



**Frank Hoffman**

by Evelyne Vandersande

Frank Hoffman has done stints in various capacities at other parks like William S. Hart Park in Newhall, Val Verde Community Regional Park, George Lane Park in Quartz Hill and others. But for 35 years, Placerita Canyon was his home. The late-blooming naturalist toiled for 16 years as a banker, real estate loan officer and appraiser before he decided to go back to school to get his credential to become a Recreation Service Leader at Placerita, a job he loved dearly.

He even got married under an oak tree at Placerita, to his wife Mary that he met during an outreach. We could not find a volunteer to do that on a cold Sunday morning and Frank volunteered under some gentle pressure on my part.

Frank is a master falconer, has a wealth of information about birds and has many contacts in the field. He does programs at Henry Mayo Hospital about rattlesnake education and bite prevention. He did many educational programs at Placerita and his moonlight walks are a legend!

Frank is the guy with a wealth of information about wildlife. He enthusiastically shares what he knows with guests, but he'll follow that up with a request for them to go out into the world and teach three things they just learned to others they know.

Frank is a Recreation Service Supervisor, and he was transferred to Whittier Narrows after 32 years at Placerita.

We wish you the very best in your new Natural Area, Frank. You taught us well, we cannot thank you enough, we are very grateful for all you did at Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

We are thankful for the never-ending passion for Nature you share with us and our visitors every day. Many children will look at Nature in a different way because of the friendly and uplifting way you taught them. Goodbye and good luck. We will miss you more than you will ever know.



# The Rattler

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

**July-August 2026**

Editor: Evelyne Vandersande Publisher: Heidi Webber



## Dear Nature Friends

Who ever thought that Placerita had a slow time during the hot summer? During the board meeting, we heard the surprising news that Frank Hoffman, Recreation Service Supervisor, has been reassigned to Whittier Narrows Natural Area and Dave Stives, Park Animal Keeper, is retiring. These two County employees have been at Placerita for many years so it is a huge change. We will miss them both.

Then we heard the Board election results, and Rick Brammer is not our treasurer any more after 13 years of dedicated service. We will be in good hands with Herb Broutt, and we thank him for stepping into this challenging position.

Moving right along we had the summer kickoff Potluck dinner with more than 70 guests, the movie night with the Super Mario Brothers 2 and all our regular programs back-to-back. Never a dull moment at Placerita.

If you participate in a program, make sure to check the summer schedule before coming to the park. Starting times have changed for many programs to help you enjoy cooler weather, as SCV can get toasty in the summer.

Come, visit, get your water bottle and hiking shoes and enjoy your nature area.



## Dave Stives is Retiring

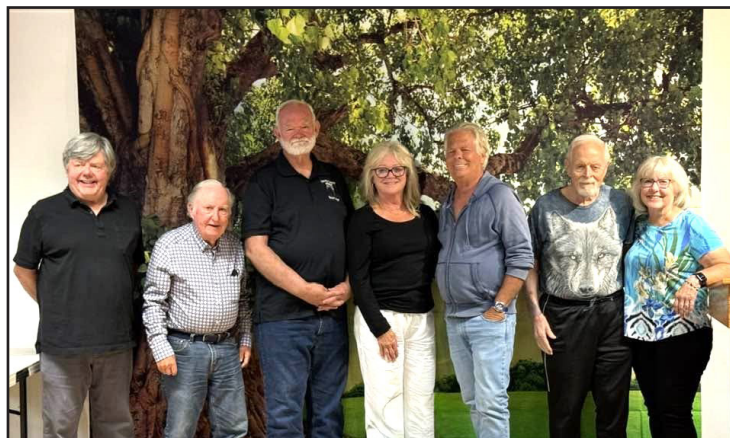
Dave was an "animal whisperer" at Placerita, a rare and incredible human being who knew how to handle and care for any type of wildlife, especially if it was injured and needed help.

Dave has a special sense of the need that an animal has, even without seeing it directly. He seems to know in advance what its reactions will be and how one should approach it, and he never fails.

He learned the ability to care of animals by being around them all the time and observing them carefully. His education was hands-on, and it was an easy decision for him to start doing rehabilitation for different veterinarians.

He worked at Vasquez Rocks for two years and Hart Park for eight years as an animal keeper. It took a few years, but he finally got the job at Placerita. He ended up in charge of animal care for seven parks and as the need grew, the job became larger. He traveled from one facility to the next, making sure all were in compliance with state and federal laws governing everything from the diet of the animals to their educational use including permits, handling, housing and first aid. This was all his responsibility as the Park Animal Keeper.

Dave, we wish you well in your retirement, not only the animals but we will miss you. You sure saved many lives during your many years at Placerita. Thank you for all your knowledge and care.



### **Election for Board of Directors Result**

Again this year, Jim Crowley made a real effort to carefully plan the election effort. He was helped by Dan Kott. Jim thanked all the candidates who stood for election for the Board of Directors. Emails were sent, election boxes were provided, new docents were approached, the ballots were counted and here is the result of the 2026 election:

The officers of the new Board of Directors are President – Fred Seeley, Vice President – Jack Levenberg, Treasurer – Herb Broutt, Recording/Chapter Secretary – Ken Yasukawa, and Corresponding Secretary – Sue Murchanian

Judie Davis and Denise Allen were elected as Alternate Directors.

Congratulations, and thank you all for your commitment. We really appreciate your effort and your participation in making Placerita a better place.



### **The Breakfast of Champions**

Phil Rizzo came up with the idea of having an event at the Nature Center to wake up our docents after the long summer, compel them to think a bit and do a little review of the facts about the Center, before the school groups return.

Ron Kraus works very hard to keep up this tradition. He takes a lot of time to search for facts, look for dates and names, and develop a series of questions relating to several categories: animals, plants, history, docent stuff and potpourri. It covers Placerita Canyon Nature Center quite comprehensively! Ron loves history, and some of the questions are rather difficult, but it is totally impossible to cheat even if you hide your phone under the table. “How many concrete benches are there in the amphitheater seating area?” That made me pause to think!

Thank you so much, Ron, for the incredible work that you do to prepare for the breakfast of the Champions, we are very grateful for your work and your enthusiasm. Phil would be proud.

Ron has used a whole new technological approach to make the presentation smooth, as well as easy to see and understand, including finding photos to enhance each of the questions, providing another level of entertainment. The crowd does not get bored and is sitting at attention for each question.

The docents are divided into random groups by Cindy Gold (who also keeps the score) and answer the questions to the best of their ability, reinforcing the friendships and teamwork. It usually works out that mature docents are mixed up with newer docents and each learns from their different experiences.

The winning team will be awarded the Jill Goddard’s hat. Jill is a very creative artist; she decides on an animal each year and amazes us with attention to detail. They have become a prized collector’s item! Thank you, Jill.

A big thanks is due to the Hospitality team for decorating and setting up the room for the event. The breakfast of the Champions is a wonderful tradition, breaking the long summer and providing an opportunity for the docents to get together. But it would not be possible without the dedication of Ron Kraus and Jill Goddard. We are deeply grateful for their commitment and hard work weeks ahead of time, to make this event so successful.

Thank you for being such a wonderful team, bringing joy, fun and education to the Placerita Docents.



### RIP Gordon Uppman

I am deeply sorry to have to let you know that Gordon Uppman passed away on May 14.

He was a valued member of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (PCNCA), where he participated both as a docent and a board member. He developed PCNCA's first website – which was no trivial matter 30 years ago – and he provided inspirational leadership as a board member during some difficult times when the park was threatened with closure in the face of county budget cuts. Gordon helped with numerous aspects of PCNCA's activities over the years, from docent training to museum displays, gift shop operations and public presentations.

Ron Kraus described him as a great problem solver with a positive outlook and great personality, who made visitors feel welcome at the Nature Center. He was also a volunteer at the SC Historical Society Saugus Train Station Museum, in Hart Park where he was working with RuthAnne Murthy, and he was still very active at Rancho Camulos. He was a true gentleman and helped shape PCNCA as the wonderful organization we now enjoy.



### Placerita Canyon Nature Center Open House Brought Wilderness Fun to Santa Clarita

Posted by: Alexandra Ines in Community News, Santa Clarita Latest News May 9, 2026

Families and children alike enjoyed the numerous activities at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center's open house event in the Santa Clarita Valley.

On Saturday, the Placerita Canyons Nature Center hosted its annual Open House, considered one of the center's biggest events of the year. The center was jam-packed with activities and booths focused on wildlife and nature.

A few of the incredible activities that took place included gold panning, husk doll crafting, DIY newspaper hats, and many more arts-and-crafts tables.

Informational booths were present at the center, such as the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, and the Local Group Astronomy Club, which brought together their telescopes for guests to look up at the planet and stars.

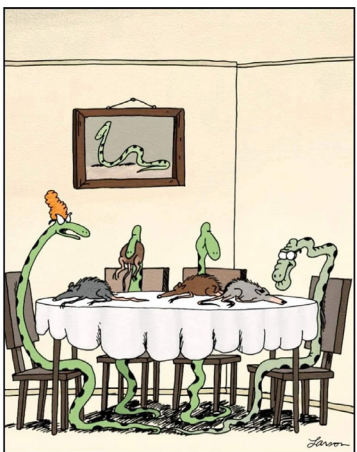
Another fantastic booth was the milkweed giveaway station, where workers provided information regarding milkweed, which attract butterflies, giving them the nutrients they need to survive,

A standout of the event was the live animal presentations, including a barn owl, a peregrine falcon, and snakes and reptiles, courtesy of Herp Connection.

A traditional Native American ceremony, a blessing on the land, welcomed the season of spring. At the Walker cabin, a presentation was given by Debra Walker Bush and Bob Walker about the history of the cabin and their grandmother, Hortence Victoria Reynier, who lived there.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center has so much to offer outside of the Open House, including guided tours, hikes, nature walks, and so much more.

To learn more information about what the center offers as well as future events, check their web site, [Placerita.org](http://Placerita.org)



"Bobby, please jiggle Grandpa's rat so it looks alive."

### Open House

Open House was such a wonderful event with many fun things to do. So, who doesn't need a new hat? Children, teens and adults tried their hand at folding an old newspaper into a hat! There were a lot of smiles and laughs!

People found creative ways to wear them including layering the newspaper hat with the crowns they made at another booth.

We also made paper drinking cups. It was warm enough that people purposely spilled the water for the cooling effect. It's the little things in life that are fun and memorable.





**A Trip to the Santa Clara River Preserve**  
by Colleen Moulay

I attended a Docent Enrichment Day trip to The Santa Clara River Preserve with Friends of Placerita Canyon Natural Area. What a beautiful place for a guided nature walk.

The weather was fantastic and I learned a lot about the geology, history, plants, and wildlife of the area. I will be back to explore more at this unique place.

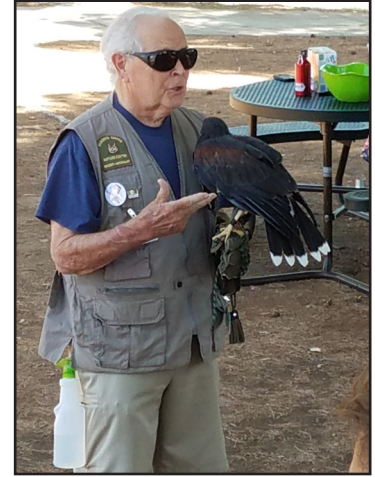
Thank you to Brienne Keppy for planning this trip, and to Amy Davis for being such an interesting guide.



**Thank you Denny and Pat**  
by Amanda Carder

The fence posts around our Tataviam display were looking sad, the posts had deteriorated over time due to the weather and sun exposure. Denny Truger and Pat Coskran stepped up and took on the job of replacing the fence posts. They removed the old, weathered posts and installed new wood posts, this time installing a concrete base to better support the posts over time.

Thank you, Denny and Pat, we love the new fence, it looks great!



**Richard Brammer**  
by Linette Brammer

After Rick retired from his position as director of materials for an international electronics firm, he looked for a way to maintain a sense of meaningful contribution. Inspired by a bird of prey tour in San Diego, and as a lifelong birder, he resolved to work with raptors.

Since joining the Placerita Docents, Rick has served on the Board of Directors and eventually took over as Treasurer from Heidi. Rick kept the position of Treasurer for 13 years. With a postgraduate degree in finance and a career in accounting, the role has been an ideal match for him.

He also finds great fulfillment in presenting Wheelie during school tours and community outreach.

One of his most memorable experiences was on a very hot day when he lost consciousness; Wheelie extended her wings protectively over him and refused to let anyone approach, illustrating their extraordinary bond.

The past 17 years at Placerita have been both demanding and rewarding. Rick looks forward to continuing his volunteer service for many years and supporting Herb as he transitions into the Treasurer position.

**Last Month B&H Held a "Scavenger Hike"**

by Ellen Coleman

For May 2026, Books & Hikes featured *Secrets of the Oak Woodlands: Plants & Animals Among California's Oaks* by Kate Marianchild. This book has 22 chapters, each featuring a different flora and fauna component of the California Oaks' ecosystem; however 16 of the 22 chapters included animals and plants unique to Placerita. The author encourages her readers to be "Citizen Scientists" so 11 B&H members and 3 docents went on a "Scavenger Hike" to see if we could find all 16. B&H members took the Hidden Trail, with a brief climb to Manzanita Mtn – great views! – before returning to the Hidden Trail.

It was close! We didn't find 16, BUT we did find NINE plants and animals featured in the book. They are as follows: Acorn Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse, Western Gray Squirrel, CA Scrub Jay, Woodrat, Manzanita, Mycorrhizae, Poison Oak, and Toyon.

For "Snack Time," B&H served Cheese Trees, in honor of the California Oaks. There were none left!

Join us at 8:00 am [new summer hours!!] on Sunday, 7/26/26, where we will hike and discuss the book *Playground*, by Richard Powers. Four individuals arrive at a French Poly-

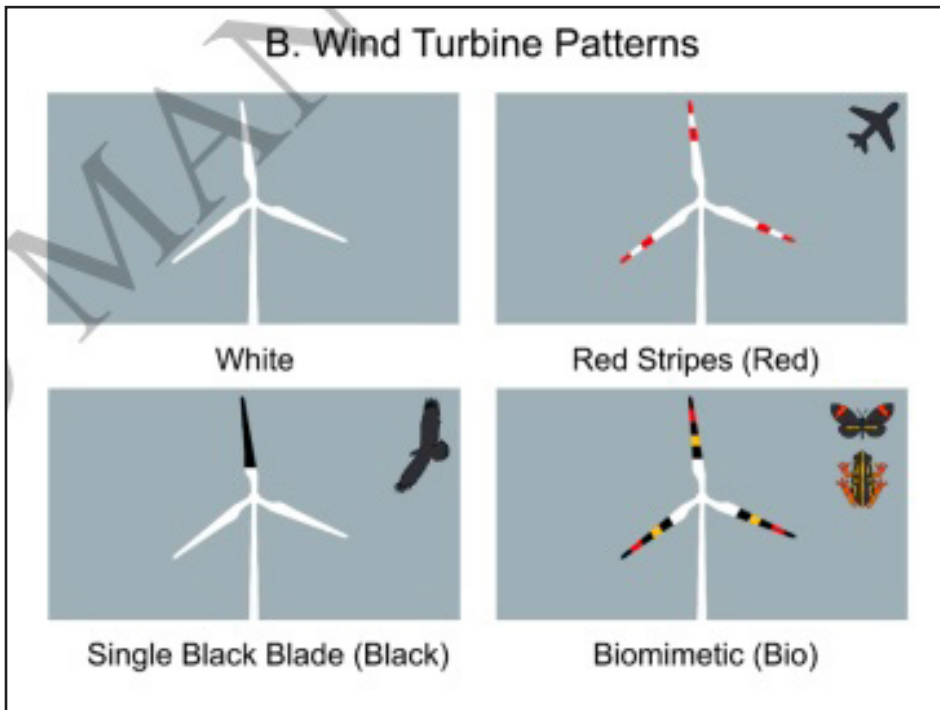


**Nature Tots**

by Jennie Marsh

The theme of our June Nature Tots program was Snakes. We had 28 kids registered for the program on June 1 and an additional 8 siblings and alumni registered for the concurrent nature hike.

The program will take a break for the summer months of July and August. We will begin again on September 12.



**Using A Biologically Inspired Pattern to Deter Bird Collisions with Wind Turbine Blades**

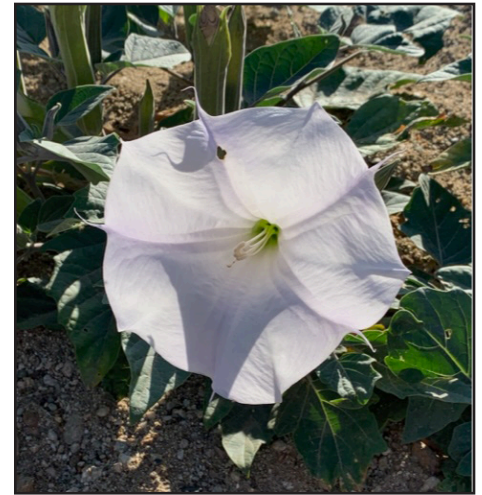
By Ken Yasukawa

As investment in wind power increases, bird fatalities from collisions with wind turbine blades are also increasing. Biologists who study interactions between predators and their prey suspect that they might be able to reduce such collisions by making turbine blades more detectable or aversive to birds.

Prey have many ways to avoid predation. One common one is “crypsis” or camouflage, which makes an animal difficult to detect. Another, perhaps counter-intuitive one, is to be conspicuous with bright, contrasting colors and eye-catching behavior, which make these animals easy to find. But why would it be advantageous to be detectable? Biologists call it “aposematic” (“warning”) coloration and these aposematic animals are warning predators that they have defenses such as toxicity or bad taste. High-contrast colors (e.g., Monarch butterfly) and striped patterns (e.g., striped skunk) are common examples of such warning signals. These signals are effective because they are conspicuous, memorable, and take advantage of already-existing color aversions. [Note that otherwise defenseless animals such as the Viceroy butterfly can also be highly detectable. In “mimicry,” the similarity of perfectly palatable prey with aposematic species also deters predators.]

Then the question is, would biologically inspired turbine warning colors help birds to avoid turbine blades? A team of biologists presented images of turbine blades to wild-caught Great Tits (*Parus major*), European relatives of our North American chickadees, to test their responses to three existing wind turbine patterns (white, red-striped, and single black blade), and to a novel, biologically inspired, aposematic pattern. Tits were less likely to approach and, when they did approach, took longer to approach the patterned than the uniform white blades, and the bio-inspired pattern showed the strongest aversive effect. This research shows the potential value of using aposematic patterns to reduce bird collisions with wind turbines.

Hancock, G.R.A., Lehtonen, H., Brown, T., Ejjite, A., Nokelainen, O., Mappes, J., Winters, S. 2026. *Biologically inspired warning patterns deter a passerine, Parus major, from digital turbine blades. Behavioral Ecology, in press.* <https://doi.org/10.1093/beheco/arag039>



*Wild Morning Glory  
Calystegia macrostegia*

**Trail Treasures**

By RuthAnne Murthy

Wild morning glory is a perennial vine that grows on the Coastal Sage Scrub and Chaparral from the San Francisco area to Baja California at altitudes under 3000 feet. It thrives on dry slopes and disturbed areas. There are more than 1500 species in this family including sweet potatoes. The scrambling vine wraps around nearby plants for support. Morning glory had a woody base, and the stems that branch from the base are usually hairy. The plant is especially prolific after a fire.

The 2-inch-long leaves are lobed and arrow shaped. They are a light green and turn brown in the hot summer. The leaves grow alternately, one this way and the next the opposite way.

The 2-inch white flowers bloom from March to August. Often there are purple or pink stripes on the exterior of the flowers. The flowers are trumpet-shaped and have 5 petals that close in the evening.

There is sketchy information about using the flowers for a tea, but most sources don't agree.

Wild morning glory is primarily a beauty to behold. Their simplicity, and common occurrence sometimes leads to taking it for granted, but when I see it, I can't help singing. That's why I call it a trail treasure.

## Walker Cabin Summer Hours Are Here

by Jennie Marsh

With the summer heat just around the corner, we have begun summer hours at the Walker Cabin. Our hours are Tuesday through Friday: 9:00 – 12:00, Saturday 8:30 – 12:30, and Sunday 10:00 – 12:00. The summer hours will run from June 6 to September 5.

Travel plans and other events have resulted in revised staffing.

We had 740 visitors in May. We are still working on a new historical display for the third kiosk window, focusing on the many aspects of Frank and Hortense Walker's work, and the many tools they used to complete their diverse tasks.

Save the Date!

**Nature Center Associates of Los Angeles County (NCA)** will be holding their Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition on Saturday, September 26.

There will be light refreshments available before the meeting, at 9:30AM, with the Annual Meeting beginning at 10AM, and Volunteer Recognition immediately following. There will be a light lunch about 11:30AM.

The site is Ayers Hall at Los Angeles County Arboretum, at 301 Baldwin Avenue, in Arcadia. An invitation with an email to RSVP should be sent in early August.



### Who's Challenging Whom?

By Pat Coskran

On Saturdays when I hike with my Challengers, I try to plan a theme and a lesson for the day. This photo shows me explaining the mutually beneficial relationship between the yucca moth and the yucca plant.

Preparing and presenting a lesson like this helps me to really think about what will be understood and appreciated by this audience. Am I trying to impress myself with esoteric, multisyllabic vocabulary, or should I force myself to dig deep for the basic language and concepts that will engage and explain the subject clearly and simply.

Thank you to my hikers for continually challenging me to stay grounded--seeing things through your eyes and helping me to teach about nature as it should be taught.



### A Change for the Downhill Sliders

Hike with the Downhill Sliders with RuthAnne Murthy: 2nd **WEDNESDAY** of the month, 9AM at Placerita. Meet on the patio.

Many schedules change during the summer; people go away on vacation, or grandparents have to take care of the grandchildren while school is out. A request was made to have the hike take place in Placerita.

The Nature Center being closed on Mondays, the Downhill Sliders will now meet on Wednesdays at the Nature Center.

Bring your water bottle and see you there. We usually go out for lunch after we hike. If you cannot do the hike, you can also just enjoy lunch after.



### Nature Education Committee

Sue Sutton and Jim Crowley, Co-chairs

The Nature Education Committee, formerly known as the Exhibits and Displays Committee, has been working for almost 10 years to develop projects that increase our visitors' knowledge and enjoyment of the plants and animals in Placerita Canyon.

We started with the installation of information kiosks in the courtyard and butterfly garden. Next, in the space that later became Nature Knowledge Room, we developed exhibits that featured Placerita mammal footprints and information as well as a bulletin board displaying photos of our many residents and visiting birds. In that same space we recently completed a beautiful bird's nest display. Outside the Nature Knowledge room you'll find a "Bugs in the Park" bulletin where you can learn about some of our favorite Placerita creepy crawlies.

Recently, a hard-working team of docents carefully cleaned all the exhibits in the museum and classroom. The committee has also commissioned a talented artisan to carve wooden birds to replace damaged taxidermy. We're also in the process of reinstalling our Then and Now exhibit in the museum

display case in the museum foyer. This exhibit compares the way of life of native Tataviam and modern people who have lived in Placerita Canyon.

Finally, we've taken the Nature Boxes out for the summer and are encouraging docents to take a box out to the courtyard, museum or classroom and share them with our visitors as the days warm up. Look for a sign-up

## Docent Recognition Awards

By Cindy Gold

At our Summer Potluck we gave out eight Docent Recognition Awards. These awards acknowledge the dedication, hard work and positive effects the awardees have on our PCNCA community.

**Robert Grezniak** was honored for his continuous and expert efforts to maintain our park flora. Every week he's seen working throughout the park, weeding, planting and leading other docents in park conservation and the care of our treasured plants. Robert truly makes the park a better place.

**Sue Maracharian** is a full-time volunteer. She co-manages the Gift Shop, is the force behind organizing all our social events, as well as the Movie Nights that so many families enjoy. She worked hard on our recent Open House and is a board member. Sue's tireless efforts embody the spirit of volunteerism.

**Judy McClure** has been leading families on nature walks for over a decade. She also maintains our Hummingbird Garden and works with Robert G. cultivating other park gardens. She is an advocate for Monarch Butterflies, and every year educates the public at our Open House, passing out Milkweed seeds. Judy's tenacity inspires us all.

**Gary Harper** is a recent graduate of Docent Training. He jumped right into leading school tours. He was trained to run the audio/visual systems used in our classroom and during outdoor events. During our Open House he did difficult jobs like setting up and taking down equipment and happily helped wherever needed. We are lucky to have Gary join us.

**Dennis Cain** co-created our popular Books and Hikes program. He's worked hard to survey and protect our tree population, collaborating with the County Biologist and organizing docents to assess the health and identify trees that are infested with the Golden Spotted Oak Borer (GSOB). Dennis' knowledge, energy, and new ideas are greatly valued.

**Joe Morelli** is a quiet force behind the scenes, tackling maintenance jobs like painting our large storage container (along with his wife). He works hard organizing activities during our Holiday Craft Faire and Open House, as well as setting up and taking down equipment. When we need strong arms and a "can do" attitude, Joe is always there.

**Lori Wolfe** did the time-consuming job of organizing school tours for the last three years. She got the program going after Covid and the various insurance obstacles. She oversaw the process on site, taking students on the tours. She helped with the county tree surveys and putting on our social events. Lori is conscientious and dedicated, a real asset to our PCNCA.

**I, Cindy Gold**, am grateful for this award. I've organized the Open House for the last five years and helped it grow. I've enjoyed doing tree surveys/GSOB program. I'm honored to be on the Board. It gives me pleasure to acknowledge hardworking docents by overseeing the awards program and Mentorship program for new trainees. PCNCA is an amazing place!



### Movie Night Under the Stars Draws a Crowd at the Acorn Amphitheater

By Herb Broutt

It was a magical evening of music, community, and classic entertainment as more than 100 people gathered at the Acorn Amphitheater for our first "Movie Night Under the Stars" of the season. John Schreffler opened the evening with his amazing guitar playing and vocals. As the sun dipped behind the hills, the big screen came to life with the Super Mario Bros movie. Families spread out under the night sky, enjoying the movie and the sense of community that filled the amphitheater.

The next Movie Night Under the Stars will be held on July 18th, starting with Disney Sing Along and followed by the Disney/Pixar animated film Hoppers

### Summer Schedule

**Important change in the Park schedule:** The park will be closed on Mondays. The gate at the park entrance will be locked, and no parking is available. Parking on Placerita Canyon Road is not allowed. From Tuesday through Sunday, Park hours of operation are 8:30AM to 7:30PM from March 1 to October 31. The office opens at 10:30AM and closes at 7:30PM.

**Books and Hikes:** 4th Sunday of the month from 8AM to 9:30AM. Please register at [booksandhikes@placerita.org](mailto: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 with Docent/Naturalists:** 1st Saturday of every month with Ellen Coleman, and the 2nd Saturday of every month with Ken Yasukawa. It starts at 8AM from 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:** 2nd WEDNESDAY (note the day change) of the month, 9AM at Placerita. Meet on the patio area.

**Nature Education:** Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2PM, PCNCA provides a free educational program. Check the webpage to learn about the topic.

**Native Plant Renewal and Restoration:** Every Thursday at 8AM, led by Robert Grzesiak. Bring garden gloves and water. Just show up to work, do not send email.

**Placerita Nature Tots:** No program in July and August. See you in September.

**Walker Cabin:** Summer hours are Tuesday through Friday: 9:00 – 12:00, Saturday 8:30 – 12:30, and Sunday 10:00 – 12:00. The summer hours will run from June 6 to September 5.

**Breakfast of the Champions:** August 15 from 9:00 to 12:00 – Breakfast pot luck, bring a dish to share.

**Tree Surveys:** Jun. 18, 22, and 29. Contact Dennis Cain [ddbscain@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ddbscain@sbcglobal.net) or Cristhian Mace [CMace@parks.lacounty.gov](mailto:CMace@parks.lacounty.gov)

**Community Nature Education Series:** June 21 at 2PM, the topic is coexisting with rattlesnakes with Dana Stangel.

**Docent Enrichment:** June 24, 10AM - 11AM, guided tour of California Botanic Gardens. with a bus provided by L.A. County (depart Nature Center at 9AM).

**The next Movie Night Under the Stars** will be held on July 18th, starting with a Disney Sing Along and followed by the Disney/Pixar animated film Hoppers