

Hello Nature Friends

What a strange beginning of 2020 it has been... January and February were glorious, with record-breaking warm temperatures and no rain. However, this was supposed to be our rainy season. We enjoyed every day, but with the nagging sensation that we were going to pay for it later on.

March came and the temperature dropped, we had snow in the mountains and the rain started to fall, nicely, on a regular basis. We started to breathe easier about the water situation. We were going to have Spring blossoms! And indeed, many gorgeous wild peonies started to bloom at Placerita. Kids came to play in the stream. All was well... we were busy finishing docent training with 17 dedicated trainees. We were enjoying the classes and the docents were offering them friendship and support. On Thursday March 12, they took their tests and after the testing, they were able to check out all the options for getting involved at Placerita. During the coffee break, we were lightly joking about a certain new Corona virus that sounded like the name of the beer. Little did we know what was coming. We were in total denial.

On Friday March 13, all hell broke loose. The Nature Center had to be closed by 5pm, something that had never taken place, and we were taken by surprise and very concerned. We barely had time to catch our breath, when we realized that each day was bringing new restrictions and that the situation was very serious indeed. I am writing this newsletter in mid-April and we have been told not even to go food shopping if possible, because the next 2 weeks are going to be crucial. That is very worrisome.

I want to send you a message of love and friendship with this Rattler. Californians are tough cookies, and this too shall pass. It is a difficult time, I am not going to minimize the situation, for sure. We are outdoor people and it is painful to be locked inside when Spring is outside calling us. But it seems to be a matter of survival at this point.

We will see each other again, and I want to wish you good health in both body and mind. Hopefully, the COVID-19 will be just a bad memory very soon.

Stay well, be safe and wash your hands for 20 seconds many times each day, with a smile if possible!



The Rattler

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

May-June 2020

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Message from Russ Kimura

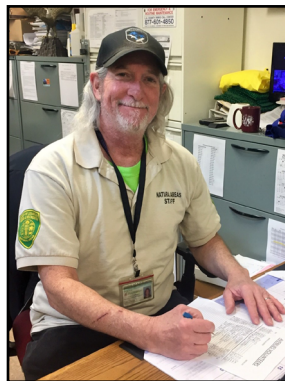
Regional Park Superintendent 1
at Placerita Canyon Nature Center

I just wanted to inform all of the volunteers that I miss you, and wanted to share my personal feelings about what is going on at Placerita. I miss your enthusiasm, energy, companionship, work ethic and dedication. I know how much all of you love Placerita, and let me tell you it is because of you, the volunteers, that Placerita is the very best park unit in the State of California. I say that from my heart and from 37 years of experience in the park business.

And now to inform you about what's going on at the Nature Center. As you have already heard and experienced, we are officially closed. This means the access road into the park is closed, the Nature Center is closed, the day use area is closed, all the trails are closed, and the Walker Ranch Area including the Placerita Canyon turnout parking area is closed.

The California Conservation Corp was asked to halt their work on the Canyon Trail due to COVID-19. The L.A. County Trail Crew is continuing to work on the Canyon Trail.

On behalf of me and my staff, Frank, Marietta, Miles, Jeff, Monica, and Victoria, we cannot wait for the day that we may all be together again. It is at times like these that we know we are really a family here at Placerita. Please stay healthy and safe, and remember you can always call me at the Nature Center. Thank you and I love you all.



Reservation System

Many organizations are looking to have a centralized reservation system enabled on line. The County sees many advantages to have this available, and the new reservation system started in March. The docents understand it will require careful planning and thinking ahead, but are very grateful to be able to use the building and the park free of charge.

Most of the work will fall on the shoulders of Frank Hoffman, Recreation Services Supervisor, who is going to apply for the reservations and we are very grateful for his efforts. The docents will supply him with all the dates needed for all events, a year in advance. Reservations are needed for the school tours, docent training and all the special events to

make sure the Nature Center or amphitheater has not been reserved by another group.

The County is starting to take reservations from groups who want to use Camp site Number One on Walker Ranch, and the camp site is being cleaned up. All those reservations had to be put on hold because of the Covid 19 virus but will take place when the Nature Center is reopened.

**Our Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (PCNCA)
Board of Directors Voting Season is Upon Us**

PCNCA members normally conduct the Board of Directors election at the end of the school year and results are normally finalized and announced at a potluck dinner on the first Saturday in June. However, you have probably noticed this year is NOT normal. We will still have our election for directors, just done a little differently. Everyone will wear a mask and gloves--NO, just kidding. More on that below. In early May a letter will go to all members with instructions...wait, I'm ahead of myself again. First, WE NEED CANDIDATES FOR THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS. That is where everyone can get involved, especially our current Class of 2020 who got a bum deal on graduation and other such festivities due to CEV (Creepy Evil Virus) and we want them to know that if any of them are interested in being a part of what goes around the Center, they are encouraged to run for a board position.



Let me explain some Board of Director (BOD) basics: Elected board members serve a two-year term, with half the BOD up for reelection each year (six positions this year). Additionally, two alternate directors will be elected to a one-year term. Consider being on the BOD as a golden opportunity to participate and have your voice heard in determining operations for the organization. All docents and members in good standing (paid dues) are welcome and encouraged to seek a position on the board.

The voting process--You will receive detailed voting information, including a ballot, in early May. This year, voting will be electronic (via e-mail) or by snail mail, without the office drop-off option. An election committee consisting of non-BOD members will process the votes and determine the six individuals to be elected to the BOD and the two alternates.

When you get the letter with instructions, please vote your choices for the board. And, in the meantime, if you have even any inkling of interest in this opportunity to run for election, or you have any questions about responsibilities, meeting times, etc., please call one of the board members or election committee members below to discuss in more detail.

Thank You,
Election Committee,
Jim Crowley
Vicki Cunningham



Congratulations Class of 2020

Saturday, March 28 was supposed to be the graduation party for the Docent class of 2020. They were all in our thoughts on this big day, and we were really disappointed not to be able to congratulate them the way we wanted to, and be able to celebrate with the usual party at Placerita.

The Nature Center closed down on March 13 because of COVID-19 virus. We will celebrate at a better time. Their name tags were ready for the big day, but since we can't give those out now, here are the names of the new docents from the class of 2020. Congratulations again.

Liz Bastiani
Pat Coskran
Sondra Fox
Fred Heiser

Linda Jensen
Sue Looper
Barabara Marxmiller
Chelsea Morel

Joe Morelli
Sue Murachanian
Angela Myers
Daniel Peck

Kelly Ramnarine
Laura Skorich
Gayle Tietjens
Suzanna Wood
Ken Yasukawa



PCNC Library News

by Gary Freiburger

Although the library is closed, work goes on offsite. I'm preparing several new donations for addition to the library. When we return, our collection will have additional resources on butterfly, flower and bird identification in addition to some other topics. If you have suggestions for items to add to the library, please let me know. I can send you a list (4 pages) of all of our current titles.

I hope that everyone is healthy and finding interesting ways to weather the current crisis!



Docent Training 2020

by Ron Kraus

Docent Training 2020 started off with great promise with a large group of eager students attending the orientation on January 7. As happens most years, we had a few drop outs and the class settled down to a dedicated group of seventeen students (including one coming back for a refresher.)

Because there were no school tour groups in January on training days, we were able to conduct most of the early sessions in the Frank Hovore classroom rather than the docent room. We always begin docent training with Ecology I, presented by our own Janet Kubler. Janet sets the tone of the training and introduces the students to many of the subjects and concepts they will be studying later on in the program.

We had most of our regular instructors back from prior years, with a few new ones included. The weather was dry for the most part in January and February, so we were able to conduct some field work along with the classroom lectures. As requested by previous classes, we were also able to include more topics regarding interpretive techniques and tips on how to handle the school groups.

The class was moving along fine until the second week of March when the Corona Virus issue took over. Fortunately, we were able to get in the final exam that week along with the new "Job Fair" event organized by Cindy Gold. The next week the park closures started happening and that put a hold on our students being able to practice working with school groups to complete the last phase of docent training. Also, the park closure cancelled the Docent Graduation scheduled for March 28.

We are hopeful that the park will reopen sometime in the near future so that our great new class members can have their graduation ceremony. There will be no school groups for the rest of this academic year, but if the park reopens, we can find many opportunities for nature interpretation with our new docents.

So...let's keep that positive attitude going and before long we'll all be back at our favorite nature center doing the



Thank You Toni

by Jim Crowley

Several weeks ago, our Native America Indian Artifact display case in the interpretative center was vandalized. Someone decided to toss a rock or some such thing into the glass and it was broken into a bazillion pieces. I contacted a glass shop in Newhall who had replaced one of the shelves before, and they informed me they could help us in July.... not before. Thanks a lot.

The cost was going to be probably about \$300 plus two techs labor for 3-4 hours, total, about \$800. Business must be great!

Two other local glass shops were contacted and seemed to be willing to help...not really... as they never called back to offer assistance.

Now you would think this is an easy job to replace the front glass in the case. No. The other time we replaced one shelf inside it took some glass professionals about four hours to disassemble the case. Just to insert a shelf.

So, what to do? Many thanks to Fred Seeley, for safely taking the artifacts home while we tried to develop a fix. There had to be a way!

My wife Toni was at the center one day, looked at it, and casually asked me why we don't turn the case around. The back had a glass panel and it would become the front. Brilliant! We turned the case, removed the black window tint and all we needed was any type of flat panel

on the back. I took a sheet of plywood painted it black, and with the help of Joe Morelli and Brian Broders we attached it to the back. It worked great. The structure of the case was now sturdy and we have access to the inside from the locked front sliding doors. Easy peasy, net costs about \$12 for the paint.... plus the usual rate for the Docent labor, really priceless. And much gratitude goes to Sue Wallander for reassembling all the artifacts.

Thank You Toni, my dear resourceful wife for your insight!





Team Project

by Denny Truger

The front door on the Walker cabin was in desperate need of repair. I mentioned to Herb Broutt that he should get hold of Ray Orloff to replace the door. Ray checked the door and suggested that we change the hinges to strap hinges, instead of changing the door.

This is where our new docent Joe Mortelli stepped in. He asked his wife, Cathy, who is a welder, to modify the existing hinges to a modified strap hinge.

The next day Joe installed the new hinges and the door works perfectly.

Thank you so much to Cathy and Joe Mortelli for your help!

Covid-19 Mid-April 2020

Why is this in the Rattler? You have no idea how often I have to pull out the old issues of the Rattler to find out what was happening at Placerita around a certain date. Let's call it "historical value"? I certainly hope that in a few years we will have all forgotten about this difficult time, and we will be slightly amused about all the drastic changes that happened so fast. I wish for you all, to stay safe and healthy.

Gas prices in Santa Clarita, \$2.69

School cancelled - yes, cancelled

Schools transitioned to distance learning.

Tape on the floors at grocery stores and others to help distance shoppers (6ft) from each other.

Limited number of people inside stores, therefore, lineups outside the store doors.

Non-essential stores and businesses mandated closed.

Parks, trails, beaches, entire cities locked up.

Entire sports seasons cancelled.

Concerts, tours, festivals, entertainment events - cancelled.

Weddings, family celebrations, funerals, holiday gatherings - cancelled.

Churches, Mosques and synagogues are closed.

No gatherings of 10 or more

Don't socialize with anyone outside of your home.

Shortage of masks, gowns, gloves for our front-line workers.

Shortage of ventilators for the critically ill.

Panic buying sets in and we have no toilet paper, no disinfecting supplies, no paper towel no laundry soap, no hand sanitizer.

Shelves are bare.

Manufacturers, distilleries and other businesses switch their lines to help make visors, masks, hand sanitizer and PPE.

Government closes the border to all non-essential travel.

Fines are established for breaking the rules.

Stadiums and recreation facilities open up for the overflow of Covid-19 patients.

Press conferences daily from the President and the governors. Daily updates on new cases, recoveries, and deaths.

Government incentives to stay home.

Barely anyone on the roads.

People wearing masks and gloves outside.

Essential service workers are terrified to go to work.

Medical field workers are afraid to go home to their families.

Sepulveda Basin Bird Walk

The docents never miss a chance to learn and to spend some fun time together.

RuthAnne Murthy made a reservation for our group to get a guided tour of the Sepulveda Basin, given by the San Fernando Audubon Society. We planned for early in the Spring so we could enjoy a bird walk, learn about the native plants and what is growing after the fire in one section of the park. We borrowed binoculars and got some instruction how to use them. Right away we spotted a few very active Great Egrets on the lawn! Good start.

We spent quite a bit of time around the lake where the wildlife was most active. We saw many white pelicans before their migration (they do not breed in LA), a huge cormorant nest up in the trees on the island (that was a special treat), many water birds (all sorts of herons and ducks), plus smaller passerines.

A lovely memory to savor, as so many programs had to be cancelled due to the Coronavirus closure of the Nature Center.





Eagle Scout Project

Placerita has always been a place of predilection for many Eagle Scout projects with the help and supervision of Frank Hoffman, Recreation Service Supervisor at Placerita. We are pleased to show you a part of the Eagle Scout project accomplished by Nicholas Humphus, Troop 94.

He refurbished the benches around the pond and in the Butterfly Garden, replaced benches along another trail, and made new trail markers.

Thank you, Nicholas! When the trails are opened we will be glad to check out your work.

Thank you for your help in keeping the place in great shape.

The Walker Cabin Centennial

Saturday October 24

COVID-19 put many restrictions on our way of life, and the Open House had to be cancelled. The next big celebration at Placerita Canyon Nature Center will be the Walker Cabin Centennial on Saturday, October 24.

The preparation for this big event started many months in advance and it is going to be a wonderful occasion to celebrate together after all the months of stress, quarantine and anxiety.

Jill Goddard outdid herself this time! We are used to her artistic talent, but she designed a really eye catching banner with the outline of the Walker cabins. This illustration will be used on posters for the event.

Thank you, Jill.



Missing Hiker Found Uninjured

That was the title of the Signal article written by Emily Alvarenga, who interviewed Frank Hoffman, Recreations Service Supervisor, at Placerita. This hiker was outside the boundaries of the State Park but it is good to take note of Frank's recommendations.

"There are a lot of natural things out there to be cautious of, but you never want to hike alone and don't hike in territory which you are unfamiliar. If something happens and you happen to trip and fall, no one is going to know where you are, up there by yourself. You've got to have somebody to back you up.

Make a plan and stick to it, wear the proper attire, bring a fully charged phone, compass, extra food and water as well as be aware of wildlife (snake season is here!), your surroundings and weather conditions."

While writing this article, I learned that there is no cell phone reception inside the Canyon (we all find that out very fast) but the phone reception is great when you are on top of the hills and the reception is unblocked. Something to keep in mind.



New Items in Our Gift Shop

By Gary Freiburger

Reusable water bottles available in clear or green can now be purchased in the Gift Shop. These are great for hiking or for just keeping a supply of water with you when you are out and about. They have a nice wide mouth that will let you load them with ice cubes, and a straw (removable) with a flip top for easy access to your water. Our PCNC logo is on each one, so they make a great souvenir or gift for visitors to the park. Stop by the Gift Shop and take one home!



News From Your Favorite Park

You will be happy to know that all the employees at Placerita are in the offices, they are all being maintained on the payroll. We are not taking this for granted in this very difficult time, we all extremely grateful for that.

The animals are being well fed and taken care, of so that is good to know. The county employees spend some time every day disinfecting faucets, door handles and telephones to protect one another. No visitors are allowed in the park, so that reduces the chance of contamination.

With our recent rains, there was some minor flooding in the gift shop, but that was quickly corrected. It is a long-standing issue, and a gutter drain needed to be installed to divert the water to the patio. That was done, and all is good now.

You will be happy to know that the stream is rolling along with plenty of water, and the Canyon Trail is holding on quite nicely with no mud slides. The stream is flowing in the same path as before, so no destruction is taking place. We do not take that for granted, as you know this has not always been the case.

The tortoises are awake and scratching around, but by mid-April they have not been taken outside yet. After all, we had 4 inches of rain this week! As soon as it is dry, they will go into their outside enclosure.

Easter used to be a madhouse at Placerita, with huge crowds of people, some even pitching tents along the stream. It will be very different this year. The county employees hope they won't have to police visitors out of the park. Because it is supposed to be a rainy Easter, maybe the weather will make it easier for people to obey the rules.

The county employees all miss the docents and the visitors to the park. It is a little bit lonely, and way too quiet. If you are hunkering at home and a little bit bored, know that you are not the only one.

Stay well and be safe everybody, we miss each other and remember this too shall pass.



Shirley Moreno Celebrated her 99th Birthday

By Herb Broutt

Shirley Moreno came to Placerita on February 25, 2020. She spoke to the new trainees, and told the class of 2020 how things used to be at Placerita. This was before there was a Nature Center and the bridge across the water.

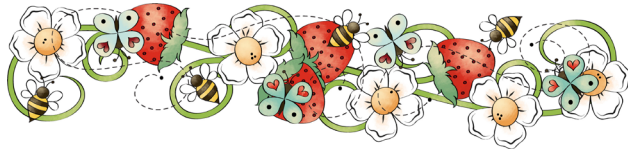
Shirley was a volunteer, not a docent. She worked with a group of mothers and teachers from the valley who were looking for a place to bring their kids and teach them about nature. The students were impressed, and Shirley was happy to answer their many questions.

After the class, 20 of the senior docents took Shirley out to lunch at Chili's (one of her favorite restaurants) to celebrate her 99th birthday. Shirley told me what a wonderful time she had. As she always said, Placerita is

a magical place.

Thank you for your visit, Shirley, and thank you for the many years you volunteered at Placerita answering the phone so that the county employees would not be tied to their desk by this duty.

We wish you the very best, and you are part of Placerita forever!



Meet Amy, Placerita Canyon's New Groundhog

by Frank Hoffman

Amy was transferred to Placerita on October 15, 2019 from the Wildlife Waystation, upon their closure. She was originally owned by Beney's Birds and Animals, and placed with the Waystation on February 21, 2018 as a retired movie animal. It's difficult to positively tell how old she is, but upon her transfer and subsequent stay there, we guesstimate her age to be at least three, presuming she was at least one when she arrived at the Waystation.

She's an "imprinted" Groundhog (also commonly known as a Woodchuck) that exhibits few wild behaviors except "duck and hide." It's somewhat difficult to see her, as she mostly sleeps under her shelter in enclosure #15 on the bird observation deck. Staff feeds her an herbivore diet daily, consisting of raw broccoli, yams, carrots and rodent chow.

That's right, rodent chow - like dog chow or monkey chow but for, well, rodents as she is one. Off the top of my head I can only think of one larger rodent here in the United States...the beaver!

Groundhogs are not native to California but are found in the mid-west and the eastern states, primarily in the most northerly areas. As such, they are a true hibernating mammal and she's no different. She took about a two-month nap after her arrival and settling in here, until awakening in mid-February.



She's up now and voraciously eating everything we give her (amounts which keep increasing), sharing only with the wild mice that get into her enclosure every night. She's full-grown length wise, but is fattening up with every meal.

We'll keep her as long as she lives and we're the only facility to have one, so please come down when the (viral) coast is clear and introduce yourselves to her!



News from Nature for Tots

The parents, the tots and the docents are all missing the programs that cannot take place during the covid-19 shut down. We were delighted to receive this note from one of the mothers:

Hello,

I just wanted to send a quick note to say that Kobe, my husband, and I miss your wonderful program. We hope that everyone involved is healthy.

Hoping to see you all in the near future.

Fondly,

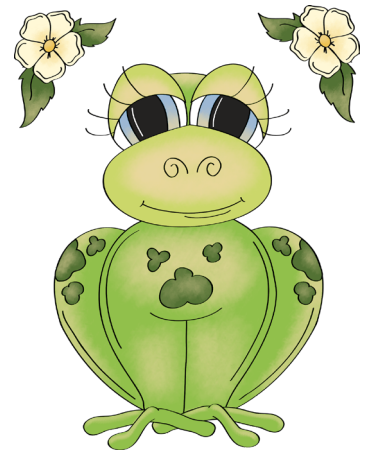
Jessica

Hello Jessica

Thank you for the nice note. We're all well and healthy. We miss doing the program and much as you miss it! I forwarded your note to all of the Tot's team. They all appreciated it and it put a smile on their faces.

Thank you

Nature for Tots



Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

With the nicknames of Our Lord's Candle and Spanish Bayonet, yucca is one of the common plants of the chaparral and coastal sage scrub. It is a member of the agave family. It blooms from April to June where it grows below the 5000 foot level. It is very fire resistant, and it is one of the first plants to recover after a fire when its base produces new leaves.

The leaves of the yucca are spear-shaped and grow up to 3 feet long. The needle-sharp leaves form a basal rosette. They are a yellow-green color.

The flowers are a creamy white with a delicate lavender tinge. The individual flowers are about 1-1 ½ inches long. They grow on compact panicles (clusters) that can be 3 feet long. The stems can grow upwards to 12 feet. Once the plant blooms, it dies and new ones grow around the dead "mother" plant. The seedpods produce small black seeds that look like watermelon seeds.

The Tegeticula maculate moth has a fascinating symbiotic relationship with the yucca. The yucca is the only larval plant for the moths' young, and the moths pollinate the flowers.

The yucca was one of the most important plants for the Native Californians. They gathered all parts of the plant for food. The flowers were eaten raw. The roots and the base were roasted in an underground oven. The delicate stems were steamed. The seeds were pounded into flour to be made into a gruel or flatbread. The roots and leaves contain saponin that when combined with water made a sudsy soap. The leaves were used to make cordage and sandals. The sharp points on the leaves were used as sewing needles, and dried leaves were used as paintbrushes.

It seems easy to take for granted this common plant, preferring the more spectacular and rarer ones. So next time you hike past a yucca plant, stop and consider this amazing trail treasure.



Hesperoyucca whipplei (current rename)
Yucca whipplei (old name)



Birds Have Viruses Too

Virulent Newcastle disease (VND), formerly known as exotic Newcastle disease, is a contagious viral avian disease affecting many domestic and wild bird species.

In the February- March 2019 edition of the Rattler, I announced that the birds in Placerita Canyon Nature Center had to be not quite in quarantine, but protected from the public, so Newcastle disease would not affect them.

Cases of Newcastle disease were spotted in many parts of California (cock fights were suspected). Affected birds must be euthanized to prevent the infection from spreading, so you can well imagine our anxiety.

One year later, we are in the same situation, as new cases of Newcastle disease are spotted here and there as soon as we think we would be safe showing our birds to the public. We are very happy that the precautions we have been taking are very successful and all our birds are fine.

Little did we know that all the humans, one year later, would be in the same situation because

of COVID-19.

Good luck to all of you, our feathered friends and our fellow human beings!

Updated Telephone List

by Glenda Perl, Membership Chairperson

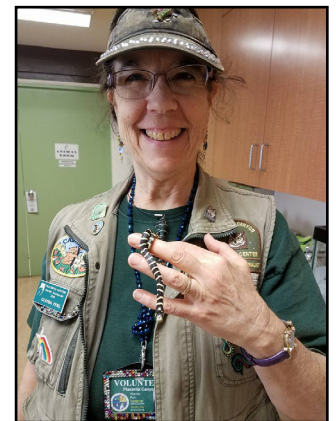
Glenda sent the updated telephone list, so that communication between Placerita docents would be easier during the COVID-19 virus, when everyone is hunkering down at home. Many docents are in the high-risk groups, and many live alone. The PCNCA support can be crucial at such a time. Without thinking of emergency situation, it is important for our mental health to be able to call each other. Thank you, Glenda Perl, for providing this important service. We care deeply for each docent.

Hello, all of you dormant docents (and praise-worthy, animal-saving county staffers)! During this unprecedented time in the history of our planet, everyone is finding interesting activities to pass the hours while we shelter in place.

Even though we are unable to visit parks, beaches, and so many other outdoor sites, we are encouraged to get outside for some fresh air and exercise (take a walk or a hike, ride a bike, or get your groove on dancing to your favorite music videos on You Tube in the comfort of your living room).

We want to stay connected with all of our friends at PCNC. In that regard, the updated PCNCA Phone List has been emailed to the docents. I ask that everyone review his or her individual information for accuracy. Please email any corrections to me.

Reach out and...email, text or phone a friend (NO touching!). I miss you all! STAY HEALTHY! STAY SAFE! STAY INDOORS (mostly)!





Bird Walk on March 7

by Rosemarie Regis

On this day, I woke up to a chilly morning with rain threatening, and I felt a little disappointed that no one would show up to our monthly Saturday Morning Bird Walk, perhaps even the birds might decide to stay tucked in? But we dressed up warmly in layers, with gloves, knit caps, and jackets with hoods, in case of rain.

We arrived at the Nature Center around 7:45 a.m. No one was there where we normally park, just in front of the building entrance. We proceeded to put on our hiking boots and don our binoculars, when within minutes cars began showing up all around us.

Suddenly, slight streams of sunlight shone through the clouds and birds began arriving, as if right on cue. I thought to myself, "It's going to be a awesomely fun day"... and it was!

Half of the participants were first timers, the other half and I thank God, were our hard-core birders and mostly regular attendees. We immediately started spotting all the different birds, so many that I could hardly keep up typing them into my cell phone notes.

Eventually, we had to leave this prime spotting area, to warm ourselves up. We headed up to the Ecology Trail, our normal path and where the sunlight first hits the Canyon.

We normally end the walk in the Picnic Area, but this day we ended the walk at the Oak of the Golden Dream, earlier than normal, when rain drops started falling on our heads.

Here is a list of the birds and particulars, we identified on this day:

Participants =17, Temperature 56-58 degrees, Rain= slight

1. California Scrub Jay
2. Spotted Towhee
3. America Robin
4. California Quail
5. Acorn Woodpecker
6. California Towhee
7. White-crowned Sparrow
8. Golden-crowned Sparrow
9. Dark-eyed Junco
10. Black Phoebe
11. House Finch
12. Oak Titmouse
13. Turkey Vulture
14. Wrentit
15. Bewick's Wren
16. Ruby-crowned Kinglet
17. Common Raven
18. Cooper's Hawk
19. Anna's Hummingbird
20. Pacific-slope Flycatcher
21. Band-tailed Pigeon
22. Lesser Goldfinch
23. Cassin's Finch
24. Wilson's Warbler
25. Bushtits
26. European Starling
27. Western Bluebird
28. Nuttall's Woodpecker

Once we are able to return to our normal lives and bird walks, I hope you will join us so we can share the beauty and excitement of finding and identifying these incredible little dinosaurs.



Who is Pat Coskran?

My name is Pat Coskran, and I'm part of the Docent Class of 2020. One thing I've learned is that lots of people don't know who a docent is and what they do. Well, I'm finding out—big time!

I grew up in the foothills of the San Fernando Valley and didn't know how good I had it as a kid—roaming through nearby woods: scaring deer, being scared by snakes, and lying on my back watching hawks soar overhead.

My wife Linda and I moved to Santa Clarita in 1987 to live near open spaces (shrinking every year) and to raise our daughter Shannon (now 36) and our son Sean (now 34). Yikes time flies. Sean has autism and developmental delays, and Santa Clarita's well-earned reputation for resources for those with special needs and their families was a definite draw.

Sean and I discovered Placerita Nature Center about 12 years ago when I was searching for a positive outlet for his boundless energy and curiosity about nature. Ian Swift (superintendent at the time), Frank Hoffman, Dave Stives and the rest of the staff welcomed us and accepted Sean, quirks and all—not to mention my quirks (just ask my wife). We found a place to volunteer and a home that allowed Sean and me to relax, work and learn. After being away for years, we started volunteering again on Mondays in

2019. Feels like coming home.

When I saw the posting for docent training, I thought why not? The training program has been surprisingly comprehensive with very engaging instructors who are passionate about their area of expertise. They definitely have their work cut out for them when it comes to teaching this old dog new tricks.

I retired in 2016 after teaching High School students with special needs for 15 years. I describe them as differently-abled not disabled. I started off thinking that I knew it all-- I would teach them what they needed to know. Slowly I realized that they were teaching me, by helping to slow me down and see things through their unique lenses. I wrote a book titled, "Growing Up With Sean" which chronicles my journey.

As a docent, I hope to share my new knowledge with visitors to Placerita Nature Center, and I'm sure they'll be teaching me too. Happy Trails!

What? Explain New Words

Tip of the Month by Cindy Gold

"The redolent pongs hark back to my inchoate fervor of alfresco."

What? It's English, but what does it mean?

As adults we sometimes forget that a child's vocabulary is not as extensive as ours or don't realize we are using words that are new to them. On a hike, basic words like: nutrients, pollinate, nectar, seedling, rodent and burrow may sound like a foreign language. In our enthusiasm to explain more, we actually explain less.

Take a moment to define words. Check if they know what a word means. Kids, just like adults, don't readily admit to what they don't know. Or sometimes they have a mistaken understanding.

To make it easy, at the beginning of a hike invite kids to ask if they don't understand a word you use. Compliment a child if he/she does ask for clarification.

Be watchful of their expressions, and if they seem puzzled or disinterested, take a moment to check if they understand, not by quizzing them, but by asking open-ended questions where they can safely share what they know, or have just learned.

Use metaphors, similes and concrete examples whenever possible, i.e., "The roots of a tree are like long, giant straws that suck up food and water from the soil." Or "Gopher tunnels are like a huge freeway right under our feet..."

So, what is the meaning of that opening sentence?

"The fragrant smells remind me of how I loved to play outdoors as a kid." Well, why didn't I just say that in the first place?



Placerita Canyon Park Closure Status

Placerita Canyon Nature Center is COMPLETELY closed until further notice, because of the COVID-19 virus. All programs have been cancelled. Call the park office at 661-259-7721 for further information or email your questions to info@placerita.org



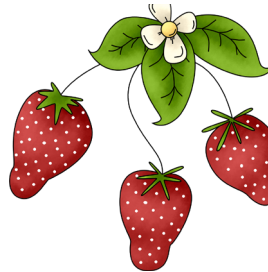
UPDATE FROM LA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION ON CLOSURES AND CHANGES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 DATED MARCH 23

As the County of Los Angeles works to stop the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (LA County Parks) continues to do its part to implement precautionary measures in response to COVID-19. We believe that the health and safety of our program participants, park guests, team members, and community are the top priority.

We recently had an influx of park guests and hikers at multi-use trails and natural areas, understandably so, to enjoy much-needed recreation during this challenging time. However, the large number of visitors made it difficult, and in some areas impossible, to maintain social distancing that is critical for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Out of an abundance of caution and in accordance with guidance from State and local health officials to prevent the spread of COVID-19, LA County Parks is temporarily closing the County multi-use trail system.

At this time, you can still enjoy time outdoors at your local park for passive use, such as walking, jogging, or leisure time outdoors for individuals or families. Social distancing is still required, and group gatherings are prohibited by the health order.



We thought We Could Prevent Cold Feet

We had 17 new Docents in training and we wanted to make sure they would not get cold feet once the training was over. Going on the trail with a school group can be intimidating, and young children can be just plain scary.

To help our new trainees, a mentor program was started and mentors went on the trail with the new docents, showing them the ropes and giving them support and confidence in their interpretive skills.

New docents had mentor support for their first forays into working in the gift shop, in the Interpretive Center, with the Nature Boxes and the Nature Tots.

Right after they finished their test, a Job Fair took place to provide the brand-new docents with information about all the opportunities for involvement at Placerita. 20 organizers represented their activities and contacts were passed out.

The new Docents, headed by trainee Gayle Tietjens, had decided to host a lunch to thank the Mentors, the Instructors and Docents who helped with the training. This was supposed to take place on Tuesday March 24. On Friday, March 13, Placerita Canyon Nature Center was closed because of COVID 19, and due to the virus groups of more than 10 people could not be gathering.

We suddenly entered a time of uncertainty and restrictions, with rules changing almost daily and all plans had to be cancelled. Having little control over the very fluid situation and the need for many of the docents to find shelter at home and quarantine themselves, all events had to be put on hold.

