



The Rattler

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Placerita Canyon Nature Center

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.

January/February 2008

Hello Dear Nature Friends,

I want to wish you, your family and friends a very happy, healthy and fun 2008. Take the time to have a good look around you, enjoy this beautiful planet we live on and try to keep it that way. Most of all be excited about the nature around you.

We are going to be faced with new challenges with the construction, but we will face them day by day and we will survive. If this sounds like déjà vu you are right. I wrote those lines last year as the construction was supposed to start in March of 2007. Hopefully, it will all be done on time in October of 2008 as planned.

We are so pleased with our new docent training class starting January 8. Check the class schedule and you will understand why. Welcome to all the future new docents and the class of 2008!

A Happy New Year

Dateline: November 13, 2007

Construction has officially started. The building is blocked off and a work schedule has been posted. Work is also in progress to fix the problem we have every time it rains and it all drains into the entry drive creating a muddy, slippery mess.



**Happy Birthday toooooo
Youuuuuuu!**

“Congratuliosn to Ian Swift who is turning 30 on January 16, 2008. We are very proud of our all grown up and efficient Superintendent at Placerita”

The Rattler is a bi-monthly publication sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates to promote the preservation and enjoyment of the Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Please come, enjoy, learn...and volunteer.

A Golden Time for Eagle Viewing

The eagles have landed in California and Cachuma Lake is a good place to see—maybe—some of those big birds.

On Sunday January 20, Placerita Canyon Nature Center docents, volunteers and their families will be going to Cachuma Lake Recreation Area in Santa Barbara County for a 2-hour lake tour. The cost is \$15 per person and you have to be there at 9:30 to get your life jacket and hear the safety program.

A docent naturalist will be on board. He will answer all your questions and will make this trip an interesting experience. Please bring your binoculars with you and dress in layers as the temperatures on the lake can be quite cool at this time of year. Plan to stay after the trip ends at noon as we will all go to a restaurant to have lunch, get warmed up and socialize. Please RSVP to Evelyne if you can stay for lunch so I can make the reservations.

If you want to make a weekend of it, Cachuma Lake has a beautiful nature center with a spectacular view and a nice trail around the lake. You can camp there or rent a cabin. If you want to stay in Santa Barbara, I can recommend the botanical gardens, the zoo and the Natural History Museum (of course, there is nice shopping too!). If you are not affiliated with the Nature Center but would like to go on the 2-hour lake tour, please call 805 686-5050 to make your reservation. Susan works from 8am to 3pm with a lunch break from noon to 1pm.

Docents, do not wait until the last minute, I need to have your payment by January 6. I got excellent feedback from previous visitors who all had a very good time and I am certain it will be the same for us. See you there.



Glenn Hakason

Glenn, or Hak, as we used to affectionately address him, is a docent from the past but he still receives the Rattler and that is how his wife Marion got in touch with us. Hak has been in the hospital since last summer after a serious car accident. He is paralyzed and is in sub-acute care at the hospital. Docents always remain part of our big family at the center and we want to send our best wishes to Hak and his family.

The Rattler

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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:

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or you can email it to Evelyne at evelynevandersande@hotmail.com.

Please email your article in MS

Word if possible.

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Visit our Internet site at www.placerita.org--Jason Stuck is the webmaster.

Moving? Please let us know so you won't miss any issues of the Rattler.

The Rattler is printed by

Valencia Printers

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 have paid their yearly dues. 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.

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

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.

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

There is the often told joke about the person who prayed to God to receive the gift of patience and concluded with asking if they could have it right away.

At Placerita Nature Center we are also asking for patience as we adapt to our outdoor children's program while the County Parks and Recreation Department slowly contracts for the Nature Center's renovations and improvements. We look forward to the Nature Center Building having a new roof over our heads, new insulated siding, a new heating and air conditioning system, and restrooms with new interiors and a sewer system that can handle large public events. With patience we may find ourselves back in the renewed building next Christmas in time for our volunteers holiday dinner.

Speaking of patience here are a couple examples of what can be accomplished by those who persist at their goal:

A. In 1999 a group of Placerita Canyon and Sand Canyon residents began speaking before the Santa Clarita Planning Commission to protest the Golden Valley developer's plans to build 866 homes and a 90 acre commercial center on 1300 acres of biologically diverse open space north of the nature center. This project included a four lane road through the hills intersecting with Placerita Canyon Road where a housing cluster of 169 homes plus an elementary school and a sewage pumping station would be located directly across from Walker Ranch entrance.

After years of public hearings before both the Planning Commission and later the City Council, the city compromised on a smaller project of 499 homes which did not impact Placerita Canyon and included 920 acres of open space to be given to the city including a section of land adjacent to Walker Ranch. In 2002 the developer and the city agreed to place a conservation easement on the open space requiring the land to remain in its natural state in perpetuity. This May 2007, after the developer's bankruptcy and lawsuits were settled, the 920 acres of Golden Valley Ranch Open Space had the conservation easement recorded on the land and the title to the open space was transferred to the City of Santa Clarita. "Patience"

B. In 2000 the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates and PNC Foundation attempted to assist the owner of the abandoned 160 acre SDI business site offering this land for sale to the County Parks and Recreation for open space. This property is at the east end of Walker Ranch and includes a beautiful oak woodlands as well as streams and waterfall feeding the Placerita Creek. After years of trying to "sell" the county on considering this property as an extension of the park, the Foundation turned to the City of Santa Clarita and were successful in having them visit the site and consider adding this property to their adjacent Golden Valley Open Space. In 2007 the city successfully passed the Open Space Measure to raise money for purchasing open space land and this December announced that the city was in escrow to purchase 140 acres of the SDI site. "Patience"

O.J—Oh Boy!

By Heidi Webber

Anyone who has been at the center more than a couple of minutes have met Owl Junior—aka OJ. OJ is the center's beloved mascot and is also very old for an owl. For several years we have said that he should be in the Guinness Book of Records and finally I did something about it. I contacted Guinness and laid my claim. In a couple of days, they had emailed me that they have opened a file on OJ. I had to fill out and fax paperwork and now Bill and I are in the process of proving it. We have found old newspaper articles and photos. We found an old Rattler indicating an in-service to learn to handle a baby OJ—dated September 1985. We found an old VHS with OJ in the bird room when it was used for animal rehab. This can take a bit of time, but we will let everyone know how this turns out. If our claim is accepted we will get a certificate (suitable for framing) from Guinness and he will be official.

In the meantime, if anyone has old DATED articles or photos, please pass them along to me so we can scan them and add it to our documentation. What a great way to honor our grand old man, don't you think?



Beginning Birding Isn't Very Hard

by Bob Fischer

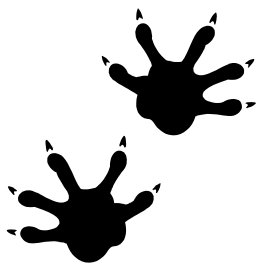
Do you have a bird feeder? Do you wonder what all those different birds are that come to the feeder? Or the ones that scrounge on the ground for the seeds splashed over the edge. Like that sparrow sized bird with the black head or the ones with the white stripes on their heads? Want to learn the names of all the birds you see in your back yard and on your walks? Learning isn't very hard. In fact it's a lot of fun besides being exciting and rewarding. If you are a lover of or even mildly interested in nature, birding is an activity that gets you out in nature and makes one look at what is happening, where it is happening, how it is happening and why. You begin asking questions never thought of before. Your understanding and appreciation of nature is enhanced.

Well, the Nature Center is offering a beginning birding class consisting of four sessions partly indoors and partly outdoors starting January 12 at 9:00AM.

The setting is informal and friendly; there will be no tests; you can learn about just a few common birds of our region or choose to delve deeply into bird lore and become a committed "birder".

Our bird walk in December provided a first for me in Placerita Canyon. A small flock, perhaps ten or twelve birds flew over the parking area and landed on the top of an oak tree. At first I thought they were mourning doves which was pretty exciting because we seldom see flocks of Mourning Doves in the Canyon. But on closer inspection it was apparent they were a different species. Then I knew! They were Band-tailed pigeons. I had seen them a number of times before but never in Placerita Canyon though they appear on the list for the Canyon. After a few minutes they flew off in the direction from which they had come. They are seen regularly in other parts of the Santa Clarita Valley. They come frequently to Evelyne's backyard feeder. Band-tailed Pigeons are large, two inches longer than Rock Doves, which is the common pigeon seen in our cities and two and one half inches longer and with heavier bodies than Mourning Doves. They are found in low altitude coniferous forests along the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington and in oak and mixed woodlands in Arizona and New Mexico. But I saw them most frequently on my morning walks when I lived in Granada Hills sitting on telephone wires. Their name comes from a wide black band about halfway up their tail. They are gray with a white ring across the back of the neck and white under the rump and look like a pigeon but are larger than the ones you see in our cities.

The next bird walk in Placerita Canyon will be on January 12. If you are a beginner and want to learn more about bird watching, join the class for a one hour session and then go out on the trail for the excitement of being a "birder" looking in the trees and bushes and on the ground to discover the birds.



Good Bye Penelope

Penelope, our opossum, passed away quietly during the night of December 5, 2007. She would have been 4 years old in March but did not quite make it, just like our previous opossum Gini. There lifespan is really 3 years old. She had a tumor, her back legs started to fail and she was at the end of her life. We gave attention and care to Penelope but we did not want to subject her to the risk of anesthesia. She was found by Chris Bruce's dog when she was a baby. Chris caught her just in time and brought her to the center with just a few scratches. She had been separated from her mother too soon and we had to bottle feed her. She spent her life educating thousands of school children about opossums.

Goodbye Penelope, we are sad to see you go.

Carlton Reininger

Quite a few years ago, we had a violent storm during El Niño. The stream along the Ecology Trail overflowed and the large rocks that were tumbling along did so much damage along the way that the trail never recovered. After each heavy rain it was difficult to use the trail at the stream-bed crossing. Carlton Reininger took this problem as an Eagle Scout project and worked to find a solution with Eagle Scout Troop 498 and Troop 609. Two bridges were built, tons of rock were moved into place, a rock and cement footing was placed under the bridge to hold a railroad tie crossing and after 71 hours of work, the project was completed.

Thanks go out to all of you for your hard work and making our trail safe again.





Meet Paula Parr

Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I was born in a suburb of Chicago. I lived the majority of my life in California.

What is your education? I went to 11 elementary schools, 3 junior highs and finally did a whole high school stint in the same place. I graduated from Marshall High School (Los Angeles) as did my father and three brothers. I went to Los Angeles Community College then transferred to California State University at Los Angeles. I have a B.A. in anthropology and an elementary teaching credential.

What is your work experience? I taught elementary school in Los Angeles Unified School District for 20 years. I taught mostly 2nd and 3rd grade. My students were non-English speaking and I spend most of my day teaching in Spanish. Most of our field trip students are 2nd and 3rd graders so it seems like I have come full circle. I then spent 17 years working at United Teachers Los Angeles. This is the labor union

that represents the teachers in Los Angeles Unified. In that capacity I assisted Sue Wallendar at one time. I retired in June 2006 but still work occasionally.

What is your family life? I have one son, a teacher of 7th grade math and science at the school across the street from where I taught. I also have two grandsons who are participating in the junior ranger program at the Nature Center.

When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place? I came to the Nature Center for the first time in the spring of 2006. I went on a hike with a group up to the Devil's Punchbowl. I decided that since I was retiring I wanted to become a volunteer/docent at the Nature Center. I enrolled in the next training class.

How did your love of nature start? I have always loved the out of doors. My grandparents owned a cabin on a lake in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The cabin was only a step up from the Walker Cabin. We could hand pump water into the kitchen sink. It had a wood burning stove for cooking, an outhouse and an ice house. I did a lot of fishing, at least as much as a less-than-5-year-old could do. I did a lot of camping and backpacking when younger and fitter. I never got any better at fishing. I still camp--in a trailer. I don't know if I had someone in particular who brought a love of nature to me. I think it was going to my grandparent's cabin as a small child that set the love in me. My grandfather used to say about the upper peninsula of Michigan: "If you are not there on the fourth of July, you have missed summer".

What did or do you like the most about your job at the Nature Center? As a volunteer naturalist I really enjoy showing the animals to the students. They love seeing animals up close that they do not normally get to see--the snakes and tarantula. I like showing the snakes, particularly "Moonshadow", the King snake. Because of this, my friends bought me a snake for my birthday. It is a member of the King snake family, a Sinaloa Milk. She/he is red with bands of yellow and black and looks a bit like a coral snake. I have also become very interested in learning about birds. Santa Clarita and its canyons and wildlife areas have an abundance of birds. I bought a bird book and have been looking for unusual birds all the time.

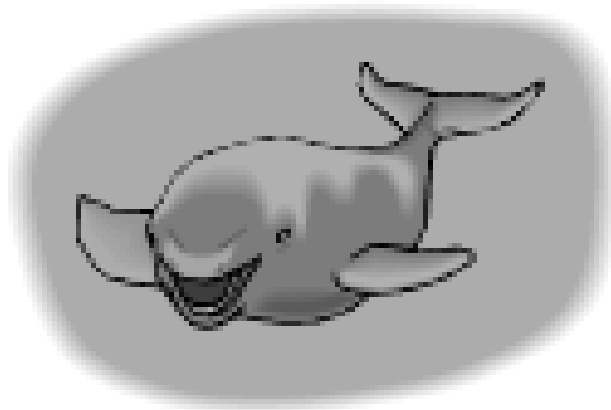
What is your favorite color? Orange.

What is your favorite place? I think my most favorite place in the world, so far, is Maui. What a gift to people is this island. The wildlife in both the ocean and on land is amazing. I will be traveling to Israel with my church this February.

What else would you like to tell us about you? In addition to camping I was a downhill skier for years. I have to camp for a

Whale Watching Season is Almost Here

The grey whales will be starting to migrate north after having had their babies in the warm waters of Baja California. They have to reach Alaska in the summer to enjoy the abundance of food and for the babies to reach mature size. Whale watching boats are leaving from many harbors: check the week-end calendar section in your newspaper. My own experience is that I have been very lucky with boats leaving from San Pedro. This is truly a Californian miracle you don't want to miss and it finishes quickly in March.



Volunteer-Naturalist Training

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

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 8th, 2008

Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 AM to 12 NOON.

Prospective Volunteer-Naturalists are invited to attend our 9-week training program. Topics include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history, and interpretive techniques. Classes are taught by knowledgeable, experienced professionals.

Other volunteer opportunities are also available that don't require the 9-week training program such as animal care specialist, office helper, and gift shop staff. Bilingual (English/Spanish) volunteers and docents are especially needed.

For further information call or visit

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91321
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Email: info@placerita.org

Do You Know The Full Moon Names?

Full moon comes each month and we marvel at the light in the sky and the bright round face above us. People have been fascinated for centuries and gave special names, each month to the full moon.

We thought the beginning of the year would be a perfect time to list some of the full moon names. Thanks to Earth & Sky: <http://www.earthsky.org/> and Guy Ottewell's Astronomical Calendar: <http://www.universalworkshop.com/AC.htm> for the list.

January: Old Moon, or Moon after Yule

February: Snow Moon, Hunger Moon, or Wolf Moon

March: Sap Moon, Crow Moon or Lenten Moon

April: Grass Moon, or Egg Moon

May: Planting Moon, or Milk Moon

June: Rose Moon, Flower Moon, or Strawberry Moon

July: Thunder Moon, or Hay Moon

August: Green Corn Moon, or Grain Moon

September: Fruit Moon, or Harvest Moon

October: Harvest Moon, or Hunter's Moon

November: Hunter's Moon, Frosty Moon, or Beaver Moon

December: Moon before Yule, or Long Night Moon



Ojai Raptor Center

A Trip with Frank

Kimberly Stroud does wildlife rehabilitation. She handles all birds with an emphasis on birds of prey, but she also takes care of shore birds, wetland birds and an occasional eagle. Her facility is in the middle of a reconstruction so she can only handle a 15-docent group.

Frank Hoffman, who is a long-time friend of Kimberly, will take us to her Raptor Center in February. When a date is decided, I will let you know through Trails-n-Nuggets. This trip is open to docents only because of the small group requirement.



Monarch Butterfly Migration

If you are like me, you drive along the coast in the summer and you take the opportunity to visit every nature center that you find to understand the local flora and fauna. Then you get very frustrated because you hear "If you had been here in February, you would have been able to observe the Monarch butterfly migration. They always stop in this eucalyptus grove, right there next to the parking lot!" Too late again!

Jim Southwell is going to take us there in February. I will let you know about the date via Trails and Nuggets. As usual, please RSVP to Jim. If we have to cancel because of weather, we will contact you if you have signed up. We will leave the center at 9am. If you cannot make the date, I am still going to give you directions because I do not want you to miss this experience. It is the sort of event that you read about in National Geographic and my whole family has stood speechless for a few moments, staring at the wonder of it all. The tree trunks are covered with a sort of fur made from millions of Monarchs. It happens in Isla Vista (close to U.C. Santa Barbara).

From Santa Clarita, take the 126 then 101 north. Go through Santa Barbara. You will reach the Stork Avenue exit in Isla Vista. Turn left and keep going until you reach Hollister Street. Turn right. Drive about 1 mile and turn left onto Coronado (the Coronado sign is hard to see. One block before is Entrance Street—that should help). Coronado dead-ends into the park. Park your car and follow the path. The butterflies will be heading south in mid-March or as soon as it warms up, so go as soon as you read this. This is a very unusual sight.



Bill Kopatz

Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It is in the northeast part of Pennsylvania. It is coal country, a mining town. It is a poor place right now and always has been. My parents were emigrants from Germany, running to the states after the first World War and I was the first child born in the states. I had one brother and one sister. I grew up poor and I find myself fortunate because it forced me to take on challenges. I lived on the outskirts of town and wilderness was behind my home. My friends and I did not have a lot of parental supervision and we were left on our own so we spent our free time exploring the wilderness, building forts and enjoying our freedom. It was a real Huckleberry Finn existence, I guess.

How did your love of nature start? As a child being able to get out, catch frogs, catch fish, and look under rocks. My friends and I were turned loose so we took off together to explore.

Education? I went to trade school to become a machinist.

Work experience? I spent most of my life in machine shops working on everything that cut metal, I did... from beer cans to elaborate electronic machines.

What is your family life? As you all know, I am married to Linda. I met her at a church picnic. Between the two of us, we have 8 children scattered all over the United States, from Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Simi Valley and Irvine.

When did you come to Placerita for the first time? There is too much congestion and civilization in Canyon Country where I live, so I was looking for outdoor recreation in 1995. During my first visit, I went hiking, or exploring as I call it, and I wanted to find a place to show my grandchildren. This park was so lovely before the fire and it was so sad after the fire. I have taken all the trails in the park. With the school groups, I like to take the Canyon Trail, but my very favorite is the Waterfall Trail when I am on my own.

What is your title at Placerita? Docent of Class of 2003.

What do you like the most about your job? I enjoy the children. The younger ones I especially like. I always get a "whoa!" when they are taught about acorns and woodpeckers' holes. It never fails when you show them where to look and I love to see this look of wonder on their faces. The bear claw marks on the sycamore next to the stream always gets rave reviews from the kids. In the wintertime, when you show them the mistletoe and you tell them about being kissed under the mistletoe and they giggle, that is nice. I am also very impressed with the docents. Their knowledge, education and the dedication they have.

What don't you like? I will tell you: I don't like California. It is brown before the fire and black after the fire. It is never really green. If I had a choice, I would like to live in Bucks County Pennsylvania. California has a nice climate but I never minded the winter on the east coast. What I did not like was to rake the piles and piles of leaves in the fall.

At Placerita, is there an accomplishment that makes you feel proud? Taking the kids on the trail.

What is your favorite food? Italian.

What is your favorite color? The green of the trees, of the grass and of the lawns.

What is your favorite television show? PBS, nature shows and news. Steven Colbert does a satirical show I enjoy.

What is your favorite music? Baroque music (Vivaldi, Handel, Bach). I love this music but it drives Linda crazy as she finds it repetitive. My parents were not highly educated, but I grew up with a love of classical music.

What is your favorite pastime? I play golf and I volunteer a lot at my church. I am a sucker to help and if somebody asks me, I am always ready to lend a hand.

Anything else you would like to say? I guess I am a grumpy old man; that sums it all up (but Bill says that with a big smile on his face, so we all know to take it with a grain of salt!)

Some words of wisdom as we enter the New Year.

"People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.
If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.
If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.
The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.
For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

Mother Theresa

**GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT IS GREAT
OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH NATURE**

***In February, volunteers throughout the U.S. and Canada are invited to
“Count for Fun, Count for the Future!”***

New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, 23 October 2007—Millions of novice and accomplished bird watchers can make their fascination with nature add up for science and for the future during the 11th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, led by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. During “Presidents’ Day” weekend, February 15–18, 2008, anyone can count birds from wherever they are and enter their tallies online at www.birdcount.org. These reports create an exciting real-time picture of where the birds are across the continent and contribute valuable information for science and conservation.

“These volunteers are counting not only for fun but for the future,” said Tom Bancroft, Chief Science Officer for Audubon. “It’s fun to see how many different kinds of birds can be seen and counted right in your backyard or neighborhood park. Each tally helps us learn more about how our North American birds are doing, and what that says about the health and the future of our environment.”

“The GBBC is a great way to engage friends, family, and children in observing nature in their own backyard, where they will discover that the outdoors is full of color, behavior, flight, sounds, and mystery,” said Janis Dickinson, Director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

People of all ages and experience levels are invited to take part wherever they are—at home, in schoolyards, at local parks or wildlife refuges, even counting birds on a balcony. Observers count the highest number of each species they see during at least 15 minutes on one or more of the count days. Then they enter their tallies on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site www.birdcount.org.

The web site provides helpful hints for identifying birds. Participants can compare results from their town or region with others, as checklists pour in from throughout the U.S. and Canada. They can also view bird photos taken by participants during the count and send in their own digital images for the online photo gallery and contest.

In 2007, Great Backyard Bird Count participants made history, breaking records for the number of birds reported, and the number of checklists. Participants sent in 81,203 checklists tallying 11,082,387 birds of 613 species.

“Literally, there has never been a more detailed snapshot of a continental bird-distribution profile in history,” said John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “Imagine scientists 250 years from now being able to compare these data with their own!”

Already, the count results show how the numbers of some birds species have changed in recent years, such as a decline in Northern Pintails and an increase in Hooded Mergansers, consistent with trends from the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey.

“People who take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count see the results of their efforts in the news and in bird conservation work taking place across the country, said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus. “Whether the counts occur at home, at schools or nature centers, they’re more than engaging and educational science activities for young people and adults, they’re a way to contribute to the conservation of birds and habitat nationwide.”

Lt. Daniel Britt, who served in Iraq 16 months, is glad to be back home in Zimmerman, MN, where he and his sons plan to join the GBBC. “We get a bunch of birds in our backyard,” Britt said, “but my oldest son, Daniel, and I may cross country ski into the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge to count birds there.”

For more information on how to participate, including identification tips, photos, bird sounds, maps, and information on over 500 bird species, visit www.birdcount.org.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is sponsored in part by Wild Birds Unlimited. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a nonprofit membership institution interpreting and conserving the earth’s biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds. Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation. www.audubon.org

Docent Training

Ron Kraus is in charge of docent training and was faced this year with a difficult dilemma as we will not have access to the Nature Center because of construction. We want to thank Pat Salatore, Executive Director of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society, who is offering us a roof to do our docent training. They have a nice room with a screen and a PA system so it will be perfect for our teachers who want to do a Power Point presentation. Many classes will still take place at Placerita as we want to conduct "hands-on" experience on the trails teaching the local fauna and flora of the canyon to the new students. The cost for the class is \$45: \$30 for insurance and a \$15 materials fee, which includes a t-shirt.

We want to thank the different committee members who planned this training class: Judy McClure contacted and confirmed 3 teachers, Diane Henry checked on Windows of the Wild, Phil Rizzo handled the newspaper ads and Ron had new banners made and contacted the approved organization to have them hung in December and remove at the appropriate time and who also will contact public access television and KHTS radio. Pam will make sure we all have bringing snacks to keep the new docents well-fed and happy.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Tentative 2008 Volunteer Naturalist Training Schedule

Wednesday, November 14, 2007
Classes are held from 9 AM to 12 PM

Week	Day	Date	Subject	Instructor
1	Tuesday	January 8	Orientation/Intro/Fundraising/Gift Shop	Bob M, Pam, Docents & Staff
	Thursday	January 10	Ecology I	Ian Swift
2	Tuesday	January 15	Insects	Ian Swift
	Thursday	January 17	Birds	Judy Bass
3	Tuesday	January 22	Native Indian American Culture	Phil Rizzo & Sue Wallander
	Thursday	January 24	Placerita History	Ron Kraus
4	Tuesday	January 29	Ethno-Botany	Vanessa Acosta
	Thursday	January 31	Basic Animal Handling	Frank Hoffman
5	Tuesday	February 5	Mammals	Chuck Haznedl
	Thursday	February 7	Botany	Ileen Anderson
6	Tuesday	February 12	Classroom & Preschool Techniques	Docents & Staff
	Thursday	February 14	Trail Techniques	Susan Haugland
7	Tuesday	February 19	Reptiles & Amphibians	Mickey Long
	Thursday	February 21	Ecology II	Janet Kubler
8	Tuesday	February 26	Intermediate Animal Handling	Staff & Docents
	Thursday	February 28	Geology/Review of Course	Geology Instructor Pending
9	Tuesday	March 4	Reports Due/Final Examination	Docents & Staff
	Thursday	March 6	Hands on Classroom & Trail Experience	Docents & New Docents
10	Tuesday	March 11	Show Time (New Docents lead tours)*	Start of New Docent Service
	Thursday	March 13	Show Time (New Docents lead tours)	
11	Tuesday	March 18	Show Time (New Docents lead tours)	
	Thursday	March 20	Show Time (New Docents lead tours)	
12	Tuesday	March 25	Show Time (New Docents lead tours)	
	Thursday	March 27	Show Time (New Docents lead tours)	
	Saturday	March 29	Graduation BBQ Dinner	6:00PM Location Pending

* New docents must audit three hikes and lead two hikes before graduation.

OAK WOODLANDS: WHO'S EATING WHOM?

By Vera Strader

Venture into an oak woodland and woodpeckers sound the alarm; rodents and lizards skitter about, and foxes watch from afar. Over 300 species of amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals depend on oak woodlands for food, shelter and reproduction.

Regrettably, smaller and smaller islands of habitat remain for wildlife as piecemeal conversions of oak woodlands expand. The remaining smaller habitats restrict wildlife movement impacting migration patterns, mating opportunities, and ultimately the gene pool.

With recognition of the plight of oak woodlands and their wildlife, governmental agencies, environmental groups, ranchers, and homeowners are working to check their decline. Guidelines and laws are beginning to limit oak removal and to direct replacement and management. California SB1334 provides counties with a new outline for minimum oak protection and replacement. The plantings around our Sonora Bypass are another example of restorative governmental action.

Nonetheless, replacement of lost woodlands is complicated. Oak woodlands constitute a complex environment not easily duplicated due to the trees' slow growth (mature trees may be over 1500 years old) and because many woodland elements are inextricably hitched together.

THE LITTLEST ESSENTIALS. We speak of the food chain with higher animals consuming those below them in the chain. However, life in the oak woodland actually begins at a far more essential level—with the soil food web—a habitat that has developed through centuries.

The soil food web refers to the relationships among the living organisms found in the soil—bacteria, fungi, nematodes, protozoa, earthworms, and arthropods ranging from microscopic mites to centipedes. Some are considered beneficial; others like blights and molds can be pathogens, yet all have a part in growth and decay cycles.

Over the years, these organisms process forest litter from animals, trees, and plants, converting it to soil nutrients. They aerate by forming tiny channels to allow oxygen and water to reach the tree roots, and they balance and feed each other. Thus, an ongoing, interrelated process occurs supporting the growth of the oaks and innumerable other woodland plants.

INVERTEBRATES—YET MORE LITTLE ESSENTIALS. Nearly every part of an oak tree, from the roots, bark, and branches, to the leaves and acorns, provides food for invertebrates. Invertebrates include insects, spiders, pill bugs, centipedes, millipedes, and related creatures with no backbone or internal skeleton; invertebrates vastly outnumber the vertebrates (animals with backbones). Many of the more than 5,000 species of insects and arachnids (spiders and their relatives) found in California oak woodlands are specialized, feeding exclusively on oaks.

Invertebrates convert sunlight, carbon dioxide, and mineral nutrients absorbed by oaks and other plants into food for each other and for much of the more sizeable wildlife in the oak woodlands.

THE VISIBLE WILDLIFE COMMUNITY. The oaks provide cover, nesting sites, and food for salamanders, lizards, frogs, toads, bats, 80 mammal species, and 170 bird species. Many of these creatures rely primarily or exclusively on invertebrates for sustenance. Without invertebrates, they lack the food to grow, to reproduce, and in turn to nourish their young. Their numbers then decline, and in time even entire species can disappear. And as these animals drop out of the food chain, those who depend upon them for food in turn become imperiled.

THE BIG PICTURE. Oaks are lost not only to sprawl and agriculture but through ill-planned management of our remaining oaks. Our native oaks have evolved for centuries without summer water, yet we put water-thirsty plantings under them and then endanger the trees with summer irrigation to nurture lawns and ornamentals. We build homes, shopping centers, and roads around the oaks, trenching through roots, compacting soil and eliminating soil oxygen. We apply chemicals that imperil the diverse life within and above the soil, degrading soil, air, and water resources.

Can you imagine the Mother Lode without sprawling old oaks and their bountiful wildlife? If we are to achieve successful long-term oak woodland management, we must control woodland conversions and respect the needs of our surviving trees. And remember—the littlest things do indeed count.

To learn more, visit the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program, <http://danr.ucop.edu/ihrmp/>; the Oak Foundation, www.californiaoaks.org; or see “Oak Woodland Invertebrates, The Little Things Count” (Publication no. 21598), available at <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>, (800-994-8849).

See you in the garden.

Vera Strader is a Sonora-based Master Gardener who believes that the mature trees and the wildlife of the Sierra Foothills are irreplaceable.

Note: Master Gardeners are accepting recommendations for home landscapes and gardens to be part of the annual Garden Tour, held annually in May. If you have a garden to recommend, please call the Master Gardener office at 533-5696 or e-mail rmcripps@co.tuolumne.ca.us.

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

CHC Winter Schedule
Communityhikingclub.org

All hikes meet to start at 8:15am. Please go to the CHC website to get information regarding conditions, parking fees, etc or contact Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel at zuliebear@aol.com

January 5-Pico Canyon to Odeen #January 19-Placerita Canyon Trail to the Waterfall

January 26-Save the Condors Stewardship Event-Magic Mountain Micro-trash clean up.

February 2-Santa Clarita Canyons-Santa Clarita Canyons is a beautiful proposed wilderness area, which adjoins Placerita Canyon.

February 9-Whitney Canyon-

February 16-Towsley Canyon

February 23-Elsmere Canyon

March 1-East Canyon

March 8-Big Tujunga Stewardship Project-TBA with the Sierra Club. Details to be posted as they become available.

March 15-Magic Mountain Old Miner's

March 29-Manzanita Trail-This is another of Placerita's beautiful trails.



A Lending Library

Sue Wallander had a great idea one day while sharing interests and ideas while waiting for a school group to arrive. It was evident that many of the docents are avid readers, so she started a lending library. You bring one book to the center and take one home. Great idea Sue and thank you.

Holiday Dinner

Rainbow Glenn has a beautiful club house, all the Christmas decorations were ready for us and we were all very grateful that Jim Southwell made it available for our little group.

The food and the company were a big success. Pam Koch and Sue Wallander wrote special cards to each docent thanking them for their special accomplishments during the year. Pam organized a gift exchange which brought a special holiday touch to the evening. 2-year certificates were distributed to Shari Newman, Lynn Zdonek and Angel McDonald. Phil Rizzo received his 5-year name pin.

The evening reached its crescendo with a roast of each docent done by our very own Santa, Bob Moss, who was totally hilarious and was a huge success.

Thank you everyone who helped set up and clean up the room. It was a fun and very friendly holiday party and you all looked gorgeous.



How did it Go?

"An Affair with Wreaths" was a little slow but at least our visitors know that we are back in action. It was a good opportunity for families to come to the center after the children's parade in Newhall. I heard a little girl saying to her Mom "Are those really Santa shoes?" and a teenager was asking about face painting because she had that done here years ago. Those are memories that you cannot put a price on. Financially speaking, we broke even but "An Affair with Wreaths" gave us publicity and visibility in the community.

Again I want to thank all the docents, volunteers and family members who came to give us a hand on such a cold but sunny day. I hope you managed to have some fun and that it helped you get in the holiday spirit.

Beginning Birders

This new program was designed by Frank Hoffman, Bob Fischer, Roger McClure and Bob Moss. Thank you all for this fascinating new education. It is a 2-hour program on 4 consecutive Saturdays. It starts at 9am with a focus on ages 10 and up. There will be a maximum of 20 students per class.

Session !! January 19 through February 9, 2008

Week 1 Key Note Bird: Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)
Biotic Community: Oak Woodland
Elevation: +/- 1550 feet asl

Lecture subjects to include birding equipment, bird information handouts, field guides and their uses, birding ethics and field etiquette and a list of California birds. Ongoing throughout each week will be field skills, birding tips, bird habitats and presentations on resident birds utilizing preserved birds for an up-close and personal look.

Week 2 Key Note Bird: Western Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*)
Biotic Community: Chaparral
Elevation: +/- 1600 feet asl

Lecture subjects to include great record keeping and field notes with bird topographic anatomy, sizes, behavior and individual characteristics.

Week 3 Key Note Bird: Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)
Biotic Community: Riparian Oak Woodland and Big Cone Spruce (Walker Ranch)
Elevation: +/- 1850 feet asl

Lecture subjects to include bird songs and calls and organized birding memberships and resources. Basic birding terminology will constantly be discussed throughout our four-week program as well (identified as Sessions).

Week 4 Each session conclude with attendance in the 9am Bird Walk here at Placerita, led by Bob Fischer and friends.

Graham has Retired

If you are wondering what happened to Graham, our Burmese python, you will be pleased to know that Graham has found a new owner and that both are very pleased with the change. A gentleman had just lost a large snake and has half a room in his home that is devoted to a cage, light and heating elements and was approached by friends of ours. Graham was close to 40# and we could not provide her with the exercise needed and Fish and Game does not want the Nature Center to keep exotic animals any more, which is completely understandable.

Graham was brought to the center in 1989 and spent her life educating school children and the public. When we would have her in front of a group of students and ask them why our native scrawny snakes could live here and a nice fat huge snake like Graham couldn't, it started their mental wheels spinning. They would then compare the different habitats that allowed this sort of variation in snakes. Graham was also a huge success during our annual Open House and "Pictures with Graham" where she would patiently spend the day taking photos with excited children and many not-so-excited adults. We found that people who were a bit afraid of our smaller native snakes, would pat and touch Graham's tail—10 feet from her mouth. We wish her a long and happy life.



Feedback from the Awards Ceremony

Food first: Leave it to the volunteers. They do a great job. Each year we have a pot luck breakfast buffet which is splendid. This year it was catered and it was not a success. We hope we will be able to have pot luck next year.

Ron Kraus and Jim Southwell were MCs for Placerita and made funny and moving speeches to present Pam Koch as Volunteer of the Year and Hannah White as Junior Volunteer for 2007. Pam got a kiss from Mike Antonovich and Hannah looked positively radiant. Congratulations again to both for this great achievement.

For next year, it was decided to introduce the little phrase “also not here” before we read the list of docents getting their one- or-two year certificates and who cannot attend in an effort to speed up the ceremony and prevent awkward pauses.

Paula Parr, Debbie Walt, Linda Ioerger and Candace Arney received their one-year certificate. The docents who could not make it got their certificates during our Holiday Dinner ceremony.

Congratulations to Ron Kraus and Roger Gibson who received their 5-year pin. Phil Rizzo received his during the holiday dinner. Thank you gentlemen, for all those long hours of work at Placerita Nature Center for the last 5 years.

Diane Henry was officially introduced as our representative for NCA.

It is always a very interesting ceremony and we enjoy visiting with docents from the other Nature Centers and realizing that we belong to a “larger family” than just Placerita. We are also very grateful that Mike Antonovich graces us with his presence each year in spite of his very busy schedule. It shows us that he appreciates our efforts and we thank him warmly for his support.

Something about Birds

Spring in Southern California will be arriving before we know it. The articles below are a repeat from last year, but the topic is timely.

Bird Milk

Like mammals, the young of some birds are fed on special secretions from a parent. Unlike mammals, however, both sexes produce it. The best known of these secretions is the “crop milk” that pigeons feed to squabs. The milk is produced by a sloughing of fluid-filled cells from the lining of the crop, a thin-walled, sac-like food-storage chamber that projects outward from the bottom of the esophagus. Crops are presumably a device for permitting birds to gather and store food rapidly, minimizing the time that they are exposed to predators. Crops tend to be especially well developed in pigeons and game birds.

Crop milk is extremely nutritious. In one study, domestic chicks given feed containing pigeon crop milk were 16 percent heavier at the end of the experiment than chicks that did not receive the supplement. The pigeon milk, which contains more protein and fat than does cow or human milk, is the exclusive food of the nestlings for several days after hatching, and both adults feed it to the squabs for more than two weeks. The young pigeons are not fed insects as are the chicks of many seed-eating birds; instead, the crop milk provides the critical ration of protein.

Reference: The Birder's Handbook, Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, Darryl Wheye

Plants as Nest Pesticides

Some materials are selected specifically to help sanitize the nest. More than half of our hawk species routinely add fresh green leaves that contain natural pesticides such as hydrocyanic acid, which may inhibit infestation by insect parasites. Such preventive efforts are not limited to birds of prey. Users of old nest sites, such as starlings, can discriminate between helpful and ornamental leaves and select those that deter lice and bacteria for inclusion in their nests.

Reference: The Birder's Handbook, Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, Darryl Wheye

Incubation: Heating Eggs

For an egg to develop normally, it must be exposed for a considerable length of time to temperatures a few degrees below the normal 104° /f (40° C) avian body temperature. Indeed, the ideal incubation temperature for many birds' eggs is about human body temperature, 98.6° F. Almost all birds create the required temperature by sitting on the eggs and incubating them, often transferring heat via a temporarily bare area of abdominal skin called the “brood patch.” A few birds, like penguins, pelicans and gannets, transfer heat through their webbed feet.

Reference: The Birder's Handbook, Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, Darryl Wheye

Bathing and Dusting

When birds bathe in water or saturate themselves with dust they are actively maintaining their plumage. In well-watered areas bathing is most common, in arid ones dusting is more often observed. Experiments with quail show that frequent dusting helps to maintain an optimum amount of oil on the feathers. Excess plumage lipids, including preen oil, are absorbed by the dust and expelled along with dry skin and other debris. If quail are prevented from dusting, their feathers quickly become oily and matted. Dusting may also help to discourage bird lice, but no experimental evidence exists as yet showing that to be the case.

Wrens and House Sparrows frequently follow a water bath with a dust bath (one reason to suspect an anti-parasite function for dusting). Overall, the amount of time and effort birds put into bathing and dusting indicates how critical feather maintenance may be. Feathers are marvelous and intricate devices, but keeping the functional requires constant care.

Reference: The Birder's Handbook, Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, Darryl Wheye



New Beetle Species Discovered by Ian Swift

Ian has traveled around the world including the jungles of Costa Rica, but he didn't have to go very far to discover a new species of beetle the Devil's Punchbowl. Ian discovered the new species and named it *Xylotrechus hovorei*, after Frank Hovore. According to Ian, not a lot is known about this new beetle except that its larvae feed on living Alder trees and they take one year to develop into an adult beetle. Their preferred habitat is mountainous regions of southern California, including Los Angeles County.

In researching this new species in museums and universities, Ian found additional specimens that others had collected years ago, but did not realize they represented a new species. "What may be surprising to most people is that there are still new species of living things right here in L.A. County unknown to science, and our knowledge of many of these organisms is still largely unknown," Ian said.

Discovering new species of insects is just one reason that Ian is fast becoming a local celebrity of sorts, having been named one of Santa Clarita's most influential people of 2007 by the Signal, our local newspaper.

Strangalia ianswifti: new species. Description: male. Form: moderate-sized, slender, tapered posteriorly; integument entirely black except mandibles, dark red-brown, and basal segments of palpi, testaceous; pubescence short, depressed.

As you can see, this is a highly technical language not generally used in the Rattler. Where did it come from? From a little booklet "Les Cahiers Magellanes" which is a new publication by Frank T. Hovore and John A. Chemsak.

In a bittersweet and ironic twist of fate, Frank Hovore, our beloved mentor who passed away more than a year ago, had discovered a new beetle *Strangalia ianswifti* that he dedicated to Ian Swift, our superintendent and good friend. His postmortem publication came about the same time that Ian published his paper in the *Coleopterists Bulletin* announcing the discovery of a new beetle *Xylotrechus hovorei*, named after Frank Hovore. These are noble gestures between two etymologists of great stature and we watch in wonder as these scientific events develop under our eyes.

Life takes very interesting paths sometimes...congratulations to both for those discoveries and it is a great honor to have witnessed this exchange of beetles and names.

Connecting people with nature

WINTER 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.
- VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION** First Saturday of the month from 10 to 11 am.
Learn about volunteer opportunities at the Nature Center and Park.
- TRAIL TEAM** First Sunday of the month at 9 am. Help repair trails, pick up litter and remove weeds.
Fifteen minute safety orientation mandatory. Please wear long pants, boots, and bring water.
- BIRD WALK** Second Saturday of the month from 9 to 11 am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.
- COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB** A monthly community event that invites organized groups and families to get into the outdoors, visit wilderness areas, and lead healthy lifestyles. Call the Nature Center for more information, or visit their website at communityhikingclub.org
- AMPHITHEATER NIGHTS** A new program on the 3rd Saturday of each month. January will be a program in astronomy and February will be mammals. Call the center as times vary with the season.
- BEGINNING BIRDERS** A new program meeting in 4-week sessions each Saturday at 9am, lasting 2 hours. The first program will run from October 20 to November 10. Focus on ages 10+. Call for a reservation (first come basis) as each session will have a maximum of 20 students. The second session will start January 19 to February 9.
- THE NEW JR. RANGERS** A revamp of an old favorite program. Meetings will be held the 4th Saturday of each month. From 9:30 to 11am. Subjects vary monthly. January: Marine life. February: Animal Winter Adaptation.
- BEGINNING BIRDERS** A new program meeting in 4-week sessions each Saturday at 9am and lasting 2 hours. Focus on ages 10+. Call for a reservation (first come basis) as each session will have a maximum of 20 students. The second session will be January 19 to February 9.

Please Note: The Placerita Canyon Nature Center building will be closed for construction beginning this Winter. During the construction period, the Nature Center office will be in temporary trailers. The temporary office will be open and operating during normal business hours: 7 days a week, 9 am to 5 pm. All trails will be open as usual, and park hours will remain sunrise to sunset. The campground will be closed during this construction period. Many of our usual programs will be presented in the outdoor amphitheater, and appropriate clothing during all types of weather is recommended (i.e. jackets, hats, loose-fitting and light colored clothing, umbrellas, rain gear, etc.).

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 213-738-2970 TDY 213-427-6118 FAX 213-487-0380; Upon 3-day 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.

Donations

Again, we wish to thank all the generous people who made a donation to the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates. All donated funds are used for animal care and housing and to pay for programs to the public. These donations are tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. Thank you all.

Antelope Valley Moms
Bartee, Alberta
Bethany Christian School
Canyon Springs Elementary
Colvin, Renate
Cooper, Jo
Dardin Fund
DeSchryver, Laurie (for Nick)
Fair Elementary School
Fair Oaks Elementary
FAWN
Fischer, Bob
George, Georgia
Joshua Hills Elementary
Klein, Diane

Kuntz, Herbert
MacMurdo, Fred
McGarry, William
Morano, Shirley
Newhall School District
Northridge Community School
Parr, Paula
Primetime Preschool
Stilling, Dick and Dorothy
The Academy
Vena Ave. School
Webber, Kimm
Zielinski, Stella



The Rattler

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can grow together."*

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