



# 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 2021**

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

## Hello Nature Friends,

I have some fantastic news: Placerita Canyon Nature Center is going to reopen on May 1st. The park is open, and we have enjoyed many visitors. It will be wonderful to have the Interpretive Center, the offices, the classroom and the gift store reopened, and all the exhibits and displays to enjoy once more. I am certain there will be some restrictions as to the number of visitors inside the building at one time. Those numbers are still fluctuating, and we will have more information as the big day approaches. This is news that so many have waited for, for so long, that we can hardly believe it. But it seems to be a solid date at this time.

This newsletter is for May and June, and it will be the last newsletter of the season. Strange statement, but PCNCA usually follows the school year schedule from September to June. The schools were not in session this year, but many docents go away for the summer, it is hot, and our activities slow down. The Rattler takes a break for July and August because there is usually not too much news to report. After our forced inactivity because of Covid 19, that might change, and the docents are very excited to start the few programs that are available. You can follow our activities on our web page [www.placerita.org](http://www.placerita.org), or on our Facebook page. Have a great summer, and enjoy your new freedom from Covid 19, with safety in mind.



## LA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

Presents: Everybody Explores

Starting April 1st – Spring into Parks

Get outdoors, discover, explore and create. As part of the new and exciting “Everybody Explores Programs”, youth in LA County are encouraged to get outdoors and visit our Seven Nature Centers for free activities and workshops to discover, explore and create while learning about the natural world.

Everybody Explores:

Wednesday – Friday 2.30 pm – 5.30 pm. Drop in and play fun nature games

Saturday 10.30 am – 1.30 pm: Interactive display and take home activities for all ages.

Registration not required.

Everybody Explores encourage youth getting active by visiting our trails and staying healthy in a safe place. They will have access to caring staff, the chance to make new friends and simply laugh and have fun as all youth deserve to have the opportunity to do. Drop in, get outdoors, and learn about the natural world around you.

## Docent Enrichment

This program has been especially useful for our many docents stuck at home during the pandemic. RuthAnne Murthy took charge and gave us the chance to see each other on Zoom and learn about different topics. Garry Freiburger lent his expertise behind the computer, to make sure each meeting ran smoothly. Many docents decided to make a presentation in a setting a little bit less intimidating than standing in front of a large audience-filled room. We are delighted to see some programs have been allowed at the Center, but the on-line Docent Enrichment will keep on taking place as long as needed.

May 24: The topics will be Frank Hoffman presenting the rattlers, and Lori Wolfe will take you along the Manzanita trail (it is a steep hill, and you will not have to make the effort, but it is interesting to discover the trail that easy way).

June 28: Ron Kraus will take you to the site of the Placerita Plane crash that happened many years ago, and Ron did some in-depth research on the topic, so he has many details and photos to share with you. Glenda Perl and Sandra Cattell will take you on a hike on the Hillside and Hidden trails, so that is always fun.

This program is for docents only, so please read your email. You will be sent a Zoom link by Trails and Nuggets to be able to participate.

Thank you so much to RuthAnne Murthy and all the docents participating, who made the Docent Enrichment such a success.





### How did We get the Grizzly Bear at Placerita?

It is a great story, and it shows how the interest of a little girl can be so important and should be nurtured.

We received this bear from Sandy Tietjen in October 2005, and she told us the amazing story of how she became the proud owner of the grizzly bear.

Her grandfather had hunted this grizzly bear in Alaska in the 1950's. The skull had been removed, bleached and was hanging on the wall of her grandfather's house as a prize trophy. The taxidermied grizzly was standing next to the skull and Sandy, as a child, was always extremely impressed when visiting her grandfather. She even had a special chair next to the bear, and they would share time together.

When her grandfather passed away, nobody in the family wanted the bear and Sandy, then 18, claimed it for her bedroom. She thought "This beautiful and imposing creature died; I am not going to abandon it

now!" Her parents were perplexed by the new décor of their teen-aged daughter's room. When she went to college, she took the bear to her dorm (I guess the dorm rooms were larger at that time!).

When she was newly married, she was extremely excited at the first Halloween in her new home, to have the opportunity to give candies to the children. The first time the bell rang, she opened the door and 3 young boys around 6 years-old were standing at the door, their eyes were huge, and they stood petrified. They did not even ask for candies! Sandy had not noticed her bear was standing in front of her window. She said she was upstaged for the whole evening.

Why did she decide to give away the grizzly? Sandy was in the process of revising her insurance policy, and insuring the bear was becoming too costly. She thought about donating it to Placerita, and we are incredibly grateful she did.

Because of its middle size, our supervisor at the time, Ian Swift, estimated that it was killed at about 2 years of age, so it is a juvenile, not a full-size adult. During the reconstruction at Placerita, the bear and mountain lion found a safe haven in my guest room, away from the dust. I did not get too many guests that year!

The bear was put into a plexiglass enclosure to get more protection after some of its' claws were stolen. We are proud to be able to show what a young grizzly looks like, and we hope that many people will share the feeling of wonder and appreciation that Sandy had so many years ago.

### Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

Yerba Santa is a perennial shrub that grows in the chaparral and coastal sage scrub. It grows up to 9 feet tall, but is commonly about 4 feet tall. It prefers dry, rocky places on the south or west facing sides of slopes. Yerba Santa translates from Spanish to English as holy herb. It grows from sea level to about 4,000 feet in elevation.

The gray-green leaves of Yerba Santa are woolly on the top and bottom surfaces. The leaves grow from 3 inches to 6 inches long. The margins of the lanceolate shaped leaves are scalloped or toothed and are alternately growing on the stems.

Between April and June, the flowers grow in lavender clusters that are quite showy. The clusters measure up to 6 inches in diameter. The individual flowers are about ¼ inch wide.

Native Californians used Yerba Santa leaves in several ways. They steeped a tea from the leaves to treat coughs, colds, sore throats, asthma and tuberculosis. A poultice was made by pounding leaves into a paste and applying it to sores to promote healing. The leaves were chewed to increase saliva production that reduced thirst. Fresh leaves were used for bandages.

Currently, scientists at the Salk Institute are researching the potential use of Yerba Santa to treat Alzheimer's disease. Numerous flavonoids in Yerba Santa leaves look helpful in this regard.

It is easy to hike past this very common plant and think nothing of it. However, after learning about it, it is easy to say that it is a very important trail treasure.



Yerba Santa  
*Eriodictyon crassifolium*





## Spring Makeover for the Tataviam Dwelling

by Denny Truger

It's been 6 years since the Tataviam Village was last redone, and it was starting to show its age. So, I proposed to our PNC Board of Directors that we get it looking good for when the school children starting coming to the Center, when the pandemic restrictions ease.

It took about a month to get all the supplies that were needed. Dan Kott, Jack Levenberg, and Herb Broutt begged me to let them work on the village, so I could not say no! It took us three part-time days to return it to its' prior glory.

Along with the outside of the dwelling being refreshed, there are new rabbit skins on the drying rack. I invite everyone to come and check it out.



## Peonies 2021

by Sandra Cattell

Last chance to view the shy peonies on the Ecology Trail! They are one of my favorite flowers. Sometimes difficult to see because of the downward facing flower, but once you turn it's face up to get a closer view, you're hooked. A couple of years ago I was worried someone would "take" our peonies, so I took a few seed pods and spread them around, even hiding a few further back where casual visitors would certainly miss them. That was highly successful, which encouraged me to try it on a grander scale. With Glenda Perl, we took some seed pods and spread the seeds around, some out in the open, near the original plant, and some further back. Well, it appears that the amount of rain has a whole lot to do with the viability of those seeds; given our low rainfall it appears last year's work was in vain. However, we plan on another try this year so we can all enjoy more and more peonies!



## Braille Information for the Lyon's Oak

You might have noticed the oak stump on the trail, just before the cabin. A list of information was posted with dates of events corresponding to the rings on the stump so children and adults can better relate to the tree longevity.

Joe Morelli supplied Braille strips for the Lyon's Oak, showing the dates and events. Denny Truger installed them a few weeks ago. Thank you both Joe and Denny for making the visit to Placerita more inclusive for all our visitors, including people who are visually impaired.



## Shooting Our Virtual Hike Video Has Begun!

By Cindy Gold



Our first shots for the Virtual Hike video are "in the can"! My son Nathan, who is a professional cinematographer, and I hiked the Canyon Trail in the moonlight to a predetermined spot to shoot time lapse footage of the sun rising over the park. At around 6:00 am the sky started to lighten up and the park gradually woke up. Every six seconds the camera shot a frame and Nathan carefully adjusted the exposure to accommodate the extreme brightness of the rising sun with the surrounding dark rock faces, trees and foliage. We shot the sun rising in the sky until 8:10 am. Nathan will digitally enhance this footage to bring out all the details and highlights. We plan to use this time lapse footage in the opening of the video.

Then we hiked to the water tower on the Hillside Trail and used a drone to videotape arial shots moving high above the park revealing the canyon, trails and Nature Center. The wind was very strong making it tricky to maintain control of the flying drone. But Nathan was skillful and determined and we shot some beautiful footage of the park.

We plan to shoot the actual hike and our docent movie stars in April and finish the editing in May. Once completed, the video will be available to schools, the Sierra Club and other interested groups and individuals. Stay tuned for more production news!

## Deeper Dive into the Oaks of Santa Clarita

by Sandra Cattell



Our area of Santa Clarita is the home of four distinct oaks. The three found at Placerita Canyon Nature Center are the Coast Live Oak, the Scrub Oak, and the Canyon Live Oak. Close by, in the Santa Clarita Valley, you can find the Valley Oak.

Oaks have traditionally been classified as white oaks or red oaks. Red Oaks have pointy leaf tips with burrs or bristles, and the lobes of the leaf can be jagged. This category includes our Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). White Oaks have rounded leaf tips with rounded lobes, which includes the Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*) and our Scrub Oak (*Quercus berberidifolia*). [Quick aside about Scrub Oaks: Their name in Spanish is chaparro, from where we derive the word chaparral.] That leaves the Canyon Live Oak, with leaves that have the characteristics of both. It is known as a Golden Oak (*Protobalanus*)

Native Americans enjoyed the acorns of all these oaks, but different species of oaks produce acorns with varying quantities of tannic acid, resulting in variable palatability. The acorns of the white oaks like Valley Oaks are large and tend to have less tannic acid. (favored by deer). Additionally, they have shells that split when wet, making them easy to process and a favorite among early peoples. Although they tend to be smaller (very small in drought years), the Scrub Oak acorns were also harvested. Red Oaks, like the Coast Live Oak, have more tannic acid (which takes longer to remove). They are more labor intensive as it is difficult to release the nut from the shell. Canyon Oaks have the biggest acorns, and the tannic acid content is somewhere in the midrange.

All our oaks have acorns that are nutritious when properly prepared, with a healthy balance of fats, proteins and carbohydrates. They were a valued staple of the Tataviam, alone or mixed with local grains and berries. Although acorns are still eaten in many cultures, my first taste came at docent training, with jelled acorn mush prepared by Helen Sweeney. So, everybody, go plant oaks, and enjoy the fruits of our trees.



## Can a Raven Remember Who Treated It Fairly?

By Ken Yasukawa

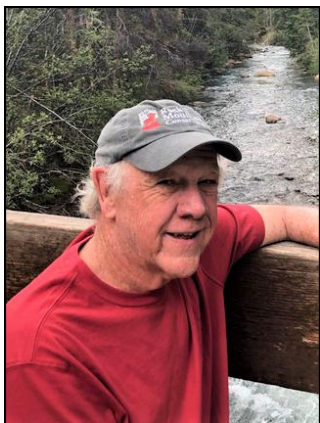
You may have heard people discussing which animal is smartest. Cognitive scientists are also interested in animal intelligence, but to them, an animal's behavior depends on what sensory information it can gather and how its nervous system processes that information. In the last several decades, we have learned a lot, and we now know that animals are not so different from people in their cognitive abilities. I wanted to describe one study of cognitive ability in ravens, a species of bird that we often see in Placerita Canyon.

The Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) is one of the most widespread birds in the world and it is prominent in the folklore of many cultures. For example, Native Americans of the Northwest believe that ravens created the earth, moon, sun, and stars, but they also regard it a trickster and cheater. Writers in Western cultures have often used ravens to symbolize death, danger, and wisdom. It is hard to think of another bird associated with so much myth and mystery.

Four Austrian cognitive scientists studied nine ravens that were raised in captivity to find out if they could remember people who treated them fairly. These scientists were looking at the very sophisticated concept of reciprocity—"I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." They chose to study ravens because they are known to have complex social interactions and an amazing memory. The scientists used something called an "exchange paradigm" in which each raven could trade a low-quality food item (bread) for a better one (cheese). These ravens interacted with people who were either "fair" (would exchange cheese for bread) or "unfair" (would eat cheese after taking the bread). Amazingly, the ravens remembered (preferred to interact with) the fair experimenters even a month later. This memory of direct reciprocity might be very important in the raven's social interactions within an "unkindness of ravens."

We now know that ravens form coalitions and exchange support, cooperate best with affiliates (friends), and stop cooperating with partners that cheat (refuse to exchange). Seems pretty smart to me!





## Placerita Nature Tots

by John Whitaker

After 50 years of full-time practice of real estate and land use law in Downtown Los Angeles, I retired and became a graduate of the 2018 docent class. My desire was to spend more time in nature and to share my love of nature with young kids. Thus, my pre-Covid docent activity was leading hikes for the elementary school kids when they visited the Park with their classes. I also joined the group organizing and implementing the newly-created Nature Tots program for kids 3-5 years old, led by Andrea Donner and Denny Truger with storytelling by Herb Broutt.

When the pandemic closed the Park to these activities, we decided to continue the Nature Tots program in Zoom format. It started slowly with about 9 or 10 kids joining, but word of mouth has us now at about 20 kids each month. Andrea is still our leader assisted by her talented husband, Richard, who handles all the critical computer issues. Our team of presenters in addition to Andy and me are Carol Mercado, Sandy Holloway, Sue Wallander and Brian Broders. Denny is our video presenter and Sondra Fox is our outside consultant.

Our programs take place on the second Saturday morning of each month, and are now open to older siblings as well as the targeted kids 3-5 years old. We had a fun program last fall on snails, which included an exciting snail race on a race track we created for the race.

A major part of each program is Sandy's craft segment. To each registered family, she sends the supplies they need for that month's craft. Carol creates and leads one or more fun physical activities for each program. We have also now included a treasure hunt as part of each program, tied to the program's theme.

Our 2021 program themes have been the California Quail, the Woodrat, the Birds of Placerita and Native Indians. The May program will be the Wild Flowers and Plants of Placerita and the June program will be Mountain Lions.

Even though I have now returned to part time legal work, I will always have time for our rewarding Nature Tots team and activities. We would welcome participation from other docents, and we hope that you will ask the parents or grandparents of any young kids you know to register for a future program.



## Donation in Memory of Roger McClure

by Gary Freiburger

Rosemarie and Don Regis have made a donation to the PCNCA Library in memory of Roger McClure. The "Baby Elephant Folio" edition of Audubon's Birds of America is bound in green leather and weighs over 15 pounds. It is autographed by Roger Tory and Virginia Marie Peterson and includes 917 illustrations, 482 in full color. The fold out illustrations allow almost full-sized representations of many species. The Petersons have reorganized the engravings in phylogenetic order, in a standard scientific classification sequence following the evolutionary history of each genetically related groups of birds.

Because of the value and fragility of this beautiful volume, it will be NON-Circulating. PCNCA members may view and use the book in the Nature Center but it must be used onsite. It will be kept under lock and key in the office. If you would like to see it, please check with Russ or Frank.

Thank you, Rosemarie and Don, for this beautiful addition to the library in memory of Roger.



## Board Member Election

for June 2021

by Jim Crowley

Just a reminder...again. Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (PCNCA) Board of Directors election will be June 5. There is still time for members to consider joining into the election as a candidate. Please contact Jim Crowley by May 10 if you are interested or have questions. The board is always looking for new ideas and input.

To make it easier, we will process the election for directors utilizing electronic methods. (or snail mail if you choose) And the best part is your talent...please share it.

In May 2021, all members will receive voting instructions with a ballot  
Thank You.



### **Nikki Dail – Docent**

Class of 1999

I was born in the early 1960's in a rural area of Riverside County that was considered horse country. My family lived there until 1979, when we moved to Hesperia. At that time, the area was still so undeveloped that we had Joshua Trees in our yard and in the surrounding area. My love of nature and outdoors began with my mom's large garden, fruit trees, flowers, chickens, rabbits, dogs, and the camping trips our family would take every other year to visit National parks in California, Oregon, Arizona, Utah, and Wyoming.

After graduating high school in 1981, I spent the next ten years attending various colleges in

Victorville, Riverside and San Luis Obispo until I moved to Santa Clarita, finally settled on a major that suited me, and earned a BS in Accounting at CSUN. Following graduation, I spent three years as an auditor in public accounting to obtain my CPA license. In 1995, I left for a position with Disney Studio Accounting. Fast forward 25 years, and I am still working for Disney in Corporate IT, looking forward to retirement in a few years.

While I have been visiting Placerita since I moved to the area in 1990, I never really got involved as a volunteer, as the docent training takes place on weekdays when I work. In 1998, I began volunteering as NCA Treasurer, and in 1999, I completed Eaton Canyon docent training, which was scheduled in the evenings. In 2015, an opportunity to volunteer at Placerita finally came up that suited my work schedule, when a volunteer was needed to manage the Trails & Nuggets e-mail communications. At some point, I transferred my docent membership to Placerita, which is closer to home. My recent attempt to transition the NCA Treasurer role to another docent did not work out, so I will continue taking on this role to ensure all of the non-profit reporting gets done until someone else volunteers.

I currently share my home with my husband Corey, and two parrots, Gabby & Dusty. However, anyone who knows me, knows that my passions are hiking, birds, and travel. For me, perfect happiness is when I can combine all three, and my travels have taken me hiking and birding on all seven continents and some of the highest mountains on the planet. I have also had the privilege to share my love of adventure and photography through several presentations of my travels at the Placerita Community Education events over the years.



### **Plant Nursery**

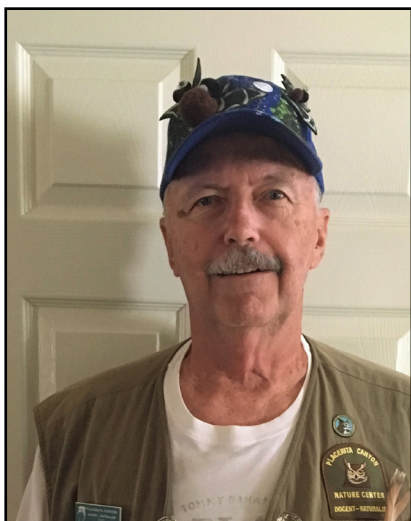
by Chuck Lingo

One of the resources available to PCNCA docents is the Plant Nursery. Over time, we have used it for education of park visitors, propagation of local plants, and more.

Unfortunately, last year while access was so limited, the Nursery became quite a jumble. Wind, and disuse caused it to be pretty much unusable.

Several of us got in there recently and got the area ready for use once again. I want to thank Dave Taylor and Brian Broders for their help in getting this done. Hopefully, as we move forward this year with increased activities, our fellow docents can add that resource to their tool kit as much as they need. Earth Day was April 22, the Docent programs are just starting and we expect the Nursery will play a role!

Thanks again to Dave and Brian for their labors!



### **The Docent Programs are Starting Again**

by Dave Taylor

The Department of Parks and Recreation has approved the PCNCA Nature Box Program, along with the showing of various birds and snakes. This is the first activity to start since COVID-19 restrictions began lifting. The program will be available every Friday and Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Docents will exhibit and explain to the visitors the fun details inside the various Nature Boxes. The boxes are for all ages. In addition, docents will provide information on the birds located in the patio area. There is a scavenger hunt for kids, using items found in the park.

This is the first opportunity for our Senior Docents to get reacquainted with new Docents, and for new Docents to get involved in the Placerita Nature Center activities. All the safety requirements will be followed with sanitizer, masks, gloves and wipes provided.

At various times, one of the Nature Center birds will be brought out along with one of the various snakes that the center has on display. This will add a lot of excitement to the program. The docents will have a fun time and it gives them an opportunity to socialize with each other, visitors, and families. Docents are so glad to be back!