



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

April-May 2019

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Hello Friends

This year we had a winter with noticeable weather for a change. We received many rain showers and the water gauge stands at 18.3 inches since last October. The average amount of rain we had for the past 6 years was 6.5 inches each year, so those figures have to attract your attention.

The good part is that this important amount fell over the course of many days, so we did not have a huge stream overflowing onto the parking lot like we had two years ago. The stream has been flowing steadily, and many children have been playing in the water for the first time. We also had many very cold days, and even frost a few times.

February was the coldest month on record, and not one day reached the 70-degree mark, which was unheard of before. Of course, if you just moved from the Midwest, you are having a good laugh reading this. But for our SoCal residents, it was a little bit disconcerting. Many of us do not even own a winter coat! It was gray for many days and all our drawers had to be reorganized. We were getting grumpy!

Now the sun is shining and we are looking with great satisfaction around us. This rain has brought green to all our hills that are so bright, it is almost fluorescent. The spring flowers are exploding everywhere, and we are even finding mushrooms along the trail!

Enjoy the Spring, walk in the grass, smell all those new plants and listen to the birds. Open your eyes, you will never be disappointed by Nature.

This is my biggest wish for all of you.



President's Message

By Ron Kraus

This is my sixteenth year on the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates Board of Directors and my fourth year as President. It's been a wonderful experience being part of the PCNCA leadership team and working with all of the great people over the years on the myriad of projects and issues.



This year I am not running for a position on the Board in the June election. After a decade and a half on the Board and a four-year term as President, it's time to take some time off. I will continue to do the things I enjoy around Placerita—lead school tours, oversee the docent training program, manage the website and social media sites, and work on the numerous other projects that preserve and promote the nature center. And, I really hope to be able to get back to doing my Placerita videos!

I won't be leaving the Board entirely, though. Our PCNCA By-Laws have a provision for the outgoing president to serve a one-year term as "Past President," a voting director seat. So, I will continue to serve on the Board during the 2019-2020 term.

I thank all of you for your support, cooperation and friendship over these past sixteen years. I look forward to continuing to serve at Placerita for many years to come!

The Class of 2019

I am very pleased and proud to introduce the class of 2019:

Melissa Rocha
Chuck Lingo
Carole Frocillo
Brandi Herdliska
Salvador Jurado
Barbara Wyrozumski
Tricia Foley
Richard Barsky
Joaquin Hemstree
Alexia Brown
Gary Freiburger
Sandy Holloway

They have taken classes since January, taken the test, written a report, audited the school groups with a few senior docents, and they are not only ready, but eager. We welcome them with open arms!

The graduation party will take place at the Nature Center at 6.00pm on Saturday, March 30 where they will receive their 2019 new name tags and Naturalist Certificate.

Congratulations to all, and best wishes in your new life as a Placerita Docent – Naturalist. We hope it will bring you much happiness.



RIP Pam Koch

Pam passed away on Valentine's Day 2019. This is a very sad event, but it somehow seems fitting that she passed on Valentine's Day, because she was loved by so many people. We saw her fighting cancer for 30 years, and she came back victorious each time. We were so

used to her being a wonder woman, that we were taken aback when the bad news came.

Pam was very active at the Nature Center for many years until her move to Arizona. She was a very strong, smart woman with a great sense of humor and a heart of gold. Here is a list of just a few of her accomplishments:

She started doing animal care when the County ran out of money and the docents stepped in, and after that Pam was unstoppable.

She researched the history of PCNCA, did upkeep for the procedure manual and bylaws, did the NCA bylaws update and NCA budget, was PCNCA Recording Secretary, NCA rep, NCA Vice President, did the year end report, Open House co-chair, Craft Fair co-chair, annual membership meeting co-chair, obtained our Directors and Officer's insurance, got all the Nature Center treasurers on the same chart of accounts, proofread the Rattler, worked on the Frank Hovore memorial committee, and read term papers of new docents. Whew! That's some list, and I know it only scratches the surface of all she did for Placerita.

As you can see, Pam took part in many projects and was a great help in making Placerita and NCA well organized and more efficient.

Pam will be deeply missed. We are forever grateful for all her hard work, her friendship for all those years....and her great laugh which made it such a joy to work with her.

Newcastle Disease Quarantine

The State of California has placed a quarantine on all birds housed within Los Angeles County and parts of San Bernardino County, to try to prevent the spread of Newcastle Virus (NDV) disease.

NDV is spread primarily through direct contact between healthy birds and the bodily discharges of infected birds. The disease is transmitted through infected birds' droppings and secretions from the nose, mouth, and eyes. NDV spreads rapidly among birds kept in confinement, such as commercially raised chickens. There is no treatment.

It is an airborne virus which makes it difficult to contain, but some precautions can be taken to protect the birds that are kept in captivity at Placerita. The birds won't leave the Center for outreaches. Barriers around the cages prevent the visitors from coming too close to the cages and potentially infecting the birds.

The cages, as usual, will be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis. At this point, we are currently working with the state virologist to determine how we can best handle this new situation.

The public is not at risk, only people working actively in poultry farms and coming in close contact with a large number of sick birds may develop a mild conjunctivitis. It is very important not to bring any birds to Placerita: no babies fallen from the nest, no injured or sick birds. Please call the office and the phone number from a rehab center will be given to you.

This is a new situation so please be patient and cooperative while our supervisors finalize rules and regulations to proceed with our programs.



Who is Rosemarie Sanchez-Fraser?

I was born and raised in Boyle Heights, just East of Downtown Los Angeles.

Most of my childhood was spent shuttling back and forth between grandparents' homes. I was asthmatic and could not enjoy many activities that other children did, and missed lots of school. However, I did get spoiled by my grandparents and loved being with both grandmas in their small gardens whenever possible. My dad's parents owned a bakery where I learned most of my math i.e., giving change, weights & measures and very importantly "that the customer is always right!" It was also my first paid job in my pre-teen years.

I attended Catholic schools in Los Angeles, then Community Colleges at East LA, Hollywood and finally obtaining my AA degree at COC.

I worked the whole time in different venues; a biller at Black & Decker Mfg.,

clerical supervisor at Union Bank and Bank of California.

Then I did a 180 by taking a big cut in salary and taking a position at Kaiser Permanente. I started there as a clerk steno/secretary to the Public Health Nurses and to the manager of the department. I became a coordinator of one of the patient education classes in Social Medicine.

After 16 years, our manager died, and I eventually moved to the new Woodland Hills facility, then to Granada Hills Clinic and finally to Panorama City outlying offices, for Mental Health and Drug Dependency. After almost 40 years I retired as a department manager at the Santa Clarita and Reseda offices.

I never completed my nursing program at COC, due to my first husband's illness of Asbestosis. He had been a supervisor in Kaiser's Engineering Dept., for 30+ years, and he died in 2001.

Shortly after, I took on the responsibility of caring for my mom while I was still working. I soon sold my home and moved us to Friendly Valley Senior Golf Community.

In 2004, I found myself, under doctor's orders, "needing to do something for myself." One day, on my way home from work, I saw a huge sign advertising "Placerita Nature Center Docent Training!" Perfect, I thought!

I loved all the choices we have in working with the children, animals, gift shop, etc., but I really enjoyed the great Bird Walks, then headed by the late Bob Fisher. When he decided to retire and moved onto doing Blooms of the Season, he asked me to take over the Bird Walk.

I think my love for birds began because my grandparents always had canaries and a parrot in their home. When we moved to Canyon Country, we noticed all the wonderful birds and quickly put up Hummingbird and Oriole feeders and were gifted our first bird book, Bird Field Guide by Roger Tory Peterson. So it was very easy for me to gravitate towards becoming a Birder!

One Sunday in 2008, I came to walk my Dachshund at PNC and met my 2nd husband, Don Regis. He commented on how his grandma had a Doxie when he was a kid!

And so now, you know the rest of the story! We will be celebrating our 10th anniversary this coming June. He also became a Docent and helps me with the Bird Walks.

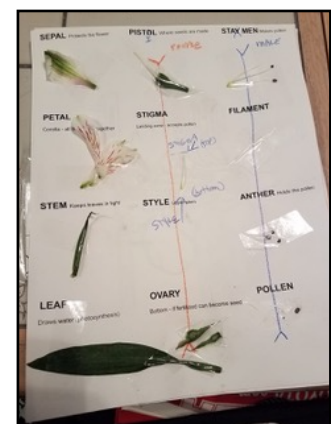
In our retirement, I guess birds have become one of our passions, as we now arrange most of our vacations around going to places where we can view birds such as California Condors, migrating Plovers, Snowy Geese and Swainson's Hawks.

The best thing about our experiences at PNC is meeting all the amazing people who visit, volunteer and work here! I love it!

Docent Enrichment

by RuthAnne Murthy

Our February Docent Enrichment was so much fun. Our own Helen Sweany was our teacher, and she did an amazing job. The topic was Botany 101 Lab. Helen review 8 plant families traits and reviewed how to photograph plants for ID. Remember to take pictures from close-up as well as the whole plant. Then the real fun began. Each docent was given a flower to dissect. We use scalpels and a great worksheet to label the "girl and boy parts". It was done with a great deal of humor and light-heartedness. The photo shows our final product. Thank you Helen for teaching us so much. Photo courtesy of Glenda Perl.



Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

May 11, 2019

9AM to 3PM

- FREE Admission
- Hikes
- Animal Presentations
- Crafts & Fun Activities
- Panning for "Fools" Gold
- Animal Presentation at 9:30am
- Caricatures
- Gift Shop
- Live Music
- Hands on Nature Education
- Interpretive Center

Bring a picnic & enjoy our picnic grounds. See all the changes that have happened at the nature center. Many fun activities for the whole family!

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Canyon
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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.



Shirley Moreno is our oldest volunteer at age 97. Shirley never had the time to become a docent because she had to make a living and support her family, but she was part of the team of volunteers when Placerita was starting to become a reality.

When it was time to retire, Shirley remembered the good times she had at Placerita, and came back to answer the phone at the office a few times each week. The county employees were delighted because it gave them the opportunity to leave their desks and take care of other tasks.

Shirley always graces us with her presence during docent training, and takes a few minutes during the Placerita History class. She explains about the beginning of the Nature Center, and how it all got organized, she also tells the new students that they will make lifetime friendships in this Center.

It is always a joy to see you, Shirley. Thank you very much to Herb Broutt for bringing Shirley for this visit.



It is Going to be a Fun Open House!

I am going to give you a little preview of all the activities, so be sure to put the big date on your calendar.

Open House will be May 11, from 9:00am to 3:00pm. Plan to bring your picnic lunch, and you'll be able to have your lunch alongside the stream.

There will be panning for fool's gold (panning for real gold is not allowed in the park), and at the cabin you can see how washing clothes was done the old fashioned way.

All the children's crafts will be free. Jill Goddard will make her wonderful caricatures again, and we will ask a donation for those. Mine is very precious to me, she made me look so great that it is very uplifting to have a look at it from time to time!

We will have live music by Rachael Komulainen's terrific band, Bacorado (She is the animal keeper at Hart Park and a previous County Employee at Placerita). They will be playing in the amphitheater. The astronomy club, the Local Group, will be there as will the Sierra Pelona Rock Club.

Of course we will have demonstrations using the nature boxes, animal presentations, and hikes. A new surprise is in the works...let's just say that you will be able to milk a wooden cow and Denny Truger is hard at work making this a reality!

Kona ice will be there again, selling snow cones. This wonderful day was planned for you by Joan Fincutter, Andrea Donner and Sandra Balaram, who are our co-chairpersons for the event. We are delighted to hear that Linnette Brammer and Mary Oien have joined to be "Open House Docents in Training" to learn the ropes.

It is going to be such a lovely day, come and visit, and see all the changes happening at the Nature Center.



Trail Treasures

by RuthAnne Murthy

Hollyleaf cherry is a California native, evergreen scrub that grows up to 25 feet tall. It is part of the rose family that prefers the moister, north-facing slopes of the chaparral. It grows below 5000 feet and does not do well with prolonged freezing temperature.

The leaves are shiny, dark green, with lighter green undersides. The margins are serrated with tiny spines, and are ruffled and wavy. The big word of the month is sclerophyllous which means hard, thick, and leathery. These traits preserve moisture within the leaves, an adaptation to the dry Mediterranean climate.

Hollyleaf cherry flowers bloom in April or May. The tiny white blooms are in long clusters called racemes. The clusters are about 2 inches long, but each flower is about ¼ inch in diameter. Bees utilize the flowers for nectar, and they, in turn, pollinate the flowers.

The flowers fade and the ¾ inch spherical drupes form. The fruit changes from green to red and to finally to dark burgundy. The cherries are prime food for birds, as well as cover for nests. The cherries are edible and sweet, however, there is very little fruit and a large pit.

Native Californians used hollyleaf cherries for food and drink. They ate the cherries fresh and dried. They were only second to acorns as a food source. The pits needed to be processed, much like acorns, because they contain hydrocyanic acid. The seeds were cracked open, crushed into meal, leached with water, and then cooked into a mush or flatbread. They also fermented the flesh of the cherries for a beverage. The gray bark of the scrub was made into a tea to treat colds and coughs.

It is easy to take this Placerita plant for granted because of its common occurrence, but as you can see, hollyleaf cherry scrubs are truly a Trail Treasure.



Report from the March Bird Walk

by Rosemarie Sanchez-Fraser

It was a frosty morning in Santa Clarita, so I believed that no one would be coming to Placerita to join me on our monthly Bird Walk.

Surprisingly, there were 10 brave birders joining us on our walk. We often have visitors who are vacationing here and today a couple from Grants Pass, Oregon joined our walk along with several local residents, (one of which has lived in Santa Clarita since 1952 and had lovely stories of how it used to be) and a retired botanist.

Even though we didn't see many birds today, I feel very lucky to be able to meet interesting people from near



Walker Cabin

by Herb Broutt



Since the Centennial is coming up for the Walker Cabin in 2020, we decided it was time to begin fixing it up.

The first thing we did was replace the door. Once the door was replaced the next order of business was to hire a company to take care of rat abatement, because the cabin was full of rats and rat feces.

We requested estimates from 3 reputable companies. The company we hired was able to perform the task without using chemicals, to insure the wildlife would not be poisoned. They also poured concrete under the back of the house and put in screens to make sure the rodents could not re-inhabit the cabin. We also have a one year guarantee.

Once this was completed the hard work began. Sandra Cattell, Jim Wyozumski and I took on the task of cleaning the cabin. We took everything out and meticulously cleaned all the items that had been inside. We then scrubbed and mopped the floors. Once that was completed, we put everything back. It was a dirty job but it had to be done.

And now the Walker Cabin is ship-shape again!



Where is the Hillside Trail-head?

You have probably taken this trail so many times that you think you could do it blindfolded. You pass the amphitheater and you veer a little bit to your left, the trail is right there as the hill starts to come up. That seems very obvious, right?

No, it is wrong. Strangely enough, the trail-head sign is on Placerita Canyon Road, on the same level as the bridge over the tunnel. Indeed, you cannot park your car there, there is even a gate to prevent you from doing so.

However, this is the location of the official panel with the map of the trail, the length of the trail and all the official details about the trail.

Instead of going up left toward the top of the hill and the water tower, go right toward Placerita Canyon Road and you will discover this signage.

There's your little known fact about Placerita.



How Do You Clean Up a Tunnel?

There is good news and bad news related to our local tunnels. The good news is that the stream is running full speed. The bad news is that the water is carrying sediment, mud and silt and the walkway under the tunnel filled up, making it impossible to access the Oak of the Golden Dream.

One rainy day, we had 2 inches of rain and the next morning, the walkway was spick-and-span. We were very surprised, even wondering if a team took pity on us, and cleaned up the place early in the morning... Then we noticed the stream did the cleanup by itself, very nicely!

The other side of the tunnel was still covered with a thick layer of debris, and we were expecting another heavy rainy day. Miles Butcher, Grounds Maintenance Worker II worked fast with a team to lay a large number of sand bags which would redirect the stream to clean tunnel number 2.

Their efforts were successful, and as of today, March 5, both tunnels are clean and the water is flowing freely. Check out the photos taken by Ron Kraus, they say it all!



Leadership Team Building

by Ron Kraus

Our PCNCA community is growing, with more volunteers, more events and more time spent working together and with the public.

As your Board, we want to do the best job we can to assess our effectiveness, build leadership capacity, improve communication, nurture team building and develop resolution skills.

Therefore, we've planned a day-long Leadership training for all Board members in April with the assistance of a leadership coach. Afterward we will provide opportunities to share our learning with all docents, and discuss ways to improve and maintain our culture of cooperation and collaboration."

Cindy Gold has done a tremendous job preparing the board to participate actively in this training, to be more receptive and to focus on the different issues. She put us in touch with our coach during the board meeting so we had direct contact, and we were pleased with his approach.

This day-long training is going to take place on April 1st (for real, no April fool there!) at Ventura Pierpont Yacht Club. Being away from Placerita will help the board to concentrate on what they want to learn. The venue will be free of charge for PCNCA because Johan and Evelyne Vandersande are members. We always try to improve!



Our Board of Directors Voting Season is Upon Us!

by Jim Crowley

This Rattler is for April-May, and the PCNC members will finalize the Board of Directors election on Saturday June 1st, at 6.00pm, at "The end of the school year" dinner.

Docents, let me explain some general guidelines, in case you have interest in the Board! The elected board members serve a two-year term, alternates serve one year. Some board members' term will expire in June, but they have the option to run for re-election. New docents are also welcome and encouraged to seek a position on the Board. Consider it a golden opportunity to participate, have your voice heard and ideas considered for the way we operate.

You will receive more information during the month of May. When the time comes, please vote your choices for the Board. If you would like to consider an opportunity on the Board, please talk to one of the Board members for more information or better yet, attend the next two Board meetings to see how they are run.

Mark your calendar for April 2 and May 7 at 1:00pm at PCNC.

If you would like to enter your name into the voting process, or have questions, Jim Crowley is in charge of the election. You can contact him at (661) 755-7377. Thank you in advance.





24 Years on the Board

by Evelyn Vandersande

How does this happen? Fear is a good motivation! When I joined the Nature Center, PCNCA presidents and board members were changing rapidly, so we did not have stability. Even getting enough board members to a meeting was a challenge, and often we could not vote because we did not have a quorum. The supervisor situation was also difficult. We lost one to a promotion, then one died suddenly. One came for 6 months, one went looking for a better job, one retired and we even survived a few months without a supervisor at all! We are very grateful to have had Russ Kimura, Regional Park Superintendent 1, since the Spring of 2011.

In the previous years, we have had some major fires, two floods and some serious financial distress. The County ran out of money and wanted to close Placerita, so the docents decided to pay the supervisor's salary to keep the place open. The Museum was dismantled and was an empty space for years, the Nature Center was closed for reconstruction and the docents and County Employees operated from a trailer in the parking lot.

However, through all this, the schools could come to the Center on school trips, and programs were offered to the public. But this all took lots of work from a handful of really dedicated docents. We rolled up our sleeves for years and we did our best. We had great spirit and wanted to succeed.

We have had two long-time and dedicated presidents in Jim Southwell and Ron Kraus, and that made a big difference. The number of docents has steadily increased and with them, more programs can be offered at Placerita. PCNCA is doing great and we seem to be financially secure, so it is time to leave my spot on the board for somebody with more time and energy.

The PCNCA board welcomes guests at the board meeting at 1pm on the first Tuesday of the month. Come and check it out. It is very interesting to see how decisions are made. You might want to join!



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. There is no charge for these programs and they are fun for the whole family.

BIRD WALK

Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.

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.

COMMUNITY NATURE EDUCATION SERIES

is an exciting program at Placerita. It is held every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm with a different topic each month. Judy Bass, bird expert from Eaton Canyon, will talk about "Hummingbirds" in April. Frank Hoffman, Recreation Service Supervisor at Placerita, will talk in May about "Rattlesnakes," a topic he knows in depth. Changes may be made, so please call the center at 661.259.7721 to verify or check our website calendar for the current schedule.

TWILIGHT HIKES

This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month and runs for about one hour. Park staff and the Nature Center Docents split groups and courses through the different trails in the dark. April 20th at 7,00pm and May 18th at 8.00pm

JUNIOR RANGERS

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

PLACERITA NATURE TOTS

Every second Saturday of the month, there is a "nature Tots" program for children 3 to 5 years old from 9.30AM to 10.30AM. Pre-registration is required and one adult companion for each child. Registration open the 1st of each month, program limited to 15 children. Register at nature_tots@placerita.org

GRADUATION OPEN HOUSE

For the Class of 2019. Ceremony and potluck dinner on Saturday, March 30 at 6pm at Placerita May 11 (see flyer)

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