



The Rattler

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

March-April 2025

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Hello Nature Friends,

The beginning of the year was difficult. Extremely strong winds forced the Nature Center to be closed and without power, then the fires started - some closer to the Nature Center than others, but we were luckier than many and the park was saved. A few times, the park reopened but needed to be closed again because the power was cut off. Recently, we had some welcome but heavy rain after our very long drought.

With all these different delays, the Holiday party was rescheduled 3 times, and we had to accept that docent training would be cancelled for this season.

Spring is coming, the stream is running, kids are playing in the water, and buds are starting to open up. Nature does not quit, and it is very reassuring to see birds making nests at the same time every year.

There is hope, come and visit Placerita.

Docent Training is Cancelled

Three times in a row, Ron Kraus held fast and postponed the docent training for different potential dates. It is a huge amount of work because all the teachers must be contacted, new dates for the classes have to be planned, the students have to be aware and change their schedule.

By mid-February and the last news of an atmospheric river on the way, we were getting too late in the season. A new schedule for docent training would have interfered with the many school groups which had already registered for the spring at Placerita.

Thank you, Ron, for your hard work, dedication and perseverance.



Fire Disaster

On January 7, the board meeting was taking place at Placerita when Russ Kimura, Regional Park Superintendent 1, received the order to close the park at 2PM. The board meeting was almost finished so the gate was reopened to let the docents evacuate. The wind was getting stronger to a level we had never seen before, 100 miles per hour...

Then the Hurst Fire broke out at 8:20PM in Sylmar, cutting off the Newhall pass, and the evacuation line kept on creeping north through the night. Placerita was protected because it became a fire staging area for the firemen, to allow them running water and bathrooms.

The Eaton fire destroyed large areas of Pasadena and Altadena. With great sadness, we found out that the Eaton Canyon Nature Center was destroyed, along with all their animals. Last time they burnt down, it took 5 years to be rebuilt after many fund raisers.

We have close ties with this Nature Center, their docents have taught classes at Placerita and we exchange information. Each June, we have a ceremony to give recognition to special docents and we have established friendships with members during this celebration. Then the Lidia fire started around Acton, way too close for comfort. Pacific Palisades is a little bit further, but the devastation there is beyond all description.

We thought our valley was going to be spared, but then the Hughes fire started in Castaic. Right away, it took off to a frightening scale. 31,000 people were under mandatory evacuations including a few of our Placerita docents. The firefighting was impressive, and Hughes was under control more quickly than others.

January was a painful month, scary and tragic for too many people.





Seven Very Special Docents Are Honored

By Cindy Gold

At our PCNCA Party in February seven docents were honored for their dedication, hard work and initiative. Congratulations to these amazing docents!

For twenty-five years **Heidi and Bill Webber** have been organizing one of our most popular events of the year - our Holiday Craft Faire! Multiple generations have enjoyed creating beautiful wreaths and other holiday crafts because of their dedication and hard work. Also, they manage the School Outreach Program, bringing our live animals to schools and teaching students about the magic of mammals, birds and reptiles. Heidi is an amazing cook and caters some of our events. Bill is a jack-of-all trades when it comes to building projects and maintaining the park. They have been a major part of Placerita Canyon Park since the beginning. We are so grateful to have this multi-talented couple on our team! (they are not on the photo because they could not attend the ceremony)

For ten years **RuthAnne Murthy** has managed our Docent Enrichment Program. She organized monthly fieldtrips and workshops where docents learn, explore and hone skills and knowledge they pass on to our park visitors. She also leads the popular monthly Blooms of the Season hikes, sharing her impressive knowledge about the flora of the park. She organizes the children's crafts at our Holiday Craft Faire. She leads school tours and organizes the Downhill Sliders, a fun hiking group for docents. The list goes on and on. RuthAnne is always willing to lend a helping hand, offer encouragement, a joke and a friendly smile!

Dan Duncan is a longstanding, veteran docent who has contributed much throughout the years to educating park visitors and helping behind the scenes. On weekends he shares his passion for birds by introducing the public to our beautiful raptors. He delights young and old with his explanations and stories. He goes above and beyond by feeding and taking care of these amazing animals. He co-led our monthly twilight hikes and is a big help to our county park staff, even bringing fresh cookies to them every week. Dan is a well-respected and highly valued member of our docent community!

Sandy Corkle has worked tirelessly researching Walker family history and helping to make the Walker Cabin come alive. She skillfully archives photos and other historic documents as well as leads tours of the cabin on Saturdays. She's sewn new curtains for the windows and helps maintain the cabin. Sandy also helps develop educational materials and co-leads hikes for the Challengers Program, which serves our visitors with special needs. Sandy has packed so much dedication and service into her first year as a docent!

Denise Allen is full of enthusiasm and energy. She has shown initiative by organizing tours of the Walker cabin, as well as inviting Walker family members to come and speak about their family and how they impacted the history of the park. Adults and kids alike love hearing her stories as she brings history alive. She is an exceptionally hard worker, jumping in to help at the Open House and photographing many of our activities and programs. Her engaging personality puts everyone at ease!

Brienne Kelly has demonstrated her commitment to PCNCA and nature education by jumping right in to lead school tours and help organize the activities. She's willing to lend a hand in many park events and programs from working at the Open House, to leading activities at the Holiday Craft Faire. She helps to plan Docent Training and carries out administrative tasks. Her tech skills are put to good use as she helps promote PCNCA events. We are fortunate to count her as one of our dedicated and active members!



Nikki Dail Received the 25-Year Cup at Placerita Canyon Nature Center

One never knows how even small decisions may influence their life's journey. Such was the case for me when I travelled to Eaton Canyon Nature Center from my home in Saugus for the first time in 1999, in response to an ad in the newspaper seeking a volunteer for the Treasurer position on the Board of the NCA (Nature Center Associates of LA County).

Following my meeting with John Speakman, then NCA President, and other Board members, I was sent home with a cardboard box with files to sort through to try to piece together the puzzle of the NCA, its' (then) five Chapters, and various non-profit and tax filings due to both the State

and Federal Governments. While I had several years of experience in Public Accounting and at my position managing an International Accounting department at Disney, this was to be my first experience doing a consolidation of a non-profit and preparing its filings.

Over the years that followed, that one small decision has provided me with both the pleasure of giving my time to support an important need and tremendously enriched my life with a wonderful community of other like-minded docents, volunteers, and County employees. Through the last 25 years, I have experienced many changes and highs and lows: 2000 - Completing my docent training program at ECNCA over nights and weekends around my work schedule; 2001 - Setting up a common chart of accounts for the NCA in Excel and working with the Chapter Treasurers to define a process to easily prepare a combined NCA financial statement; 2015 - Receiving a Volunteer of the Year award from Mike Antonovich for NCA; 2016 - Switching my membership from ECNCA to PCNCA and taking over the Trails & Nuggets communications for PCNCA; 2016 - Giving the first of seven annual presentations for the PCNCA Community Nature Series events; 2020 - Facilitation of both the PCNCA and NCA Board meeting via Zoom due the Covid closures; 2021 - After serving with seven different NCA Presidents, I decided not to run for NCA Treasurer again in the vain hope that someone else would volunteer. I continue to act as Treasurer to ensure NCA will maintain its non-profit status; 2023 - Receiving Kathryn Barger's compliment on my Treasurer's report presentation at the first post-Covid NCA recognition ceremony; 2024 - Completing 25 years of volunteering with the NCA; 2025 - Seeing the devastation of Eaton Cyn Nature Center after the Eaton fire.

In 2026, I look forward to finally retiring from my full-time position at Disney. This will provide me with even more time and opportunity for many more years of participation at the docent events and activities at the Placerita Nature Center.



Downhill Sliders.

The day was January 13, and we were supposed to walk along the Canyon Trail. The park was closed because of very strong winds and fire danger. We had recently found out about the destruction of Eaton Canyon Nature Center and many docents had friends who lost their homes. The mood was somber.

However, RuthAnne Murthy came to the rescue. If we could not go on a hike because of this dangerous wind, we could at least have fun and go to lunch. RuthAnne took 10 Downhill Sliders to lunch in Newhall, the food was delicious, and we had fun!

The Stage is Almost Ready!

If you have not seen the amphitheater stage lately, you will be surprised. . The ramp was finished a long time ago, the wooden stage has been enlarged, and the guard rail is close to being complete.

We can safely accommodate large groups on the stage: singers, dancers, the sky is the limit, and it will be very exciting to see what kind of entertainment we can enjoy this summer.

The New Birds

by Jim Crowley

Over the past 3 years hopefully you have noticed new birds on display. These museum quality bird models are professionally carved and painted. They are the result of display evaluations done as far back as 2015.

Taxidermy models are subject to micro insects that destroy the display and are very expensive to replace. A trade off evaluation of price and longevity comparisons was made of purchasing new taxidermy birds versus wooden carved birds. The life span of the carved birds obviously out lives the taxidermy models. And that saves overall costs and maintenance for many years.

With the help of our resident docent bird expert and professor, Ken Yasukawa, along with other known birder docents the list of priorities was put together. Subsequent to that, James Durow, a professional Bird Carver (www.wildbirdsinswood.com), was identified and he has delivered what we expected in quality over the past three years.

We will have 17 new birds on display with #18 soon to come, an American Kestrel. As an example, view the beauty of the Greater Roadrunner or California Scrub-Jay as reality displays. As a super bonus, park visitors and especially children can enjoy them and learn to identify what they might see in their back yard or perhaps learn the difference between, say, a Scrub-Jay and a Western Bluebird.

Below is a list of the birds. See if you can find them.

California Scrub-Jay, Greater Roadrunner, Spotted Towhee, Acorn Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, California Quail (male) Wrentit, Oak Titmouse, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Western Tanager, California Towhee, Hermit Thrush, White-breasted Nuthatch Phainopepla, White-crowned Sparrow, Western Bluebird, Dark-eyed Junco, American Kestrel (under construction).



Eduardo Munoz

Let me introduce our new part-time recreation leader at Placerita.

Eduardo started at Placerita in mid-January and will work the afternoon shift, helping Monica to close the park. Monica is very pleased, because closing the park when it is very dark can be scary.

Eduardo's previous experience was at Castaic Lake where he was in charge of the kiosk, collecting the entrance fee. He also took care of the boat inspection.

He loves Vasquez Rocks and has gone there often with his brother who had his wedding photos taken at that park. Family life is important for Eduardo, and his parents live in Sylmar.

Welcome to Placerita, Eduardo

Tristan Uribe

Tristan is a new part-time recreation leader at Placerita. You might remember him, because he used to work at Placerita for the Youth-at-Work program with Monica Chocooj. They were a great team.

Tristan worked previously with Goodwill Industries, also for the Youth-at-Work Program, but was pleased to know there was a job opening at Placerita with more work hours available.

He lives in Sand Canyon with his parents. Some days he will have the late shift closing the park and on other days, he will be there early taking care of maintenance.

He lit up when he said he loves the park, the trails, and had great relationships with all the employees before - so it was like coming home for him.

Welcome back, Tristan.



Denny Truger to the Rescue!

Some mud was noticed on the path in the butterfly garden. Frank Hoffman, Recreation Service Supervisor at Placerita called Denny Truger, docent from the class of 2012, for help.

Denny is a hands-on problem solver in so many areas. Denny was there the next morning, immediately identified the problem and corrected the situation. This happens time and time again, and very often we are not even aware of the work Denny does because he keeps quiet about it.

Thank you so much Denny for always being ready for the rescue, we deeply appreciate your help. If you want to meet Denny, he also shows birds at Placerita every Saturday morning. You cannot miss him; he is the guy with the great big smile!



Bird Watching

by Rosemarie Regis

If you would like to know more about the birds that frequent our beautiful Placerita Canyon Nature Center, I invite you to join us on the first or second Saturday of the month. (Please check our website for time details).

I never thought I would spend almost 20 years enjoying, not only the variety of birds, but also meeting many amazing people.

When I first became a Docent at PNC, I wanted to absorb all the history and information possible. Bob Fischer was one of those amazing Docents who I found helped fulfill my interest in birds. I can't remember ever missing any of his bird walks. Once he could no longer lead them, he passed the lead to me and I'm still enjoying Bird Walks.

I'm so lucky to be able to meet birders from different cities, states and countries, as well as new birders of all ages! Some locals become dedicated birders and friends.

Whatever time of the year, there are always great birds to view at PNC. One of my favorite times is March through August. But any time of the year is great!

Spring is of course a fantastic time to start bird watching: noticing new nests, courting behavior, different songs. Come to a bird walk at Placerita, bring binoculars and I think you will have a great life-changing experience!



Books and Hikes by Dennis Cain

We recently held our sixteenth program...and it was the first one in which rain kept us from hiking! Nonetheless, we filled the Docent Room table with what has become a regular group of outdoor lovers who like to discuss many topics that make us feel that way.

We have covered nature impacts on health, several quests, forest management, interactions with animal life, and communication of several types - and we always have reflective, inclusive, and invigorating conversation with involvement of docents and the general public. Our hikes rarely extend past a mile, and we've found a few places that are great for discussion (with views and/or water noise).

For example, our latest book was *Travels with Charley* by John Steinbeck, which covered a trip he took in 1960 with his dog in an effort to rediscover America. There were many elements that spawned discussion, including some that we keep returning to: how much of a park visit by different people is similar, and how much is individual? How do you find out through a brief conversation what people really think?

We have books planned for the next several months that address the 'conservation versus preservation' topic (*Encounters with the Archdruid*, *Engineering Eden*), camping (*Under the Stars*, *A Walk in the Park*), and (of course) trees (*Greenwood*). Come join us and participate in the fun!



Blooms of the Season by Glenda Perl

It was a cool and crisp Saturday morning when a small group of intrepid trekkers joined the Blooms of the Season hike with PCNC Docent Extraordinaire RuthAnne Murthy.

We headed towards the Canyon Trail and walked up to the first water crossing. We searched for dudleyas in the rock faces and fresh sprouts of wild cucumber reaching for the sunshine. Since we've had no water dropping from the sky (until later that night), there was very little new growth to be found. However, the oak trees put out a plethora of acorns this year!

At the water crossing, we turned around and trudged down the rocky path to the Hidden Trail. Up the Hidden Trail we went. Climbing up those steep steps to the water tank was a real challenge for me but, I did it! From the water tank, we took it slow going down the Hillside Trail, as there are some bald spots, loose rocks, and slip-and-slide areas.

Again, I expected to see a lot of wild cucumber starting to grow all along these two trails, but there was none. Maybe, after the nice dose of rain we had that night, we'll see new life sprouting all around the park very soon. It's the Circle of Life!

Thank you, RuthAnne Murthy.



Narrow Leaf Milkweed
Asclepias fascicularis

Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

Narrow leaf milkweed is a perennial plant that lives in dry, grassy meadows and in disturbed areas. They grow up to 4 feet tall in the Pacific states up to 6000 feet in elevation. They have a sparse appearance with thin stalks and leaves.

The leaves are arranged oppositely in lanceolate shape (pointed) often as narrow as a ¼ inch wide. The green leaves are up to 5 inches long in whorls (in bunches around a stem). The long, slender stems present a white sap when cut.

The flowers are white with a rose fringe. They develop from a common point, and the umbrels (bunches) have flowers on a ½ inch stems. The flowers have a mild honey-like fragrance. The plant is the home of the red and white spotted common milkweed bug. They bloom from May to September. The 3 ½ inch long, brown seed pods contain hundreds of seeds with fine white hairs that help distribute the seeds in the wind.

Narrow leaf milkweed plants are essential to the existence of the Monarch Butterfly because they are the preferred larvae plant. The larvae often eat the leaves to a bare stalk.

The native Californians used the stalks for their fibers to tie on splints and bandages. All parts of the plant were eaten, and it is said that they have a mild asparagus-like taste. The sap was used as a binder to make paint for pictographs.

Narrow leaf milkweed is not a showy plant, but it is a Trail Treasure because of its importance in its support of the Monarch butterflies whose population is in serious decline.



Sandie Corkle

I have been a resident of California for seven years. I find visiting Placerita Nature Center, and hiking the beautiful trails of Placerita Canyon Park, to be a delightful experience.

I wanted to give back to Placerita, when “coincidentally” I met Judy McClure, whose enthusiasm is contagious, she encouraged me to take Docent training. By February of 2024 we were encouraged to start thinking about finding our niche/field of interest.

Marc Alva was cleaning every item in Walker Cabin, at that time, in preparation to reopen the cabin after it had been closed due to Covid in 2020. I stopped by to help a couple of times and found that Walker history is fascinating. The cabin reopened in March 2024. Judy and Jennie Marsh encouraged me to join the Walker Cabin Committee.

The more I learn about the Walker Family the more respect and appreciation I have for them.

Frank E. and Hortense V. Walker worked very hard to live off the land, while respecting and preserving that natural habitat. Recently, Bob Walker (Grandson of Frank E.) found that by 1949 Frank had rejected multiple requests from oil companies for drilling leases. He chose to sell his land to the state of California to create Placerita Park, with a clause in the contract requiring that the park be left in its natural state...and that is why we have the privilege of visiting Placerita Park.

Frank continued to support this endeavor for the rest of his life. Now, 76 years after that sale, his children and grandchildren have continued to support Placerita Park and the Walker legacy.

It is a pleasure to welcome visitors to Walker Cabin on Saturdays. Adults and children enjoy investigating the artifacts, viewing photos, and hearing stories about what life was like for the Walker family in the early 1900's.

Jennie Marsh, Denise Allen, and I, have all had many people say, “Thank you, for letting me come inside. I have been peeking through the windows for years and always wanted to see inside.” Also, people often ask, “When is it open again?” Because they would like to bring friends and family to see the cabin. Unfortunately, currently Saturday from 10AM-2PM is our only regular day.

At the January Board Meeting, Jennie Marsh reported that 1,899 visitors toured the cabin during the last 9 months of 2024. That included school tours, “Open House” most Saturdays for 4-5 hours, and some limited weekdays and Sundays.

The County park’s “rough estimate technique” indicated that there were roughly 25,000 visitors to the park in 2024.

My Walker Cabin wish list:

- 1) Offer more visiting hours in the cabin to allow more visitors to learn about our benefactors.
- 2) Continue work on our presentation of artifacts, and photos to enhance our visitor’s experience and education.
- 3) Share Frank Walker’s legacy with our community: “Preserving nature in our world is priceless”.

Please join us on the Walker Cabin Team. Hosting visitors at Walker Cabin is guaranteed to be a fascinating, enjoyable experience.

2024 Christmas Bird Count

Ken Yasukawa

On Christmas Day 1900, 27 birders counted birds at 25 locations yielding a total of 90 species. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the nascent Audubon Society, proposed the “Christmas Bird Census” as an alternative to the traditional “Side Hunt” in which hunters chose sides to see who could kill the most animals.

Today, thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas sign up in November through the Audubon website to count within specified areas, each with a 15-mile diameter and directed by a designated compiler who chooses a day between December 14 and January 5. Once combined, the counts of these citizen scientists are then used to assess the health of bird populations and to guide conservation action. On Dec. 28, 2024, the 125th annual CBC yielded 109 birds of 27 species at Placerita.

The data collected since 1900 enable researchers, policy makers, and conservation agencies to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across the Americas. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, we get a good picture of how bird populations have changed during the past 124 years.

For example, the Climate Change Report issued by Audubon in 2014 provided comprehensive predictions of how climate change could affect 588 species of North American birds. According to the report, more than half of the 588 species will decline and 314 species will lose more than 50 percent of their climatic range by 2080.

To learn more about this hemispheric community science program and how to volunteer, go to <https://www.audubon.org/community-science/christmas-bird-count>.

Library at Placerita

by Gary Freiburger

I’m the person who has been in charge of the PCNCA library in the docent room at the Nature Center for the last five years. Sometime this summer my wife and I will be leaving the area to live closer to our son and daughter-in-law.

I sent a request to the docents for somebody to take over this project and I was delighted to have people interested. I spent much time and effort to have it in great shape. We have an interesting choice of books, and it is a pleasure to see the docents are aware of that and care to keep it in good order.





Pond Cleaning

by Fred Seeley

Every year the pond needs to go through a big cleanup, most of the vegetation is cut off or thinned out, the pond gets drained and refilled with clean water.

At the January Board meeting, Russ and I discussed turning the pond maintenance over to the County since PCNC is now fully staffed. He agreed.

In mid-January, I met King, Grounds Maintenance Worker II at Placerita and two younger new court referrals at the pond and worked with them, led by King, to get the pond done and to share ideas going forward.

Joe Morelli stopped by later and did some more work. I asked King and Joe to work out the best way to do a major water change. The pond is now ready for spring.

Docent Enrichment at the Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum's historic diorama halls are the largest exhibitions at the museum, showcasing more than 75 incredibly detailed habitats ranging from arctic tundra to tropical rainforest.

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the dioramas, NHM has restored and reopened a diorama hall that has been closed for decades. Ruthanne Murthy, who is in charge of Docent Enrichment, knew about the exhibit and wanted the docents to experience the new displays.

We were very impressed. The new lighting and new information panels made a huge difference, the displays are pristine and truly beautiful. What a change!

Linette and Rick Brammer returned home at lunchtime when they heard about the Hughes fire, because they live in Castaic. They were evacuated but were able to go back home the next morning.

Thank you so much RuthAnne Murthy for planning all these very interesting visits for the Docent Enrichment. We learn a lot and we have fun with our fellow docents. How perfect is that? We deeply appreciate your commitment and expertise.



Special Education School Group

by Pat Coskran

A few weeks ago, Marietta Ewing, Lori Wolf, Maria Elena Christensen, Jack Levenberg, Sandy Corkle, Denny Truger and I presented to a group from Valencia High.

Students, Teachers, Instructional Assistants were all engaged and entertained. Watching the compassionate support offered by the VHS staff is inspirational. These high school students at Valencia High are entitled to Special Educational services until they turn 22.

The teachers noticed the children became very quiet during the presentation so they could focus all their attention, which is a major step for them to take.

Such a joy to share the treasures of our Nature Center

Thank you all for supporting me.



Trail of Hope in Hiker's Haven

by Jaclyn Cossgrove

†The Los Angeles Times 1/25/25

Cristhian Mace, L.A. County Department of Parks and Recreation employee, made these statements about the Eaton Canyon Fire.

Mace estimates that the alluvial scrub, where buckwheat, sage and yucca grew amid seasonal streams could take five to 20 years to recover. The riparian habitat, where plants like willows, and mule fat grow along the creeks and rivers could take between five and 20 years to recover. The cottonwood trees will take longer. And the chaparral – including the red-barked manzanita shrubs, sugar bush, and lemonade berry – could take between 10 and 30 years. And all of her estimates Mace said, depend on how much rainfall the region gets. The Eaton Canyon we recognize is probably going to take at least five years to grow back in a way that starts to feel familiar, Mace said.

But we should not rush into the area and start ripping up burned shrubs and trees, cautioned Gabi McLean, president of the San Gabriel Mountain chapter of the California Native Plant Society. "Rushing to act could do more harm than good" she said.

"The general rule is – leave it alone" McLean said. You can make an assessment after the first year, maybe the second year where it did not recuperate and if you have native seed. If you have that seed from that area, then it is OK to help it along. In the meantime, watch for those invasives and pull them out."

McLean said today we know that native seeds can live several decades in the ground, some germinating only after fire because they need the heat or chemicals created in the burning process. Ideally Eaton Canyon would be allowed to recover naturally outside of yanking up invasive plants that challenge native plants for nutrients and space. "We get the idea that we have to do something" McLean said Let nature show us what to do and how to recover".



My Name is Brienne Kelly

I am a recent graduate of the 2024 docent class. After the birth of my daughter in 2016, my family and I moved to Santa Clarita Valley from Lancaster to split the commuting distance between Edwards AFB, where my husband works, and Port Hueneme, where I was employed at the time. We settled in Newhall, right by Hart Park, and have made it our forever home. Originally from Huntington Beach, I consider myself a beach gal through and through, but I have always loved being outdoors—hiking, camping, and immersing myself in nature. Whether digging my feet in the sand or dirt, nature has always been my grounding place.

Throughout the years, I have had a diverse career journey, including roles such as Home Health and Hospice Manager, CNA, Clinic Scheduler, Aerospace Logistics Specialist, Marketing professional at a record label, healthcare career advisor, and small business owner. In 2013, I decided to join the Air National Guard/AF at the age of 35, just making the cutoff! Despite being a weekend warrior, I served full-time on active duty until unforeseen health issues led to my medical retirement after seven years. This turning point led me to pursue my passions by using my benefits to return to school and to volunteer in areas that bring me joy. I am currently in my final semester at CSUN, majoring in Cultural Anthropology, with plans to pursue an M.A. in Museum Education.

In my free time, I enjoy going to concerts, creating art, and spending quality time with my husband, Adam, and our 8-year-old daughter, Domino. We love going to movies, visiting museums, hiking, camping, and exploring the great outdoors. You may have seen Domino on Nature Tots days, enthusiastically leading the big kids on their hikes.

I am passionate about California native plants, habitats, and wildlife, and I am dedicated to fostering a lifelong appreciation of nature. As a docent at Placerita, I strive to inspire others to connect with the natural world and make a positive impact on our community. I actively contribute to programs such as School Tours and Nature Tots and am always eager to assist wherever needed. My commitment to continuous growth and learning drives me to seek new knowledge and experiences, and I greatly value participating in Docent Enrichment programs. I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside a talented and dedicated community of docents and look forward to evolving in my journey to educate and inspire others, while preserving and appreciating Placerita's natural beauty.



Spring Schedule

Important change in Park Schedule: The park gates are open 8:00AM to 7:30PM starting March 1 to October 31.

Books and Hikes: 4th Sunday of the month from 9AM to 10:30AM. Please register at book-sandhikes@placerita.org

Bird Walks: 1st Saturday of every month with Rosemarie Regis. 2nd Saturday of every month with Ken Yasukawa. For all levels of birders, from 9AM to 10AM. Bring binoculars, water and a field guide.

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.

Family Nature Walk: Every Saturday from 11AM to noon with Judy McClure. An easy 1-hour walk exploring the natural and cultural history of the area.

Hike with the Downhill Sliders: 2nd Monday of the month, check Trails and Nuggets for information.

Placerita Nature Tots: 2nd Saturday of the month at 9:30AM. For 3-to-6-year-olds. Program lasts 45 minutes to one hour and will involve learning about the environment. To register, go to Nature_tots@placerita.org

Nature Education: Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2PM, PCNCA provides a free educational program open to the public. Check the webpage to learn about the topic. March 16, the topic will be Mushrooms.

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



The Docent Enrichment Program Went on the Sierra Pelona Rock Club February Field Trip

By Heidi Webber

Ruthanne Murthy asked me if the rock club I belong to (and has a table at our Open House each year) could do something for her Docent Enrichment program in February. I responded with an invitation to our monthly field trip to go on a collecting expedition to the desert to collect jasper, agates and other goodies.

On February 22nd, Barbra Marxmiller, Lori Wolfe and Brienne Kelly, along with Brienne's husband and daughter, met with members of the Sierra Pelona Rock Club for their desert adventure.

The club went to Lavic Siding, which is on Interstate 40 not far from Barstow. The first site was full of beautiful red jasper, just lying on the ground waiting to be picked up. There were also lava bombs found everywhere you turned. After about an hour, we moved a couple miles up the road to another site where a lot of butterscotch-colored jasper could be found in addition to the red jasper. A little later we moved a few hundred yards up the road looking for moss agate, which is kind of hard to find, but is in the area. By about 2:30, we were done.

It was such a beautiful day out, around 73 with a cool breeze. The roads were flat and accessible so we didn't need to worry about driving safely. In the end, we all came home loaded down with rocks and great memories—which is always the point!



A nice piece of red jasper. To the left is a lava bomb. Above and slightly to the left is another lava bomb. There are 3 extinct volcanos in the immediate area, hence the lava fields.

Photo credit to Lori Wolfe



Butterscotch Jasper
Photo by Lori Wolfe



A Desert Tortoise Den
One of two Lori found
Photo by Lori Wolfe