural History Museum of LA, Common Birds of Placerita Canyon, a trip to Vasquez Canyon, and a talk about the CEQA process.

March 6th is the date of the next planning meeting for Docent Enrichment. Everyone is welcome to come and help plan for the coming year. We will meet at 2:15 after the March board meeting.



March 11, 2018

*Don't forget to spring forward!*