



Hello Nature Friends,

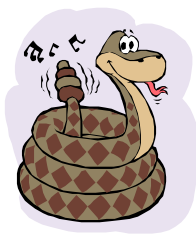
Great news! If we have a very light rainy season in the months to come, the Canyon Trail might be reopened in time for Open House on May 9th.

The CCC is back to work cleaning up the trail and trimming bushes. Their next step will be to install the signage, and to build the pinch points to slow down the mountain bikers on the trail. They will be working with the LA County trail crew. The trail might have to be redirected in some places where it is too close to the stream. All this work might have to stop if we get too much rain in the coming months. We are still in the “rainy season” that usually ends around the beginning of April. If the stream is running fast and furious, those crews cannot be put in a dangerous situation.

Consequently, progress will be made if the dry weather continues the way it was in January but will slow down if we get heavy rain. At this point in time, let's be optimistic and hope for the Canyon Trail to be reopened by May 9th. Our visitors have been waiting patiently for many years, and it would be a great opportunity to celebrate the opening at our Open House!



The Class of 2020



The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91321
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Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Over 50 Years of Nature Education

March-April 2020

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber



Who is Victoria Lazarz?

Hello Readers of the Rattler! My name is Victoria Lazarz, and I'm a Recreation Services Leader currently working, here at Placerita and over at Devil's Punchbowl Natural Area in Pearblossom. Many of you see me as a new face, but I've actually been working here since early 2018, so my official introduction is long overdue.

My time as a Rec Leader with the Department of Parks and Recreation has been a wild ride, but I'll try to explain the journey and my role, as best as I can.

In the summer of 2017, I started at Placerita as a college volunteer helping Frank Hoffman, Recreation Services Supervisor, with animal care. I was graduating from CSUN with a BS in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and wanted some volunteer experience under my belt.

Several months later, I applied for a Recurrent Recreation Services Leader position under the REAACH Program, got hired, took a training course at El Cariso Park and began officially working at Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

In the summer of 2018, I left Placerita and the Parks Department to intern (full-time) for the US Forest Service as a Field Ranger in the Angeles National Forest. Even more months passed, and I was asked to return to the Parks Department to work part-time at Devil's Punchbowl helping monitor LA County's Wildlife Sanctuaries. I worked both jobs until my internship with the Forest Service ended.

I returned to Placerita in the spring of 2019 (and later returned to Devil's Punchbowl in November of 2019), and never really left after that. The hours and days I work at Placerita vary depending on need. I'm mainly here to close the building and assist the staff with animal care (diet prep, feeding, cleaning enclosures, etc.).

My other duties include office work, training youth volunteers, answering public inquiries, educating the public on native flora and fauna, cleaning and maintaining the Entomology collection, assisting Park Maintenance and chatting with/assisting the Docents.

Placerita Canyon is one of my favorite parks, and I'm happy and lucky to be here. I'm not sure how long I'll stay with the county, because I do hope to pursue my Masters in Entomology. Until that time, I'll be around as long as Placerita and Devil's Punchbowl still need me.

So feel free to stop by the office to chat or just say Hi.



Earth Day



What a Difference a Year Makes!

The rainy season is with us until the end of March, so we will remain optimistic for more precipitation to come. However, we have had many gorgeous sunny days and not too much rain this year. Last year at this same time, the rain gauge was up to 18.3 inches. This year the mountains received many inches of snow, and some local areas close to Santa Clarita were covered with a thick blanket of snow in late December, so we hope that the underground supplies have been replenished.

However, it does not seem we'll have the abundance of wild flowers we had last year which was an astonishing display. This picture was from the stream last January, and if you check the photo on the first page, the difference is clearly visible.

Enjoy the Spring.



Cleaning up the Pond

by Fred Seeley

It was a clear and crisp morning on January 29th at the educational pond in the Butterfly Garden section of PCNC. As you can see from the photo, the annual pond cleaning to get ready for the frogs and toads spawning in early spring was very successful!

Working on the project this year were Joe Morelli (a pond clearing MACHINE!), Jim Crowley, Sue Murachanian, Jack Levenberg, Pat Coskran, Maria Elena Christensen, yours truly, and Charitha Eragoda (the photographer). We really appreciated the three docent trainees joining in the fun!

We filled at least four big trash bags and saw several adult frogs. It was a fun project. Start checking for pollywogs any day now!



The Mouse Wizard--Denny Truger!

I am sure most of you know there was a little mouse problem in the Nature Center office. Due to age and water damage, the bottom of the side door to the office needed repair.

Frank Hoffman had seen mice zip in and out, as he worked at his desk. After a trip to Industrial Metal to get some angle iron for the repair, Dan Kott and I took the door off and were able to repair the door to almost as good as new. It just needs to be repainted and it'll look perfect. Plus keep out the mice!

Build on What Kids Already Know

Tip of the Month by Cindy Gold

Even the youngest children bring lots of memories and knowledge about the world with them when learning something new. Brain research shows that we learn and remember best when we hook new information onto something familiar. Our knowledge is built in layers of understanding. For example, a child learns about acorns by remembering what a tree is, or recalling eating other seeds like nuts or peas. Skillful parents and teachers build on what kids already know. This strategy eliminates confusion, gives kids confidence, and makes learning more personal and fun.

Ask kids what they already know about the topic when introducing new ideas. Encourage them to share their experiences and knowledge, no matter how basic. Lecturing and expounding on facts may seem more efficient, but it's the least effective way of building understanding.

Ask open-ended questions - Who? What? Where? Why? How? Questions that have more than one answer and encourage kids to explain what they already know. Then add new ideas or facts.

What do you know about ____?

Have you ever...?

What/Why do you think...?

Guide them into making connections.

You know this is an oak tree, and this is a sycamore. How are they different? The same?

We know the sun gives us light. Why is this important to plants?

Remember the Golden Rule of Learning: Everything we learn builds on what we already know.

The Class of 2020

I am very pleased to introduce the Docent Class of 2020:

Liz Bastiani	Sue Murachanian
Pat Coskran	Angela Myers
Sondra Fox	Daniel Peck
Fred Heiser	Kelly Ramnarine
Linda Jensen	Laura Skorich
Sue Looper	Gayle Tietjens
Barbara Marxmiller	Suzanna Wood
Chelsea Morel	Ken Yasukawa
Joe Morelli	

They have taken classes faithfully since the beginning of January, twice a week from 9.00am to 12.00, they have started to audit the school groups with a few senior docents, and they have received lots of support via the mentors program.

The Graduation Party and Ceremony will take place at the Nature Center on March 28, where they will receive their 2020 name tag, their Naturalist Certificate and vest patch..

Congratulations to all for taking this big step to become a docent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. We hope it will bring you much happiness, and we are looking forward to seeing you in action at the Center.



Acorn Amphitheatre Equipment

By Jim Crowley

After many months we reached a point in the further development of the Acorn Amphitheatre requiring a decision on the audio/visual equipment needed to support future entertainment. We needed a larger stage (now in works) to support individual artists, small music groups, dancers, and performers. As odd as it might seem, storage of the equipment was a large consideration. A cabinet will be constructed by docent labor.

I put together several component price packages to compare the benefits of a rental each time or to buy the equipment and maintain it. To use five years for comparison seemed sensible. PCNCA would save several thousand dollars by making the one-time purchase of the complete sound system, a projector suitable for large outdoor use, a blow-up movie screen, a DVD player and a custom-built portable storage cabinet.

Many hours were spent scouring the internet to see what would meet our needs. Seemed easy, right.... Doing that forced an education on me in audio/visual equipment that seemed like an endless loop. As I dug further into the claims of at least ten manufacturers for projectors, all claiming to be the best. One was titled "YABER Native 1080P", it was too weird to trust.... Buyer Beware! How about what the benefits of a projector with DLP processing versus LCD and or LED? They all have trade off benefits. And of course one must determine the needed Lumens and "projector throw distance" to put into a formula so we have a projection image larger than a sticky note on the 12' X 7' screen. Then I figured we needed to feed it a 4K signal, minimum, as the industry puts out higher standards (I hear 8K is in works) to view their media? That industry gets a big raspberry award for that effort to make people buy newer equip. Did you get your new i-Phone15 yet? New DVD movies may not play on older technology players and vice versa. And one must know the quality repercussions of a projection provided by "Supports 1080P" versus a "Native Resident 1080P" or just "1080P". So, I had my hands full of trade-offs. All we wanted to do was show movies, sheesh! So I found a reasonably priced unit that has a decent warranty and we are good to go.

As it relates to the sound system we could go very expensive or at a minimum match what we have rented since we knew what that provided. The Guitar Center in Stephenson Ranch offered several "packages" that saved a lot of money and they were local if we had issues, and the equipment was better than we previously rented.

The DVD player provides endless fun in determining features versus what we need. I'm still working on that one.... almost as complicated as the projector due to features. Whatever happened to KISS? "Keep It Simple Stupid".

Lastly, there are numerous Projection screens for outdoor theater use. The Blow-up type is perfect for our use and it will handle an image up to 12' x 7', much better than the sticky note size. It appears they are all about the same except cheap ones that appear to be a notch up from a hung white bed sheet on a clothes line. Turns out the units are durable, very light weight and foldable/roll able like a sleeping bag.

I want to thank LA County employee Miles Butcher for his suggestions on equipment, since he has great knowledge about sound systems.

The request for the purchase was presented and approved by the Board of Directors on Feb 4, 2020. If anyone has technical knowledge of all this or is interested in more details please contact me and I will discuss it with you.



PCNC Docent Library

by Gary Freiburger

First of all I have to thank Carole Frocillo for all of her hard work in getting the PCNC Docent Library back into shape. Carole took a bookshelf cluttered with out-of-date, off subject, and cast-off books, and turned it into a useful resource.

The library now has books organized into these topic areas: Plants, Birds, Amphibians/Reptiles, Insects/Arthropods, Animals, Natural History, Geology, General Interest, Native Americans and children's books.

The notebook for checking books out of the library is now located on the bookshelf so it will be easy to record any books that are in circulation.

In addition to reference books, such as field guides, the library also has a collection of titles by John Muir, Rachel Carson's "The Sense of Wonder", and the "Eat-a-bug Cookbook"!

We are always open to suggestions for new titles and for donations! Feel free to contact me with any questions or suggestions.

Gardeners of the Wild

Spring is here, and it is time to do some gardening at Placerita! Robert Grzesiak and Brian Broders will welcome you with open arms every Monday from 9am to 12 noon, as well as every Saturday from 9am to 11am. Meet next to the Nursery, in the back of the Nature Center. Bring a sturdy pair of gardening gloves and be ready to have some fun together!

There will be some time set aside to learn about the native plants. The planned subjects that will be covered are: planting, plant identification, planting seeds, mulching, watering and weed abatement.

It is a great way to learn about the plants in Placerita, and the weather is delightful right now.

This opportunity is not restricted to docents only, gardening can be fun for many. So show up, ready to work and feel free to bring a friend...there is plenty of weeding to do in the Spring!





Frank Hoffman is a Master Falconer

Frank is the treasurer for the California Hawking Club and Mary, his lovely wife, is in charge of Membership. You might have noticed that Frank was away from his desk for a few days on "vacation". That is because he was one of the officers in charge of the field meet for CHC.

Each year the CHC holds a Field Meet where falconers come to fly their birds on wild game, attend clinics and workshops on falconry equipment and husbandry, enjoy speakers who discuss these and other

topics at the nightly meetings and purchase falconry equipment and artwork.

The Field Meet culminates in a Saturday night banquet where awards are presented and newly elected CHC officers are congratulated. It is a fundraiser for CHC, and the members enjoy meeting each other to compete in the practice of the ancient art of falconry, which is close to 5000 years old.

About 230 falconers attended the 6 day-event and found lodging in the local hotels. They came with their birds to hunt and there were many falcons, hawks and even a Golden Eagle.

This club was founded in 1971 and next year will be celebrating 50 years as a non-profit conservation and scientific-based organization.

Thank you so much Frank and Mary Hoffman for providing your services to this great organization and we all benefit at Placerita from your wonderful knowledge.



Why Become a Docent?

A desire to learn more and more is a good incentive, and we have a great program at the Center called "Docent Enrichment" which does just that.

We were very lucky in January to welcome Florence Nishida to Placerita again. She is a renowned Mycologist and Master Gardener. She first gave a class on mushroom and fungi, and then took us on a hike to discover them in the park.

The event was well attended and we all learned so much and took notes. Early in the year is the best time to find mushrooms at Placerita because they need some moisture to grow....and we found plenty!



Who are You Going to Call?

Glenda Perl

The Docents of Placerita Canyon Nature Center are a close-knit group. Most of us are enjoying our "retirement years." There's no denying that we are getting "longer in the tooth."

Because we care about each other, we become concerned when we notice that a regularly active docent hasn't been seen or heard from lately. "Is she sick?" "I heard he was in the hospital." "Did someone pass away?" Many docents live alone. Not everyone has family or close friends they can call on for help.

The topic was discussed at a recent board meeting. It was suggested that there should be one person in the organization that people could call (or text or email) to alert about the health and well-being of our fellow docents.

As the current Membership Chairperson, it just felt right that I should take on this task, and I volunteered to do so.

Everyone on the PCNC phone list now knows that they can contact me if they are concerned about another docent, or know that someone is, in fact, sick or in the hospital, or worse. I will try to reach out to that person, with love and support, maybe send a get-well card or flowers.

Getting through life really DOES "take a village"!



RIP John Morris

by Jim Crowley

We are sorry to report that John Morris, docent class of 2018, passed away on December 26, 2019.

He was a very talented man, knowledgeable about antique cars and motorcycles. He especially enjoyed Placerita Canyon Nature Center. His likable demeanor was well received by those who knew him, and he especially liked leading school tours. He was a resident of Sylmar, CA.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

May 9, 2020

9AM to 3PM

- Free Admission & Parking
- Guided Hikes
- Crafts & Fun Activities
- Panning for "Fools" Gold
- Animal Presentations at 11 & 12
- Caricatures by Jill
- Gift Shop
- 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!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road
(661) 259-7721
www.placerita.org

Sponsored by
Placerita
Canyon
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Associates



The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial District of Kathryn Barger. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates.



Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

Purple Nightshade is a perennial, native plant that is common in the southern oak woodlands and chaparral of southern California. It is related to potatoes, tomatoes, and eggplants. They have woody stems that are covered with soft, short hairs. It grows up to 3 feet tall and is found up to 4000 feet in altitude.

The leaves of the purple nightshade are dark green, ovate (oval), and between $\frac{3}{4}$ and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The margins of the leaves are generally smooth. The leaves are soft and so the plant is summer deciduous allowing the plant to live through the summer heat.

Dark purple flowers bloom from February to July. The 5 petals are fused (connected) and the anthers are bright yellow. The flowers are about 1 inch in diameter. Under magnification, you'll see 2 green dots on the base of each segment.

Purple nightshade produces berries that are about $\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter. They start as a bright green and ripen to a purple-black. The berries look like tiny tomatoes in clusters. The berries are poisonous especially when they are green.

Because all parts of the plant are poisonous, the Native Californians did not use purple nightshade for food. It was, however, used to make ink for tattooing.

The bright yellow centers and purple petals are appealing to the eye and help us to stop and appreciate this Trail Treasure.



Purple Nightshade
Solanum xanti



Bohdi, the Turkey Vulture

Since October 15, we have a new turkey vulture in an enclosure on the patio, and its name is Bohdi. Is it a male or a female? We do not know. As you might be aware, we had a turkey vulture at Placerita named Apollo and for many years, we thought it was a male. We discovered it was a female after a blood test was needed, but taking a blood test is stressful for a bird. So the mystery will remain, and Bohdi is a good name that can go both ways!

Bohdi came to us from the Wildlife Waystation. They had to close their facility, and offered their animals to different places with experience in the care of each animal type. They had Bohdi since 2016, and it is not releasable because it is missing one wing. We estimate it to be around 12 years old. It is a shy bird who was never socialized, so it won't be used for public presentation. It is in good health and eats with good appetite (150 grams of rat meat every day, prepared by the staff or volunteers).

Because of the missing wing, its balance is not the best, so the perches in the enclosure were lowered to accommodate that need. However, it can jump and perch quite well.

As you can see in the photo, it has a red head which tells you it is a mature turkey vulture. The juveniles have a black head, which turns red at about 2 years of age. In the wild, the turkey vulture population is stable or increasing. If you see a large black bird higher up in the sky not flapping its wings but using the thermals to go soaring, there is a strong chance it is a turkey vulture. If you happen to be closer, you will notice the slight rocking side to side in flight, and wings held upward in a shallow vee shape.

Welcome Bohdi, we are glad you are now with us at Placerita.



Why Did I Write a Study Guide?

by Brian Broders

It was actually started just for my own use, when I was taking the Docent training classes in 2018. It was originally intended to be another way of studying the material, supplementing by using the internet and feeding my thirst for new knowledge. I simply had to get more information on the subjects!

I started by placing the content into a Word document named by the article and/or subject. With so much information, it was still not in a usable format. I had to find a better way. Collating everything on a specific subject in one document worked way better. That is how the study guides ended up being in the current format, as well as all the supplementary study guide material. There have been small changes as time went on, and more content was added, but my hope is that it's still in a logical order to allow easy reading. I added some graphics to reinforce the material in each of the sections, along with text immediately below the graphics.

I created a simplified audio file from the Word document once I completed the study guide. I placed a copy of the audio document on my smart phone and I listen to them on my phone. I can now understand why it is so hard to write a technical document using layman's terms! There is usually too much technical gibberish and the material is disorganized enough to give you a headache.

Hopefully in the near future I can release some of this material into our docent library, and create more supplementary study guides. There are lots of subjects to choose from here at the Nature Center. I hope this will be helpful for all who want to study this guide.

Open House 2020

Open House is Saturday, May 9th from 9:00am to 3:00pm.

What is an Open House at the Nature Center? It is not a fund-raiser; it is a day of fun at Placerita to enjoy with your family. It is our way of saying "Thank You" to the community who supports us all year long. Mark this date on your calendar and remember to check the Flyer, as May tends to fill up with other activities.

There will be panning for fool's gold (panning for real gold is not allowed in the park) and many fun old-fashioned crafts to do at the cabin.... maybe churning butter or making corn husk dolls? You might even try to milk a wooden cow and it is not as easy as you think! You can take pictures of your family members wearing butterfly wings, or scrub clothes on a washboard. Jill Goddard will make her wonderful caricatures again, and we will ask for a donation for those--but all the other activities are free of charge and so is the parking.

Of course, we will have demonstrations using the Nature Boxes, animal presentations, and family hikes. The local Astronomy Group of SCV will be there with solar scopes, the Sierra Club will have displays, the Sierra Pelona Rock Club will have a table selling items for a small charge, as well as many other organizations who always have interesting presentations throughout the day.

Do not miss this date at the Nature Center, you will have a great time!



Earth Day

SPRING PROGRAMS

FAMILY NATURE WALK	Every Saturday from 11 to noon. An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.
ANIMAL PRESENTATION	Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm. See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.
BIRD WALK	First 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 9:30am 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 the 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. March is "Wild Food Cooking" by Pascal Baudar and April is "Volcanos" by Richard Wade.
TWILIGHT HIKES	This program is offered on the 3rd Saturday of each month. This program begins at 7pm in March and April and runs for about an hour. Park staff and the Nature Center Docents split groups and courses through the different trails in the dark.
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
PHOTO WALK: NEW	3rd Saturday of the month at 8:30am in the Acorn Amphitheater. Learn how and where to take some of the best photos at Placerita. Docent and volunteer led. For more information, contact Fred Seeley via the Nature Center.
LOS PINETOS TRAIL	The trail is now open. You can have access from the east gate. There is no access from the Nature Center because the Canyon Trail is closed.
Graduation Ceremony and Dinner: Saturday, March 28 - 6pm at Placerita Canyon Nature Center	

The White-tailed Kites are Back

We have not seen them for a few years at Placerita, but when you have a few sightings, you can be sure they are back and it is pretty exciting.

How do you know that this bird is a White-tailed Kite? It is often seen hovering on rapidly beating wings over open fields, looking for small rodents, its main food source. It stays in one spot, flapping its wings fast while checking for prey. It's a very specific hunting technique, so once you have seen it, you won't ever forget.

They really stand out because they are mostly white, with a white tail and black shoulder patches. Their main requirement seems to be trees for perching and nesting, and open ground with a high population of rodents. We have both at Placerita, so we are happy to see them back.

We had some endangered owls at Placerita that we were proud to have close to the waterfall. That trail has been so damaged that we have not been able to survey the area the way we used to. We hope they found refuge in Placerita again.