

The Rattler

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

February March 2019

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Hello Nature Friends

We hope that the beginning of the year has been kind to you. We are delighted to see a good amount of rain this year so far, and lots of snow in the mountains. We notice the trees and plants around us are starting to wake up with all this moisture, and we are starting to see many buds and new shoots. The stream is not running yet, but the rainy season could bring us some surprises... we will wait and see.

Right now, the big event at Placerita is that docent training is taking place. We have 16 very eager new trainees, they are showing great interest in all the classes they are attending and they have many questions every time they get a chance...that is always so exciting to see. The instructors are covering a wide variety of topics from Ecology to Arthropods, Botany, Herpetology, Birds, Mammals, Geology, Placerita Canyon History, etc..

All the students are well aware that before graduating, they must audit three school hikes and lead 3 hikes (or equivalent service) with different senior docents. The approach to the term paper required from them was upgraded last year. We did not want 16 term papers about the acorn woodpecker, so instead we ask them to describe some suggestions for improvement to the park or new programs.

They will also take a general final test covering the different topics. Because of those requirements, we hope the students will get a real flavor of the volunteer work that is expected of them once the training is over, and that we will have better docent retention.

Good luck to all, enjoy all your new knowledge and we are already looking forward to your Graduation Ceremony and Dinner in March 30.

Twenty-One Years of Writing the Rattler

Let's go back in history and see how that happened. I did not create the Rattler myself, the first docents at Placerita did...then they stopped. Ian Swift and Valerie Vartanian, both county employees, wrote a few issues and I wrote one article. Dangerous move. On the last board meeting in 1997, I was told that I was in charge of the Rattler. Did they not notice that English is not my first language? I swallowed my fear and started writing. I found a publisher and managed the first issue for January, February and March 1998. I had it printed, and sent it using bulk mail at the large post office on Route 126.

Let me introduce Heidi Webber : new docent from the class of 1996.(We did the training in the fall back then) We were all impressed by Heidi; she was grabbed on her first day of docent training to attend the board meeting and "because she had an honest face" was quickly sworn in as treasurer. Heidi would also rescue the Rattler when the publisher quit and the board told me the Rattler should come out monthly. Heidi noticed my anguish and whispered in my ear "I will help you with that." Since then, we have made a very strong and reliable team, and it has been deeply satisfying for me to work with Heidi all these years.

She is the publisher, putting articles and photos into pages, finding clip art fitting the seasons and makes a clean and clear presentation. I am the editor

The issues grew larger, the cost of the mailing increased, and we decided to go paperless. However, we collected huge list of e-mails (a few thousand) and we sent electronic copies to all people who left their e-mail at the center. We kept going for 4 years that way, and maintaining the mailing lists was so time consuming that nobody wanted to assume the work - but at the same time, we did not want to have the cost of professional list keepers involved. Right now, the Rattler is sent to all PCNCA members and a few political representatives by Nikki Dail, and Ron Kraus faithfully posts each issue on the web page. I also have to thank my wonderful proof-reader Diana Kalisz who has saved me from many potentially embarrassing moments.

The purpose of the Rattler has never changed; we want to tell our readers what is happening at Placerita, we want to give recognition to the docents doing special projects, and it also serves as a publicity tool for PCNCA. We have shared many deep tragedies with our readers in those 21 years, but also many happy times. After doing a survey, we decided to do a thinner version with shorter articles, easy to scan through on your phone. The quality of the photos has improved with a new program. Many docents now participate by writing a few lines about their own personal projects, so they have ownership too. The interview is always one of the favorite articles, giving people a chance to get to know each other.

It has been a great honor to write the Rattler for 21 years.

Most of all, I have fun doing it. I love to gather all the photos and information to make sure all the topics are covered. As you can see, it takes a whole team of different people to make this final product, and I deeply thank you all! I really hope you enjoy reading the Rattler! It is YOUR newsletter and I always welcome your input.





Dryad, the spirit of the oak tree by Jon and Sabine Sherman: This was our topic for the Nature Education Program in January, they did a musical play about the bio-region of Southern California. It was a great and very professional presentation, and the music tied nicely to the Nature Center goals. They might come back to perform in our amphitheater later on in the year, so if you missed them, keep checking for later dates in the year.



It Takes a Village!

Docent training has started, and we are very excited to learn that we have 16 new students.

Months before the docent training starts, many details need to be planned and the list is very long: scheduling the classes and the instructor, preparing the files for each student and gathering their information, doing the publicity for the event, preparing the program so the new students feel at home quickly and are aware of the expectations, reviewing and updating the information, deciding about lunch and snacks and who will be in charge, and making copies of all documents needed. This list only scratches the surface of many tasks, but I want to make sure to give recognition to all included in the Docent training committee and to thank them all for their work. Without each of you, the docent training could not take place: Ron Kraus, RuthAnne Murthy, Jim Owens, Andrea Donner, Fred Seeley, Judy Mc Clure, Henry Cuaz, Robin Mendenhall, Brian Broders, Joan Fincutter, Jim Bloch, Mari Carbajal, Herb Broutt, Sandra Cattell, Dave Taylor, Sue Sutton, Erica Andrassy, Irene Heerlein, Helen Sweany, Vicki Cunningham, Jack Levenberg, Lori Wolfe, Alicia Tilley, Linda Kopatz, Russ Kimura (General Park Superintendent 1) and Frank Hoffman (Recreation Services Supervisor).

I hope I did not forget a name, but if you did help on the Docent training committee or even if you just came to make the new students feel welcomed and to offer your support, we thank you all so much for your help and all the snacks. A student well fed pays more attention! You have some people who do just that : Linette and Rick Brammer who bought the supplies for the kitchen and Roger and Judy McClure who are there super early to start the coffee, set up juice and cups. This will again be a very successful year, thanks to all of you!

Nature Center gets \$500.00 to Fix Trail Damaged in Sand Fire

Article by Jim Holr

Signal SC.com January 16, 2019

Staffers at the Placerita Canyon Natural Area and Nature Center are getting \$500,000 to fix a popular trail damaged by the 2016 Sand Fire and the heavy rains that followed it.

On Tuesday, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved \$500,000 in funding to repair the 1.8-mile-long Canyon Trail, which sustained major damage following the Sand Canyon Fire in 2016.

The fire destroyed areas of vegetation along the trail, and subsequent heavy rains in early 2017 caused mudslides that eroded significant portions of the trail, forcing closure to the public since spring 2017.

Los Angeles County Regional Park Superintendent Russell Kimura manned the nature center fort in July 2016 as the Sand Fire advanced.

"I sat here waiting for the fire to arrive," he said Tuesday. "No one was here at first, then everybody was here."

"What stopped the fire was the aircraft," he said. "I saw the fire right outside my window, and that's when the planes came."

"The fire went through here and burned up the entire campground," Kimura said.

What really tore up the trail was "all that sand and clay, which all ran into Placerita Creek."

The approved restoration project calls for the removal of nonnative and invasive plants, debris and brush along the popular trail. In addition, it will repair eroded trail sections, replacing wayfinding signage, damaged benches and bicycle traffic calming devices, as well as related improvements.

"Today's action will allow the Canyon Trail to be reopened for public access once work is completed," said Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, whose Fifth District office is helping to fund this project.

"I know how important outdoor recreation is to the residents of the Santa Clarita Valley, which is why I'm pleased to fully support this project."

Work on the trail is slated to begin in July of this year, with completion anticipated in March 2020.

The \$500,000 cost was secured through \$300,000 in Proposition A Safe Neighborhood Parks County Excess Funds available through Barger's office, as well as \$200,000 from the California State Habitat Conservation Fund.

As part of the Board of Supervisors' approval, the trail restoration project calls for the hiring of at-risk youth to perform weed abatement and general cleanup duties.

"We are grateful to Supervisor Barger and the entire Board of Supervisors for their support of this important trail restoration at Placerita Canyon Natural Area and Nature Center," Department of Parks and Recreation Director John Wicker said.

"The Canyon Trail is a significant amenity of the park, and we look forward to reopening it and providing access once again to the community," he said.

The Sand Fire broke out July 22, 2016, off of Highway 14 just northeast of Sand Canyon Road. It burned at least 41,432 acres, killed one Sand Canyon resident, destroyed 19 homes, and prompted the evacuation of several SCV neighborhoods.

Kimura said he is hoping to have the trail repaired before April next year.



Arroyo Willow
Salix lasiolepes

Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

My favorite Arroyo Willow in Placerita Canyon is located just through the tunnel before you get to the Oak of the Golden Dream. It is a large specimen that grows along the creek. Most arroyo willows are 10-18 feet tall. They are considered to be small trees or shrubs. They have multiple trunks. They grow along creek and are water indicators.

Arroyo willows have male and female plants. They develop catkins from January to March. Catkins are downy, pendulous, and wind-pollinated. The catkins of the arroyo willow are a pale golden yellow. The

photo above shows the seeds that are fuzzy and ready to blow in the wind.

The leaves of the arroyo willow are about 4 inches long. They are dark green on the top side and a gray green on the bottom. The shrub is deciduous. Interestingly, the catkins grow on the plant before the new leaves appear.

California Indians used arroyo willows in many ways. The brown bark was made into a tea to fight fevers, colds, and sore throats. The bark contains salicylates, the precursor to salicylic acid, a chemical in aspirin. The branches were used to construct dwellings, granaries, baby carriers, and basket frames. The inner bark was used to make rope.

So, why not take a walk down to the Oak of the Golden Dream and see one of my favorite trail treasures.



Going to Santa Paula

by RuthAnne Murthy

The fourth Monday of the month is Docent Enrichment Day. On January 28th a group of enthusiastic docents carpooled to the Santa Paula Oil Museum. Our guide, Jim, was wonderful as he explained the various parts of the museum. We were excited to see the upstairs where the Union Oil Co. had their offices starting in 1890. The Arts and Crafts décor has been lovingly restored. We also saw the amazing photographs in the "Insectology" exhibit.

We hope you will put Docent Enrichment on your calendar for February 25th. Watch your Trails and Nuggets for details.



The Holiday Party

It is always an event that is well attended, and we thank all the cooks who made so many delicious dishes. Since we switched to pot luck dinners, each buffet has been pretty to see, plentiful, and so very tasty!

It was the first party where Linette Brammer was in charge, she was quite excited and did a wonderful job. Many docents came to help setting up and cleaning up. She was especially grateful for the help from Sue and Allan Wallander who knew where everything was. Regretfully, I could not attend so, all of you, thank you for your help. Traci Stockhausen-White, known at Placerita as the « Bow Lady » decorated all the tables for the party and they were really lovely.

After dinner, it was time to give recognition to the docents who have been noticed for their extra efforts. Lanita Algeyer gave those recognitions:

Cindy Gold -- she jumped right in last January to help clean the pond, she was elected to the Board as an Alternate, accepted the difficult job of Recording Secretary, and has been very supportive of virtually all activities.

Sue Sutton -- She works at and thinks about the Interpretative Center every day, and has accomplished a lot. She works very well with others and helps maintain enthusiasm throughout the organization

Bill Webber -- After all the very hard work on the Yule Logs, he is also there to set up, and a few days before Christmas, he was the only person working to get all the Craft Fair things back into the storage shed (many cart loads). Heidi Webber accepted the award for Bill who could not attend.

Jim Wyrozumski and Dave Taylor: Jim for being there every day to help with the school groups and Dave for his efforts with the nature boxes during the summer - he was there every day.

To wrap up the evening, Ron Kraus showed one of his "Placerita Globe Award" movies. Ron puts so much time and effort into those, and it is always a joy to see those memories, in part nostalgia for the past, but a lot of laughing too for Ron's "special effects." A very pleasant evening always, with the best crowd ever!



Let's Get to Know Suzy Hermann

I was born at Glendale Memorial Hospital and grew up in La Canada, where my brother and I could wander the canyons, climb trees, throw rocks and just plain run around exploring all there was to enjoy outdoors. It's always better outdoors. We had dogs, cats, rats and snakes to keep us busy.

After graduating from John Muir High School, I attended Pasadena City College in the Nursing program. It was at that time I spotted a really cute guy at the gas station, and of course I wanted to greet him. When the opportunity arrived one day, I jumped out of the car and hollered "Hi Ya' handsome"...that blossomed into 55 years of marriage, a son and daughter.....and three grandchildren.

We moved into a small house which we could barely afford, in what was then Saugus, now Canyon Country. We collected a menagerie of dogs, cats, rats, mice and snakes.

I heard about an organization...Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates, and investigated this neat park whereupon I joined the organization, became the treasurer (to this day I still hesitate to handle any funds). We were selling Corita Kent prints in order to raise

funds for the non-existent Nature Center building. I believe Shirley Moreno still has hers, I never had enough money to purchase one.

Life interrupted my Nature Center activities, though we did make occasional trips there, and at one time we had to rehome our large collection of pet mice (which mice do so well) and the Nature Center needed new blood for their feeding program and gratefully accepted them all.

During the years away from Placerita, I spent loads of time and energy with the kids and all their activities. I played softball, played and coached soccer for many years, hiked, taught swimming in the school's backyard swimming program, taught Sunday School and put in 50 years of nursing.

I always intended to return actively to the Nature Center and eventually did. All I had to do was retire, which came about 6 years ago, the last day on the job being December 26th. The following January I found myself thoroughly enjoying Docent training.

For me, the best part of being a docent is time spent with the kids, enlightening them with new knowledge about the beauty of animals, plants, ecology and how to enjoy and value all that nature presents and helping them realize that nature is not to be feared, but to be protected while hungrily exploring it all.



Virulent Newcastle Disease

Virulent Newcastle Disease (VND), formerly known as Exotic Newcastle Disease, is a serious, highly contagious viral disease that can affect poultry and other birds. In rare cases, humans that have exposure to infected birds may get eye inflammation or mild fever-like symptoms.

How does this affect Placerita? Cases of Newcastle disease have been spotted all around our area. Affected birds must be euthanized to prevent the infection from spreading, so you can well imagine our anxiety. It seems that this disease may be carried by migrating birds, but at this point, that has not been proven. None of our birds at Placerita has been affected, and we intend to keep it that way.

Consequently, our birds are not quite in quarantine but are protected. They cannot leave the Nature Center for outreaches to schools or different events in our valley to reduce the risk of exposure.

We still want to help injured birds of prey and owls, but those are brought to rehab centers right away. We hope you can better understand our predicament and these new protective measures.



The Adopt-An-Animal Program

The live animals of Placerita Canyon Nature Center are a vital part of the nature center's programs. With more than 25 animals calling the nature center home, we must be able to provide food, veterinary care, and supplies for these special animals through private donations. These animals are always in need of that special guardian who wants to help in their care and feeding.

We have established an Adopt-An-Animal program for this purpose, and we appreciate all the support that has been given us over the years. When you participate in the Adopt-An-Animal program you are helping the nature center continue providing exceptional care for all of our live animals – from our tiny lizards and tarantulas to our falcons and hawks.

There are different packages of support available, ranging from \$25 for our smaller animals to \$250 for our red-tailed hawks and great horned owl. All packages include a certificate of appreciation, photograph, fact sheet, and recognition on the PCNC website. Larger packages include a nature center T-shirt, a special “behind-the-scenes” tour, and personalized plaque of recognition.

These adoptions (no, you can't take the animal home, but you can visit your adopted animal whenever you wish) make perfect gifts too and can be personalized to your wishes. Valentine's Day will be here before we know it; wouldn't an adoption make a perfect gift of love for someone you love? For a brochure or more information, call the nature center at 661-259-7721 or Judy at 661-252-6187.



The Paul Levine Cup Goes to Suzy Hermann

By Jim Crowley

The annual Paul Levine Cup was presented to Suzy Hermann by Jim Crowley, during the Christmas Pot Luck Dinner on December 8th, on behalf of past winner Linda Ioerger.

Suzy's attention-grabbing techniques while making a classroom presentation and unique educational approaches while teaching children is exactly what the Paul Levine Cup represents. Suzy motivates children in a way that enables them to understand and appreciate the natural features of Placerita Canyon. Many children come away saying they had the best day of their life. Does it get any better? We think not.

Thank you, Suzy!



Irrigation

by Denny Truger

Because the LA County plumbers were overbooked and couldn't get started on providing water to the nursery and Botany Trail, Russ Kimura, Regional Park Superintendent, and I worked out a deal with the LA County plumbers.

Jeff Crosby, Senior Grounds Maintenance Worker and I would do the all the work under their supervision, and they would do the final hook up.

I rented a trencher from Home Depot and Jeff dug a 180' trench by the nursery and hummingbird garden. The next day three Court Referrals cleaned gigantic river rocks out of the trench. These couldn't be taken out with the trencher.

Over the course of the next two weeks, with the help of Dan Kott, we installed the water pipe to the nursery, the hummingbird garden drip irrigation system, a new bird bath automatic water fill, and an outlet for future irrigation.



KHTS AM 1220

We are very lucky in Santa Clarita to have a home town radio station. If you do not know where they are located, take a stroll on Main Street in Newhall, they are on the same side of the street as the Canyon Theater Guild, another landmark in Newhall. They are about 2 blocks further down the street, as you walk toward the library.

PCNCA is very grateful because every year, we are the first interview of the series they do about non-profit organizations, and it is always the day before the first day of docent training, so it is great publicity.

Janis Murray, from KHTS, conducted the non profit spotlight show and did an interview with Ron Kraus, Jack Levenberg and Fred Seeley. They gave information about docent training and other programs at Placerita. The video is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LzwPIhFIQ&feature=em-lsp>

You can also see it on the Placerita Face Book page. They did a very complete, interesting and fun presentation. They made us very proud.

Thank you Janis Murray for this fantastic opportunity.

Thank you KHTS, you really are our home town station!



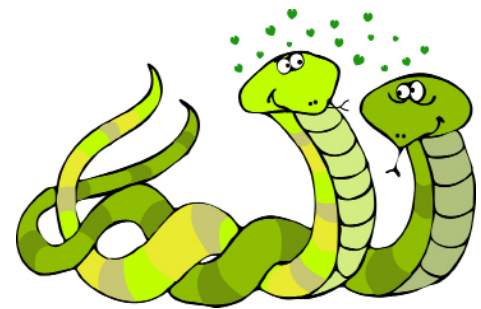
Pond Cleaning

by Fred Seeley

It must certainly be true that Mommy and Daddy Baja Pacific Tree frogs and fellow amphibians, Western Toads, appreciate a nice clean place to spawn each Spring. With that in mind, Cindy Gold, Spencer Schwartzback, Charitha Eragoda, and Girard Cohen joined me on Monday, January 21, 2019, for the annual pond clean up.

The pond has three very invasive species of plants (cattails, pennywort, and water lilies) and it is amazing how much rootage they grow in just one year.

Sincerest thanks go out to Cindy, Spencer, Charitha, and Girard for their hard work!!! Hopefully the result of the effort will be many, many tadpoles to show our students and families.



Roger McClure

For many years, you could check the calendar section of the Rattler and read "The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly walk at Castaic Lake Recreation Area on the first Saturday of the Month at 8:00AM".

Roger McClure was the faithful docent in charge of those monthly bird walks at Castaic. His first bird walk was on February 28, 2008 and during these nearly 11 years he has introduced so many to this wonderful hobby and the fun and excitement of bird watching.

Many beginners were happy to be introduced to the art of bird identification, bought their first book guide with Roger's help and his more advanced students enjoyed his good eyes checking the tiniest details to identify a bird properly, as well as his expertise and explanations.

All good things have to come to an end eventually, and Roger decided it was time to stop doing the bird walks at Castaic lake. I guess you won't be surprised to read that he has not been replaced. It will be very hard to find a replacement to fill his shoes, really no one will have the same deep knowledge of the waterfowl, birds of prey, passerines, non-passerines and all the other families and accidentals...so many names to remember but such an exciting field!

Thank you, Roger McClure, for your dedication and for sharing your knowledge so freely for such a long time.



A Note of Thanks

by Judy McClure

It's important we get the word out into the community about our events at Placerita, and it takes special people to make that happen.

Richard Green, owner of Green Landscape Nursery on Bouquet Canyon Road, has allowed us to hang our big banners for docent training, Open House and our Craft Fair on the fence bordering his nursery. He has displayed these for us for many, many years.

They have been great advertisements for our special events, and we want to express our most sincere appreciation to him and his family for allowing us to do this! Stop in to say "thanks," meet a wonderful man who loves Placerita - and maybe do a little shopping as well!

We also want to thank Denny Truger who has been so skillful at hanging those banners, so they are not ripped by the wind anymore.

WINTER AND 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

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

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. The topic for February is Urban Bears by Kim Bosell and for March, it will be the Chaparral Ecosystem by the Chaparral Institute in the Amphitheater. 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 in February and 7pm in March through the different trails in the dark. Come howl at the moon--if there is one that night!

TWILIGHT HIKES

JUNIOR RANGERS

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

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

GRADUATION

The Class of 2019. Ceremony and potluck dinner on Saturday, March 30 at 6pm at Placerita.

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