



The Rattler

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

January-February 2026

Editor: Evelyn Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber

Hello Nature Friends,

The year 2015 started in a tragic fashion. We were caught in a few violent windstorms, the electricity was cut off to the nature center for safety reasons, and we learned with great sadness that Eaton Canyon Nature center had burned to the ground, and docent training had to be cancelled. We were deeply concerned and a little bit anxious.

The rain was delayed and Spring came as usual, more school groups than ever before came on school trips and their enthusiasm was catching.

A group of docents decided to take the cabin as their special project and brought new life to the ancient building. Open House was very well attended. We had fun movie nights outdoors in the amphitheater until late in the fall with blankets, hot cocoa and many families enjoyed those evenings. We just finished 2 days of the most successful Craft Fair ever and it was a joy seeing all the docents working hard as a team, having fun and the visitors enjoying this special event, sharing in the excitement. The next class of docent training is going to take place on January 13.

We have so much to be grateful for, nature never disappoints, the park in every season is a source of joy and magic for everyone walking on the trails.

We wish you all the very best for 2026, may you enjoy the beauty and peace around you and thank you for your interest.



"We Did It"

by Lori Wolfe

2025 has been quite a year for our school tours. As of November 13, 2025, we have hosted 38 schools. They brought a total of 1,766 school kids, chaperones and teachers. To coordinate this with the Los Angeles County office staff and our many willing and able docents is something that might seem daunting but always seems to work out. Sharing our beautiful Placerita Canyon Nature Center with these students is a very uplifting experience!

Lori is very humble, but I must add that she is the contact with the schools wanting reservations. We reach full capacity months in advance. As the date comes closer, Lori has to plan the proper number of docents to take care of the children. The program lasts a little bit longer than 2 hours. There is a presentation about the circle of life and some live animal presentations, then the children go on the trail with a docent to learn about botany, geology, and history. But, most of all, they have a great time enjoying nature. Thank you, Lori, for all your work and the fantastic result.

Happy
New Year!
2026





The fall sessions of Books & Hikes were epic!

For October 2025, Books and Hikes presented *Trailed: One Woman's Quest to Solve the Shenandoah Murders*, by Kathryn Miles. This was a 'cold case', involving backpackers Lollie and Julie, who were murdered by a serial killer in 1996, while camping at Shenandoah National Park. The crime was finally solved in 2024, through DNA analysis. We hiked the Heritage Trail to the Disney property line, passing ghostly props along the way. B&H addressed the murders as a 'cautionary tale' and provided suggestions for camping safety.

The Books and Hikes Grand Finale was held on November 23, 2025. Our last meeting for 2025 featured the book, *Tree*, by Melina Watts. The novel follows the creation and development of a Coast Live Oak, named "Tree", who watches the world change from his vantage point in Topanga Canyon. *Tree* is available for purchase at the PCNCA Gift Store!

But that's not all! In honor of our last meeting of the year, the author of *Tree*, Melina Watts, attended B&H. She gave several readings, providing commentary on various chapters and her writing process. She also signed books for members during "Snack Time", while we ate incredible pumpkin bars!

B&H concluded the event with a tree-planting activity, led by Tree People, a non-profit organization, who also attended the Grand Finale. In honor of "Tree", B&H members planted Coast Live Oak seedlings at PCNCA, with Tree People providing assistance.

B&H's 2026 Kickoff is on Sunday, 1/25/2026, at 9:00 am, where we will feature the non-fiction book, *Tent for Seven: A Camping Adventure Gone South*, Out West, by Marty Ohlhaut.



Welcome to PCNCA

We were delighted to be introduced to Noemi Navar, who is the new Regional Park Superintendent III. She attended our board meeting, and was impressed not only by our large group, but also the many committees and projects that were presented. We were proud to show her a small sample of what the docents do at Placerita.



Festive Movie Night at the Acorn Amphitheater

By Herb Broutt

The Acorn Amphitheater kicked off the holiday season in heartwarming style with its final movie night of the year, featuring the beloved classic "A Christmas Story". Families, friends and neighbors filled the Amphitheatre as the community came together to celebrate Thanksgiving and the joy of the holidays.

Guests enjoyed hot cocoa, coffee, cookies and giveaways for the kids. The event was a tremendous success, bringing the community closer and setting a joyful tone for the season ahead.



The Talented Children's Craft Team

by RuthAnne Murthy

It's only October! Yes, it is, but that's the time we must start thinking about the Holiday Craft Fair children's crafts. If you know about working with children, it is essential to be super organized, or chaos prevails. First, we have to decide what crafts we want to prepare for: traditional favorites for sure, but we need new ideas too. We have to make a list of all the little things to be purchased.

Then, in November, the fun begins!! My faithful crafting team gets together to make samples and display boards. We laugh and discuss logistics. Everyone has a favorite station to supervise. Some of our volunteers have been at it for a decade or more!! In 2025 we kept the traditional birdhouses, candle dipping and pinecone bird feeders. Other crafts included felt Christmas trees and gingerbread people, jingle bell bracelets, wooden snowflakes, and our brand-new wooden snowmen.

But the magic begins when the doors open and we see the bright eyes of the children coming to make their treasures. Some of our past crafters are parents now. We have seen them grow up before our eyes. For me, it feels like Christmas is near.



How was the Craft Fair?

Whew! Great job, Docents! A gazillion holiday revelers filled the wreath room and outdoor tables to create incredible, unique works of art (wreaths, Yule logs, and kids' crafts), while Santa Claus handed out candy canes to the little ones. We were abuzz with activity the whole weekend long. The Craft Fair was a wonderful success again, thank you to all who worked such long hours to make it happen.

A few new ideas were tried: hot cocoa station and fancy holiday decorations could be bought; both were very welcome and are here to stay! Even more important is the fact that our visitors had big smiles, were happy and excited about their creations. They had a good time, and they mentioned that everyone was so nice - that is the spirit!

Happy Holidays to everyone.





The “NEW” Interpretive Center is 11 Years Old...

If you visited before summer of 2009, you’ll remember the original museum. The “Nature Study Center” was dedicated in November 1971, but the museum was created by the American Association of University Women, who also founded the docent organization. They were the ones who got the funding from large corporations such as Richfield Oil.

At the time, the museum was rather sophisticated, and natural history teachers at College of the Canyons would visit yearly with their classes.

Some of the exhibits were quite high-level in their explanations – and were confusing to both youngsters and the public. Some were so technically complex that they never worked, even from Day One. So, for quite some time, the museum was classy, if outdated.

All was running on its normal course until the floor needed some repair. To effect the repairs, the old exhibits had to be taken outside. This trip was fatal. The old display cases fell apart and had to be discarded.

Members of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates were heartbroken but not defeated. We tried to show educational items in some donated display cases, but it was an amateurish effort at best. The Nature Center was going to be renovated; the docents had been accumulating money for many years in the hope of redoing the museum. Maybe now was the time?

At that point, “museum” did not seem to be our objective any longer. We wanted an Interpretive Center.

“An interpretive center is an institution for dissemination of knowledge of natural and cultural heritage.” How perfect for a Nature Center to be a place designed to stimulate the discovery process and establish a connection for our visitors with the nature they are going to discover outside.

Meetings were held and museum design companies were solicited by the docents. Soon we got three bids for a more modern conceptual design. We had a competition between the two finalists and selected the best company, based on price and past performance. We awarded a contract for \$35,000 to a GGE of San Francisco.

The first phase was to establish what the museum would be for – its purpose – and what the exhibits would look like – the implementation. We had hundreds of suggestions from the public, which were slowly refined to something manageable. Phase 1 of the conceptual design was completed, including artists’ renderings of the exhibits.

The county parks staff for the Placerita Canyon Nature Center applied for a State Parks grant for the museum project, based on the conceptual design approved by the docents. Subsequently, the L.A. County Department of Parks and Recreation was granted \$1 million for the museum project.

At the same time, L.A. County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich found out the docents lacked sufficient money to go further than the design phase for the museum – but they were willing to do a lot of fundraising to make their dream come true.

You can only imagine the degree to which the docents were surprised, grateful and overjoyed to receive an allocation of \$1.1 million from Supervisor Antonovich to complete the project started by the docents and make the construction possible.

We have always enjoyed Supervisor Antonovich’s support and friendship. He often participates in docent “graduations” or sends a representative. He enjoys coming to the park to use the equestrian trails – but this generous response was beyond our wildest dreams.

The county Parks Department requested and received rights from the docents to all conceptual materials and took over the management of the museum project using the state grant and the allocated county funds.

The parks staff spent many months negotiating a budget and a statement of work with a company called Delphi (which had merged with GGE) to get final approval from the Board of Supervisors.

The county assumed construction management of the patio portion of the project while Delphi proceeded with the Interpretive Center exhibit design and construction.

Both the patio and Interpretive Center exhibit projects were scheduled to be completed by January 2015.

Those are a lot of facts to take in, but it’s important to have them recorded somewhere so that years from now, when we are old and gray and our memories start to fail, we can revisit the source and figure out how it all went.

I want to thank the museum committee which spent so many hours proposing, correcting and making sure all would be accurate in the Interpretive Center. I want to thank everyone who worked at making this dream a reality.



Walker Cabin News Wonderful Changes Underfoot!

By Dee Allen and Jennie Marsh

We are excited to share that we have two new additions to our cabin tour guide roster. Evan Decker, an avid Santa Clarita historian from Hart Park, has joined our team and helps Dee Allen during the week giving regular and school tours. Evan is a part time LA County staffer. Additionally, we are thrilled that Michelle Davis-Smith and her husband Willie have agreed to do Sunday morning tours with large numbers of visitors! One day they had 82 visitors in the two hours the cabin was open!

Our cement floors have been fixed! Denny Truger, Ray Orloff and the County staff worked very hard repairing the cracks in our floors. This provided a much-needed "face lift" for the cabin. After the ce-

ment work was completed, the cabin docents Sandy Corkle, Marc Alva, Jennie Marsh, Evan Decker and Dee Allen took part in a deep cleaning of the entire contents of the cabin, along with the walls, ceiling and furniture. The cabin windows have also been updated with a beautiful set of new gingham valances sewn by our own RuthAnne Murthy. (We were replacing the originals bought by Evelyne at the local K-Mart during her first year as a docent!)

A vintage crib used by a Walker grandchild was recently donated by Lisa Hill Lynn (Walker) along with "lobby posters" from movies shot in the canyon. She promises a vintage Walker quilt in the near future. A grandson of Melba Walker, Walt Fisher, gave us her "root snake" used to prod her younger siblings to finish their chores after their Mama died when Melba was 14. It now hangs in a place of honor above the fireplace, on custom brackets courtesy Ray Orloff.

Sandy Corkle, with the assistance of Bob Walker, put together lovely, informative photo books for visitors to review: movies filmed in Placerita, beautiful photos documenting family history, Walker ancestry, and more!

Our grand reopening celebration took place on Saturday, October 22. We collaborated with the Hospitality committee and invited the public to Trick or Treat at the cabin before watching the holiday movie *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. We also invited Santa (Fred Seeley) to the cabin on November 22 for families to take photos and enjoy candy canes prior to the showing of *The Christmas Story*. There were at least 150 visitors who toured the cabin!!! THANK YOU again to those who volunteered and those who attended!

We are grateful to all who have contributed to making the cabin so special and inviting!! Please do come by and see all the new changes, kiosk displays, and improvements. The cabin is a shining gem in Placerita, and celebrates the legacy of Frank Walker, his wife Hortense and their twelve children.



Caterpillar Phacelia
Phacelia cicutaria

Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

Caterpillar Phacelia is a common wildflower of the borage family that grows in the chaparral and the coastal sage scrub especially after fires. It thrives on rocky slopes and in sandy or clay soil. The plant grows up to 2 feet tall and up to 3 feet in diameter. It is an annual that relies on its reseeding yearly. The plant prefers full sun but will tolerate light shade. Its range is California, Nevada and to Baja California.

Caterpillar phacelia is named after the tight hairy coils that grow at the tops of the stems. The leaves are a dark green, but the white hairs on all parts of the plant give it a gray undertone. The leaves can grow up to 4 inches long and the top leaves are toothed.

The flowers range in color from white to pale blue to lavender. The tiny ¼ inch flowers grow in racemes, bunches, and bend into a coil that looks like the top of a violin. They bloom from March to May.

Caterpillar phacelias are important for two reasons. They provide for pollinators, both bees and butterflies. They also control erosion in burn areas and the seeds are often dispersed after a fire for this purpose. When seeding the plant, horticulturists recommend supplementing the soil with either pieces of charred wood or a "tea" of charred wood. Char stimulates germination and growth. But be careful! The stiff hairs on all parts of the plant can cause dermatitis. So, when you see this beautiful Trail Treasure, look, but don't touch!

RIP Donna Fagan

I am very sorry to let you know that Donna Fagan passed away on October 28. Donna was a very important docent through the 1980s and 90s, and into the 2000s, when there were only a handful of docents and we had to work very hard to keep Placerita open and alive.

Her daughter Michelle Fagan, is planning a memorial at Placerita on January 11, in the classroom. Friends and family are welcome. Photos and memories will be shown in a slide show, and trees will be planted to honor Donna's memory.

We remember Donna gratefully for all she did for PCNCA, for so very many years.



The GSOB Blitz

by Dennis Cain

The GSOB (Goldspotted Oak Borer) hunt was led by Cristhian Mace in October with the support of LA County pest management experts along with CalFire, Tree People, our docent community, and a couple of folks from the public.

We split up into four groups that surveyed about 18 trees on the extreme western and eastern ends of the park. We found 4-5 trees that exhibited D-shaped exit holes - and, upon further investigation, uncovered GSOB larvae incubating under the bark in two separate trees close to the border with the Disney property, north of the creek.

So... they are here. Cristhian is working out a plan of action, but it is likely that the plan will ask for our help in extending this GSOB survey to attempt to determine the full extent of the infestation. Russ Kimura, Regional Park Superintendent1, has been informed of our findings.

Although there was evidence from downed dead trees of GSOB infiltration, the preliminary assessment from the county experts was that the larvae we found represented 'first generation' beetles - leaving hope that the infestation may be limited and recent.

There are a few options for dealing with this early stage of infestation that will be fleshed out soon. We will communicate next steps as they are firmed up, including any requests for additional docent help. We will likely try to do additional surveying in the next couple of months, so that any preventative actions can be taken before the next generation of beetles emerge next spring.



Nature Education with Nikki Dail

Nikki Dail is a naturalist, a hiker, a nature photographer and a birder. She has traveled to many parts of the world to fill up her life list.

A birder's life list is a personal record of all the different bird species a person has seen in their lifetime. It is a cumulative list that serves as a personal logbook for bird-watching adventures, often including the date, location, and any personal notes about each sighting.

Nikki fell in love with Alaska, and wanted to share her adventures with all of us and teach us about what she saw: the landscapes, the people, the animals in the different parts of the area, and the best time of the year for various observations.

What began in 2023 with a trip to Utqiagvik (Barrow) to see migratory birds in the Arctic turned into three unforgettable summers of exploration. From the remote tundra of Nome to the rugged beauty of Kodiak Island, each journey brought close encounters with bears, seabirds and Alaska's stunning landscapes.

We learned so many interesting facts and enjoyed her amazing photography. Nikki is always a wonderful treat to listen to, and we are grateful that she shared those incredible memories with all of us.

The Nature Education program is every 3rd Sunday of the month at 3PM. It is a free educational program that lasts for one hour.



Big Beautiful Bird Walk

By Ellen Coleman and Ken Yasukawa

On Oct. 25, 2025, we hosted our largest Bird Walk ever, a school tour for the College of the Canyons. Professor Tonyan arrived at Placerita with 25 students from her Environmental Biology class to participate in a Bird Walk and to experience nature in our Park. Professor Tonyan then administered a quiz, which we believe all passed!

After the event, several students sent heartfelt thanks for the tour. Below are three

excerpts:

"Thank you, Ken, for finding the time... to give me and my peers a tour of your facility. My favorite part was the oak tree where Francisco Lopez found gold on the roots of an onion. The story really brought me hope, hearing it made me realize that good things will happen no matter what you go through. I am planning on visiting sometime in the future with my brothers."

"I just wanted to reach out to thank you for showing us around the nature center and educating us of the history of the region. You told us many neat facts that I probably should've learned in school that I've never even heard... It was also impressive watching you listen to bird calls and immediately being able to recognize what bird makes what call. Prior to Saturday, I had never been to the nature center, but after the field trip, I know for certain I will come again as it was so fun getting to take a step into nature and just enjoy it and all the history that comes with it."

"I just wanted to say thank you for giving me and my classmates this opportunity to experience this little trip and enlightening us with these very interesting facts about nature... Something I found really interesting... was the acorn woodpeckers and their methods of storing their food in holes inside the trees... I also enjoyed how this was all in the morning and if felt so peaceful just hearing the birds and their chirps. Again, thank you so much for this opportunity!"



October's Docent Enrichment to Mission San Fernando, Rey de Espana by Jack Levenberg

We had 22 docents attend the Docent Enrichment visit to the Mission. We were led by 2 Mission docents, Jack and Steven, who were very knowledgeable.

We visited the Mayordomo's house, which was occupied by Francisco Lopez, the Foreman for the Mission's ranch. This was the same person who discovered gold at Placerita Canyon Nature Center in 1842.

We visited the convent which was 13 years in construction. Its famous corridors have 21 Roman arches, four-foot-thick adobe walls, and the original iron grilles. We also visited the wine cellar.

In the several rooms we visited, there were so many artifacts it was a bit overwhelming. In the Madonna Room are several hundred statues, plaques, paintings and depictions of the Blessed Mother. The room itself was probably the Mission's former jail in Provincial times.

We also visited the Mission Church which is an exact replica of the earlier edifices erected between 1804 and 1806. The Mission was visited by Pope John Paul II in September 1987.

Upon leaving the Mission, we were given a package which contains stationery of the Mission. We all went to the Bear Pit for lunch.

Thank you to Brienne Kelly for planning this very interesting visit to the Mission.



Downhill Sliders in November

November is a little bit early for rain, but we had seen the forecast so we were aware it might be our last chance to hike the Canyon trail without crossing running water. It was a beautiful day and we were wearing shorts, but the predictions were accurate. Soon enough a 3-day deluge started, breaking many previous rainfall records. The stream is definitely running, to the great joy of all the park visitors.

Sunday Mornings at the Cabin

by Michele Smit-Davis

Beginning in October, the Walker Cabin is open to the public each Sunday from 10AM to 12 noon. Willie Davis, Tom Adamiak and I welcome an average of 40-45 guests. This opportunity enables visitors to experience a different aspect of the Placerita Canyon story.

This story is truly a microcosm of California history. The history dates back to the Tataviam people; then there is Spanish colonization, followed by Mexican rule in the early 1800s. Then the discovery of gold at the Oak of the Golden Dream, California independence, and then our statehood is another period.

A time of homesteading, first with Joseph Reynier and then Frank Walker. We have gold and oil. Los Angeles county develops as a hub for the entertainment industry in the early 1900s.

Here we discuss Walker Ranch cabins and the extensive movie production made here. Then we have another mainstay of our economy, land development. People soon recognize the unique position of Placerita Canyon Nature Center that Frank Walker's foresight and generosity enabled. These are just a few among the stories we share.

Many people comment that they've seen the cabin for years and are thrilled to finally get a chance to peek inside. They are very interested in the various artifacts; they ponder what the lifestyle was like. They are amazed to think about hauling your own water, gathering wood, cooking on the wood stove, and living without electricity. We always get a chuckle from folks when they recognize the origin of common sayings: "sleep tight" is one, another is "through the ringer." It's terrific when things click, they see through new eyes.

The most excited visitors we had were a group of four middle school students. They came to Placerita to shoot a film for their cinematography class. Their script was based on a Native American legend, and they filmed it all in and around the cabin. It was a blast.

The tradition continues!



Partners for Potential

by Pat Coskran

Shout out to my volunteers from Partners for Potential! These folks show up every Thursday to work on projects like removing invasive plants, planting natives, watering, and here they are shown collecting buckwheat seeds to be dispersed to encourage spreading to new areas.

Always ready to work, with a positive attitude, and take pride in their contributions.



Dues are Due in January

CATEGORIES

Student Naturalist	\$15.00
Senior Citizen (over 62)	\$15.00
Individual or Docent	\$30.00
Family	\$45.00
Lifetime Member	\$1000.00

Envelopes can be found on the docent desk. Fill out your name, address, phone number and the amount Enclosed/Category
Contributions are tax deductible. Please make checks payable to PCNCA

Winter Schedule

Books and Hikes: Fourth Sunday of the month from 9am to 10:30am. Please register at booksandhikes@placerita.org.

Blooms of the Season: Learn about native plants with RuthAnne Murthy, 4th Saturday of every month. Meet on the patio at 9am for a one-hour stroll. Bring your camera and questions.

Bird Walks: First Saturday of every month with Docent/Naturalists Ellen Coleman, and the second Saturday of every month with Ken Yasukawa. It starts at 8am March-November and 9am December-February. Bring binoculars, water, and a field guide.

Docent/Naturalists: Second Saturday of every month with Ellen Coleman, and Ken Yasukawa. Starting at 8am March-November and 9am December-February. Bring binoculars, water, and a field guide.

Family Nature Walk: Every Saturday from 11am to noon, with Judy McClure. An easy one-hour walk exploring the natural and cultural history of the area.

Hike with the Downhill Sliders: Second Monday of the month, 9am. Check Trails and Nuggets for information.

Nature Education: Every third Sunday of the month at 2pm, PCNCA provides a free educational program open to the public. Check the webpage to learn about the topic.

Native Plant Renewal and Restoration: Every Thursday at 9am, led by Robert Grzesiak. Bring garden gloves and water.

Placerita Nature Tots: Second Saturday of the month at 9:30am. For 3-to-6-year-olds. Program lasts 45 minutes to one hour and will involve learning about the environment. To register, go to Nature_tots@placerita.org

Historic Walker Cabin Tours: Learn how the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Area came to be, thanks to Frank Walker's vision. Tours: Tuesday-Friday 9am – 12 noon. Saturday 10am–2pm and Sunday 10am–12 noon.

PCNCA New Year Potluck: Saturday, January 10 at 6.00pm at Placerita, Please RSVP to Sue Murachanian (Members and Guests Only)

Donna Fagan Celebration of Life: Sunday, January 11 from 2 to 4pm in the classroom--slide show, snacks. Her daughter Michelle will be there.

DOCENT TRAINING: Tuesday, January 13th, 2026, from 9am to 12 noon. (See flyer)
Orientation morning - stay for lunch (thank you Heidi Webber for doing this again this year!)



Outreach at the Sheriff's Haunted House by Jayme Thomas

Happy Halloween!

Glenda Perl, Bill Webber, and I worked the Placerita Canyon Booth at the Sheriff's Station Haunted House. There were kids of all ages, adults, and even seniors dressed up in their fun and frightening Halloween costumes. I heard the Haunted House was excellent and scary.

Patsy Ayala, City Councilwoman, attended the event, and judged the youngest kids' costumes. The young kids were told to dance to the music, and the best dancers won 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place and received medals to hang around their necks. The Haunted House was fun and exciting for all who attended.

Glenda, Bill, and I worked with the King snake, the Gopher snake, and Bill took a chance to work with the Rosy boa.

The Sheriffs even had a couple of working horses there so that the community members could pet them and learn about the Sheriffs who work on horseback. That was one of my personal highlights of the day!!

Agent of Discovery by Lori Wolfe

December 10 was another Docent Enrichment event. We met in our classroom, and Amanda Carder, new Recreation Service Supervisor at Placerita, gave a presentation about the new interactive game at the Nature Center--Agents of Discovery.

This is a phone app that you can download from your app store, or you can use the QR code at the kiosk in the front parking lot and download it right there.

This game is a scavenger hunt with descriptions of interesting GPS points around the nature center. There is a fun quiz so you can collect points in the game and learn more about the Nature Center, too!

Northern Spotted Owl vs Barred Owl

Ken Yasukawa

A proposal from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to save Northern Spotted Owls by killing Barred Owls is creating a dilemma for conservationists and bird lovers. Is it OK to kill one species to save a threatened or endangered species?

The recent history of the Northern Spotted Owl is well known. By the 1970s, forest managers became aware that logging was causing declines in the Northern Spotted Owl population, but harvesting of old-growth forests, the preferred habitat of the owl, continued and the owl quickly became a symbol of the larger battle over forest stewardship. But even with subsequent reduced logging in old-growth forests, the spotted owl population continued to fall following the arrival of the Barred Owl in 1965.

Barred Owls are larger and more territorial than Northern Spotted Owls, and they quickly became a threat to both the spotted owls and to the ecology of the forests they took over. The spotted owl population declined 65% from 1995 to 2017. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to kill up to 470,000 Barred Owls over the next 30 years across the Pacific Northwest as part of its latest management strategy to save the Northern Spotted Owl.

Some organizations have criticized the plan as unethical and likely ineffective, but others have endorsed the USFWS proposal as a necessary, lose-lose intervention.

So, the question is: How do you weigh the value of the lives of individual Barred Owls against the value of a unique branch on the tree of life as represented by the Northern Spotted Owl?



Nature Tots

by Linda Jensen

With the collaboration of a large team of dedicated docents, the Nature Tots Program continues to delight.

The theme for November was Native Americans, with an emphasis on the Tataviam Tribe. We had 28 kids, along with 7 sibling/alumni trekkers who participated in a docent-led walk.

Once everyone has checked in and received their nametag, they gather in the Interpretive Center until it's time to enter the classroom (this time to a video of a Native American Pow Wow at CSU Long Beach).

After a brief introduction and announcements, a short L.A. County Land Acknowledgment statement is read. Up next was:

An educational video – Native American History for Kids.

A singalong and fingerplay.

Reading of the storybook Tata the Tataviam Towhee.

A video demonstration of How-to Pow Wow Dance for Kids.

Next, we took it outside to the Tataviam Indian Dwelling exhibit by way of the Botany Trail (where we learned about plant uses) and lastly to the patio for a simple circle dance.

Finally, it's back to the classroom and docent room for Skill centers ... mortar & pestle, basket weaving, matching pictures and assembling beaded necklaces. Game center ... walnut and stick games, hoop and stick game.

Our programs are on the second Saturday morning of each month except May, July and August. They last about an hour and we are continuing our concurrent nature walk program for older siblings and alumni.

Registration information can be found on the placerita.org website



Outreach for a Creepy-Crawly Lunch

by Glenda Perl

Bill Webber and I did the annual Creepy-Crawly Lunch Bunch at Sierra Vista Jr. High. Since we still can't show birds, Mrs. Fulleman found the video "Raptors of Placerita Canyon" and showed that to the students. Then, Bill talked about spiders while I walked around the room with the Mexican Red-knee tarantula.

We always save the best for last...SNAKES!
Happy Halloween



Indigenous Peoples Day

by Sandra Cattell

Our Indigenous Peoples Day event was informative and enjoyable. Superintendent Russ Kimura started us off by speaking about his and the park's connections with the Chumash and Fernandeno Tataviam tribe of Mission Indians.

We were honored to have Tataviam Tribal Elder Dennis Garcia speak about his journey, still in progress, learning about his people so that he can educate others.

He entertained us with stories and sang songs about the natural world and traditions. He also showed us special ceremonial and personal items, including his regalia (special ceremonial items and clothing).

It was a wonderful experience for all.

Docent Training Fact Sheet

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 13th, 2026
Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 12 Noon

Docents attend a 12 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 \$75 (Seniors \$60), 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/) for further information regarding the Docent program. We may have to limit the class size if the number of potential students exceeds our capacity, so send an email to ron@placertia.org to get on the interest list. You can also sign up for the class on sign-up sheet located at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

Other volunteer opportunities are also available at Placerita Canyon Natural Area that don't require the 12-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**