



# The Rattler

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

**December 2018 - January 2019**

Editor: Evelyne Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

## Hello Nature Friends,

I want to wish you all a wonderful holiday season, and a great new year 2019 filled with much happiness, blue skies and gentle rain.

The first monkey flower is in bloom in the butterfly garden so it is a quiet reminder that the earth keeps on doing what it does each year, with a very heart-warming schedule. I find security in looking outside and seeing the bird migration happening each fall, noticing the winter birds around us and discovering mushrooms poking out of the ground. Soon, nests will be built and some species have already started...

Go outside, enjoy the fresh air in the morning, walk on the crackling dead leaves on the ground, take notice of the new buds, enjoy your life...that is really the best wish I have for you. Big hug to all.



## Doing it Outdoors

The Community Nature Education program is very popular, and the crowd is too big to be contained inside the building. This fall the weather has been very pleasant, and it is a joy to be able to offer these programs outdoors. We have used the patio, but using the picnic ground and being surrounded by plants and natural resources made more sense for this last program.

Here is a picture from Ron Kraus that shows you how much our visitors enjoyed learning survival skills from Christopher Nyerges at our Community Nature Education Series event.

Big success!



## President's Message by Ron Kraus

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

—Aesop

I love the website "BrainyQuote.com" It has thousands of quotes from all kinds of famous people throughout history. I have used it over the years for captions to photos

I have taken, particularly of sunrises and sunsets. With a little searching you can always find just the right sentiment to capture the spirit of the moment.

For this article, I thought about several favorite quotes to express my thanks for another year of fun and involvement at Placerita Canyon. Our established programs continued to grow, new programs were added, we welcomed a number of new docents, and we continued on a capital improvement program to enhance public enjoyment in and around the nature center. All in all, there was a lot to be thankful for in 2018.

Looking ahead, I am optimistic that we can continue the momentum we have built up over the past several years. There is a lot of "can-do" attitude around here. We deal positively with new problems or tasks, rather than complaining or giving up. However, there is one area I would like to see us spend some time with in the upcoming year. I'm calling it "leadership support." We'll talk more about it as the year progresses.

We ask a lot of the people who agree to be in charge of committees, special events, programs, and other functions. Planning, organizing, and implementing activities requires a lot of work. And leadership can be tough, particularly when dealing with volunteers. Several times in the recent past some of our leaders have experienced difficulties which could have been prevented if they were offered "an act of kindness." So as we move forward into 2019, keep the above quote in mind when dealing with our volunteer leaders who generously give of their time and talent.

I hope you all have a great holiday season. Remember, we start Docent Training on January 8, so come by and say hello to the new class—it's a great way to start off the new year and support the Class of 2019!

### Craft Fair

The Craft Fair just took place this last weekend, and it was a great success. Thank you so much to Mari Carbajal who did a superb job as chairperson for the event and also to all the docents who participated and worked hard to make this such a special and fun weekend. "It takes a village" and much preparation!

It can create a lot of anxiety when we have rain 2 days before the event and even the toyon berries are not ready yet, but all the docents become creative, full of good will and the desire to make the event successful. The visitors enjoy this unique opportunity to make their own holiday wreaths with all the branches, seeds and pods available, and the room smells wonderful with the aroma from all the branches! It is really a special way to start the holiday season.

Thank you all for all your help and your love for Placerita.



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### Docent Training on Tuesday, January 8th.

We barely sat down to recover from the Craft Fair, when just a minute later we are rolling up our sleeves to get ready for docent training. Placerita is sure not a place where you get bored!

What is docent training? Have a look at the flyer and it will help you understand the general idea, but here are a few more details: The classes are designed to make you a Volunteer Naturalist and teach you how to explain the park environment to the school groups as well as the adults coming to visit Placerita. That is what the flyer says. So if you have some free time, like nature, and enjoy learning, keep on reading this article...because so much more will happen to you if you take this training.

You are going to make many friends by meeting all the other docents who are going to support you, you are going to fall in love with one or more topics covered during training and you might get new binoculars to be able to see those birds more closely.

The books that you are reading are going to change or you will be surprised to discover so many new Nature websites. You might even consider that pulling out weeds with friends is a good new way to discover botany!

It is a warm and friendly atmosphere and you will feel at home right away.

So be aware before you join, you are never going to regret it, and it is going to enrich your life very much. I speak from experience after being a docent for 33 years and enjoying every minute of this adventure.



## Placerita Tots Program

By Sue Wallander

Placerita began a new program this year which has turned out to be successful beyond anyone's imagination.

Placerita Tots is designed for 3, 4, and 5 year olds. The program is one hour long, taking place on the second Saturday of each month. Parents must register their child on the first day of the month for the program. They have discovered that they must register on the first day, because the class fills up so fast.

The program for November focused on turkeys. What a great program! There were several choices of hands-on activities. One was designed to show the size of the turkey egg in relation to ducks, geese, and chickens. The

goose egg is the largest.

Another activity showed that hens and toms have different shaped poop. The tots used clay to form the different shaped poop.

The life cycle of the turkey was another activity. The tots had to put the cups showing each stage of turkey growth, in the correct order.

They made turkey tracks and turkeys figures. The children looked at turkey feathers under microscopes. There was also story time, turkey songs, and turkey videos.

But the best was last. Shawna brought her 3 turkeys and put them in a circular pen outside. The tom turkey was a real ham. Shawna had the kids make gobble-gobble sounds, and the turkey would answer back each time. He also did a little turkey dance.

What a great learning experience for the tots!

Some of the past programs were on bats, butterflies, and leaves.

Next year there will be a program on Acorn Woodpeckers, and another on bears. One of the parents asked if we are going to bring a bear in to pet.



## The Gift Shop

by Teresa Jacobs

Over the years the gift shop has really become enhanced and keeping up the wonderful things going on at the Nature Center. Some of the popular items are puppets, jewelry and walking sticks. Like the profits from our Craft Faire and Open House, all monies collected go to the care of the animals and the improvement of this magical place called Placerita Nature Center.

Like many of our programs that are operated by the great docent program, the gift shop is operated by docents as well. There are so many exciting and affordable gift items located in our gift shop so please take some time to stop by to consider a gift for the holiday season. We have gifts for all.



## What is a Nursery Good For?

by Robert Grzesiak

Well, it's good for teaching about Placerita's and thus Los Angeles County/Santa Clarita's unique plants. It is for butterfly appreciation. It is for curious hikers who would like to learn about the green and brown stuff growing around them. It's for growing plants that cannot be bought at any commercial nursery. It is for restoration after a fire or other disturbances. It is for growing plants that can displace noxious weeds.

Several docents, like Sue Wallander, have initiated a nursery at home to realize all of these things. But the thought is to use the newly refurbished Placerita nursery also as a more sustainable and educational effort at the park. But how? How do we establish a consistent sustaining effort?

The hope is to attract a core group of docents and volunteers to keep the nursery going. "Nothing succeeds like success."

Omar Pena had the nursery remodeled to grow plants for the Botany Trails, and has done a superb job. Thus, the "foundation is laid." Rose Krueger is working to support Omar in the nursery. The Botany Trail has the support of the board. Michael Elling and I have been working on a "support the Monarch project." We are working on growing Narrow Leaf Milkweed (thanks to seeds from Maria Helena Christensen, Mark Hershey and Bob Joyce). We are trying to grow at least 50 to 100 plants to give away at the May Open House. The hope is to make this a regular feature of the Open House planning.

Frank Hoffman is very supportive of having his weekend volunteers help in the nursery, and we have lots of infrastructure support from Denny Truger.

However, this Monarch project has unexpectedly turned into a "support the Placerita Mice" project. Mice have selectively eaten virtually every milkweed seedling!

Stay tuned for more info, or even better - get involved please. We need baking trays that you don't need any more at home to put under the larger pots. The trays will collect the water when we water the pots. Hopefully that way, we can space our watering out by a few days. We still need those trays, any you can provide are very welcome.

Thanks for your help.



## Placerita Canyon Nature Center Amphitheatre By Herb Broutt

On November 3rd 2018, Placerita Canyon Nature Center Amphitheatre welcomed its first performance. There were over 150 people present at this inaugural event.

It was a Volta Drum Dance, performed by members of Cal Arts, led by their professor Nani Agbeli. The Volta Drum Dance combined oral storytelling with the symbolic tales held within the dance to create a multifaceted entertainment experience.

A great deal of time and effort was spent by the Amphitheatre Committee to find and set up the program. The main goal was to begin this series with an art form that was in line with Placerita's mission statement of preserving nature and the environment. Committee member Jessica Broutt sent a personal email to professors at the departments of CalArts that she felt would have an interest in staging a performance at the amphitheater, and would keep this mission in mind.

Professor Agbeli contacted Jessica to set up a meeting to see the Amphitheatre. He was very impressed with the size of the venue and the beautiful surroundings, but was still unsure about how the logistics for a live dance event would come together. He came back and brought other people in his department to look at amphitheater and determine the logistics.

They were equally excited at the prospect of Placerita Canyon as a backdrop.

One obstacle remained, originally we had thought we would have a speaker system for the show. When we realized this was not going to be completed in time, the decision was made for them to perform "Ghana Style." This decision added authenticity to the program, as it is the way it would have been done in Africa without any amplification.

The presentation started with a family picnic hour. Drums were set up so children and adults had the opportunity to beat the drum and learn about Ghanaian traditional music and culture. The show consisted of several stories centered on the theme of nature and the harvest. As Professor Agbeli's troupe presented the dances, there were many opportunities for the audience to participate in both singing and dancing.

The performance was a great success. Everyone had a terrific time, and the weather was beautiful. Hopefully this will be first of many enriching programs celebrated at our magnificent Amphitheatre.



## "X" Marks the Spot (to Dig) by Fred Seeley

One hot day it occurred to us, (in fact, several folks thought about at about the same time) that when you read with your fingers, a' la Braille code/language, it would be way more pleasant if the sign weren't just plain too hot to touch! So we thought about shading the Braille panels in some way. Since we are Placerita, after all, trees were our first thought. Sycamore trees seemed like a good choice because, just like the trail, they are in the riparian ecosystem. They are also deciduous so sun can come through during the cooler months. And as an added bonus, we had six on the patio waiting to be planted. Perfect!

The spots were chosen by a tree-oriented Docent and marked with an "X" and a circle. During the next few days, lots of people including volunteers, Court workers, and Docents dug five BIG holes for the trees. On a beautiful Tuesday, October 23, several hardworking Docents planted the trees. Robert Grzesiak brought some gopher protection wire and got us off to a good start, then Dan Kott, Jim Wyrozumski, Herb Broutt, Jack Levenberg, and a few others lent a hand when they could! The serious "Heavy Lifters" were Jim and Dan and we all hope their backs are OK. We made good use of our new mobile watering tank and we appreciated everyone who helped by pushing it to the right spots so we could give the newly planted trees a good soaking. The trees will have to be irrigated until they find a natural water source, so if you enjoy that sort of thing, volunteer to help out. It was a fun and productive day for all!!!

The saying "those that can, do, and those that can't, write about it" applies here.





**Andres Pico Adobe**  
by Glenda Perl

About 15 Placerita Nature Center Docents were taken on a magical, mystery, docent-led tour of the historic Andres Pico Adobe house and grounds. This amazing place is located just down the street from the San Fernando Mission.

We learned so much about the history of the San Fernando Valley, the early city founders Isaac Lankershim and Isaac van Nuys (Isaac being a popular name at the time, apparently). There is a small building that holds American Indian artifacts, including hundreds of arrowheads arranged in artistic collages. It was very impressive!

The 2-story main house contains vintage furniture, beautiful clothes from the 1800s and early 1900s, plus a treasure trove of collected machinery, kitchen gadgets, and other original STUFF. This very nice trip was planned by Ron Kraus for our great pleasure.

**Linda Kopatz and Publicity**

"I have been a docent at the PCNC since 2008 and have loved being a part of this wonderful organization. I volunteered early on as a leader, walking and teaching the school kids who come on school tours throughout the week to learn about nature. Now I am responsible for publicizing the various community events as they come up throughout the year.

A couple of years ago Evelyne Vandersande needed help publicizing one of the annual events that are held at the Nature Center, and I was glad to pitch in and help. It has now been my pleasure for the past couple of years to publish our upcoming events in local magazines and newspapers, to get the word out to the general public about special events as they occur, and to invite them to come out and join in the various educational and fun activities we do. Recently one of our new docents, Alicia Tilley, has volunteered to help out in this area as well - which is terrific.

It has been exciting to get acquainted on a personal level with various reporters who help me get our events published in their publications, including The Signal, The Los Angeles Daily News, the Santa Clarita Gazette, the Santa Clarita Valley News and our local radio station KHTS 1220AM, among others. Right now we are working on announcing the Holiday Craft Fair 2018."



**Bridget**

We are so sorry to have to let you know that Bridget, our skunk, passed away on the morning of October 18. She came to us as a one-year old in May of 2015.

Her health had been declining recently, and she did not eat her food the night before. That is usually a sign that the condition is getting worse, but even when you have warning signals, it is always hard to say good bye. She was a sweet, lovely skunk, and we were blessed to have her with us for more than three years.



**So Many Outreaches!**  
by Glenda Perl

Once again, Placerita Canyon Nature Center participated in another howling success at the annual Santa Clarita Sheriff's Station Haunted Jailhouse and Carnival. As in the past, we were set up in the far corner of the station's back lot, right next to the always-popular petting zoo. There were bunnies, baby goats, chickens, ducks, llamas [watch out, they spit!], and an itty bitty baby porker---oh my!

Hundreds of costumed kids brought their parents along for the Halloween holiday happening. Will Webber, Jim and Barbara Whittaker Wyrozumski, Sandra Cattell, Irene Heerlein and her daughter Luca, and Rick Brammer did a great job keeping things both fun and safe for kids, parents and animals.

The outreach team was in action every weekend this last month, and we were also passing out flyers for the Craft Fair so that's a great publicity effort for Placerita. The next outreaches will be at the Volta dance company and the Creepy Crawly Lunch Brunch at the Sierra Vista Jr. High Library.





### Life and Times of Linette Brammer – so far!

When I was a kid my Mom would pull over with a screech of brakes if she saw an American tourist wandering down the streets of Salisbury. Imagine their surprise when this petite lady with a strong English accent trilled: “Will you come home and have tea and tell us all about America?” But that was my parents’ passion and goal in life; to come to America.

When not entertaining visiting Americans, or helping with my mother’s show dogs, I was usually out exploring the Downs around Stonehenge near my house. I also enjoyed raising fancy-colored mice. If you have never tried it, I can tell you it is a lot of fun to design and build elegant mouse mansions for adorable little mice; complete with toys and bridges and little secret rooms for them to play in. Occasionally I would take one of my favorite mice to school with me in my pocket, which made school a lot more interesting.

When I was 17 years old my parents finally achieved their dream, and I was bundled off to Pasadena City College. In chemistry class I was partnered with a gorgeous all-American hunk with kind eyes and a fun sense of humor named Rick. Is it any wonder that I flunked Chemistry? The nuns at my convent high school back in England had not prepared me for

this! We have been married 53 years now and we are still making great chemistry together.

It was so satisfying to see the love of nature blossom in our 3 children. After they were grown I managed an Urgent Care while finishing my masters’ degree and then taught Medical classes at the community college. In June I retired and am now ready for my new life at Placerita Canyon - where the real action is! What a privilege to be part of such an outstanding and unique place. I am really looking forward to deepening my relationship with the wonderful docents and to being a useful part of this excellent team.

## 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 8th, 2019**  
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](http://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](mailto:ron@placerita.org)**



### Welcome Back, Laverne Booth

In 1984, Laverne Booth was a docent at Placerita, and at the same time, she wanted to share her love of Astronomy in the Santa Clarita Valley. She teamed up with her good friend Christine Schmidt, and started the Local Group.

In astronomical terms, the Local Group is the galaxy group that includes the Milky Way along with more than 54 other galaxies. But they thought it was also the perfect name for a community organization dedicated to furthering astronomical knowledge. The group was a great success, and meetings were held at Placerita for many years, with telescopes set up on the driveway.

Eventually Laverne moved out of the area, but the Local Group flourished and is still active to this day.

Our membership chair, Glenda Perl, was surprised to get a Placerita Nature Center membership renewal and a donation from Laverne recently, and contacted me about it. I explained to her who Laverne was, and that I had recently learned Laverne had moved back to Santa Clarita. I was touched that she wanted to join Placerita again. By a heartwarming coincidence, this happened during the Local Group presentation done at Placerita by Van Webster, a Mount Wilson Observatory docent and member of the Local Group.



### Jewel and Wilder

This is a Peregrine Falcon (see the strong mustache, the stripe under the eyes). She came from Vasquez Rocks and is going to stay at Placerita. That is so exciting! This bird is presented to you by Marietta Ewing, Recreation Services Leader at Placerita.

She cannot be released into the wild, as her left wing was broken and though it has healed, she is unable to fly.

In the mid-20th century, this species was in decline because of the pesticide DDT, which was widely used, and resulted in the egg shells being very fragile. After DDT was outlawed, they made a great comeback.

Peregrine falcons are among the world's most common birds of prey, and live on all continents except Antarctica. They prefer wide-open spaces, and thrive near coasts where shorebirds are common. However, they can be found everywhere from tundra to deserts. Peregrines are even known to live on bridges and skyscrapers in major cities.

We also have a new Prairie falcon called Wilder. A raptor of the West's wide-open spaces, Prairie falcons search for ground squirrels and other small mammals and birds, and is similar in size to the Peregrine falcon. As with all falcons, Prairie females are noticeably bigger than males. Wilder is an adult male, and we are very grateful that Vasquez Rocks was able to transfer these birds to Placerita. Wilder is non-releasable because of an injured coracoid in his right wing (it's a paired bone stabilizing the shoulder joint - I had to look that up). Because of that, Wilder is unable to gain lift when trying to fly. He will have a safe haven at Placerita, and we will enjoy training him to be used in presentations to the visitors.

We are overjoyed with those two new raptors. We know both these beautiful birds will help people gain a new appreciation for raptors.



## 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 BIRD WALK

Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm. See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area. Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.

### BIRD WALK, Castaic

Castaic is being cancelled. Roger McClure was in charge for many years and he has stopped this activity but has not been replaced.

### BLOOMS OF THE SEASON

Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832

### NATURE EDUCATION

Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm: A free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please call the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. No program in December - In January, we will see "Dryad-Spirit of an oak tree" by Jon and Sabine Sherman, a musical play about the bio-region of Southern California.

### TWILIGHT HIKES

This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 6pm 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 PLACERITA NATURE TOTS

Second Saturday of each month from 11:30 to 12:30 for children 6 years and above. 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).

### DOCENT TRAINING

Tuesday, January 8 at 9am (see flyer)

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