



# 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**

**September-October 2021**

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

## Hello Nature Friends.

We have had a very hot summer, but hopefully the temperature will cool down now that Fall is on its way.

The programs at the Nature Center slow down in the summer while many docents are traveling, but fall brings us back in full force. We will start with a Docent Kickoff planned by Ron Kraus so that the docents can sharpen their skills and memories. Some schools have approached us and want to make reservations for school trips to the Nature Center, so that is very good news. We cannot wait to welcome the children again.

The Covid virus prevented us from planning large group activities at the Center, but we are very hopeful for the future. We are planning to have our much-loved Craft Fair on December 4 and 5th. The classroom gets filled up with all kinds of greenery, seeds and pods and people can make their own Holiday wreaths. The children have their own crafts to do, and it is always a great success.

We are also planning to have docent training in January to train a new group of volunteers to become Placerita Docent Naturalists. Give us a call if you want to put your name down on the list.

However, at the present time, we are still dealing with the Delta virus so the current county guideline mandates that all individuals going inside the building, regardless of their vaccination status, wears a mask.

If you take part in a large group activity, even outdoors, many visitors and docents take the precaution of wearing a mask as a personal choice.

We hope that the restrictions will be lifted in the coming months but with some precautions, we are going to be able to enjoy Placerita during the fall. It is one of the best times of the year to be on the trails with friends. Happy fall to you!



## Cindy Gold, Volunteer of the Year

We made a major life change on Thanksgiving 2017 when we moved into our new home in Santa Clarita after living overseas for 27 years. After the holidays, my husband Mike was transitioning and flew back to manage his business in the Balkans. I knew very few people here, except for our two sons who live in Los Angeles and the Bay area.

Though I was happy to be back home in the states, I had to adjust because it seemed a bit foreign after so many years abroad. Then I showed up for a Bird Walk and discovered the PCNC. Within days I jumped into docent training. Suddenly I was surrounded by people who love nature, enjoy making new friends, and have a love of life. I felt at home.

Having worked as an elementary teacher and principal, I love taking children on hikes and teaching them about nature. I am honored to be

part of the Board to help maintain our volunteer programs and initiate new projects.

As a past writer/director/producer in TV and film, it's been a joyous adventure to work with other docents to create our virtual hike video Let's Go On a Hike. I had to dust off past skills and loved the synergy of working with a cast and crew who contributed their unique talents and time.

Hiking together, exploring museums and gardens, learning about nature and volunteering with other docents has enriched my life. Placerita Canyon Nature Center is not just a place, it's a community and I feel blessed to be a part of it.

## Recognition Event

The Nature Center Associates of Los Angeles County will hold the annual meeting and badge ceremony the morning of Saturday, September 11, 2021, at the Eaton Canyon Nature Center's Outdoor Classroom. Badges for years of service will be given out and there will be a recognition to the Docent of the year.

Masks will be required at this event (except while eating). Guidance from LA County staff is that there will be mandatory temperature checks on entrance and a waiver to sign.

Coffee, juice, and pastries will be available at 9:30 a.m.; the meeting will begin at 10 a.m. A light lunch will follow at approximately 11:30 a.m.

If we know you are coming, we will assign you a parking space. We hope you can join us. RSVP needed



### Movies at Placerita

July 17th was the first time in more than a year and half, that the PCNCA Docents could get together at the ACORN Amphitheater. Great music, tasty food, and a movie about squirrels on a warm summer night with bats flying in the sky made the docents very happy, finally.

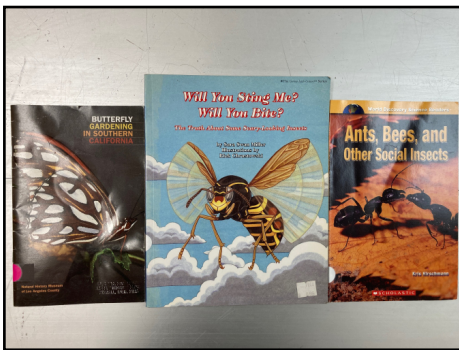
Special thanks goes to Bill Kahl and his brother who played nonstop for a full hour, with great stamina, and even got us to do a singalong of "Brown Eyed Girl." They were fantastic, and started the evening with excitement in the air while we were having our picnic.

Thank you again to all who helped with the technology involved to provide the screen and make sure the projection and sound were faultless in the amphitheater. Thank you to all who took the time to make the movie selection. It was beautifully filmed and very interesting. We learned many facts in a pleasant manner, and we do not take that for granted. All ages were spellbound.

Thank you to all the cooks who prepared the picnic, and thank you also to all the docents and families who came to share this evening. This year and a half has been deeply challenging on so many levels, so the opportunity to be together, enjoying each other's company in the safety the outdoors made the summer evening very special.

To finish the evening on a very "Placerita" note: the docents who stayed late had the privilege of spotting a fox coming to check the garbage can in the parking lot! Always something exciting happening at Placerita!

Dates planned for future movies are August 21st, September 18th and October 23rd. The movies are not open to the general public because of the Covid restrictions, they are reserved for the docents and their families.



### Three New Books and Donations

by Garry Freiburger

Two new books for older children have been added to the collection. One of them is, "Will you Sting Me? Will you Bite? The Truth About Some Scary-Looking Insects." This beautifully illustrated book will teach children which insects might hurt them and which won't. It's a great antidote to "insectophobia"!

The second book is, "Ants, Bees, and other Social Insects". It's a short book, but at a

higher reading level. It explains the social behavior of these wonderful creatures.

Another new book is, "Butterfly Gardening in Southern California" published by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. This small pamphlet has a few tips on plants that attract butterflies, and additionally identifies many varieties of butterflies and caterpillars. It is filled with colorful photographs.

### Donations

We are grateful for donations to the library. Remember, however, that the purpose of the library is "provide a source of reliable information of use to the PCNC docents as they interpret the flora, fauna, history, environment and ecology of Placerita Canyon and, in some cases, California and beyond." Books that don't meet these needs will be donated to the public library.



### The Acorn Granary Sign

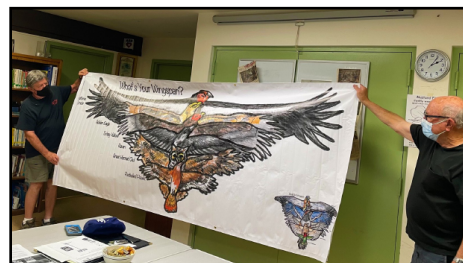
Our feathered friends and the PCNCA are fortunate to have Ken Yasukawa as a new 2020 docent. Ken is a retired college biology professor specializing in ornithology, the study of birds. Ken and Rosemarie Regis lead monthly bird walks at the Nature Center on the first two Saturdays of each month. Along with Denny, Ken organized the text for the sign, got it printed at the sign shop then brought it to the Nature Center.

On August 2nd Denny Truger, Pat Coskran and Pat's son Sean installed the new sign next to the Acorn Granary. It explains what a granary is, and how it is used by the acorn woodpeckers to safely preserve their food supplies.

A few months ago, they secured the granary with concrete and rebar, so it is now safely anchored and won't fall again.

It was a long hot day involving much digging and pouring concrete, but it is a job well done as usual with this great team. Thank you all.

We hope our visitors will enjoy reading the sign and will learn a little bit more about the granary.



### The "Wingspan" Banner

by Sue Sutton

We now have a wonderful "Wingspan" banner that will be available to use with school groups and for open house. Our young visitors can compare their "wingspans" with those of our local birds. Our very own Jill Goddard designed this beautiful banner. We are so fortunate to have talented and generous docents that share their gifts with Placerita Canyon Nature Center.





## Nature Tots Program

*We received this letter from a dad who was incredibly pleased about the experience his two young daughters received during the Nature Tots program conducted on Zoom since the start of the pandemic.*

Hi Placerita Canyon Docents,

We are looking forward seeing the Nature Tots program again this week. I do not know if the program will continue through the summer, but we are moving to the east coast at the end of this month, so this might be our last time to enjoy Placerita.

We have loved these past several months getting to learn about the rich wildlife at Placerita Canyon while having fun with the crafts and activities. Thank you all for making this difficult year special for our little girls!

It is no exaggeration to say that many of the happiest and most memorable moments for my girls over the last 12+ months have been at Placerita Canyon. From visiting the birds of prey on exhibit (especially the long-eared owl), to finding three *Motixia monica* millipedes in March, to recently finding tadpoles and baby frogs along the Canyon Trail, and to meeting Ranger Frank and seeing how incredible he is with young kids like my daughters—we have made some wonderful memories over the past year! Thank you for educating my daughters and the other children in the virtual and in-person programs! We will never forget Placerita Canyon, and we will visit again whenever we can.

We were delighted to read this. The Nature Tots program is a free program given every 2nd Saturday of the month; it lasts for one hour. During the pandemic this program could not be given “live” but was provided on Zoom. It required many rehearsals to smooth out the technical challenges and to learn new and fun ways to deliver this education to the little ones, while keeping their attention.

Here are the core people working together to make this program possible

Sue Wallander  
Carol Mercado  
John Whitaker  
Brian Broders  
Sandy Holloway  
Sondra Fox  
Richard and Andrea Donner

Here are some other wonderful contributors to the program.

Denny Truger  
Herb Broutt  
Jack Levenberg  
Linette Brammer  
Melanie Golder  
Melissa Rocha  
Joan Fincutter  
Rachael Komulainen

It does take a village, and thanks to you, Nature Tots happened even during the pandemic. Thank you all for your dedication.

The Nature Tots program is stopping during the summer but will start again in the fall. We will be having a Tots Planning meeting in mid-August, so watch for the date and time.

## LET’S GO ON A HIKE Video is Completed!

By Cindy Gold

Our video Let’s Go on a Hike is ready for the silver screen! All thanks to the efforts of our cast and crew: Herb Broutt, Glenda Perl, Erica De Poor, Gary Freiburger, Dan Duncan, Jack Levenberg, Ron Kraus, Jim Crowley, Dan Kott, John Whitaker, Dave Taylor, Fred Seeley and Cindy Gold. In fact, you’ll be able to see it at the world premiere on Saturday, August 21 in the Acorn Amphitheater.

We are currently working on distribution to schools and other interested groups. Ruth-Anne Murthy and Sandra Cattell are helping create a Teacher Guide and Lesson Plans to be used in the classroom. A link to the video will soon be available on our PCNCA website.

To celebrate its completion, we had a fun-filled Wrap Party where the movie was screened, along with a collection of “Bloopers” that brought back fond and funny memories. The red carpet was rolled out and everyone received Oscars for their talent and participation.





## Lessons from the Drought

by Gary Freiburger

In late June my wife, her sister and I joined RuthAnne Murthy for her monthly "Blooms of the Season" walk. I know that RuthAnne was disappointed because there were not too many flowers to be seen. However, she more than made up for it by explaining how drought has affected Placerita Canyon.

We saw Sycamore trees with leaves much smaller than normal. This prevents excess evaporation while balancing the need to gather sunlight. We learned about plants that are "summer deciduous," meaning they naturally lose their leaves during the summer when it is hot and dry – another way for the plant to conserve its water supply. Some flowering plants simply do not germinate at all without the normal supply of rain. These plants will bide their time until the rains come. Other plants looked now as they normally would in the fall. They just went dormant, hoping to try again next year.

We saw large Holly-leaf cherry bushes with no cherries on them which is another way for the plant to conserve water. This led to a discussion of the drought's effect on animals. Normally we would see coyote scat with plenty of cherry pits in it. This year the coyotes will have to look elsewhere for food. Then we found cherry bushes with plenty of cherries! Where? Next to the dry stream bed, a reminder that water is often flowing underground. We noticed that many of the plants near the creek looked healthier than those further away.

It was not the Blooms of the Season walk that RuthAnne had hoped for, but it was a great lesson for all of us about how plants naturally cope with a lack of water. Here is hoping for rain in our future!



California Wild Rose  
*Rosa californica*

## Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

California wild roses grow in 3–9-foot thickets along shady riparian areas. They are often tangled with black berries or poison oak. The branches are gray-brown and covered with flat, curved thorns. They grow at altitudes below 6,000 feet. They are the cousins of strawberries, apples, almonds and other fruits.

The lovely rosy-pink flowers bloom from May to August. Each flower has 5 petals and many stamens. The flowers are from 1-2 inches in diameter. They produce a wonderful fragrance that lights up the trail.

The leaves are a rich dark green. They are oval with saw-toothed margins. They are slightly hairy. The leaves are in groups of 5 or 7 leaflets that are arranged pinnately, side-by-side. Each leaflet is about 3/8-1 3/8 inches long.

The seed pods of the California wild rose are called rose hips. Each rose hip produces one seed. They are bright red and about 5/8 inch in diameter. They are extremely high in vitamin C, and they can be eaten fresh, but often are dried for future use.

Native Californians used all parts of the wild rose for medicine. It was often used as a children's curative. The dried petals were ground into a powder to treat rashes and chafing. The rose hip tea was used to treat colds and to rinse eyes. The tea was calming and was given to treat anxiety. On a different note, children would make necklaces from the ruby rose hips. The tea was also used as a sweetener.

You will find California wild roses on the Canyon Trail. Their rosy faces are so welcoming, and they are a trail treasure you don't want to miss.

## Placerita Canyon

Nature Center Associates (PCNCA)

Board of Directors Election Results

by Jim Crowley

We are pleased to present the results of the PCNCA Elections on June 1, 2021 for votes cast on or before May 31, 2021.

The Corona Virus presented concerns for the second year. We again cancelled our end of the year potluck which would have included a general membership meeting, Board election results, and a live Board of Directors meeting. The election was conducted electronically through an e-mail process, ballot box, and submittal of votes via the US Mail. The membership votes were accumulated from 53 members spread between 9 candidates and one write in. The Election Committee sorted and tallied 302 vote choices and conducted an in-person meeting on June 1, 2021. The results were reported to the Board of Directors on June 1, 2021.

A special shout-out goes to our election committee consisting of Mara Cohen, Jim Crowley, and Jackie Thomason. They arranged the system and conducted the election. We salute those voting members with a big Thank You!

## 2021 Board of Directors Voting Results:

Voted as Directors for a two-year term through May 2023 are Denny Truger, Sue Sutton, Cindy Gold, Gary Freiburger, Ken Yasukawa, Joan Fincutter.

Erica de Poor, and Chuck Lingo were elected as Alternate Directors for a one-year term.

Continuing Board members previously voted through May 2022 are as follows: Fred Seeley, Ron Kraus, Rick Brammer, Herb Broutt, Jack Levenberg and Bill Webber.







### Update On the Gift Shop

by Teresa Jacobs

With all the exciting things going on at the Nature Center, none is closer to my heart than the gift shop which reopened on May 1. So many people were glad to see that door open again!

Before the reopening, I was allowed to take an inventory of the mess left by our little four-legged friends. Those friends left a lot of their scat and chewed up a lot of paper. Fortunately, all the products stored in the cabinets were undamaged.

Thank you to the volunteers who cleaned up, dusted, washed floors and restocked. The shop is all ready for our summer visitors! The gift shop was honored at the last board meeting for the profits already made in less than 2 months...so we're looking forward to the rest of summer.

Between the hot weather and family vacations after being homebound for so long, the summer months will likely have much less traffic to the gift shop. When there is a plan for the park to open up to schools, I will set up some training days for those who are willing to staff the shop to support those tours.



### Thank You, Dave Taylor and Brian Broders

from the Board of Directors

*Dave Taylor and Brian Broders worked tirelessly throughout April and May to make this program a success! One if not both were here every day. Even when it was over 100 degrees, they were here to make sure the kids who came to Placerita Nature Center had a great experience. The Board of Directors wants to recognize them for their tremendous dedication and work with a certificate of appreciation and a gift card.*



### Recognition Award for Brian Broders and Dave Taylor

By Dave Taylor

Brian Broders and Dave Taylor provided support to the nature center for a County Parks program called "Everybody Explores", offering after-school activities. This took place from April 1 – May 29, every Wednesday through Saturday.

They displayed several Nature Boxes as well as doing two nature hunts they developed for the kids. One hunt was in the park and one related to the interpretive center and classroom. When the kids completed their hunt, they would bring back their nature hunt paper indicating what they found, and they received a Placerita Nature Center Pin. Some days were a little slow, but as word got out about the nature hunt more families showed up.

"We gave out about 350 pins and had trouble making them fast enough. Both the kids and parents loved the activity," said Dave. "It was a great feeling to see how this nature hunt enhanced their visit. Some parents commented that this was the first time their kids hiked around the park without complaining. We would call that a rousing success!"



### On a Bird Walk with Rosemarie Regis

During this past year and half, many of us felt frightened and paranoid if we had to go out on errands or to appointments. We wore masks, carried disposable gloves and hand sanitizer whenever we went anywhere. It was a sad, scary and different world out there.

Keeping in touch through social media, helped some. But walking outside, hearing the calls and songs of the birds is always reassuring to me. Watching the aerobatics of the hummingbirds, is always such great entertainment.

Now that Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted for us, we can return to our "normal" activities, (which I will never again take for granted). We are so happy to return to our Bird Walks.

If you have never been to a bird walk before, now is the perfect time to come, view and learn about the many beautiful birds that frequently visit or live full time in the Canyon. All you need is a pair of binoculars, comfortable clothes, hat or visor, walking shoes, sunscreen and water.

I will meet you at the front steps of the Nature Center at 8 a.m., on the first Saturday of each month. I cannot wait to meet you.



### Rescued Birds Displayed at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center

By Dave Taylor

In our continuing effort to update information in our kiosks, there is a new exhibit in the kiosk located on the patio. The display shows photographs and identification tags for most of the rescued birds at the Nature Center. This answers the question that many visitors ask, how many birds do we have?

Sue Sutton coordinated the effort, as well as providing the identification tags, and Dave Taylor provided the photographs.

We hope this will be a great source of information, as most visitors only see the birds that are on permanent display. This exhibit will help them understand that the Nature Center provides support for other rescued birds.

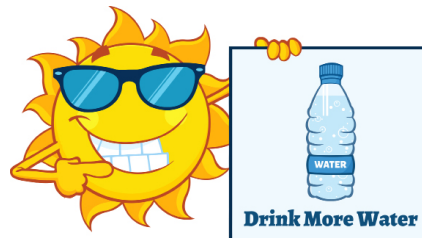


### Field Trip to Tesoro Historic Adobe

On July 26, the docents went on a local field trip to the Tesoro Historic Adobe. This trip was planned by RuthAnne Murthy with Charitha Eragoda's participation as our private tour guide.

Congratulations on your new position as Recreation Service Leader, Charitha! The building is very interesting, much larger inside than we expected, and containing some fascinating memorabilia. The Park is lovely, the back of the adobe stands on top of a large grassy area with a rose garden and is the site for many weddings. The Tesoro Adobe was built and owned by noted western film actor Harry Carey, during the 1920's and 1930's. During Carey's prolific career, he is credited with at least 233 movies. The western movie elite including John Wayne, William S. Hart, and Gary Cooper visited Tesoro Adobe.

A very large group of docents came on this field trip, we have missed each other's company greatly, and it was a great chance to be together. Even if the masks came down for a group photo, they went back up quickly and were requested inside the building. The day was overcast and cooler than the previous weeks, so it was a very pleasant visit. We learned many details about this local history from Charitha, and it was a joy to be together.



### Docent Enrichment INSIDE the Nature Center.

June 28 2021 was a big day at Placerita, because it was the very first time in a year and a half that the docents could get together inside the building for the educational purpose of Docent Enrichment.

We cannot yet accommodate programs for the public, and many docents wore masks for extra protection. During the pandemic, RuthAnne Murthy, who oversees the program, managed to provide presentations via Zoom for the docents, who were locked at home. While she did a fantastic job all this time keeping us informed and in touch with each other, as well as making sure we were getting the proper education, she was very relieved to have face to face interaction and not to have to deal with the technical aspects of the Zoom presentation. Thank you so much to Nikki Dail who helped with the Zoom during her lunch break at work, and to Gary Freiburger who took over and even made the board meetings

possible.

As introduction, Fred Seeley and Cindy Gold gave us some updates on the situation at Placerita, and talked about future activities.

Ron Kraus made a remarkably interesting presentation about "Flight 7 - Lost in History found in Newhall, The story of the Western Air Express Flight 7." That plane crashed around Los Pinetos in 1937. Ron always prepares with great care, had interesting movies about the passengers, several books about the passengers and the plane itself, some artifacts and even magazines of the era. The stories and the fact that the plane crashed above Placerita Canyon made it even more compelling.

Snack time was a little bit different than in the past, because the docents brought only store bought and individually wrapped snacks, but it was so wonderful seeing and hugging each other. RuthAnne knew that we badly needed to catch up, so she allowed 30 minutes instead of the usual 15 minutes for social time. But she still had to switch the lights on and off to bring the crowd back to their seats!

We finished the morning with a nice presentation by Sandra Cattell and Glenda Perl about the Hillside and Hidden trail. Thank you all, it was genuinely great to be together again!



# **Docent Training Placerita Canyon Natural Area**



## **Become a Docent!**

- *Learn about the natural environment*
- *Teach children about nature*
- *Make a difference in your community*

No special background needed,  
just a willingness to attend training and to volunteer at least twice a month.

**Training Starts Tuesday, January 11th, 2022**  
Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 12 Noon

Docents attend a 9-week training program. Topics include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history, and interpretive techniques. Instructors include noted professionals in the various fields. The cost of the training is \$45, which includes all training materials (instruction manual, field guide, T-shirt, and related items.) Minimum age for Docents is 18. Visit our website ([placerita.org/docents-volunteers/](http://placerita.org/docents-volunteers/)) for further information regarding the Docent program.

Other volunteer opportunities are also available at Placerita Canyon Natural Area that don't require the 9-week training program—call the Park Office at (661) 259-7721 and ask for the Volunteer Coordinator.

**For further information call Placerita Canyon Natural Area, (661) 259-7721  
or Email [ron@placerita.org](mailto:ron@placerita.org)**





### Jackie Thomason

I was born in Burbank, California and grew up in the San Fernando Valley. At that time, shortly after World War II, many housing developments were springing up where farmland had once existed. I lived in just such a development. Across the street from my house were open fields where jackrabbits and coyotes were a common sight. A marsh full of pussy willows, cattails, and tadpoles was right out my front door. In those days, I was allowed to roam freely, and I spent many happy hours playing, exploring, and discovering nature all by myself.

As I grew up, got married, and raised two sons, the agricultural land and open spaces where I lived were disappearing. The Santa Clarita Valley beckoned, and my family moved here in 1978. During this time, I had continued with my education and finally received my teaching credential in 1985. That same year I began working for Saugus Union School District and continued to do so until my retirement in 2010.

One year, I accompanied my class of second graders on a field trip to the Placerita Nature Center. Before that, I had not known that Placerita even existed. "Wow," I thought, "This place is so cool!" That day my class and I learned so much and had such a great time. The docents were extra nice and extremely knowledgeable. I was impressed with everything I saw. But I was busy and did not make it back to the Nature Center for many years.

Then one day, finding myself retired and wondering what to do with some of my free time, I saw a banner on a nursery fence announcing the docent training class of 2011. I signed up immediately, took the excellent classes that were offered and have been a proud docent at Placerita Nature Center ever since.

Over the years I have been able to participate at the center in many ways, including helping to teach trail techniques to new docents, volunteering in different capacities at the annual open house, serving on the board of directors as an alternate, and for the last three years, serving on the election committee. But my favorite activity has been to guide school groups in the discovery of the wonders of nature, just like the docents had done for my class and me many years before.



### PCNC Bird Walks

8:00 a.m.

First and Second Saturday of Each Month

My name is Ken Yasukawa. I am a Docent-Naturalist at Placerita Canyon Nature Center (PCNC) and a recent transplant to Southern California, but I have been interested in birds for 50 years.

At first, I knew almost nothing about birds and could only recognize a handful of species, but with lots of help and many bird walks, I learned to identify hundreds of species, although not the birds of SoCal. So, I joined bird walks at PCNC and, with the help of local birders, I learned the birds of Placerita Canyon.

I am now paying my experience forward by leading walks myself. I hope that you will join us—you do not need any experience, but you will need a pair of binoculars, a water bottle, and, of course, an interest in birds.

## Fall Programs

### Bird Walks:

First Saturday of every month with Rosemarie Regis

Second Saturday of every month with Ken Yasukawa.

From 8am to 10 am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.

### Blooms of the Season with RuthAnne Murthy:

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 4th Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program call 661-259-7721 or 259-7832

### Family Nature Walk

with Judy McClure: Every Saturday from 11.00am to noon. An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history

### Placerita Nature Tots:

Age 3-5 Nature Tots is cancelled for September and on hold for October

### Recognition Ceremony:

Eaton Canyon Nature Center (for docents and family) September 11 at 9.30 (RSVP required)

### Monthly Movies Nights:

Acorn amphitheater - open to the public- Bring a picnic basket and join the fun. August 21 at 7.00pm – September 18 – October 23rd – Time will change according to sunset.

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