

The Rattler



Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Natural Area
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91321
www.placerita.org (661) 259-7721



In This Issue:

- **Holiday Craft Faire**
- **Docent Trips**
- **Docent Training Schedule**
- **Docent Accomplishments**

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Over 50 Years of Nature Education

November/December 2015



The Holiday Craft Faire is coming to Placerita Canyon Nature Center on Saturday December 5 and Sunday December 6 from 10:00am to 3:00 pm. It is a very special event in this valley and people who have discovered us years ago tend to wait in line at the door to have first pick of the goodies!

What is going on here? This is our annual fundraiser that provides for the animals entrusted to our care. We are the only place that offers piles of fresh greenery, seeds, pods and dried berries so you can decorate your home for the holidays. All you have to do is buy a straw wreath or a wood log with hollows for the candles, and use a glue gun and the results are fantastic. People help each other; it is a lot of fun. The smell in the room is delicious. There are also easy crafts for the kids so the whole family can be occupied doing their holiday creations.



I also want to let you know that docent training is starting the first week of January. Maybe you are just reading this Rattler for the first time and you are impressed by all the interesting projects the docents are involved with. If you enjoy nature, children, and have some free time, you might have found your new home. It feels like this for so many of the docents! Have a look at the flyer inside the Rattler to get more details but I can tell you from my personal point of view that if you decide to take docent training, it will be a decision you will never regret. It will enrich your life more than you can imagine.

The holidays are coming and we want to send all of you our best wishes for health and happiness. We hope you can share those good times with loved ones, relax in the beautiful nature around us and enjoy the change of the season.

PCNCA's Mission Statement

To inspire a passion, awareness and respect for the environment, and to preserve and protect for future generations the history and ecosystem of Placerita Canyon.

For school / group tour information go to Placerita.org. Requests must be submitted through our website.



Fall Kickoff

Ron Kraus planned a fall meeting so we could update our knowledge and review many rules of being more effective docents. We had a great turnout of 30+ enthusiastic docents!

There was a nice handout done by Ruth-Anne Murthy regarding shrubs and trees and then she led us on a hike to see all those on the trail.

Thanks to Fred Seeley and Lanita Algeyer for leading the discussion regarding the improved school tour methods.

Fred Seeley took us to the pond and gave us some pointers for bringing a school group there to successfully capture their interest.

Ron took us on the trail to check and compare different plants to expand our knowledge and to look at some recently installed park features.

It was an interesting morning of continuing education.



The Rattler

Editor:
Evelyne Vandersande
661 254-2972



Publisher:
Heidi Webber
661 251-7978

If you have an article you feel would follow the interests of this publication, please feel free to submit it. The deadline is the 10th of every other month. Mail your article to:

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213

or you can email it to Evelyne at: evandersande@gmail.com. Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

The Rattler is printed by Valencia Printers on Recycled Paper.

Visit our Internet site at www.placerita.org--Ron Kraus is the webmaster.

Board Members

Officers

President: Ron Kraus
Past President: Jim Southwell
Vice-President: Jack Levenberg
Recording Secretary: Mari Carbajal
Corresponding Secretary: Fred Seeley
Treasurer: Rick Brammer

Directors

Vicky Cunningham
Andrea Donner
Evelyne Vandersande
Sue Sutton
Bill Webber
Heidi Webber

Alternate Directors

Jim Hazard
Ron Nichols

Nature Center Associates of LA County (NCA)

Local Placerita NCA representatives are **Jack Levenberg**, President, **Lanita Algeyer**, Corresponding Secretary and **Teresa Jacobs** and **Fred Seeley**, Placerita Representatives. Nature Center Associates of Los Angeles County are organized under the California 501(c)3 Nonprofit Public Benefit corporation law. NCA is an umbrella organization created so that different Nature Centers that belong to the organization would operate with commonality in mind.

For additional information about NCA contact Jack Levenberg at Placerita.org and fill out a contact form.

Disclaimer

Because there is often limited space on various field trips, we find that we need to enforce the following: All trips and dinner celebrations are open only to Placerita Canyon docents and volunteers who are members in good standing. Many trips can be open to family and friends but only with previous authorization from the person planning the trip. Thank you for your understanding.

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, has designated an ADA Coordinator to carry out this Department's compliance with the non-discriminatory provisions of the ADA. For more information you may contact the ADA Coordinator's Office at TEL 213-738-2970 TDY 213-427-6118 FAX 213-487-0380; Upon 3-day request notice, sign language interpreters and related materials in alternative formats (Braille-transcript, large print, audio-record, video-captioning, live-description) or any other reasonable accommodations are available to the public for County-sponsored activities and events.

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area Park are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial District of Michael D. Antonovich. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates

At Placerita, we are a family and we care for each other so this is why I am so very sorry to have to let you know that Todd Southwell, son of Jim and Diane, passed away October 25 at 10.30pm.

Todd fought ALS for about eighteen months and just last Sunday, his family and friends took part in an ALS walk to raise funds for the organization. Jim and Diane have gone to San Marcos every other week during this hard time to help his wife and his 2 young sons, driving them back and forth from school and helping with home work and anything else that needed to be done.

If you want to reach out to Jim, I am sure he would appreciate your support in this difficult time for him and Diane.

Jim and Diane 's address: 26357 Rainbow Glen Drive Newhall CA 91321

ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

PCNCA gratefully acknowledges the following special guardians who are helping in the care and feeding of their adopted animals at our Nature Center:

Joshua Franco-McClure and Daniel McClure - California Toads
Knollwood Childcare Site - Moon Shadow, the Kingsnake

Many thanks to you all for your generous support of this important program.

Many Thanks to those generous souls who donated to the Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

Shirley Moreno
St John Baptist de la Salle school
Village Christian
California Virtual Academy
St. Martin School
Northridge Preschool
Castaic Elementary
Outreach (Indian)
Judy & Roger's 50th Wedding Anniversary
Rick Brammer

The R.E.A.C.H. Program

We are delighted to see Jake McCoy, docent from the class of 2015 back at the Nature Center, taking opportunity from the R.E.A.C.H. program. Read more details about this program.

The R.E.A.A.C.H. (Recreation Employment and Achieving Career Happiness) was created by Supervisor Michael Antonovich's Office to address a need that he became aware of. That need was how to provide support for our next generation of leaders who are currently attending college. One of the greatest needs of college students is securing part-time employment while they attend school. This program addresses that need by not only providing a part-time job, but it also provides a great many other benefits. First, this is the only program that mandates the part-time employment be structured around the student's college class schedule and other college related academic requirements. College comes first, the part-time job second. Second this job provides the County of Los Angeles the opportunity to recruit college students directly into entry level positions with the County. The aim of the program is to not only provide a part-time job, but to actively train and mentor the program participants, with the goal of having them promote to permanent staff positions upon graduation from college. Third, this program provides intensive training as to the Department of Parks and Recreation rules and regulations, so they are able to function immediately when placed in a field assignment. Fourth, the program provides additional training beyond the nuts and bolts of what will be expected of them when they are placed in the field. The program covers all costs of the training, and 400 hours of direct field placement where they receive on the job training. With budgets for part-time staff always being a challenge, this is a great help to the facilities where they are placed. During the class training prior to field placement and monitoring, each participant attends seminars conducted by outside professional consultants who cover such subjects as Stock Market Investing, Resolving Inter-Personal Conflicts, Personal Finances, Diversity Training, Regulations governing the Conducting of Park Programs, and Employment Search/Interviewing techniques. Utilizing the solid classroom training that the program provides, graduates are able to be immediately effective when placed in the field. Additionally upon graduation they are now certified recurrent staff, and are able to work at any Department of Parks and Recreation facility in the County. This program has provided the Department of Parks and Recreation the ability to attract and retain these highly skilled and motivated personnel. They bring with them degrees in Kinesiology, Health, Leisure Studies, Early Childhood Education, Public Administration, and other related fields that have dramatically improved the quality of the programs offered by our Department. Finally, graduates of this program have gone on to obtain jobs not only with our Department, but also with other County Departments such as Health, Probation, Sheriff's, Fire, and others. Currently the program is just starting the eight R.E.A.A.C.H class, so some bright new stars will be joining County service in the next few months.



Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates

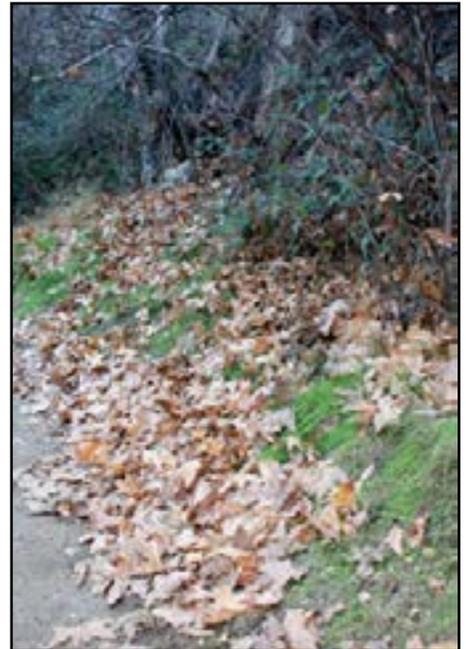
Thank You!

- Yes! I want to contribute to help fund programs at Placerita
- \$25 Friend \$50 Donor \$100 Sponsor Wall
- I can pledge _____ monthly
- Please contact me about the Adopt-an-Animal Program

Your tax-deductible donations are needed to help fund programs provided by volunteers.

Send your donation to:

PCNCA
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213



Giving Thanks

FALL PROGRAMS

FAMILY NATURE WALK

Every Saturday from 11 to noon.

An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.

ANIMAL PRESENTATION

Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.

See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.

BIRD WALK

Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.

BIRD WALK, CASTAIC

The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at **Castaic Lake Recreation Area** on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.

BLOOMS OF THE SEASON

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 fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.

COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB

A non-profit organization that invites all members of the SCV and community at large to: Join weekly planned hikes; Attend monthly nature series educational presentations; Participate in community outreach programs such as Calif Condor micro-trash clean-ups and maintenance of trails and native garden; Partner with groups such as Boys and Girls Club to introduce youth to nature. For more information, go to the website at communityhikingclub.org

NATURE EDUCATION

An exciting new program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please contact the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. November 15, Bees. January, 17, 2016 Francisco Lopez and the Placerita Canyon Gold Discovery by Dr. Alan Pollack, There will be no December program.

DECEMBER 5 AND 6

Holiday Craft Faire from 10-3. See flyer.

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

Herons, Egrets and Bitterns

Paul A. Levine

In early September, I photographed a brown-colored bird on the shore of the man-made lake at Bridgeport in Valencia that I thought might be a Bittern. When I looked it up in a field book, Egrets, Herons and Bitterns were all listed on the same couple of pages so I was curious, what was the difference between these birds.

Also, the Great Blue Heron looks more like an egret except for the coloring than it does to either the Green or Black-Crowned Night Herons that I have seen and photographed in Santa Clarita. It turns out that all three groups are in the same family of birds (scientific name: Ardeidae) and should generally be called herons.



These are long-legged coastal and freshwater birds with a total of 64 species recognized world-wide. Clearly, herons are not the only long-legged shore birds. What sets the herons apart from cranes, flamingoes, storks and others is their neck. Although they can do this when resting and hunting, when flying the neck is kinked into an S-shape. This is due to a modification in the shape of the 6th vertebrae in the neck. The other long-legged waders fly with their necks fully extended similar to ducks and geese.

Egrets are virtually pure white although the "Little Blue Heron" is white as a juvenile. Differentiating the species is based on size, the color of the bill and legs. Herons can range in size from relatively small to large but are colored while the Bitterns are generally brown in color. Egrets and Herons nest in either trees or bushes and commonly form colonies although they are solo hunters. This keeps their nests with the eggs and chicks off the ground and away from predators such as coyotes, foxes, raccoons which are their major predators, not of the adults but of the young. Bitterns make their nest on the ground hidden in dens reeds and tend not to congregate in groups, even for nesting.

The bill of these birds is long and pointed, some would describe them as harpoon-like. This bill allows them to literally spear their prey. They are all carnivorous eating fish, insects, amphibians and reptiles. They have even been known to eat mice and other small mammals as well as birds and bird eggs. Thus virtually all are found around water although the water need not be very deep such as wetlands.



One small egret, the Cattle Egret gets its name because it searches for its prey in open fields, often following cattle and other large herbivores who in the process of eating, flush out small insects and other small animals which are promptly captured and devoured by the Cattle Egret. Those that hunt along the water's edge will either stand in shallow water and wait for the prey to come by; sometimes they spread their wings to create a shadow which small fish like or it helps to block the sun to improve their vision by eliminating the reflection. Other times they shuffle along stirring up the silt and scaring up small arthropods and even fish, similar to the Cattle Egret following behind feeding cattle. Some Herons have been documented as using bait to lure fish within striking distance



Herons are said to have a cosmopolitan distribution and while they will not come to your bird feeder filled with seeds in your backyard, they will come to your backyard if you have a Koi or other fish pond. They are present on six of the seven continents in the world; only Antarctica is excluded. Those in the southern climates often are found year round where as those who live further north such as the northern part of the United States and Canada will migrate to either the southern US, Mexico, Central America or the northern portions of South America. Those that migrate commonly migrate at night which precludes our seeing them during their migration as we might see ducks and geese migrate.

Herons are also described a day or night herons. The day herons feed during the daytime these include the Green Heron and our local Egrets. The night herons hunt at dawn, dusk and into the night-time hours. This is our Black-Crowned Night Heron.

References:

1. Peterson RT, Field Guide to the Birds of North America, First Edition, Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston, 2008
2. Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heron>
3. <http://10000birds.com/what-is-a-heron>
4. Encyclopedia Britannica: <http://www.britannica.com/animal/heron>
5. A-Z animals: <http://a-z-animals.com/animals/heron/>
6. National Wildlife Foundation: <http://blog.nwf.org/2011/03/is-this-a-heron-egret-or-crane/>
7. SurfBirds.com: <http://www.surfbirds.com/namericanbirds/heron-egret.html>

Photos of Local Herons/Egrets (and sorry, no Bitterns) by Paul A Levine unless otherwise noted.



Photo by Jess Morton of San Pedro





Linda and Steve Ioerger took the Rattler to Botswana and saw elephants andOWLS.



Sue Wallander took a photo of the Rattler on the boat, National Geographic Endeavor, off one of the Galapagos Islands in September.



Mona Ruberry and her husband took a picture with the Rattler in Catalina this summer. Got lucky with the Catalina Express & Casino in the background.



Bill and Linda Kopatz took a made up Rattler to Crater Lake in Oregon. A gigantic eruption 7,000 years ago was so huge it blew up a volcano named Mazama with such intensity it imploded into itself and created the huge space now filled with pristine clear water pure enough to drink. It also created a gorgeous landscape of trees and plants that are breathtaking.



Charitha had the Rattler in his car! We were all taking part in a film shooting planned by a company trying to combine forces with Santa Clarita to purchase open spaces.. Jack Levenberg VP for PCNCA made a great speech to support such an effort.



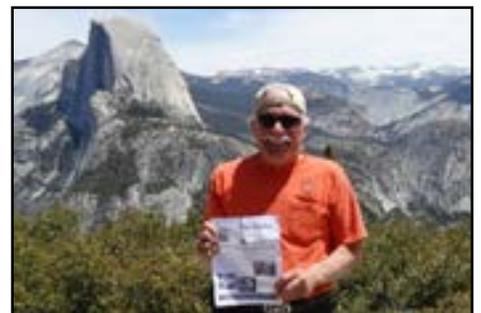
Linda and Bill Kopatz took the Rattler to Seal Beach! This fun-loving couple is taking a trip up PCH and having a great time.



Michael Elling is standing waist high in the beautiful waters off Fiji near SavuSavu, holding the Rattler for all to see!



Denny Truger takes the Rattler on many adventures. Here he is hiking at another beautiful place: Havasu Falls, Supai, AZ - Grand Canyon.



The Rattler rocks at Glacier Point Yosemite. Denny Truger went here to see Irene Heerlein and Marcus Heerlein climb Half Dome.



Robert Fischer is 90 Years Old

You have read all those articles explaining that the love of nature will extend your life. Being active outside, enjoying nature around you, be it by bird watching or looking at the different trees and plants around you, you will have better mental and physical health. Bob Fischer is the perfect example of an active docent reaching 90 years old and still enjoying a good life.

Bob Fischer was our “bird man” for many years in charge of the bird walk. He

was our bird expert and wrote a bird article for each issue of the Rattler for more years than I care to count.

I knew I could call Bob anytime I had a bird question and he would have an answer ready. He would take long walks checking on the change of seasons, the bird’s migration and who was new in town and we would be happy to exchange news of our first western tanager sighting. I remember he was the first person I called when a peacock landed in my backyard!

Bob touched many lives through those many years, he is a true gentleman, with much knowledge that he shares with pleasure. Bob Fischer came to Placerita for the first time in 1986 while Frank Hovore and Valerie Vartanian (ex supervisor at Placerita) were teaching docent training at Franklin Park for the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy that he was attending. He has been very involved with the Theater group at Friendly Valley and was teaching a class for seniors using Macintosh computers.

Congratulations Bob and thank you for your many years of service at Placerita, your interests and your dedication. We wish you the very best.



Tragic Accident

On Monday September 14, seven hikers from California were killed by a flash flood in a narrow canyon in Zion National Park, Utah.

They were well prepared for this hike, they were experienced and it was a rather easy hike but they were at the wrong place at the wrong time. Mark MacKenzie can be seen on the right on the photo. He was a well loved member from Valencia Hiking Club and had many friends in this valley. Placerita Canyon Nature Center was chosen as the perfect place to pay tribute and to help their friends express their grief.

Nikki Dail attended the ceremony and here are her comments:

“Over 300 people attended including family, friends, and many hikers from all over So California, who whether they knew them or not personally, felt a connection to all of us in our grief. Folks laughed, cried, hugged, ate, shared stories and grieved together for the loss of having our friends still here with us on this earth.

Folks brought hiking bandanas and wrote tributes to our missing friends to give to the families. They were hung on lines like Buddhist prayer flags.”

Hikers in Utah and Colorado who couldn't attend, but who climbed peaks on that day, posted pictures of flags at half mast in their memory.

Photo credit: Bojie Flores and Steve Moore.



The Scream Tree

Do you know this tree which is close to the beginning of the Canyon Trail? It holds a certain resemblance to a popular painting done by the Expressionist artist Edward Munch. His original name for the painting was “The Scream of Nature.” We always have a fond look at it as we walk the trail but a few days

ago it was very windy and the main trunk fell over and was hanging precariously. It borders the trail so it was dangerous. Our great staff managed the keep the scream ‘face’ by giving it a severe hair cut and leaving the trunk in place.



The Nature Boxes

I asked Andrea Donner to answer all kinds of questions I had about the new Nature Boxes and I hope I was able to capture some of her answers.

What are the Nature boxes about? The different boxes are about plants, mammals, Tataviam Indians, birds, pioneer toys and the rock box is the newest one. The committee is growing; it is, as usual at Placerita, a community effort with ideas from many docents.

We use them with school groups but it is purely optional. It will be very helpful to use them with the school groups in the winter if we have rainy days. They are used for outreach, Open House, the Craft Faire, during the weekend in the Interpretive Center and special events at Placerita. We use them with the school groups by having one of the boxes on the trail so they are used to enhance the trail experience. For example, the children spend 5 to 7 minutes looking at different plants in the box and experience their smell and texture and then can look for them on the trail. They can get a quick geology explanation, be shown the 3 geologic formations in the canyon and then have more fun looking for rocks on the trails. Sometimes a docent will wait on the patio with one of the Nature Boxes to give the school children a little explanation about pioneer toys for example when they come back from the trail and have some time on their hands before lunch. A docent shows them how to use the toys, the children can play for a few minutes then can be on their way.

It does not replace the animal presentation or being on the trail experience, but it is another way to make the experience more complete and interesting.

Some docents have been trained to explain the Nature Boxes but more training sessions will take place in October.

How did this idea start? We visited the Santa Ana Botanical garden and they had nature boxes to do their school program, with a docent assigned to each box. We were fascinated by those nature boxes and noticed that some activities done with plants were the same we learned during docent training. We thought it was fantastic! We also went to Eaton Canyon; they have nature boxes that are loaned to schools for a certain amount of time. We wanted to have more hands-on activities for the children and so we decided to form a committee to gather ideas and activities.

We came up with a proposal that we presented to the board to do the first box. They gave us some money to make the first box and test the water.



The first box was the pioneer toys, it went well and the board agreed to give us more money to create more boxes; we were ecstatic!

We were on our way!

We also received private funding from an organization which could give money to a non-profit and we were able to get our geology box and buy all the rocks.

It is very exciting, all those docents have wonderful ideas and have done a wonderful job with the Nature boxes.

It is the start. It is a hands-on experience that can be used as a complement to the programs we already have. I am trying to get the word out. It is optional but a very worthwhile program and I hope more people will get trained and want to use them.



Trail Treasure

Written and photographed by RuthAnne Murthy
Toyon, *Heteromeles arbutifolia*



Oh, Christmas Berry, Oh Christmas Berry! Christmas Berry is the nickname of Toyon. It looks as if we will see some of the red berries this year after a few years without them. If you want to see a great example of Toyon, all you need to do is walk through the back entrance of the Nature Center patio, and there it is on the right hand side.

Toyon is a sturdy scrub in the rose family that grows up to about 20 feet high primarily on the chaparral and coastal sage scrub below 4000 feet in elevation. It often has more than one trunk of very hard gray-barked wood. It is evergreen with hard, leathery leaves up to 5 inches long. The leaves are oblong, saw-toothed and have a paler underside.

Bright white 1/4 inch flowers bloom in June and July and grow in compound clusters. They are quite showy even from a distance. As the seasons progress, the pomes, as the berries are called, develop first as hard green berries and in November through January the berries turn a bright, shiny red. The berries are about 1/3 inch in diameter. If you cut one in half, it resembles the core of an apple. Remember that apples are also in the rose family. Toyon is protected by state law and is illegal to collect from public lands and even on privately owned lands without written permission from the landowner. The law was passed to protect the plant from people collecting it for Christmas decoration.

The native Californians prepared the berries for food by toasting, boiling, and sun drying. They also used the wood for tools and utensils. The Spanish prepared a cider from the berries and also cooked it into a sauce similar to cranberry sauce. Today studies are being done for various medicinal applications including as a treatment for Alzheimer's disease. The berries provide food for various animals, especially birds that in return disperse seeds for future new plants.

So when you pass a Toyon plant with its lovely red berries, feel free to hum a few bars of your favorite Christmas carol. And keep your eyes open for other Trail Treasures.



Wildfire Presentation

The Nature Education Program on September 22 was the Wildfires presentation and was presented by Eric Indermill, retired Glendale Fire department Captain and Placerita Docent. Thank you very much Eric for sharing your expertise with us. Eric has an extensive background in fire safety instruction and covered a wide array of topics regarding how wildfires start, burn and spread as well as fire preparation and protection techniques for homeowners. This is a particularly relevant topic this time of



year as we enter the height the fire season.

We have an evacuation protocol at Placerita to make sure that all the animals are evacuated in an orderly manner to areas where they will be taken care of with the least stress possible. We have also rules to make sure that most of the taxidermy animals can be saved and we are in the process of reevaluating those rules because the new interpretive center has many displays that we want to save in case of an emergency.

I have been part of 2 fire emergencies at Placerita where I was called to evacuate the animals from the building early in the morning and I can tell you it is a scary and emotional situation but the docents and county employees make sure that the situation is handled in the best manner possible. We always have had very fast and dedicated back up from the local firemen who have used Placerita as a regrouping station during a fire. From time to time, those rules need to be reevaluated so that we all know what needs to be done and such a program is an important step to do so.

Here is part of an article that was published in the Rattler January/February 2007 to remind you what can happen: "After wiping the tears from our eyes following the natural 2004 Canyon Fire, we adopted a motto "Hope Rises from the Ashes" and we had piles of tee shirts printed with it. Nature fulfilled our hope by producing an abundance of wild flowers as well as new sprouts from the burned oak trees. This summer of hope was dampened by a series of Canyon fires, one of which burned out the Walker Ranch camping area. Although we know it too will recover in time it is hard to understand how someone would want to burn such a beautiful resource."



The Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial and Castaic Wilderness Act (HR 3153)

Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel

The Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial and Castaic Wilderness Act memorializes the site of the former St. Francis Dam, which failed miserably in 1928, causing at least 431 deaths, and property damage from Santa Clarita all the way to Ventura. This legislation will protect the ruins from further degradation and vandalism, will allow a visitor's center and museum to be built, will protect the threatened and endangered species that live in the area, including Unarmored threespine stickleback, California red-legged frog, Southwestern willow flycatcher, Swainson's thrush, yellow-breasted chat, and Nevin's barberry.

This legislation will also protect 69,812 acres of pristine wilderness adjacent to the dam area. This is the largest chunk of unprotected habitat remaining in the Angeles National Forest, and the only land recommended for wilderness by the Forest Service. This area is filled with natural springs, seasonal streams and provides drinking water for our city. This water flows into Castaic Lake. This rugged area provides habitat for many rare plants and animals including the California Condor, the California Spotted Owl, Least Bell's Vireo, and the Southwestern willow flycatcher. It is also the site of the largest black oak forests in California, and there are a few stands of the very rare native Grey Pines. The area is also being visited by the California condors, which have been tracked recently making more than 400 trips per day into the wilderness regions.

This area is a very important wildlife linkage and connects the Santa Monica Mountains and Los Padres to the Sierra Pelona and eventually, the Sierra Nevada. It also connects the San Gabriel Mountains to the Sierra Pelona. You may have heard of the mountain lion that recently crossed from the Santa Monica Mountains by crossing the 101 freeway, then the 126 freeway, and attempted to cross the I-5, but was killed just a few feet from his goal, the Castaic Wilderness. This is the 3rd Mountain Lion we've lost in the last few years. This will continue to happen with our islands of habitat until we can connect them with tunnels or overpasses. In the meantime, we need to protect as much land as we can, because when that land is gone, those predators will instead, be in your back yard.

The Castaic wilderness is the sacred home land for the Tataviam Native Americans. It was named "Kastiq" by them, which means "EYE" or center/gathering place. This is the origin of the name, Castaic. This area, the forest home of our local Native Americans was the location where the Chumash came from Ventura to trade dried fish for grains. Our area was the bread basket of the region. We have buckwheat, Indian rice grass, slender oats, acorns, yucca root, and so much more. We are also rich in medicinal plants and plants used for sacred ceremonies, such as white sage. The Kitanemuk also met in Kastiq to trade. There are 24 habitation sites in the wilderness areas that include petroglyphs, cupules, mortars and burial grounds. This area is still used today for sacred ceremonies, burials, and debris sweat lodges.

I would like to give many thanks to the PCNCA Board of Directors for their unanimous vote to support this legislation. Please send a note of thanks to Congressman Knight for leading this fight to protect these areas in Congress.



Frank T. Hovore passed away unexpectedly in September 2006 from a heart attack while on an expedition in Ecuador. He passed away doing one of the things he loved best, collecting beetles in the tropic. He was known as the preeminent rain beetle specialist in the world.



This is what Frank's biography says if you Google his name but for the docents at Placerita, Frank Hovore was the second supervisor at Placerita, the one who started the docent program and wrote the manual "Windows into the Wild", the one who could answer all our questions, the one to whom we dedicated the classroom. There are a handful of docents who took the training with Frank and this year we were delighted to see Kathie Hovore join the docent training class. Frank will always have a special place in our heart and memory and this is why it is important to remember his poem on the anniversary of his death. The message is loud and clear and we will keep at it, Frank!

the small lives
tied into each other;
life within life, their reality
neither harsh nor cruel-
necessity.
wasting not, working against want;
mind, spirit and flesh.

we stand before this,
it is ours to know
and to pass on to those
who know it not;
it is ours only to become one with;
to protect, to shelter with reason
from the oblivions
of thoughtlessness;
the disasters of the unaware.

it is ours to understand with respect,
to perpetuate for eternity
through those who would inherit
our place;
to our children.
and to all children who will come;
to all who care –
share this canyon of cool beauty,

look to the future with a peaceful
hope:

the messages of life which spoke
to you here
will forever speak
to those who follow and would
listen.

F.T. H.



**What Keeps The Docents so Busy?
Here are a few of their projects.**

- Created Nature-In-A-Box boxes providing portable “hands on” educational materials including Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Native Americans, Native Plants, and Geology. Specialized training classes were provided for each box to qualified Docents.
- Established a Museum Committee to continually improve and protect our newly constructed Interpretive Center, Classroom, and Courtyard.
- Researched and wrote and photographed a detailed Museum Guide used for both Docent education and public enjoyment.
- Established a formal Taxidermy Register with detailed scheduled maintenance procedures.
- Funded taxidermy skills classes to enhance in-house capabilities for repairing and providing additional specimens for the Museum and Classroom.
- Secured a spectacular bee hive display, arranged to have it be home to our own honey bee colony and produced both in-house and public educational presentations on the importance of bees and our other pollinators in our ecosystems. Public interest has been very strong.
- Enriched the educational opportunities of our Lyon’s Oak exhibit on the Heritage Trail by designing an interpretive sign with matching colored stump inserts showing the history of events during that tree’s lifetime. Children love to see how big the tree was when Disneyland opened in 1955!
- Created an interpretive sign for one of our major assets, the Walker Cabin, giving the public more information about it and its important place in Placerita Canyon history.
- Reestablished the Trail Team to help repair and improve the quality of our many wonderful trails here in Placerita Canyon.
- The Weeding Team, working on the first Monday of every month, removed dozens of bags of invasive weeds from the streambed and trail sides. Weeding Team members also receive a “hands on” botanical educational experience in the process!
- The Nature Series Community Educational programs, presenting Nature and Placerita Canyon based programs on the third Sunday of the month continue to be very well received by our community, with “sell out” attendance nearly every month.
- Developed a Museum Docent program including very specific training in the plants, mammals, birds, and insects, along with schedules for weekend docent coverage for the public’s benefit.
- Funded and provided necessary interior furnishings for the newly reconstructed mews in the Courtyard.
- PCNCA’s Out Reach Program grew both in number of Docents (15) involved and in number of opportunities to present Nature focused educational experiences to schools, libraries, and major community events though out the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys. Out Reach presentations have been seen by over 2,300 people so far this year.
- PCNCA’s colorful, educational, and highly regarded bi-monthly publication, The Rattler, saw its subscription list grow to 2,166 individuals and organizations.
- The Class of 2015 Docent Training Class graduated 19 enthusiastic new Docents to help grow our core School Program and the many other opportunities to serve and enjoy our Nature Center and Natural Area.
- Organized and funded major improvements to the Gift Shop’s layout, furnishings and inventory. A formal sign-up sheet for weekend coverage was also instituted.
- Organized and funded the complete re-construction of our Tataviam dwelling, thought by some to be called a “Kij”, to enhance our student’s appreciation and understanding of our local Native American culture.
- On the first weekend of May, the PCNCA presented our annual Open House to our community. It was very well attended with vehicles filling both of our parking lots and Disney’s Golden Oak Ranch’s huge lot as well.
- This year’s Holiday Craft Faire occurred at the same time as our Museum complex was undergoing major reconstruction so we rented a large tent and had it erected in our upper parking lot and it worked out very well; in fact several attendees thought it added a lot to the “Spirit of the Season”! Again, all of our available parking lots were filled.
- Through a series of meeting with our School Program Docents, we made several subtle but meaningful changes to the Program that will allow us to spend more quality time with the students themselves. The changes were primarily in the process of getting the students from their transportation units to the classroom on time and prepared for the day’s activities.
- The well-established and always popular Saturday Family Nature Walk and Native Animal Show continue to serve our community very well.
- The Second Saturday Bird Walk is enjoyed by both amateur and very experienced birders. We also provide a bird walk at Castaic Lake the first Saturday of every month.
- The Fourth Saturday “Blooms of The Season” nature walk program has drawn many participants and as expected provides an ever changing view of our delightful Natural Area.

Meet a Great Docent: Sylvia Altamirano.

I was asked to provide a little background about myself and how my association with The Nature Center came about. I am an only child, born in Los Angeles, California and lived in Sylmar for the next 50 years. Both of my parents were from Mexico. I have two children, Diane who lives in Valencia (a teacher at Northpark Elementary) and Augustine (an ATT splicer) living in Sylmar. I am very proud of them both. They have blessed me with six wonderful grandchildren. Spending time with family is my favorite thing to do. I also enjoy travel and to hike, especially with friends.

Growing up in Sylmar, I was lucky enough to have 25 neighborhood kids on my block. As you can imagine, summers were so much fun, hiking and exploring the "hills" (now the I 5). We often saw jack rabbits, toads, horned lizards, snakes, and at times even bison grazing. The "hills" were wondrous and sometimes covered with a carpet of colorful wildflowers. Placerita reminds me of those days.

I graduated from Sylmar High School, attended Pierce College and transferred to California State University at Northridge. I majored in Education and Chicano Studies. There I took course work to obtain a partial teaching Credential. During this time I also worked part-time with the State of California Employment Development Department, in EDD Operations and the Tax Branch. Ultimately it became a career choice. I held various positions which included Management, Supervision, and a Trainer in Job Service, Unemployment Insurance and the Tax Branch.

The travel bug bit me a long time ago. I have been able to travel whenever possible. It excites me to explore new lands, meet people of different cultures and to experiment with exotic cuisine. My favorites are Africa, Mexico, Italy, Spain and Israel. I love their natural beauty, rich history and art.

When my children were young, I would take them to Placerita Nature Center. We enjoyed hiking and visiting the Nature Center which had many snakes, spiders and taxidermy on display. One day while hiking with my grandson Andrew, we wandered into the Nature Center. I noticed a flyer asking for volunteers. It spoke of a budget crisis and the possible closure of the Center. I filled out the form in 2001. Soon after, I was contacted by Pam Koch and Heidi Webber and was asked to assist in weekend activities. Eager to do what I could to keep the Center open, I accepted the opportunity. Everyone made me feel welcomed. I was amazed at the knowledge of Ian Swift, the Park Supervisor, the docents and volunteers. After receiving on the job training, I did whatever was needed. Duties varied from leading hikes, the gift shop, cleaning windows or mews, to cleaning and restocking the bathrooms. Sometimes I would get to feed Wee-bit, the kestrel, crickets or take Wee-bit and even OJ, the great-horned owl, out for some fresh air. At this time I had the wonderful opportunity to meet Dr. Frank Hovore. Both he and Ian Swift were brilliant, with lots of charisma. It was hectic, but so much fun! After all the efforts of the Nature Center Docents, volunteers and the community, the Placerita Nature Center was kept open. I was glad I could be of service.

Once the crisis was resolved, Heidi asked if I could go through docent training, since they were in need of docents to give school tours. After some thought, attending classes and working with children sounded like something I would enjoy. I requested a flexible work schedule and along with my vacation hours, I completed the docent class in 2003. After graduating, I started leading school tours and found it very rewarding. Then workload demands changed, and the flexible work schedule was eliminated. That change limited my availability to work at the Center.

In 2002, my Mother had passed, and I was traveling up and down the State, training employees on a new computer program. I would leave and return at odd hours. I decided at that time that I needed a low-maintenance home that was gated. I moved to Valencia in 2005. Weary of all the travel in 2011, I decided it was time to retire after 37 years.

After retiring, I returned to the Center. I saw many familiar faces that now were providing the docent training. There were many new docents and new developing programs. The familiar events and activities that the community expects and enjoys were still in existence. Again I felt welcomed and at home. I was glad to be back. As an added benefit, I have made new friends and have been hiking more regularly. This has helped fill the "friends at work" void. I am so proud of being a Placerita Docent and highly recommend it. You too will be welcome.



Is Placerita a Zoo ?

The answer is NO! Yes, we have many residents of the wild kind at Placerita, but they are there as educational tools and cannot be released to live in the wild for various reasons. We never actively collect them unless we have asked for and are receiving them from another preserve. Many can be seen by the public on a regular basis in the building and some can be seen in action during the animal show on Saturday at 1 pm. All these animals put Placerita on the list as one of the most loved Nature Centers. People coming to Placerita come to visit the animals and show them to their children. When we have an educational program that involves an animal presentation, people come by the hundreds because they are fascinated. We were able to see this again this year during the Wolves presentation where the building was too small and we had to do the presentation outside.

Keeping all these animals can be expensive and requires a lot of red tape. Each one needs to have a special permit and an enclosure in accordance to Fish and Wildlife regulations. The docents are pleased that the county took care of those requirements. Dave Stives, who is the Park Animal keeper, makes sure they are well taken care of and are in good condition.

The docent's responsibility is to pay for the food and the vet bills. That can become very costly and with such a long list of animals, we need to be ready.

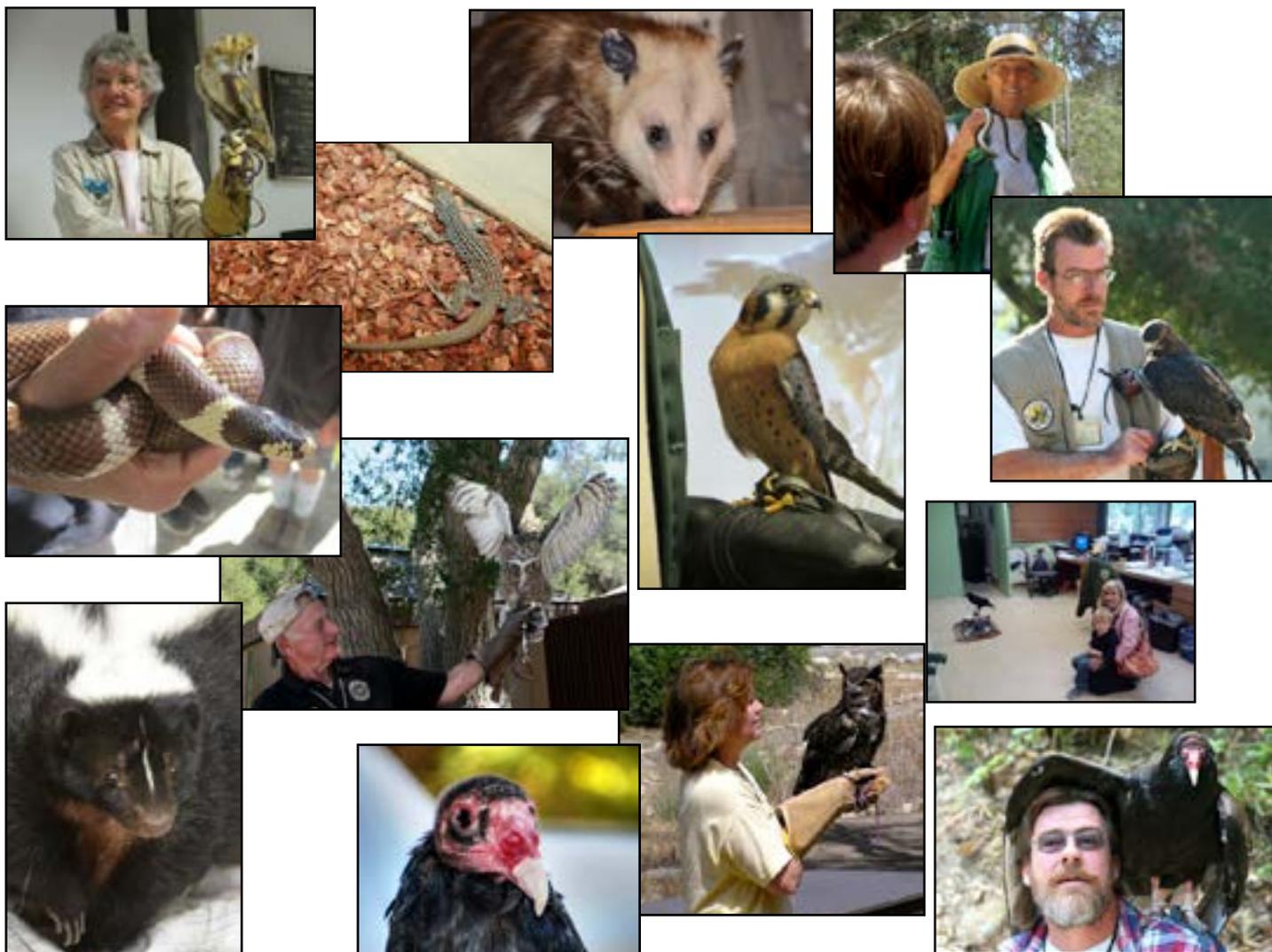
How do we handle this cost? The school groups coming to Placerita are asked to help us with a donation, some schools do so and some don't but we offer this program so many days of the week that we can count on a steady source of revenue.

We also have the Adopt-an-Animal program developed by Judy McClure where visitors or groups can "adopt" an animal and participate to help pay for the cost of this animal for a while. We have one fund raiser, the Holiday Craft Faire where people come to the Center to make holiday decoration with fresh greenery. All the donations made to Placerita help to feed and take care of the animals so it makes it possible for Placerita to have more animals to present than most of the other Nature Centers.

Cages are cleaned by volunteers; docents and one part time county employee who also makes sure the animals have food and water at all times.

The efforts of the docents and the County employees working together make such a large collection of animals possible. The public is delighted by the result and come to see the animals on the patio and in the classroom.

The generations come and go: the children who came to visit Placerita on a school trip come back to visit us now with their own little children in a stroller and ask about animals they saw then. "It was the first time I saw a snake close up and I was horrified but interested." This is what we do this for: look, ask questions and learn and our mission is accomplished.



Volunteer-Naturalist Training Placerita Canyon Natural Area



Become a Volunteer-Naturalist!

- *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 12th, 2016
Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 12 Noon

Volunteer-Naturalists 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 Volunteer-Naturalists is 18. Visit our website (placerita.org) for further information regarding the Volunteer-Naturalist program.

Other volunteer opportunities are also available at Placerita Canyon Natural Area that don't require the 9-week training program, such as office helper and trail maintenance team member. Bilingual (English/Spanish) volunteers are especially needed.

**For further information call or visit:
Placerita Canyon Natural Area
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall CA 91321
(661) 259-7721**



A Walking Stick

A few weeks ago I was at the Nature Center when a docent, all excited, asked me if I had seen the walking stick. Well, we have a nice collection of fancy walking sticks in the gift shop. I don't see them move around on their own, and though they are really pretty, many of our visitors come prepared with their own. So I was not sure what all this excitement was about. Did we get a new shipment? A new style? One that sparkled?

She must have realized by my puzzled look that I was lost; so she grabbed my hand and brought me to the front of Apollo's cage. Apollo is our resident turkey vulture. Here was the walking stick! The walking stick is one of the oldest forms of insect known to man. The first form of walking stick can

be traced 200 million years ago, during the geologic time called the Triassic age. It is a long, strange looking insect that appears as if it is made of a few dry twigs. It is such an expert at camouflage that you really have to look closely to make sure it is an insect. If I had given the cage only a passing glance, I would have thought that a little twig was caught in the cage and would not have looked again.

To make the situation even trickier, the body of the walking stick seemed to be swaying gently in the wind, the way a branch would move. That is another way they camouflage their body, taking cues from their environment. They actually bend their knees to make this little movement. It is very hard to notice a walking stick, unless it is isolated on a window screen or in this case, on the side of the cage.

If it feels threatened, it plays dead, falling to the ground like a dead twig. If you were a bird, intrigued to eat it, you would shrug it off and look for a real lunch...or at least this is what the walking stick is hoping for!

Like a lizard which can sacrifice its tail, some walking stick species can even sacrifice a leg to escape from a predator, and the leg will grow back in a few weeks. They are usually nocturnal, feeding and otherwise active at night so that makes it even harder to spot them. Their body length ranges from 1/2 inch to 13 inches.

They can be found in many parts of the USA, but are most plentiful in the warmest part of the country and are known by many colorful names: Devil's riding horse, devil's darning needle or witches' horse. Its taxonomic name comes from the Greek word "Phasma" that means phantom or apparition. I think this name was particularly well chosen, and I bet you will too if you look at the photos.

It looks like a stick but the body is formed of 3 parts: the head, thorax and abdomen. In the head there is the brain and mouth, but no apparatus for breathing! They breathe through the thorax and abdomen using structures called "spiracles."

They have eyes that can detect images, motion and color as well as antenna that can sense hot or cold and can check on smells. They have 3 pairs of long legs, ending in small claws and a suction pad on their feet, helping them climb even on smooth surfaces.

They eat plants and seem more interested in the leafy part of the plant. Certain species eat only one type of plant so that can be a problem for that plant if there is a large infestation of walking sticks. However, because they do not have wings, the insects' reach to higher parts of the plant is usually limited.

They are the prey of birds, reptiles, spiders, rodents, praying mantis, and because they are nocturnal, bats eat them too.

The life span of the walking stick is usually about a year, so mating and producing eggs is very important for their survival. The couple, while mating, can be attached together for hours, days or even weeks. But even if the female cannot find a partner, she can still have viable eggs. Those eggs produced without a male can only become female walking sticks. Animals that can reproduce asexually are described as having the characteristic of "parthenogenesis." That can be a very useful way for a species to survive one or 2 difficult seasons in one specific area, but it cannot last for much longer than that, I imagine.

The eggs are dropped to the ground, into leaf litter. For some species, the eggs are even buried in the ground by ants, a good way to have them protected from predators. They look like seeds, so being hidden under ground is just perfect. In spring time, the eggs hatch, the nymph climbs into a tree to become an adult, and the whole circle starts again.

Walking sticks are strange creatures and they have perfected the art of mimicry, since they look in almost every respect like a small twig. The purpose of mimicry is to trick your enemies into thinking that you are not good to eat (why eat a twig?). It is obvious that their appearance helps the walking stick deter many predators.

I doubt the walking stick will still be there the next time you visit the Center – but remember that something you see may not be quite what you assume it is. Take the time to look carefully, and you may get a great surprise like I did.



A One-year Review of the Weeding/Trail Enhancement Efforts *by Robert Grzesiak*

Our initial goal was to start small and doable. So the focus was to weed the trails along which our school field trips took place. In addition, we attempted to reseed a disturbed area with native seeds gathered only in the park. We had eleven weeding events on the first Monday of each month. We did not meet in September. We had great support from the PCNA board and park staff.

The 1st meeting was Nov. 14, 2014. Fifteen docents showed up the first day. First Mondays of the month, have had 9 docents on average in attendance. We spent two to three hours at each event for a total of approximately 298 docent work hours.

Our June event was unique. We hosted and served lunch for 32 students from Sierra Vista Junior High Community Service Club. 22 docents, in a grand show of support, helped the students by directing, gathering weed bags, and serving lunch.

Accomplishments:

- Initiated weeding on all the trails around the Nature Center Hillside Trail- 3 events: invasive annual grass hand pulled. 50%, as well as perennial Smilo grass- 100% elimination.
- Hidden Trail- 1 event: invasive perennial Smilo grass removed, 100% elimination.
- Ecology Trail- 2 events: invasive Black Mustard pulled (up the slope) where the car ran off the road, 90 % elimination; and another time invasive annual grass pulled along creek banks, 40% elimination.
- Canyon Trail (about three quarter of a mile) 1event: Sierra Vista students, led by docents, pulled Smilo grass- 80% elimination, and pulled London Rocket Mustard-50% elimination. Students treated to lunch.
- Oak Woodland/Picnic area- 1 event: invasive perennial Smilo grass removed, 60% elimination.
- Historical Trail- 2 events: the first event focused on Walker Cabin and the fountain removing all sorts of weeds; the second event removed noxious invasive puncture vine the full length of the trail, 90% elimination.
- Open space near Oil drilling Demo- 1 event: invasive Black Mustard pulled- 80% elimination.

For the year, we collected 109 bags of weeds. Those were 55 gallon bags.

Our efforts to reseed the open space next to the Picnic area, has shown no results so far, probably due to lack of rain in the winter.

Theodore Pyane might add that nature usually provides hundreds to thousands of seeds. More expertise is surely needed as well. Beyond the first two events, we did not attempt any further seeding and plan none for the future.

PCNA has bought some tools: gloves and long handled hand shovels. The county has also bought tools for weeding.

In the future we need to co-ordinate better with the Park staff. They have offered to assign court appointed workers from time to time.

The weeding and trail enhancement committee of the whole, has accomplished a lot. Our focus on the noxious puncture vine for October which spread everywhere in front of the Nature Center this summer is a good example of what we can accomplish. The seeds have thick long spines that can puncture bicycle tires, collect on shoe bottoms, and inflict pain to bare feet both animal and human. Puncture vine is no longer common due to the Weeding committee (park staff also did some prework on this vine).

We can be proud of our efforts. By weeding we are maintaining a natural environment, one that our school children can better learn from and experience.

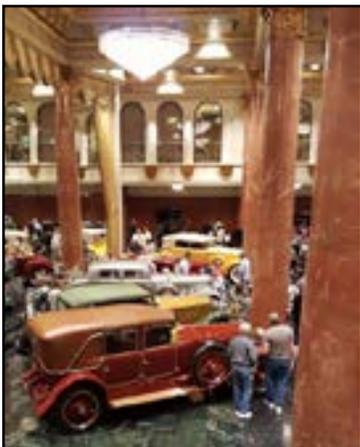
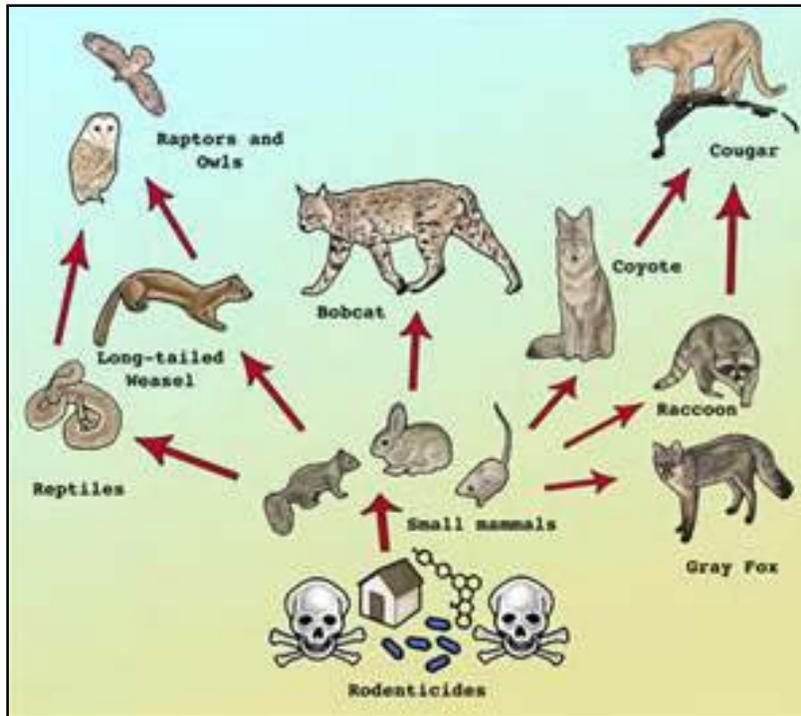


Olivia Miseroy in Action

Olivia went to a special taxidermy class paid for by the docents and she came back full of new ideas, knowledge and techniques. It is a subject that she has a passion and an affinity for. She also had a teacher who encouraged her views and her ethic: animals that are dead from accidents or natural death should be taxidermy but none should be killed for that purpose. During her class Olivia started with an opossum to be her practice project and she showed us the result at the board meeting. It looked so good already. It still needed some paint touch up and a shampoo but she did a really nice job. This opossum will be used to replace the one in our classroom since the one we have in display is not accurate. This new one will be interacting with its environment which will have more of an educational narrative. Other new taxidermy animals will be used for the outreach programs. Some schools and organization cannot come to the Nature Center on trips but we go to visit them to give them our program and show animals. It is easier and less stressful to show taxidermy animals than live ones. People can come close by and look at it so they get a better understanding of what those animal look like.



Olivia is very excited by her ability and her talents and she has plans to taxidermy other animals: Cottontail rabbit and rattlesnake will be next up and maybe even a horned lizard and a bat, maybe a new acorn woodpecker? She is very talented and she loves it so we are very lucky to be able to benefit from her creations. Keeping true to her ethic, she thinks about adding some insects to her displays but won't kill them; she needs to find them dead already. We are so impressed by her dedication. Thank you Olivia.



Trips with Docents

In August, Lanita Algeyer organized a trip to the Paul Getty Villa in Malibu. In September, she planned a great visit to the Nethercutt collection.

Nikki Dail tried to plan a trip to the Ostrich Farm but Sunday morning was not a good time for most of the docents.

In October, Andrea Donner took the docents to the Bennett's Honey farm and the oil Museum in Santa Paula.

These outings are always so very interesting and we keep on discovering new places. Thank you all for your great effort.





The Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Presents its Annual

Holiday Craft Fair

December 5 and 6, 2015

10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

at

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall

1 1/2 miles east of the 14 freeway

Create and decorate your own holiday wreaths, centerpieces, candles and ornaments using a large assortment of fresh-cut greenery, pine cones and other beautiful natural treasures.

Please note that this is a fundraising event for the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (a non-profit corporation) and that there is a charge for some activities. The charge for most crafts is \$2 and wreaths range from \$12 up. Cash and checks only, credit and debit cards cannot be accepted.

The Nature Center Gift Shop will be open to help you finish your holiday shopping

(661) 259-7721 • www.placerita.org





Holiday Craft Fair

As soon as you have eaten the last of that Halloween candy (remember the ones you told yourself you'd never eat?), you start paying attention to all those Thanksgiving recipes in magazines. Maybe you think about another way to decorate your table for the big day, or desperately try to remember where you put all the extra chairs you will need around the table for the feast! Traditions are important; they are a way to bond families and friends together. This is a time of the year where we expect certain happy events to happen at very specific times. Images come to mind; a sweet mixture of childhood expectations and memories of happy times.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center is such a place. The Holiday Craft Fair will take place on Saturday December 5 and Sunday December 6 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. The charge for most crafts is \$2.00, and wreaths range from \$12.00 and up. Cash and checks only. This is the only fundraiser for the Nature Center and the profits are used to feed the animals.

People will line up outside, some of them will bring their own hand pruners to be ready faster, and as soon as the door opens they will rush to the piles of greenery. You see, Placerita is the only place in this valley where you can make your own holiday decorations with fresh greenery, berries, seeds, pods and many other bounties of nature that have been gathered by the docents during the weeks before the event. There are also fruit slices that have been dried by the docents to bring a lovely natural touch to wreaths and table centerpieces. You can find pine cones of many sizes and shapes. Large branches have been drilled with holes to make candlestick holders. So many natural treasures are available that people have to take a few minutes to gather their ideas and see what they are going to use. They go from one pile to the next, gathering those lovely materials. It is like a treasure hunt! The wonderful smell from all that greenery welcomes you right away at the door.

People can buy a straw wreaths and branches to make a candlestick and attach all the greenery on this clean slate. With the help of the glue gun, they can attach little details and the result is always totally professional. We even have a Ribbon Lady who can help you with those finishing touches if you need help! We see fathers and children getting in on the action and working as a team. It is always such a joy to see the pride in their creations. It is really fun to watch but also to admire the final product, because each time it looks extremely good. I guess the abundance of natural treasures helps to get those results without any special talent or experience. The atmosphere is really fun because people help each other, give advice and support, share ideas and greenery and compliment each other.

While the parents are busy, the kids are having the time of their lives; simple crafts have been prepared and they can make little snowmen, pine cone angels or paint bird houses. It's great to see all those fun projects involving glue, glitter and a fun holiday spirit which seems very abundant on that day. Docents are there to help the little ones make their own creations.

This craft fair has been going on for more than 35 years and we enjoy so much when parents come now, with their own little children, and tell us about their memories coming here when they were little. Some remember dipping candles that they still have as keepsakes at home even today!

We also always have the pine cone bird feeders and that is a great hit. You roll a very large pine cone in a mixture of corn flour and peanut butter, and then you roll it in bird seed. The smell of the peanut butter takes over the room where people roll up their sleeves to get the most bird seed. It is fun and always exciting to hang this special feeder in a tree when you come home.



Fred Seeley, one of the very active docents at Placerita, will be Santa Claus again this year. Thank you for doing this Fred. Fred has lots of experience being Santa, as he used to be Santa for his company before his retirement. The little children are always a bit scared when they see this tall Santa but Fred is so gentle and soft spoken - and when they realize he has candy canes in his bag for them, the fear melts away and they dare to approach him.

If you have not been to Placerita for a while, I can warmly recommend a stop in the gift shop. It has been completely renovated and there are many lovely items to finish your holiday shopping. Do not forget to check this out, you can find unusual and interesting gifts for every age group and many things just for yourself..

Mari Carbajal is in charge of the craft fair again this year and she does a wonderful job. Thank you so much Mari for handling the craft fair in spite of your full time work load. We really appreciate your dedication.

Thank you to all the volunteers who work during those 2 days. Without your hard work this event would not be possible. It takes lots of time and preparation and we are all well aware of your efforts.

I hope you will have a chance to come to the Nature Center to participate in this delightful tradition and all the docents at Placerita join me in wishing you very happy holidays as you enjoy the beautiful nature around you.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center is located at 19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall CA 91321
1 ½ miles east of the 14 freeway
(661)259-7721





Adopt-An-Animal The Perfect Holiday Gift

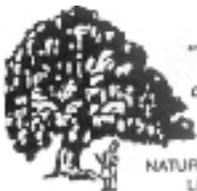
The holidays will be here before we know it, and if you have an animal or nature lover on your list, let us help you. Our live animal adoptions are perfect gifts - and they are tax-deductible too!

Packages begin at \$25.00 and include a certificate of adoption, photograph, fact sheet and other perks. Packages range from \$25.00 to \$250.00. We will personalize your gift as you wish, include your message, and wrap it up in holiday paper. Check out our website at www.placerita.org and scroll to "Adopt an Animal." Then call the Nature Center at (661) 259-7721 or Judy McClure at (661) 252-6187 for details. Don't wait another minute-happy holidays made easy!



The Rattler

*Placerita Canyon Nature Center
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213*



*"We exist so children
and oaks
can grow together."*

NATURE CENTER ASSOCIATES OF
LOS ANGELES COUNTY