



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.

May/June 2009

Dear Nature Friends,

I am very pleased and proud to inform you that Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich will come to the Nature Center on Friday, June 19 at 10am for a ribbon-cutting ceremony of our renovated building. The day after, on Saturday June 20, we will have our Open House for all visitors to see our new Nature Center and to participate in the many activities for the whole family. Keep these dates open.

This is such an important time that we have been waiting for 2 years, so you can only imagine our excitement. As you know, our building is a LEED building; we passed the inspection and will be certified 6 months after the building re-opens. If you are not familiar with the term LEED, think of us as a green building. Almost everything is made of recycled material or is reused and everything has to be energy efficient.

We are going to have a different lifestyle inside the building to be able to keep up this LEED Certification and we will be tested on a regular basis.

So we are in the midst of joy to be able to go "back home", the frantic preparations for the events of Open House, moving, setting up the Gift Shop with displays...you can only imagine. Please check the flier and join us on Saturday June 20 from 10am to 3pm.

Chris Mowry

We have a new Supervisor at Placerita. Welcome Chris Mowry. Chris came to us from Vasquez Rock so we are old neighbors. Chris has been already involved in many projects; the last one is to have all the new docents finger printed as it is required for every park because our program include much interaction between docents and school children.

Elections

May 11, in accordance with our by-laws, we will elect members to the board as some seats are coming up for a 2-year term. I apologize for not being able to acknowledge changes to the board at this time as the Rattler needs to be written in April. Good luck to all the candidates. The meeting will start at 9am and lunch will be served.

End of the School Year Dinner

We are inviting all the volunteers and docents to our annual dinner as a last Thank You and to bring this school season to a close. We still have school groups coming in June but we try to catch you, the docents, before you leave for vacation.

The big day is Saturday, June 14 at 6pm. I will send the docents more detail through Trails and Nuggets but mark the date on your calendar as you will also need to RSVP so we know how much food to order. In case the date needs to be changed, you will be notified in advance in Trails and Nuggets.

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.

Last Rattler of the Season

This is just a little reminder that the Rattler takes the summer off and so there will be no July-August newsletter. Have a safe and wonderful summer and we will be back in September.

Evelyne and Heidi

ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

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

Medtronic Northridge (ACCY, CASE, GSX) - "Kriquet" the American Kestrel.

Nancy and Larry Nikolai - "Ferguson" the Striped Skunk, "Poppet" the Opossum, and "Apollo" the Turkey Vulture. This is a third-year renewal of guardianship! Mitchell Elementary School 2009 Second Grade Class

Mrs. Ingino's students: "Sandy" the Alligator Lizard

Mrs. Fitzgerald's students: "Kriquet" the American

Kestrel

Mrs. Hanks' students: "Squirt" the Western Pond

Turtle

Ms. Himidian's students: "Rosie" the Rosy Boa

Mrs. Scavone's students: "Hopi" the Barn Owl

THANK YOU!

New Bridge

We are impatiently waiting for our new building, but I wanted to send you a picture of our new bridge. It is open, it looks beautiful and it respects all the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. It is wheelchair friendly and all those young mothers with strollers are pleased with the change. As you can see, we have a pretty little kiosk in the front where we can post news of the Center. That is a great improvement for the park and I wanted you to be able to have a look at it just in case you cannot come to the park.



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:

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

19152 Placerita Canyon Road

Newhall, CA 91321-3213

or you can email it to Evelyne at

evelynevandersande@gmail.com.

Please email your article in MS

Word if possible.



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

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

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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.

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:

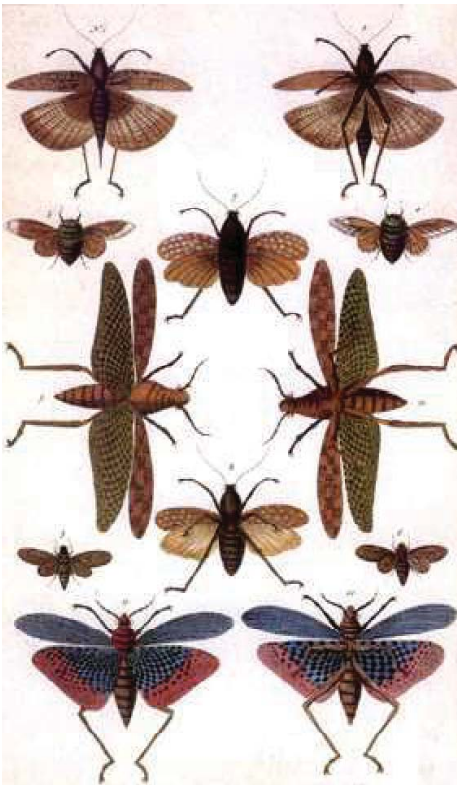
PCNCA
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
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Showtime

A school bus in the parking lot is a common sight at the center and it is a sign for all the docents that “it is show time”. The school children are communing to the center and are greeted by the docents who bring them to the outdoor amphitheater. An introduction to our natural area, canyon, plant communities and a brief explanation about the history of Placerita is given by a docent.

Before the hike on the trail, the children always enjoy the local animal presentation. They get a brief description of the animal and its behavior and they always have many questions and are fascinated to be able to examine the animal close up. Here you can see Norm Schweitzer, a new docent, performing one of his first “show time” presentations with the tarantula with the confidence of a pro.



What is this Noise in the Grass?

by Pam Koch

Crickets are an important part of the ecosystem since they help in the breakdown of plant material. Crickets are omnivores and feed on almost anything-usually organic materials, plant decay, grass, fruits, seedling plants, fungi and even meat. Crickets also need a good supply of water.

They are also an important source of food for other animals like small owls, spiders, birds, mice, shrews, snakes, frogs, raccoons and opossums. Crickets are nocturnal. They are dark in color to blend into shadows, or they are pale green or brown to blend into vegetation. Their antennae are long and their ears are located in its legs (a single white dot located near the bend of each front leg.) Wings are atrophied or absent.

Grasshoppers are diurnal. They are omnivores and eat the same things a cricket eats. Grasshoppers are a brighter green and blend into the grass but some have brightly colored under wings; they tend to be found high in vegetation to see and be seen by other grasshoppers. Their antennae are short and their ears are in its abdomen.

Locusts are a type of large grasshopper with a gregarious, swarming behavior. When they are in the swarming phase, they are a plague to crops.

Cicadas are a completely different order of insect called true bugs. The common North American ones are called Magicicada and emerge in large numbers every 13 or 17 years. While underground in the nymph stage, they feed on root juices. There are also annual cicadas called Tibicen. Unlike crickets and grasshoppers, which can bite and chew, cicadas suck up plant sap through a tube.

Information courtesy of Ask.com and Wikipedia.





Graduation Party Congratulations to the Class of 2009!

We had a large crowd, 63 guests, but Phil Rizzo's clubhouse was the perfect place to accommodate all of us. Bob Moss finally was able to receive his "Docent of the Year" award. Frank Hoffman was surprised by a book "Birds of Prey" signed by all the docents.

Ron gave a fun introduction of each new student becoming a docent and was rewarded for his efforts during docent training by a denim shirt embroidered with his name and Placerita logo presented by the new docents.

The evening was relaxed, lovely and much fun. A couple new docents came to the microphone and gave touching testimonies.

I was impressed by all the help setting up and cleaning up afterwards; even the families of the new docents lent a hand. Thank you so much, all of you and again, congratulations to the Class of 2009!

CLASS OF 2009

David Gold
Keirstin Fernandez
Shana Radecki
Sima Bernstein
Molly Roberts
Norm Schweitzer

Rick Bardwell
Rick Brammer
Frances Bojorquez
Linette Brammer
Giovani Herrera

Deborah Barroso
Kendra Geiger
Lainey White
Sue Mayhew
Jim Owens

Global Birding Website

When you travel, wouldn't it be great if you could find a birder who lives in the area and can show you the best birding spots. There is now a website that will do just that. It's a global website, www.birdingpal.org that lists local bird watchers all over the world who will treat you to a birding expedition when you're in their neighborhood. They do it for free, simply because they love to share their passion with others. Volunteers are listed by country, state, town or region; languages spoken and availability. You can e-mail them directly to make arrangements for your adventure.



Do You Notice When the Oak Trees are in Bloom?

If you expect big blossoms, forget it or you will be disappointed. If you suddenly notice that the dark green of the Coast Live Oak has patches of light and fluffy green all over, you are actually seeing an oak tree in full bloom.

The Coast Live Oak has tough, convex leaves one or two inches long with a few spiny teeth. In spring the oaks liberate great quantities of pollen from hanging catkins. Those are the male flowers. They are pendulous catkins 5-10cm long and are easy to see in April. The female flower is really hard to see; it is very small, less than .5cm long with 1-3 clustered buds together at the base of a leaf. Female and male flowers can be found on the same oak tree so pollination is made much easier by wind and insects.

The acorn, fruit of the oak tree, is the result of the pollination. It is about 2-3.5cm long and 1 to 1.5cm broad, with the basal quarter enclosed in a cupule (the little hat!). The acorn matures about 7-8 months after pollination and is the food supply for many birds and small mammals in our natural area.



A Star is Born!
By Ron Kraus

Placerita's own Bethany Sweany was cast in the role of "Sloppy Joe" in the recent Canyon Theatre Guild production of "Treasure Island." As a member of the Pirate Chorus in the play, she sang and danced her way through a rousing adventure that featured a heart-pounding search for a lost treasure. The role came naturally to Bethany—according to her bio in the playbill "she has been acting most of her life, and a pirate the rest of it." Congratulations, Bethany. This may be the start of a big showbiz career!

Pictured (L-R) are Bethany, mom Helen, and brother Jacob. Bethany is holding red skeins of yarn fashioned into a floral "bouquet" with light-up knitting needles—a congratulatory gift from Jill Goddard to our budding thespian.



Desert Tarantulas

By Richard Norton

Aphonopelma chalcodes is probably the most misunderstood creature among California's diverse wildlife. Though fearsome in appearance they pose no real threat to humans. Yet, the first reaction of most people during a close encounter is to scream and run or kill the arachnid by any means possible. This is the best example in nature where ignorance completely clouds reason. Since both male and female desert blondes become sexually mature around the age of nine years killing them is irresponsible as it may adversely impact the population. Sufficient enemies abound such as lizards, snakes, birds, and parasitic wasps to shorten the lifespan of the tarantula in the wild (females live approximately 20 years, males 10 years.) Leaving shoes outside your tent while camping in the desert may be one of the only ways to get bitten. Untrained handling is another, so it's best to leave the spiders alone especially if one is prone to allergies as reactions to protein fractions may be more serious than the venom itself. To defend itself the tarantula may also rapidly scrape the back of its abdomen with its hind legs. This dislodges urticating hairs that can irritate

the eyes or skin of an attacker. These hairs can cause rashes or even partial blindness allowing the tarantula to escape.

Tarantulas spin webs not to catch prey, but to line the inside of their burrows. This keeps things drier and prevents sand from spilling in or sliding off the walls. During winter the entrance is covered with silk and debris where the spider remains dormant until spring. Prey is caught through activity and speed, so emerging from its burrow when the sun goes down it begins to hunt for beetles, grasshoppers, sow bugs, and even other spiders. After injecting venom to kill its prey it will release digestive fluid from its mouth through the same wound made by its fangs. This fluid turns the inside of the prey to a consistency that can be sucked into the tarantula with the aid of powerful stomach muscles. Webbing is also used during egg laying. A large mat is spun where the numerous eggs are deposited and then another layer on top bound tightly at the edges. The female remains in the den guarding her flat egg cocoon for around six weeks. After hatching, the young typically remain with their mother for a week before leaving to find their own homes. The burrow is also a convenient place for the tarantula to molt or shed its exoskeleton, which it must do many times as it grows during its lifetime. Few mature males survive the post-ultimate (final) molt, as the outer husk gets stuck on the emboli or male sex organs. Molting in both sexes may be affected by their state of hydration prior to shedding their exoskeletons.

Until maturity it is difficult to determine the sex of a tarantula. The mature male is dark, almost black, while brown is the color of mature females. The shade of color can be different based on species or geographical location. Although female tarantulas make better pets due to their greater longevity it is often the males that are caught. They are often found wondering around because they abandon their burrows in search of mates. At this time they are vulnerable to predators as well. So remember, when camping in California, Arizona, or New Mexico it's best to shake your shoes out before putting your feet in them.

References: T. Steinstra, *California Wildlife*, 2000; *Wikipedia.org* 2009.

Sepulveda Basin April 6

by Evelyne Vandersande

We are just back from the Sepulveda Basin with Reg Fear and Bob Moss and, as usual, it was a wonderful opportunity to see so many birds. Thank you very much gentlemen for taking us under your wings. Our adventure started right in the parking lot with orioles and King birds, the last particularly exciting as we do not see them very often at Placerita. The cormorants were in their nests with babies on the island and we saw three white pelicans. It is getting late for them as they should have started their migration north, but we were pleased they waited for us.



We walked to the Los Angeles river where a group of graceful Stilts were a personal favorite of mine. All in all, we must have seen more than 35 different species and we had our last surprise when a coyote crossed the path right in front of us.



Can't I Take a Nap in Peace?

Bob Moss had to clean up his blue Volkswagen bus before the campout. He was folding the blankets neatly inside the van, saw the mailman, got distracted and went back into his house leaving the back door of the van open.

Later in the evening, he remembered and went back to his van and slammed the door closed. Immediately, he heard screeching and scratching and knew somebody very mad was inside. Their neighbors' cat is very large and constantly in a bad mood and Bob thought he had locked the cat in the van. "I do not want to have a mad cat jump at me." Bob thought, so he went carefully to the passenger door, opened it up and stood behind it. An extremely annoyed bobcat almost flew out of the van, screeching and growling, landed on the driveway, turned around and gave a good, long look at Bob through slit eyes full of fury. Bob was very relieved to have chosen to hide behind the passenger door at this point.



Sue Mayhew

1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I was born in Lone Pine hospital at the base of Mt. Whitney, thus my nickname--"Sierra Sue". Because of my dad's work I lived & went to school in many parts of the continental U.S. During my public school years.
2. How did your love of nature start? The sights, sounds, and smells of the out-of-doors have always intrigued me. Early on the similarities and differences of the many places I lived were worth noticing and studying. At the age of 4 I knew I wanted to have dogs and horses around and my interest in the kinds and ways of animals just expanded from there.
3. What was your education? I received my B.S. Degree in biology (natural history emphasis) from Central Michigan University in 1966. In 1990, I completed my masters in educational counseling and guidance at California Lutheran university in Thousand Oaks.
4. What is your work experience? After 41 years I retired from :LAUSD where I taught general science, health, biology and special education at both the junior and senior high school levels. I was a high school guidance counselor for the last umpteen years of that career. Currently I administer SAT, GRE, and PRAXIS tests on a regular basis. Recently I have started a home-based sewing repair business which is getting off to a shaky start.
5. What is your family life? I and my partner, Steve, live on 3 acres of hillside chaparral near Agua Dulce, Ca. Our "family" consists of some horses, a very sociable cow and 3 dogs who chose to make our place their home. I've lived in Saugus since 1973 and am glad that Placerita canyon hasn't changed as much as the rest of the area.
6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? It was September of 1966 when I first came to Placerita canyon. The science teachers at my school came weekly for a year to photograph the native plants throughout the seasons. I helped carry equipment and identify plants.
7. What do you remember about this place? I remember being impressed that such a beautiful, natural, peaceful place could exist so close to Los Angeles. The spring wildflowers were especially beautiful and so prolific!
8. What did or do you like most about your job at the nature center? I particularly enjoy the continual learning that seems to be a regular occurrence in nature in general and at the nature center in particular. The tour kids make me laugh and being able to be outside, in any weather is a treat.
9. What did you or do you not like about the job? Ticks! And they seem to like me, gosh darn!
10. At Placerita, is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud? As a new docent I'm looking forward to being a productive and helpful member of the "family".
11. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? Or pastime? I'm a voracious reader and I've a passion for horses. My current horse is a retirement project. I hope she learns as much as I do from the lessons I've planned for her. Mostly I love being out of doors---walking, weeding, watching. So if folks visit & my house is a bit messy it's because it was too nice outside.

Donations for January through March

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates wish to thank the following persons and organizations for thinking of the Nature Center when making their donations. We greatly appreciate your generosity.

20th Century Fox
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Donna McInnes
Mint Canyon ES
Shirley Morano
Palmdale Learning Center
Phil Rizzo
Van Ness Ave ES
Allan and Sue Wallander

A Jewel Of A Bird

by Bob Fischer

Perched at eye-level only 20 feet in front of us, he glowed like a jewel under a spotlight. Bluer than blue. This male Bluebird was the highlight of an early spring bird walk. As synonyms for blue, Roget's Thesaurus lists aqua, azure, beryl, cerulean, cobalt, indigo, sapphire, ultramarine and more. But none of these seemed adequate to describe the glowing, almost iridescent deep blue of the male Western Bluebird we were staring at. The National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America says the male's upper parts and throat are deep purple-blue with breast, sides and flanks of chestnut. The picture in the book showing a dark purple-blue only faintly resembles the bird we were looking at. I had never seen blue like that before or 'chestnut' either. This bluebird's breast, sides and flanks were a bright red-orange. He had to be at the stunning, peak of his breeding plumage.

Male breeding plumage in all bird species is the result of a molt into new feathers just as the breeding season begins. Bird feathers wear and as the seasons progress, colors begins to fade. By autumn those bright colors can be very dull. In some species after breeding a new molt occurs and the bright breeding plumage is completely replaced.

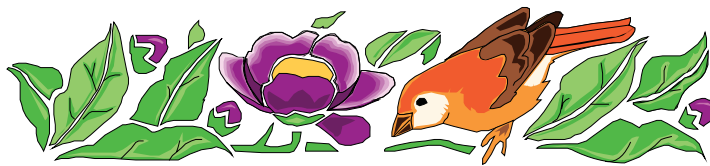
Western Bluebirds are common in Placerita Canyon and with the bird boxes the Boy Scouts put in place several years ago, seem to be increasing. At five and one half inches long, the Western Bluebird (there is also an Eastern Bluebird) is the smallest member of the Thrush family. Other Thrush family members seen in Placerita Canyon include the American Robin, the Varied Thrush and the Hermit Thrush. Mountain Bluebirds are found in higher elevations over much of California and the mountainous West. Several other Thrush species are found in the eastern US.

Placerita Canyon with its little meadows and open stream side areas is a perfect setting for Bluebirds which are attracted to open terrain including forest clearings, farms, orchards, parks and golf courses.

Bluebirds are monogamous and nest in any open area with scattered trees where holes or cavities in the trees can be found. Bluebirds don't make their own holes so a favorite spot is an old woodpecker nest hole. But manmade nest boxes with the correct size hole that will exclude larger birds are readily used. Four to six pale blue eggs are laid. New hatchlings are immobile, featherless, have closed eyes and have to be fed. Both parents feed the babies which will leave the nest in about three weeks. Bluebirds eat earthworms, grubs, insects and berries and are often seen fly catching. Two broods in one year are common.

Loss of natural nest sites has caused a decline in the number of Bluebirds, Eastern as well as Western over most of their range. The provision of bird boxes is significant in maintaining the species. So do the Bluebirds a favor as well as yourself and put up a Bluebird box in a good location. They are great fun and beautiful to watch.

References for this article include *"The Birder's Handbook"* by Paul R Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye and *"Lives Of North American Birds"* by Kenn Kaufman.



Mentryville

The docent group from Placerita visited the town of Mentryville on Saturday, March 21. Darryl Manzer, the remaining docent for Mentryville was our guide. Mentryville has suffered from fire and floods in recent years and the buildings have not all been restored.

Mentryville is located in Pico Canyon. Lyons becomes Pico when you continue west. At one time it was home to more than 100 families but just a few of the structures remain. Standard Oil donated the property to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy in 1995.



The docents were able to go into the one-room schoolhouse. It remained open until 1932. Students who attended high school had to go to San Fernando High School.

The Victorian mansion, called the big house, built by Alex Mentry has been restored and is used by movie companies but was not available to touring. We also saw a barn, bakery and machine shop.

Pico #4 was the first commercially successful oil well in the West. It began producing oil in 1876 and was capped in 1990 after 114 years. It was the longest running oil well in the world.

If you are interested in knowing more about Mentryville, they maintain a web site, which contains interviews of people who had been involved in the town.

Campout

We want to give Pam Koch our hearty thanks for organizing the campout on April 4. About 30 people came and most of them spent the night under the stars, which was surprising because we knew the night was going to be very cold (there was even a report of ice on a windshield.) We started the evening with a treasure hunt and you should have seen us running after each clue. Pam was finally able to give the Frank McDaniel Award to Diane Erskine-Hellrigel for her work at Placerita. We had a little ceremony and Diane said a few words.

Johan Vandersande and Rick Brammer (a new docent) cooked hamburgers and hot dogs on the grill for all of us and we shared the dishes people brought for the pot luck. Night was coming and we started the campfire. We sang songs and made s'mores. Ron Kraus took us on a moon-light hike and we tried to identify some birds through their calls. Bill Webber brought his telescope and directed it to the moon so we could see the craters on the surface.

As you can see, there was plenty of entertainment.

In the morning, everybody shared in the preparation of breakfast and decided they wanted to do it again, but later in the season as to enjoy a warmer night!



Hopi and Frank Hoffman

Frank has been taking care of Hopi since she was one day and a half. She was brought to the center in bad shape and needed much help to survive without parents to take care of her. Frank became the substitute parent and took care of her. The name Hopi comes from the phrase "I hope she can make it!" Indeed, against all odds, she did and mostly because of the good care she received during this crucial time.

Frank was selected by the County to do an educational video about barn owl for the LA County Parks Department.

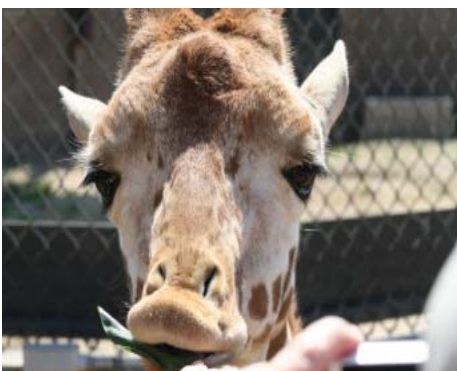
Frank is in total control of the topic, showing Hopi under different angles and answering many questions about the female barn owl.

What is the plumage coloration? What is the toes pattern? Why do they have this facial disk? How do they hunt?

It is very interesting and fun to watch Hopi..and Frank on display.

How do you see this video?

1. Go to placerita.org
2. Click "in the media" to the left
3. Click on read more, and then click on the arrow for the video to start. Relax and enjoy the show.



Wild Animal Park

Because of the generosity of Pam and Frank Koch, a small group of board members had the great privilege of participating in a Photo Safari at the Wild Animal Park.

Feeding the giraffes and the rhinoceros was an experience none of us will ever forget. Thank you so much Pam and Frank for this incredible day. Giraffes have the longest eyelashes ever!



Climate Change

By Chris Sapovchak

A big topic currently is global warming or climate change. It is a problem that is not going to go away anytime soon. The planet is facing the possibility of some major changes if things continue down this current path, so here is a brief explanation of what is happening, what impact it will have and what is being done about it.

Let's start with the atmosphere. The atmosphere is the mass of gases that surround the earth. The atmosphere as it is today is made of nitrogen (78%), oxygen (21%), and greenhouse gases such as water vapor (amounts range from 1% in arid regions to over 3% in moist regions), carbon dioxide (0.035%), and methane (0.00018%). An important process in climate change is called the greenhouse effect, here is how that works:

- 1) The sun emits solar radiation to Earth's atmosphere.
- 2) About half of the solar radiation is absorbed by the Earth's surface, warming it.
- 3) Some of the solar radiation is reflected by Earth's surface and atmosphere back out into space.
- 4) The solar radiation that is absorbed by the surface is converted to heat.
- 5) Most of the solar radiation is absorbed by greenhouse gases and clouds in the atmosphere. It is then sent back down to the Earth's surface causing it to become warmer. The greenhouse gas most responsible for causing global warming is Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), which absorbs heat. The levels of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere are increasing very rapidly. This is trapping heat in the atmosphere and causing the Earth to become warmer. Carbon Dioxide levels are increasing mostly due to the burning of fossil fuels, and from deforestation.

Here are some of the facts that researchers have found. Average temperatures have climbed 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit around the world since 1880. The rate of warming is increasing; the last two decades of the 20th century were the hottest in 400 years. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that 11 of the past 12 years are among the dozen warmest since 1850. Average temperatures in arctic regions have risen twice the global average. Arctic ice is disappearing very rapidly, causing loss of habitat for arctic animals such as polar bears. Glaciers are melting very quickly. Coral reefs, which are very sensitive to changes in water temperature and water conditions, are dying off due to stress, in a process called coral bleaching. A report released by the IPCC in February 2007, based on the work of about 2,500 scientists in more than 130 countries, concluded that almost all of the current changes in climate are from human activities. Industrialization, pollution, and deforestation have caused an increase in Carbon Dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Humans are releasing Carbon Dioxide into the atmosphere at a much faster rate than it can be absorbed by plants and the oceans. The oceans are being impacted by absorbing larger amounts of CO₂. This is changing the chemistry of seawater and is making the oceans more acidic, which is dangerous for many marine organisms and marine ecosystems.

Here are some of the things scientists are predicting will happen from climate change. The sea level could rise between 7 and 23 inches by the end of the century. Melting glaciers will not only add to the rise in sea level, but will cause a shortage of freshwater runoff in regions that depend on it. Natural disasters such as hurricanes, droughts, heat waves, and wildfires may become more common and might increase in intensity. Potentially more than a million species could go extinct from disappearing habitat, changing ecosystems, and acidifying oceans. Rising temperatures could release additional greenhouse gases by releasing carbon trapped in sea ice, releasing methane from permafrost and undersea sediments, and increasing water evaporation. This could make global warming almost uncontrollable.

So, there it is--the potential future of the planet. It sounds pretty bad doesn't it? Much of the research being done on climate change is being done by NASA and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). There is also research being done on the problem of acidifying oceans by Scripps Institute of Oceanography. To make an impact on this problem, alternative sources of energy must be found. The burning of fossil fuels and the production of Carbon Dioxide must be greatly reduced. Deforestation must also be stopped. Saving water and energy and caring what happens to the planet needs to be more than just a current trend. People need to develop a greater respect and concern for the natural environment. This means stop polluting the environment. If things do not change soon, this is the future that the next few generations will encounter.

Sources: www.nationalgeographic.com, www.nasa.gov, www.noaa.gov, www.sio.ucsd.edu



Wildflower Hotline:

We have plenty of water in the stream and the wildflowers are at their best right now. I just want to remind you the California poppy is our state flower and there is nothing more beautiful to see shining in the sun.

Ron Kraus has been working with the Theodore Payne foundation to include Placerita on their "Wildflower Hotline", so check it out: theodorepayne.org/hotline.html. Also Ron has set up a Spring Wildflower slide show on Flickr at flickr.com/photos/Placerita/sets/72157616198335824/show/. Not as good as walking through the park but it comes very close.



Norm Schweitzer

1. How did your love of Nature begin? I'm a city boy at heart. Born and raised in New York City, which is as far as you typically get from nature. But, I was lucky to get involved in the Scouting movement at age 9 when I joined the Cub Scouts and then at age 12 with the Boy Scouts. Scouting played a very influential role during my formative years. One of those influences was in the creation and nurturing of my love of nature. Through hiking and camping, it put me in contact with the beauty, adventure and tranquility of the natural areas that surrounded urban New York.

2. When did you come to Placerita Canyon Natural Area (PCNA) for the first time and why? I had never been to PCNA until I responded to a notice in the Signal regarding the training program for docents at the Nature Center. I retired seven years ago and have always on the lookout for ways in which I can contribute to the community. Of course I prefer to contribute in ways that I enjoy and this was perfect. I love nature, I love to speak to people (especially to a captive audience) and, from time to time, I can even tolerate children. This was an opportunity I couldn't refuse.

3. What makes PCNA special to you? There are many beautiful areas in So. Cal., but PCNA has many extras. First, it is a natural area. It is kept as close as possible to its original and natural state. That's really special.

PCNA is staffed by a true team. Staff and volunteers not only work together effectively but have bonded with each other. I and my training class members have been warmly welcomed into the PCNA community.

I love the animals. I think of them as part of the staff. I'm not used to handling animals other than dogs and cats and the chance to work with snakes, spiders, lizards and birds is really exciting. I'm sort of clumsy but our wildlife residents have been tolerant and forgiving.

The last thing that I'll mention about what makes PCNA special to me (but not the last thing, because I could go on endlessly) is the way it brings me back to my roots. I mentioned that my love of nature came from my experience in scouting. When I saw the contributions made by the Boy and Girl Scouts to PCNA, I knew I had come home to where I belonged.

4. What is your work experience? I've enjoyed working in a number of very different professions; probably too many. However, in each profession and job, the activity that I've enjoyed the most has been talking to people. Whether speaking to individuals or groups, I've found fulfillment in weaving information into a cohesive story, and communicating it in a way that is appropriate to the audience.

Of course, at PCNA, I'm surrounded by many other skilled communicators and look forward to learning from them.

5. What is your family life? My wife of 45 years and I moved to Santa Clarita about 9 years ago. We have no children but enjoy our relationships with our nieces and nephews and grand nieces and nephews.

We live a quiet but busy life pursuing both our shared and our individual interests. Ever since retirement it becomes increasingly difficult to find time to do all of the things we like to do. Go figure.

6. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center? Until the graduation of the 2009 docent training class on March 28, my title has been Trainee. Let's see what comes next.



How do you become an Outcast?

By Evelyn Vandersande


The word "weed" is always slightly unsettling to me. In our natural area, things become even more complex. You can find native and non-native plants; the native plants are highly regarded and we learn their names and take photos while the non-natives are looked down on; thoughts of removing them all from the park are sometimes contemplated; but there are too many of them.

So what is a weed? It is generally thought to be any plant that grows where it is not wanted, this is why a rose bush would be considered a weed if it was growing in a field where a farmer has planted wheat. Let's try again. What is a weed? A plant that grows very fast with a strong root system that prevents anything else from growing. Some plants are considered weeds no matter where they grow such as cockleburrs, nut grass and rag weed. They seem to grow anywhere, need no special care, their seeds spread easily and weeds often grow better than plants cared for in gardens and pastures. So are weeds useful? Man always wants to see nature in a way that it can best serve his own desire and purpose. Weeds do not provide food for humans but do for animals. Not good enough? Weeds prevent erosion.

I have been a docent since 1986 and I remember when Placerita Canyon Road used to be a tunnel of greenery. The hillsides along the road were covered with grasses and small bushes. In the Spring some branches would grow and need to be trimmed. Did somebody complain they could not see on the curves? Who knows but one day the bulldozers came and carved those hills at a steep angle and all vegetation was ripped off. Since then, those hills are a maintenance nightmare with rocks falling and mudslides after each rain.

Weeds are useful to prevent erosion; their roots quickly develop, holding the soil in place and keeping it from being washed away during heavy rain or blown away by wind.

So after all this and on the grand scheme of things, I am still not sure what makes a bad plant or a good weed... Relax about being an efficient gardener and watch your weeds grow as they do serve a purpose even if it is to absorb your CO² and release oxygen in the air. Now, I can come down from my soap box.



Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

and Family Festival

June 20, 2009
10 am - 3 pm

- animal presentations
- panning for "fools" gold
- food and drinks

and other fun activities for
the whole family

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall
(661)259-7721
www.placerita.org

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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.

SPRING PROGRAMS

- FAMILY NATURE WALK** Every Saturday from 11 to noon.
An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.
- ANIMAL PRESENTATION** Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.
See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.
- BIRD WALK** Second Saturday of the month from 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. For more information, or visit their website: www.californiawild.org/santaclarita.
- AMPITHEATER NIGHTS** 3rd Saturday of each month. May 16th Moonlight Hike and a talk on mammals. June 20th: Movie Night: "Life in the Undergrowth". Amphitheater nights start at 7pm.
- JUNIOR. RANGERS** Experience science in nature with our monthly program open to kids age 8 to 14.. Meetings will be held the 4th Saturday of each month from 9:30 to 11 am. Subjects vary monthly. May 23rd: Reptiles and Amphibians. June 27: Tracks and Scats.
- Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony** June 19th at 10am
Open House June 20 from 10am to 3pm.

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



The Rattler

*Placerita Canyon Nature Center
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"We exist so children
and cats
can grow together."

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