



The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
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Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Over 50 Years of Nature Education

May-June 2018

Editor: Evelyn Vandarsande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Hello Dear Nature Friends

We have two more months of Spring! In SoCal, it is a special gift that we all savor before the heat starts. We had two major rain storms during the last winter. The first one came on January 19 and we thought many more would follow. That was not the case and we were getting worried because the vegetation was struggling.

Then we had two glorious days of rain in March 21 and 22, and Spring exploded with amazing vigor! Many wildflowers opened on the side of the trails, some that we wait for impatiently each year. There is water in the stream, which means that tadpoles and frogs will survive and prosper. The hills are green which is a relief after those fires last year. All is new and fresh, the mornings are cool, and plants are covered with dew. Enjoy this beautiful time of year. Come to Placerita, sit down to listen to the birds. Each spring is a special gift, take time to notice what's around you and enjoy!



The Patio Bulletin Boards

Joan Fincutter made sure they were repaired and they are now operational. Joan updated them with new displays. One deals with animal prints, and it is very timely. With mud in the area for a few days, it was easy to check the prints seen in and around the canyon, and learn from the panel what animal made them. Thank you, Joan.



Graduation Party for the Class of 2018

It was a fantastic success with a big crowd of 85 people arriving for dinner to support the new docent class.

I was concerned because the flu kept me out of commission, but everything at Placerita is a joyful group effort: thank you to my husband who did the food shopping, thank you to all the docents who came early to set up for the party and thank you to Frank Hoffman who was also there early, setting up tables and chairs for the feast. More tables needed to be added as the crowd filled the room and a little group even ate in the VIP lounge (aka the kitchen). We almost ran out of forks!

The food was delicious, so another thank you goes to all the cooks who made a great effort. People make their favorite dish, so the "try me experimentation" is becoming another fun part of the event, along with and sharing of recipes. Heidi Webber did a recipe with an interesting twist, and Ron Kraus is becoming famous for a very spicy condiment of his own! Guests were discussing sweet and sour mushrooms, stuffed mushrooms with cheese and spinach, interesting devilled eggs disguised as Easter bunnies, and even some goose eggs appeared on the buffet table!

After dinner, the class of 2018 got their diplomas, new Docent Naturalist name tags and Placerita caps, plus rousing applause from the crowd. It was hard to say who was the proudest; the new class being presented in the front of the room or all the family and friends taking pictures from the back...a very special moment of glory!

Ron Kraus got a gift from the class of 2018: many different little bottles of vodka, easy to slip in a backpack to be taken on the trail. Those, of course, are strictly to be used for poison oak treatment as Ron reacts strongly to it. Let me make sure that you understand that it is used by rubbing on the skin to break down the poison oak oil...it really works!!! Those guys have a good sense of humor!

Lanita Algeyer gave recognition to those docents who had special achievements at Placerita: Omar Pena, Dave Taylor, George Fierro, Teresa Jacobs and Kara Franklin. Thank you



all for your efforts that make Placerita a better place. We appreciate you, and take notice of your fine work.

Congratulations to the class of 2018: 19 new docents ready to take Placerita to new heights. Thank you for being a part of the Placerita family, we appreciate your enthusiasm and your dedication. Good luck to all!



Braille Trail

So many different angles to report about this project! Ron Nichols put a committee together to determine what could be planted along this trail, with an emphasis on choosing plants with scents that might be attractive to people who are visually impaired. There again, it is a race against the clock before the warm summer months arrive, but a light irrigation system could be put in place to help the plants become established.

The docents were faced with a new problem because the County does not have the funds available to finish the 6 stations. These are exhibits that are going to be mounted along the Braille trail, and they asked the docents for financial help. It is a large expense for the docent budget, but Nature Education has always been our reason to exist. After consideration, PCNCA voted to pay for those 6 stations, hoping that the education they will provide to all our visitors (explanations are written in both Braille and English) will enhance their visit to Placerita. We feel it will be money well spent and the only way to complete the exhibit. It will take 8 months to complete all the signage on the Braille trail.

It is a rather unique experience to have a trail that people can use when they are visually impaired or using a wheel chair and we will be very proud to be able to offer this opportunity.

Dave Taylor - Docent Class of 2017

I was born in Mill Valley CA., just north of San Francisco and lived there until five, when my family moved to Santa Monica. At the time I wasn't really happy about the move, but after a while I found living in a beach community that allowed me to surf, was far better.

I was your typical beach kid, spent a lot of time surfing at Venice and Santa Monica beach. If I couldn't get a ride to the beach, I would carry my board on my bike. My Aunt was a die-hard Dodger fan, she loved baseball, and being the only boy in the family she signed me up for Little League. I played baseball growing up including Santa Monica High School. I continued to play at Santa Monica City College where I graduated in 1967 with an Associate Arts degree in Architecture. After graduation, I transferred to the University of California, Long Beach where I continued to play baseball and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree, Engineering in 1970.

My college years were turbulent times, with the Vietnam War and campus protests taking place almost daily, I was fortunate to keep my student deferment active until I graduated, but was drafted into the Army shortly after graduation. After a very short deployment in Vietnam, I was transferred to Heilbronn Germany. I enjoyed the year in Germany, traveling as much as possible; what a great experience that year was.

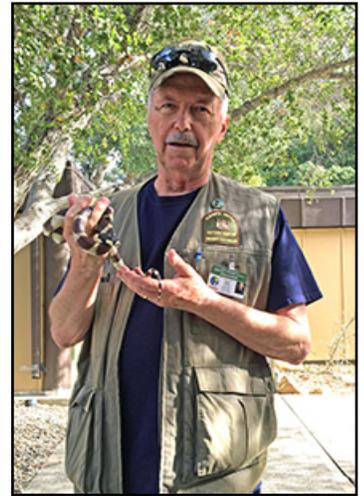
After my discharge from the Army in 1973, I spent a few months traveling around the U.S., visiting State and National Parks and backpacking in the Sierras which developed a love for the outdoors that continues to this day.

I was fortunate in 1973 to land a job with Parsons Engineering and Construction Co. in Pasadena Calif., where I worked for 44 years until I retired in 2017. I had the opportunity to travel in Europe, Saudi Arabia, and various sites throughout the U.S. that included Prudhoe Bay on the North Slope of Alaska. One of the most interesting assignments was in conjunction with the Army Corp of Engineers, Assembled Chemical Weapons Assessment (ACWA) program that involved the design and construction of various sites in the U.S. to dispose of chemical weapons.

I met my wife while working at Parsons and we were married in 1989. We have two sons, one still in college and one day hopes to work with the FBI, and the other is a global financial director with Adidas and is married with four daughters. My granddaughters are the love of my life. As my wife likes to say, the granddaughters are used to my goofy pranks so interfacing with the kids that come to visit PNC every day affords me another audience to continue my pranks and stories.

Over the years I have coached both my sons in their various sports and youth activities with baseball being the youngest's sport of choice for many years. During this time, we traveled for several years to various baseball tournaments, including a trip to Cooperstown, NY. Coaching allowed me to combine my two passions that being photography and baseball.

I enjoy the time spent at Placerita Nature Center, have gotten to know some really great people (Yes Denny Truger, that includes you) and appreciate their support, and I love to show the kids the Nature Center and the animals. I am looking forward too many more years of volunteering at PNC.



The Canyon Trail Repairs

Many visitors and the docents of course, keep on wondering when the Canyon Trail is going to be reopened. I try to use the Rattler to give you updates on the situation in each issue. At this point the Canyon Trail has been closed for almost 2 years (it was closed in July 2016) The County is trying to address the situation. They have completed a scope of work and have an estimate of \$550,000 to complete the repairs. Those repairs would be only for the Canyon Trail, not Los Pinetos or the Waterfall Trail. They are currently working on securing the funding. There is no estimated time of completion yet. Major repairs and improvements would take place. The stream is a blue-line stream and it is subject to federal environmental regulations ... generally controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers. Technically, it's a stream that appears as a solid blue line on a USGS map, meaning it runs most or all year (including below ground)

That is the latest news. If and when I hear more about the status, you can be sure you will be able to read an update in the Rattler.



Interesting Perk in Being a Docent

A few weeks ago, Irene Heerlein was running on a trail around San Francisco when she came across this huge animal track. She suspected that it was from a mountain lion and her first reaction was to try to run much faster, being very afraid! Then she remembered her docent training and knew that running from a mountain lion was not her best option.

She took a photo of the foot print and send it to the PCNCA Facebook page as she knew somebody could identify it right away. Indeed, because of the claw-marks, the answer came back very fast that it was a brown bear. Irene decided to continue on the trail making some noise from time to time to give any bear around the trail time to get away! Interesting to be able to still have these encounters just on the outskirts of such an urban area as Santa Clarita. Brown bear scats are often seen in Towsley Canyon, but only after a rainy day can we appreciate the full impact of such a foot print!



Sometimes, it Rains!

It does happen, so what do you do if you are a docent at Placerita and you are expecting a busload of children hoping to go on the trail?

Very quickly, the docents adapt to the situation and provide an exceptional program using the Nature Boxes, teaching different topics while having fun with the children. Everybody pitches in, and it turns out to be a memorable experience for all.

This is the feedback we received from one of the teachers, "I wanted to take the time to say our students had the best time on their field trip. The staff at Placerita Canyon Nature Center was extremely knowledgeable and very insightful. They were very passionate about passing along their knowledge about the natural world. They put on an incredible event for our students. The students, parents and teachers were super impressed with the learning stations that provided the students with hands-on experiences that provided reinforcement of the topics they were exposed to. Once again, we would like to say thank you for such a wonderful experience!"

Those Nature Boxes are so interesting that they are going to become part of the school program, and are going to be presented on the patio right after the children come off the bus. Thank you again Andrea Donner for this wonderful addition to our program!



Update on the Hummingbird Garden

You can find this new little haven behind the Nature Center, at the start of the Ecology Trail. Sit down on the bench and keep quiet for a while, you will see many birds coming to have a drink or a bath in the water fountain. Thank you to Denny Truger, for trying different sizes of solar panels until you were totally satisfied with the result. The water fountain works beautifully and attracts many birds.

Omar Pena has been working hard to find the plants that had been selected to attract hummingbirds, they are not always easy to find because we cannot introduce new plant species in the park. Not only do the plants have to be native, but also existing in Placerita - Omar is feeling the pressure of the hot months coming soon, so he would like to have those plantings finished before the heat sets in. Those schedules do not always match his free time and final exams!

Little bit by little bit, it is taking shape. Thank you to all who were involved during the different steps of this project.

Some Changes at Placerita

When the longest trails were closed after the flood last year, we were afraid the attendance at Placerita would go down. Those trails were very popular, many hikers would rush to the restrooms and head out on the trail, without even being aware a Museum was right there too!

However, it is heartwarming to see the parking lots full during the weekend and some regular visitors during the weekdays. Many families with young children have found out that Placerita is a great playground to help them unwind after a school day. The podium in front of the amphitheater has become the place of choice for little ones to dance or sing in front of parents and grandparents! They can run on the short trails and climb around in the meadow.

It also seems that we are attracting more visitors who are discovering the educational opportunity they find at Placerita. Many local visitors come with out of state friends to show them the Museum, the classroom, the observation deck and then they follow with a short hike on the Ecology trail.

The Educational programs on the 3rd Sunday of the month are a huge success with standing room only.

The new program for preschoolers is always filled on the first day of registration.

Nature Education is our main objective at Placerita, so we could not be more pleased by this show of support and interest. We would like all the trails to be open, of course, but we are very pleased to see that people know the Nature Center still has plenty to offer.





*Western Sycamore
Platanus racemosa*

Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

As you walk along the trails at Placerita Canyon, you no doubt will run into Western Sycamore trees. These water indicators grow along creeks or over underground water called aquifers. They are deciduous trees that grow up to 90 feet tall and have a branch span up to 70 feet. Often they have crooked trunks and branches. The exfoliating bark is very thin and leaves behind green blotches which give a mottled appearance to the trunks.

Western Sycamores flower from February to April. The flowers are strings of pendulous reddish spheres that dry to brown seed pods. They are called "button balls". The leaves are alternate, one goes one way and the next goes oppositely. The leaves are palmate-shaped with 3-5 lobes, like fingers on a hand. The leaves are wooly on both sides. Western Sycamores often have multiple trunks.

After they burn after a wildfire, they are able to grow new trunks. That is called crowning. The Western Sycamore has the unique attribute of making the trunk into roots, and the roots into trunks. This occurs after a flash flood when either the roots are exposed or the trunk is buried.

The Tataviam used the pliable young branches to frame their dwellings. It is said that they also used the leaves for toilet paper and diapers.

As for hikers in Placerita Canyon, they are a source of much needed shade in the hot months of summer. They are definitely an appreciated Trail Treasure.

Stop by the Aquarium

Have you gone lately to the observation deck to check the aquarium? You will find it full of water and of life, containing 3 fish species: bluegill, red-ear sunfish and channel catfish. Those were all line caught by sport fishing at Castaic lake. They are here to help to prepare the water and the environment of the aquarium. It needs some time and preparation to balance those things, and to make sure that all the water pumps are working properly.

This aquarium was installed to house a three spined stickleback fish that has proved to be rather elusive. There are 3 subspecies : one without scales and 2 with scales. They look very similar and it is only in passing a feather over the scales that one is able to see the difference. It is obvious that only the non-endangered species will be housed in the aquarium. But they are short lived, only for one year, and hard to find.

A local warden will try to find one for Placerita. There is one spot in this Valley where they have been seen, but the search for one has not yet been successful. Meanwhile, come and enjoy the local fish from Castaic lake, they seem to enjoy their new habitat very much and their life span is longer than one year.



Docent Enrichment Field Trip to the Natural History Museum

March's Docent Enrichment Field Trip was to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. It was planned by Frank Hoffman. A big thank you to him! Christina Rosales brought a group from the Natural History Museum to Placerita Canyon to do some research last fall. She invited us for a VIP visit to the museum.

Jack Levenberg organized a group that took the train to the museum. Thanks Jack! Others of us braved the freeways. Thanks drivers!

We were taken on a special tour of the gardens. They were full of native plants, many of them that we see at Placerita Canyon and some that we got to know. We then went to the Nature Lab to explore the hands-on exhibits. After lunch, we were free to roam the museum at our leisure. We sure enjoyed our day.

Monday, April 23rd, we will be treated to a presentation by Rosemarie Sanchez-Fraser on Birds of Placerita including a bird walk. Mark your calendar now!



Invasive Plant Removal and Restoration Committee

by Robert Grzesiak

The gardeners of the wild met again to remove Tamarisk from Placerita Creek bed. This was our fourth time tackling Tamarisk. We envision one more session (they are only two hours long) to complete the 2 miles along the Canyon Trail. Despite the recent rain, the Creek was only flowing in the midsection, about 1/2 mile from the campground. Interestingly, the flow initiated from a side channel to the north of the main channel of the creek bed. There we found many iris-leaved rushes and nearby the Giant Lupines that can get up to six feet tall, plus a small pond surrounded by cattails.

This side channel seems to initiate not far from the road crossing, but under large rocks and boulders. I would guess this side channel is what sustains the various grasses like the rush species that are uncommonly seen by park visitors, as they are found in the field to the north of the Creek.



Stalwart participants this month were: Jim Harris, James Kochan (a T. Payne volunteer), Denny Truger, Maria Elena Christensen, Cindy Gold, Dan Kott, Ingrid Brown, Bob Joyce, and Roger McClure.

Come join us next time!

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!

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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.



New Amphitheater --- Now What?

By Fred Seeley

Except for the County finishing the new ADA compliant water fountain near the amphitheater, the project is complete!

So now what? Well, an Amphitheater Program Committee has been established, under the leadership of Jack Levenberg, to address these issues. An initial meeting was held at the nature center on Monday, April 2, 2018, and was attended by 13 interested people. Many ideas were presented and the discussion was vigorous.

Russ Kimura, our Superintendent, laid out the basic rules for using County facilities and specifically amphitheaters. He pointed out that the County charge \$400 for an Amphitheater event, plus the event organizer (except County Docent organizations like us) needs to get a special events permit, the cost of which varies with the details of the event. Many events are booked directly with the County so we need to keep the calendar up to date with the PCNCA event schedule.

Among the many items discussed were that PCNCA events need to focus on nature and local history, that we are open to participate with outside organizations like Cal Arts, COC, Canyon Theater Guild, etc. to use the site for our community's benefit, movie nights with electric generators, etc. Our initial foray into possible partnership discussions will be through the Art 4 LA website.

Anyone with ideas or an interest in being on this committee should contact Jack Levenberg.

SPRING AND 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 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. The May program is Jim Adams (USC Professor) talking about Ethno Botany, the June Program is about Nature Photography with Cell Phones by Ron Kraus, PCNCA president. The July 22 (special date due to 4th of July weekend) Sunday JULY 22, 2018, is "Le Tour du Mont Blanc" with Nikki Dail.

TWILIGHT HIKES This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 7.00pm in April and 8.00pm in May, June and July 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.

OPEN HOUSE - Saturday, May 12 from 9.00am to 3.00pm (check flyer)

END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR DINNER : Saturday, June 2nd at 6.00pm.

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



REMINDER

Mark Your Calendars---Get Involved

by Jim Crowley

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates, Board of Directors Election is June 2, 2018, 6PM

Each year in June, half of the Directors have reached the end of a two year term. If they choose they may run again for re-election. We will also elect one year term alternates at the same time.

If you are a PCNCA member in good standing (paid dues) You are entitled to vote and also run for a Director position on the board. And if you think you can offer ideas and suggestions on how the PCNCA operates, this is your chance to step forward. We always encourage new people and ideas. The next board meeting is May 1, 2018, 1-3 PM and members are encouraged to attend to see how the park planning all comes together.

We will be sending out detailed information in early May. If you are at all interested or you have questions, we will have answers, Please contact one of the current board members or Jim Crowley (661) 755-7377 to possibly have your name added to the ballot.



Open House

This Rattler is for May/June but it is one of the little mysteries of editing because, of course, we have to cover the events that happened in March and April. By the time you receive this Rattler, our Open House won't have taken place yet - so please give this flyer to anyone you think might be interested, and come to enjoy a lovely day at Placerita. Thank you so much Joan Fincutter for being in charge of this big event and thank you to all the docents and volunteers who will help to make it the fun and lovely day that is always is.

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