



# The Rattler



## In This Issue:

- ◆ Memories of OJ
- ◆ R.I.P Phil Rizzo
- ◆ A Trip With Jim
- ◆ Docent Training Schedule

---

## *Placerita Canyon Nature Center*

### **50 Years of Nature Education**

#### *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 2012**

---

*All of us at the Nature Center want to wish you a great New Year 2012, with blue skies, green or yellow leaves, birds singing, heavy rain and good health to be able to enjoy it all fully. We hope you get a chance to come and take a hike at Placerita. It will be a very good year, being outdoors is a good way to celebrate the beauty around us. See you at Placerita.*



sure the 2 days went smoothly for all our visitors. It is always much work: 2 days filled to the brim with frenzied activity at the Nature center as it is the only fund raiser that we do each year. It is also much fun and a great way to start the holiday season. Thank you so much to all of you who made this Holiday Faire at Placerita such a success.

#### **The Holiday Craft Faire 2011**

It is always a fantastic success and we enjoy seeing generation after generation coming to this event, the only one in this valley where you can use fresh greenery to do your Holiday decorations.

Donna Fagan and Sandy Balaram were in charge of the children's crafts, Bill and Heidi Webber took care of the greenery, Yule logs and wreaths, Teresa Jacobs was in charge of the White Elephant sale, Bob Moss was Santa and every body else pitched in to make



**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.**

### Docent Training Committee

We are extremely proud of our docent training. The classes cover in depth all the topics required by a future docent to be able to deal with our visitors. It provides a strong background knowledge which helps each individual to further their education if so wanted. It covers many details and school teachers have been given our program very high rating and feed back after they have experienced a visit with their classes.

We would like to recognize and thank all those docents who are on the committee. Because of their efforts, we will be able to once again provide this great docent training:

Thank you to Sandra Balaram, Ed Benison, Deb Clem, Jim Crowley, Vicki Cunningham, Joan Fincutter, Teresa Jacobs, Pam Koch, Ron Kraus, Janet Kubler, Angel Macdonald, Judith McClure, Bob Moss, Ray Orloff, Fred Seeley, Jim Southwell, Helen Sweany.



### How We Designed Our Logo

Bob Jensen took a wonderful photo of OJ for the "Adopt an Animal Program".

By then OJ had really become our mascot at the Nature Center and we decided to use this photo to come up with a logo that we could use on our letter head, on our name tags that represent the Nature Center in all our publications. Jill Goddard is the artist who designed the logo.



### Update on Taxidermy

Plans are in the works to add taxidermy display to the classroom. The measurements from all the animals have been done and an artistic concept is being worked on. The display will show a landscape from the canyon with different taxidermy animals placed in their environment

We are only in the planning stage but this is how every great display has to start. We will keep you posted.

### The Rattler

Editor:

**Evelyne Vandersand**

661 254-2972

Publisher:

**Heidi Webber**

661 251-7978

If you have an article you feel would follow the interests of this publication, please feel free to submit it. The deadline is the 10<sup>th</sup> 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 [evelynvandersande@gmail.com](mailto:evelynvandersande@gmail.com). Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

Visit our Internet site at [www.placerita.org](http://www.placerita.org)--Ron Kraus is the webmaster.

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



### Board Members

President:

**Jim Southwell**

Vice-President:

**Ron Kraus**

Recording Secretary:

**Debra Barroso**

Corresponding Secretary:

**Fred Seeley**

Treasurer:

**Heidi Webber**

Directors:

**Bob Moss**

**Evelyne Vandersande, PR Chair**

**Bill Webber**

**Rick Brammer**

**Teresa Jacobs**

**Pam Koch, NCA Rep**

**Jack Levenberg NCA Rep**

Alternate Directors:

**Donna Fagan, Membership Chair**

**Sandra Balaram**

**Deb Clem**

The Rattler is printed by  
Valencia Printers on Recycled Paper

### 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.

## Goodbye Phil



*I am so sorry to let you know that Phil Rizzo passed away on November 12. Phil was very much liked for his dry sense of humor and his friendliness. He was a smart guy with a soft heart and we enjoyed reading his column in the Signal: Full Speed to Port. Working for the newspaper came in handy when he became our publicity chairperson, all press releases where they should be and on time.*

*For years, he was in charge of the American Indian program with Sue Wallander and would carry all those artifacts from school to school and did a great presentation. He had been trained as a volunteer at the Southwest Museum so he was an expert.*

*He opened his home to do a fund raiser to keep the Nature Center open.*

*When the center was closed during the renovation, he arranged so that the club house in his neighborhood could be used for our parties.*

*He thought that the summer was just too long without seeing his docent friends at the Center, so he planned a Breakfast of the Champions to keep us connected. This tradition remains with us today and has even been extended with games to refresh our knowledge.*

*Even when Parkinson disease was robbing him of his strength, he would come to the gift shop, sit next to the counter and visit with park patrons while Suzie manned the counter. Eventually he brought*

*a cot to lay on when he got too tired, and eventually they had to stop coming to help out.*

*Phil was a character, a bright mind, a very tender heart and we are grateful to have shared time with him. Thank you Phil for all what you did for the Nature Center. Rest in Peace, my friend.*

*Phil did an interview for the Rattler in the issue of March and April 2006. We are printing it again today so that you can get to know him better that way.*

**Where were you born?** Rochester, New York

**Where did you spend your childhood?** In Rochester, my interest in nature started with the Boy Scouts when I did a bird study for a merit badge. I still have this book with the bird count I did when I was 15.

**What was your education?** The last year of high school chemistry was hard for me so I told the teacher she had to pass me because I was enlisted in the Coast Guard after I graduated. She did not have any choice and the day after graduation I joined the U.S. Coast Guard. The boot camp was in New York City.

I then went to Rochester Institute of Technology to study commercial art. I graduated in 1950.

**What was your work experience?** I worked for the Rochester Times-Union as an ad designer, and then I was drafted into the army during the Korean War. I served in Germany near Munich at the engineering school. It was found I had a high mechanical IQ, so I became an instructor on floating bridges. I decided to look for a warmer climate and moved to Arizona. I was lucky to get a new job right away with Safeway as an advertising manager for their 43 stores. I lived in Phoenix.

I was then hired by Market Basket, a grocery chain in Los Angeles, and lived in Whittier for 10 years. Finally, I started my own business as a printing broker on P.O.P. (point of purchase) advertising. I bought large screens in kit form from the printer, would be involved with the designs and resale them to chain stores.

**What is your family life?** I am married to Susann. We met at a Zydeco dance in South Pasadena and got married one year later. I have four children and 10 grandchildren.

**What is your title at Placerita?** I am a docent and I am the Tataviam program. I give presentations in public schools on Tataviam natives.

**What do you like the most about your job?** I like the people here. They are friendly, caring and forgiving. Walking with the kids is very important to me.

**What don't you like?** It is a challenge to be different every time so I do not get boring. I have to change the program and come up with new ideas.

**When was your first time at Placerita?** About four years ago, I came to look around with my grandchildren and Susann. When she saw the ad about docent training, she pushed it toward me and said "You might be interested."

**At Placerita, is there a special accomplishment that makes you feel proud?** I actually had a teacher who hugged me and cried after I finished my tour. "You are so wonderful teaching the kids" she said.

**What is your favorite food?** Pasta, any Italian food.

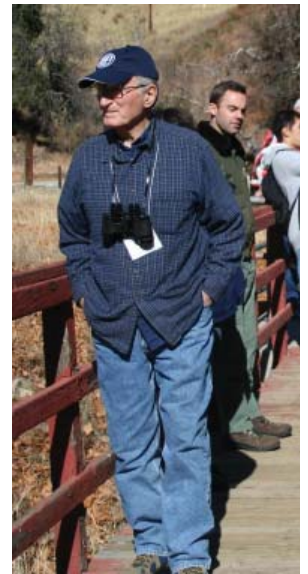
**What is your favorite color?** Blue

**What is your favorite TV show?** "Jim Lehrer's News" and Native programs, but I enjoy music too, everything from opera to rock-n-roll. That does not include rap!

**Do you have passions?** About 15 years ago a friend and I decided to take the outreach training offered by the Southwest Museum. I have given this program everywhere in L.A., sometimes driving 40 miles for my presentation. I studied the Tataviam and adapted the program for our area.

I have been writing poetry for 15 years. A Cal Tech poetry work shop got me started and I have been published 6 times.

My main passion is to become a better person and I have studied many spiritual disciplines throughout the years.





## On the Road to Camarillo

with Jim Crowley

A small group of Docents and several spouses visited the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (WFVZ) in Camarillo, CA on Dec 7<sup>th</sup>. It is a non-profit research and education institution. Its mission is to manage its ornithological collections for researchers, educators, students, and the general public in a way that contributes to the conservation of the world's wild bird species. Our docent group met with Rene Corado, Collections Manager, and enjoyed an informative tour with guide Adam Searcy. The foundation has one of the world's largest collections of bird eggs and nests and offers access to research by qualified individuals. In addition the center is open to the public on a limited basis once a month including an annual open house day. They do offer tours to organized groups by appointment.

The collections and displays of taxidermy birds and nests were extensive. WFVZ supports local colleges and research as required and participates in studies in foreign countries. In the last year they have received over 60 data requests from around the world. Their largest ongoing project is the Guatemala Project, an extensive study project concentrating on flooding and its effects on the tree and bird populations.

The WFVZ continues to look for volunteers, monetary support, and private collections from individuals. They also provide hands on classes in bird preservation. For additional information on the foundation call (805) 388-9944.



## The Skunk Nanny

Deb Clem gave a very interesting presentation in November about the California Wildlife Center, the place at which she also volunteers in addition to her docent work at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. We try to have on going in service on a regular basis to increase the knowledge of the docents and show them all the options about wildlife. The purpose of CWC is to do animal rescue and to be able to release the animal once they are healthy. The animals are cared for but kept wild.

Deb explained the different options when rescuing wildlife from a baby bird to a wounded coyote. The larger animals need to be handled with special care because of the danger of rabies. Thank you Deb and congratulation on the great job you are doing.

If you find a wild injured animal, call the nature center at 661-259-7721 and they will give you some advice according to the kind of animal and your location.

## On the Road with the Rattler

The docents took The Rattler with them on a twilight hike



Linda and Bill took this picture holding the Rattler in front of the Qumran Museum in Israel where they keep some of the precious Dead Sea scrolls found in 1947.



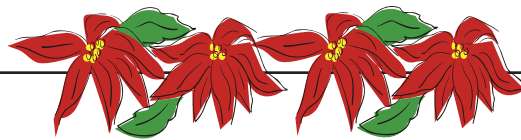
Arthur and Leontien from the Netherlands took the Rattler to Terranea in Palos Verdes



Linda Pippin, her friend Kay and Hiker, the dog, took the Rattler on a hike in Eaton Canyon. They went under the bridge to get to the waterfall.



Linda took the Rattler with her to celebrate her birthday. We all enjoyed the birthday cake with an owl on it.



### ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

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

- Coach Donna and Players of AYSO Region 678 Soccer Team 'Green Lightning' - Sandy, the alligator lizard
- Coach Donna and Players of AYSO Region 678 Soccer Team 'Big Dinosaurs' - Miss Muffet, the tarantula
- Victoria Jean Murray - Daisy, the opossum
- Laura May Murray - Orion, the great horned owl
- Golden Oak Community School - Catori, the barn owl
- Girl Scout Troop 8742 - Miss Muffet, the tarantula

Many thanks for your support and generosity!

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



photo by A. Mootnick

**Alan Mootnick**

Alan Richard Mootnick, the founder of the Gibbon Conservation Center in Santa Clarita died on Friday November 4 after complication from heart surgery.

Alan fell in love with the small Southeast Asian apes while watching “Tarzan” when he was nine years old and hearing the gibbons singing in the background. He devoted his life to save them.

A self-taught primatologist, Mootnick started the center in 1976 to prevent the extinction of the gibbons and he became one of the world’s foremost specialists on the small Southeast Asian arboreal apes. His center is the largest gathering of endangered apes in the western hemisphere. Alan flew around the world to give advice to zoos and rescue agencies on how to treat gibbons.

Forty-four gibbons live at the center, including several offspring that were born there.

The Placerita docents and volunteers visited his place many times and we had the greatest respect and admiration for the work and expertise that Alan had developed. We also admired very much the man that Alan was who decided to dedicate his life to his passion for the gibbons. He would always come to talk to us and answer our questions during our visits and we will miss him also as a friend. To top it all, we were all very proud to see such an accomplishment right there, in our valley. It is true that the gibbons are very vocal, very loud and Alan needed a place away from too many houses, this is why he was able to work in Santa Clarita.

*Ref; LA Observer*



Photo by Shirley Morano

## FALL - 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.
- BIRD WALK** Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.
- BIRD WALK, CASTAIC** The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at **Castaic Lake Recreation Area** on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.
- BLOOMS OF THE SEASON** Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.
- COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB** A non-profit organization that invites all members of the SCV and community at large to: Join weekly planned hikes; Attend monthly nature series educational presentations; Participate in community outreach programs such as Calif Condor micro-trash clean-ups and maintenance of trails and native garden; Partner with groups such as Boys and Girls Club to introduce youth to nature. For more information, go to the website at [communityhikingclub.org](http://communityhikingclub.org)

**For more information, please call 661.259.7721 or visit our website at [Placerita.org](http://Placerita.org).**



## OJ Passed Away October 28, 2011

Well, we knew this day was coming but it is still sad when it really happens.

Roger McClure took OJ (Owl Junior) from his cage the same way he has done for years and OJ sort of collapsed on his hand. We think he had a heart attack. That was something terrible to happen to Roger McClure who has taken such a good care of OJ for many years and we are very sorry that it had to happen that way. Roger, you are in our thoughts.

OJ was still shown to the public during our animal presentation on Saturday but we were very careful to prevent any stress of any sort because he was so old.

OJ was around 30 years old which is a record. We could never confirm how old he really was but it is a wonder that he lived so long.

So, there we are...OJ is no longer with us. He was a truly beautiful bird with an interesting personality; he loved some people and could not stand others. He started hooting much later than he should have. He had a regal posture and was a splendid bird with a cranky disposition many days but was the pride of the Nature Center. This is why we took him as our logo, from our name tags to our letter head.

Good bye, OJ. I knew you for 26 years and it was always a treat seeing you. We will definitely miss you a lot.

*Evelyne*

Many docents and volunteers shared their thoughts and memories of OJ

How very sad. I will miss hearing OJ when I help with the school tours and walk the children near his mew. Also, when I lead the Bird Walks, some of the regular birders love to hoot back to him and hear his response. The new people are always amazed and upon hearing him get the biggest smile on their faces and want to know why an owl would be hooting during the day time. It was so lovely to hear his beautiful hoots. We will certainly miss him.

*Rosemarie Regis*

OJ, you were the first owl I ever had the fortune of working with, an amazing ambassador to your species, and you never failed to impress. Thank you for teaching me as much as you did, and I'm sure thousands can say the same. I'm going to miss you, cranky.

*Jess Nikolai*

### Coping with O.J.

It was sad reading that OJ has been a joy to others for the last time. He was the first and largest wild bird I had ever seen up close so even though I never handled him, I will always have special memories of OJ. The school children were always so excited to see him on display.

*Eileen Blanchard*

The only thing I can say about OJ was that he hooted all day long. Also when I took him out, he was fine, but when I returned him to his mew, I backed away from him to the door and as soon as the door was open, he flew at me with talons spread aiming for my head. He also made that strong sound whenever he saw his leash.

*Rick Brammer*

Circa 2003, I was learning animal care and Ian was teaching me how to cast and cope the owls; I learned how to hood them, wrap them gently in a towel then trim their beaks and talons. I was very nervous but Ian was a patient teacher and O.J. was very tolerant of my lack of confidence. I'm sure he could sense it but was willing to give me the benefit of the doubt. When all was done, and O.J. suffered the indignities of a novice, he retreated to his mew turned his back on me and banished me from his domain.

The next day, when I went in to clean his mew, he flew at my head in retaliation. We were equally matched in our persistence and he soon allowed me back into his good graces. It took about two weeks though, of telling him, "I'm going to do this and you're just going to have to adjust. What can be so wrong with a clean mew, fresh water, a check of your weight, jesses, general well being and delivery of a meal?"

I think I may have made "the list" but it was only for a little while. O.J.'s "list" consisted of those people he would no longer tolerate. He was quite clear about his boundaries and we all loved him for and in spite of that.

I am so sad to learn of his passing. This noble character was our mascot, thrilled thousands of school children and adults alike, and introduced us to the magic and wonder of nature and her creatures. I am honored to have once been his handler and servant.

*Pam Koch*

When I first became a docent in 1991, after being trained to exhibit OJ, I regularly showed him to school groups.

OJ and I got along just fine for several years. I also displayed our gopher snake, a California king snake and the tarantula.

But we were very careful to NOT let OJ see anyone who handled him holding any of the snakes.

One day by accident OJ was brought in just as I was leaving the classroom with one of the snakes. OJ reacted to the snake and after that he didn't want me to handle him even though we had been very good friends till then.

I really missed not being able to show him after that.

*Bob Fischer*

As a new Docent I knew little about owls except what I learned from a book. Yes I knew that they hunted at night and had excellent vision and hearing in order to swoop in to snatch small mammals scurrying in the dark. *What I did not know was that they have some humanlike feelings such as being grumpy in the morning after being up all night!* Some mornings O.J. just didn't want to be removed from the safety of his enclosure and tethered to your glove and perched on your hand for all the visitors to admire. No, he did not want to be disturbed and would fly at you with talons outstretched, threatening to do you great harm if you entered his enclosure.

*The most surprising thing I learned is that O.J. recognized individuals!* O.J. could take a dislike to people (another human trait) and knew their faces. I learned this while showing O.J. to a class of students when Ian Swift – a long time handler of O.J. walked across the room and O.J. locked his sight on Ian while simultaneously clenching his talons so tightly on my glove that I thought they would pierce my hand. When Ian left the room all was well again with O.J.

*Jim Southwell*

## **How OJ came to Placerita**

Valerie Vartanian

A woman came into the Nature Center with OJ in a box. I'm pretty sure it was in 1982, a year after I started at PC. She was riding her horse and found him on the ground covered with ants. He was very thin, just a fuzz ball. I took him home that night and started feeding him Nutrical and some pinkies. The vet from the LA zoo (who lived down Placerita Canyon) checked him out and prescribed some antibiotics and an eyewash for his infected eyes. I kept bringing him back and forth to Placerita and my home while I was treating him. He wasn't into eating much, so I had to force feed him to keep him going. Eventually, he started feeling better and started eating on his own.

The President of PCNCA had a little screech owl in her care named "Little Orphan Owlie". I thought that was cute and along a similar theme named the owl "Owl Junior" or simply OJ (of course waaay before the unfortunate exploits of Mr. Simpson).

Because of all the handling during his treatment phase he became very imprinted. I felt bad, my goal is always to get the wildlife back out into the wild. A friend of mine who was the naturalist at a resort in Arizona had also come to possess a GHO that became imprinted. The Arizona Dept of Game and Fish took the owl away so they could "rehab and release" it. He did a little research and discovered that GHO's and Kestrels had a very low success rate at being rehabbed and released. A few months later, his owl found its way back to the nature center at the resort.

Given that, I knew OJ would not be able to be released, so I started working with him to be tame enough to get close to people. I brought in an old parrot stand and worked with him to fly from the back of the classroom to the front over the children's' heads. It was a great experience for children (and adults!) to see, or hear (or not hear) the silent flight of an owl. I worked with OJ for almost a year before we could take him out for shows. We were using OJ to do outreach and the school field trips well before I took my hiatus (1985-88).

Kids could come up and touch his extra special soft feathers. OJ was a great ambassador for wildlife! He helped people understand that the wild animals in our natural environment react to the world around them. And the things that we do as people can have a direct affect on something as magnificent as OJ.

When I returned in 1988 as Natural Areas Supervisor, he was a different bird, but still friendly to most of us and usable for shows. I know there's a picture in the paper of baby "OJ" at the Nature Center in 1984. This is the same paper that showed a picture of a sparrow, taken at the "What to do With a Baby Bird" program given on a Saturday, and labeled it as a baby hawk. We've had lots of baby owls, etc. come in over the years, so that could have just been a case of misidentity.

He taught me a lot about owls, and about caring for captured wildlife. I never forgot that even though he was gentle and kind to people who came to visit him, he was a wild animal. When he was 16 I sent in some blood work to an owl specialist in Florida to make sure he was doing ok at that time. The specialist told me he was in excellent health (his cholesterol was a little high, but he had just had a baby chick for dinner which may have explained it). He also told me OJ was the oldest GHO alive in captivity that he knew of at that time. Imagine that, since now he was close to 30!!! I appreciated his service to the Nature Center, and I will miss him greatly.

## **That Rascal Named OJ**

Heidi Webber

OJ was one of the first residents I met at Placerita when I joined the Docent Class of 1996. Darrell was the Superintendent at the time and introduced me to OJ's care and handling. Later on, we were formally trained by a raptor/wildlife rehabber in the proper care and handling of many of the creatures that called Placerita home.

OJ and I got along fabulously; he never went at me like he did some others. Later on, he was to extend this courtesy to Bill as he became more involved with the center. We could scratch him all over his body, under his wings, his ear tufts (making his eyes roll in his head), picking up and handling his feet and toes and also his beak. He was the star of our Outreaches, always being shown last, as any star would be.

OJ had a definite personality. He was afraid of snakes, for example. Many people got on his bad side for being seen with a snake. OJ seldom forgot, either.

Both Ian and Frank Hovore made his "List" and one day when Frank was in the office, we discovered whoever had last handled OJ hadn't tied his leash very well. OJ hopped off that perch, the leash dragging behind him and chased Frank all over the office. He didn't even try to fly—he just ran. It was hysterical. Another time, the leash was tied long to the perch and he chased Ian, dragging that perch after him as well as he could.

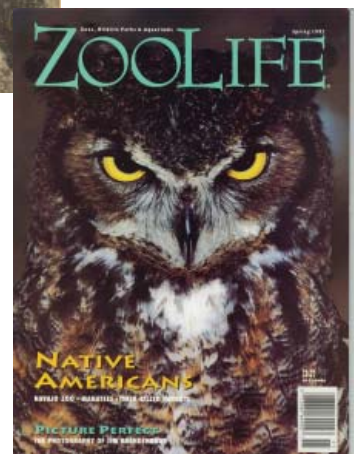
OJ had a funny little habit that many people see with their parakeets or other domestic pet birds: He had a nesting box in his mew, sitting on the floor. He loved that box. He would stick his head in it and hoot and make other owl noises. It would echo back at him. Turbo loved to tease OJ. We used to let Turbo loose in the office so he could wander around and get a little exercise, plus he really seemed curious and liked to check out every nook and cranny—including chewing on a shoe, occupied or not. One of his great delights was to circle the parrot stand OJ would be perched on in the office. The legs had curlicues on them and Turbo would climb up on one and center himself and rock back and forth. This entire procedure was observed by a nervous-looking OJ who would peer over the edge watching every move. Turbo really seemed to know it too, as you wouldn't see him near that perch unless OJ was on it.

OJ was always an ambassador for education. We had him on an outreach to a science class. Suddenly he started gasping, heaving and stretching his neck, beak wide open. Looked and sounded just like a cat about to...yep, he cast a pellet right there in front of the class.

Two of my granddaughters spent many hours at the center as babies and then toddlers, and often, when OJ was being vocal, I would carry them to his mew and OJ would be on one side of the screen and the baby would be on the other, chatting back and forth, almost like a confessional. The girls would talk about OJ before you could really understand much of what they were saying, but they could say his name!

There will never be another like OJ and I am so glad that he was in my life for so many years.







### Twilight Hike

October had turned out to be a busy month with a lot of things going on at the Nature Center so Ron Kraus did not plan for a formal in-service training event. However, after taking a photo of a fox on the trail around 7pm, he decided to plan an informal twilight hike starting at the Nature Center, walking up the Canyon Trail to Mid Gate and back, a 2 mile round trip. We were back around 6.30pm, a very good thing as you cannot park in the lot after 7pm.

While we did not see the fox again as we looked on the rock ledges above our head, we enjoyed some great smelling flowers that are particularly fragrant in the late afternoon plus the fall color (mainly poison oak) really stands out as the sun sets. A very nice time of the day to take a hike.



### Placerita Canyon Nature Center Was at the Sheriff's Haunted House

The "haunted" rendering of the local jail remains a hugely popular Santa Clarita Valley tradition after more than two decades at Halloween.

Only a handful of the younger children decided to go to the non-scary alternative "under 6 year old" line.

The carnival attracted scores of young people: food booth, face painting, rock climbing, bounce house and all kind of games but the snakes on display by Placerita Canyon Nature center attracted huge crowds. Bill and Heidi Webber, Sandra Balaram and Sue Mayhew were bombarded with questions the whole day but enjoyed being such a popular attraction and giving important information about the snakes on hand.

Ref : [jholt@the-signal-com](mailto:jholt@the-signal-com)

### Twilight Hike # 2

The first hike was such a success that a few people realized they missed something fun so we had a repeat the day after Halloween, trying to beat day light saving time. On the Canyon Trail, we all enjoyed rediscovering this tree, after seeing Pam's photo. She alerted us to the fact that it looks like the painting "The Scream" from the Norwegian artist, Edward Munch. Quite a discovery very fitting with the Halloween spirit!

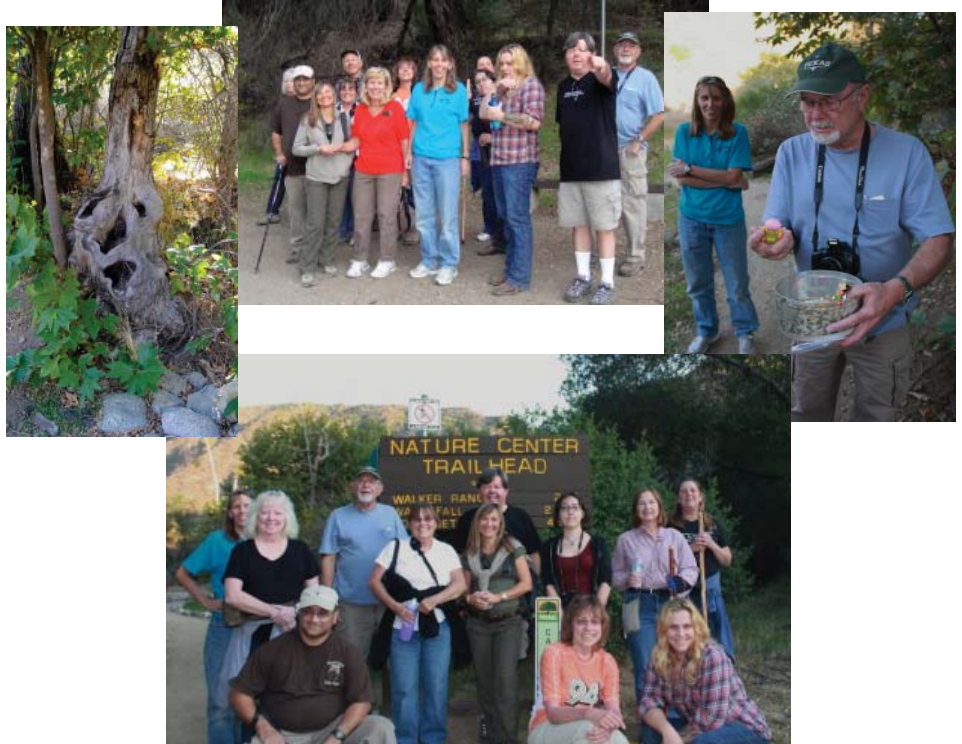
Close to "The Scream", Jim Crowley discovered a geo cash. (see photo) We saw a gopher pulling a plant down in his burrow; it was funny to observe this plant moving like crazy while the gopher remained safely underground. We looked for bats and scorpions with a special light along the hill side trails without much luck.

By then, it was getting dark but we had just enough moonlight to find our way back. It is fun to be in the park when it is dark, something we do not do very often.



### Be Safe

We have had some break-ins at Walker Ranch. Now, we have had a break-in during day time at the parking lot close to the Nature Center. Please be very careful. Do not leave any back pack, bag or any thing of value (camera, iPod, binoculars, etc...) in plain sight in your car. The thieves break windows and take what is there to be seen. Even if it is a bag with nothing valuable in it, do not offer any temptation. A car window is expensive to replace and we want you to be safe.





## Catori

What do you do when you are expecting a new baby? You want to find the perfect name and this is what Linda Ioerger did, she went on a baby girl names site and found the name Catori, which means Spirit and comes from Native American origin.

Fall of 2011 is the time that we were introduced to our new barn owl, Catori. Kim Stroud, Director of Ojai Raptor Center, knew we had lost our last barn owl, Hopi and we missed her dearly. Kim proposed that we take over this new barn owl.

Dave Stives had been called a few months ago to rescue 4 baby barn owls from the air ducts on the roof of Acton elementary school. He brought the babies to Kim who took care of them until they could be released and survive on their own but one could not be let go. She suffered some neurological damage at some point. Could it be from a fight with a sibling, from a birth defect or from some accident, it is impossible to know, but she would not be able to survive in the wild. She can tilt her head backward completely, (not just sideways as owls usually do) it does not seem to disturb her but her equilibrium would be affected. It is always imperative for a bird not to show their weakness to survive so it is sometimes difficult to know exactly how much they are impaired by a physical disability.

Catori is less than one year old and is a completely wild bird, never having been handled by humans.

At first we were very cautious about telling the good news as we did not know if we were going to be able to train her and keep her at the Nature Center. What was going to happen to Catori ?

Here comes Linda Ioerger on the scene; she found the name and was very determined that we were going to be able to keep her and she would train her no matter what.

Basically, what you need to do is have an incredible amount of patience and time, holding the bird on your hand in a quiet environment so the wild bird will start trusting that the situation is safe...and you have to do this every day for a long amount of time.

Linda can be seen at the center doing just that and it is working very well. Catori has started her career being shown to small school groups and is accepting her new situation pretty well. Without the determination, compassion and time from Linda, this training would never have been possible. Only one person was trained to prevent stress to the bird and it was done under the supervision from Dave Stives, park Animal Keeper and Frank Hoffman, Reg. Park Supervisor.



## Training Memories of Catori

Linda Ioerger

At first, Catori was not used to being handled; she was not used to all the equipment, and it was all very new for her. I got her on my hand and she tried to bait, fly off my hand, she did not know how to get back on my hand. She had to get used to the noises, the people. She had to learn all that, just to be here.

Now, there is a transformation, she is much calmer, she comes back on my hand almost all the time now. She does her little "star gazing number", (tilting her head backward) I have had her outside meeting people and they see her from across the parking lot "How beautiful, how beautiful..." they come over to meet her and she has done very well. She is quite comfortable with me now. She preens down her wing feathers; that is a sign that she is at ease.





### **Shall We Talk About Megan?**

I kept on hearing about Megan, this wonderful new volunteer at the Nature Center who would do so much for the Nature Center and I was very eager to meet her.

*“My name is Megan Smith and I am 23 year old. I have come to the Nature Center since I was a little girl with my Dad. It might sound funny but I would call it “The dead animals place” because I was so fascinated by all the taxidermy animals. I remember very clearly the Great Horned Owl from the animal show and this is why, now, I want to work with birds of prey.*

*I started to work at the Burbank Animal Shelter when I was 14 as a volunteer for 4 years. The day I turned 18, they hired me but it was time to go to college. I studied Biological and physical sciences at C.O.C.*

*I volunteer at the Feline Conservation Center in Rosamond, I was a volunteer for a while at the LA Zoo but now I spend more time at the Wildlife Care of Ventura County in Simi Valley. They do rehabilitation and most of the injured animals found around Placerita are sent there. On Wednesday, I work in Placerita.*

*I love it, I have learned about so many species and I can even give water to the tarantula now but am not sure about taking them out of their cages yet.*

*I am an assistant technician at Happy Pets Veterinary Center but I want to become a certified technician. I would love to work with exotic animals and of course, working at the LA Zoo would be great.*

*Right now, I am waiting anxiously for an answer to find out if I have been accepted at Cal Poly Pomona. I would like to start there next fall. In the spring time, I will take some classes at Pierce College to speed up my study.”*

### **So, what is it that you do at the Nature Center?**

Cleaning up cages, feeding the animals, preparing the food. That always needs to be done. I am also working on a few brochures to be handed out to the public. I do brochures about animals because it helps me learn about the species. Then I am planning to do brochures about the trails and the plants

**What are the things you like in life?** I like to read but I am so tired by the end of the day that I usually fall asleep while reading. I like to hang out with my friends, watch TV. I try to stay away from reality shows but I like “The Girl Next Door”. Me and My Friends, we like “Ghost Hunters”-- ghost shows are fun.

Thanks Megan for all the work you do so well at the center and we are happy to see you back at the “Dead Animals Place”.



## My Desert Bird: The Say's Phoebe

by Bob Fischer



I'd never heard of the Say's Phoebe before 1992. Maybe in a bird guide but it never registered. Then, beginning in the cooler months of 1992, I started going with a friend to her cabin near Twentynine Palms. The cabin was at the end of a two mile dirt road with the nearest neighbor being blocks away. Every morning we would be greeted with the pee-ee call of a Say's Phoebe that hung around the cabin and that we saw frequently during the day. Oddly, when we would walk for miles on the path leading further out across the desert, we would see other birds but never the Phoebe. It just liked to hang around the cabin.

After moving to Santa Clarita in 1993, we continued our every morning walks here in Friendly Valley and occasionally we would see a Say's Phoebe. Just a reminder that

despite the lawns, gardens and trees we have planted here, we live in a desert held at bay with mostly imported water. Sometimes I will see a Say's daily near my home. Then it disappears and I won't see one for weeks. You wonder where they go. The season seems to make little difference.

Like other phoebes, the rusty-bellied Say's Phoebe seems comfortable around people. It's a medium-sized flycatcher, one half inch larger than the Black Phoebe which we also see on our morning walks. What's odd is seeing them both in exactly the same area when one is a desert bird and the other likes to be near water. The Say's upper parts are pale brownish gray, it's belly and undertail are cinnamon and it wags its tail. This bird was named for Thomas Say, an American Naturalist. The Say's Phoebe is a bird of the west and breeds farther north than any other flycatcher and most other birds, seemingly limited only by the lack of nest sites. It breeds north past the tree line, and may be following the Alaska pipeline even farther north, nesting on the pipeline itself. Northern Phoebes migrate to southern Mexico in late summer and start their northward migration early in the spring. Those in the southern parts of their range are permanent residents.

Say's Phoebes feeds on flying and terrestrial insects, darting out from a perch near the ground pursuing flying insects. They also hover and glean insects off of low vegetation. Often, using man made structures for nest sites, nests are placed on a ledge with cover such as in a cave, or under the eave of a building or a bridge. The nest is an open cup of rocks, weed stems, grass, plant fibers, spider webs and other items, lined with hair, fibers, paper, or feathers. Kaufman says 4 eggs are typical and are incubated by the female usually for 12 to 14 days. Young are able to leave the nest after 14 to 16 days. You can listen to the Say's calls on the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology web site.

The Say's is a bird of dry open country, sagebrush, badlands, dry barren foothills, canyons, borders of deserts, and often remote buildings. It avoids watercourses and heavy forest. The Placerita Canyon Natural Area Bird List characterizes Say's Phoebe as uncommon. If you see one there, be sure to report it.

*References for this article include the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, "Lives Of North American Birds" by Kenn Kaufman, The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology web page, Wikipedia and several other pages on the internet under Say's Phoebe*



## Disney Ranch

Disney Ranch is our neighbor on the west side and we have had a wonderful relationship with them through the years. Many movies have been filmed at all times of day but we are never bothered by noise or light and they have always gone out of their way to come to our rescue when we needed help, such as sending their fire crews during wildfires, their equipment to scrape mud flows from the driveway, etc.

The only indication that the movie being filmed at the time needs a large crowd in action is that the parking lot will be filled up with many cars from the extras. Throughout the years we have seen a small lake created for water shoots and more trees being planted for forest effect, no doubt.

Recently, we have seen new fronts being installed that can mimic many different sorts of buildings for "city" shoots.

At this time, it is sort of interesting to compare the fronts that could be seen in 1985. I guess more westerns were made at the time

and there was a need for a more rustic background.

These fronts are well hidden from the road and do not interfere in the least with the beautiful view from the surrounding hills.

You really do forget that Hollywood is at your door step when you are in Placerita.



Many thanks go out to those generous persons who thought of Placerita and its residents. It is greatly appreciated.

Anaverde Hills School  
California Virtual Academy  
El Oro Way ES  
Fernangeles ES  
Cynthia Haggart  
Homeschool History Co-op  
Steve and Linda Ioerger  
Lighthouse Christian School  
Shirley Morano  
North Hills Co-op

Ocotillo ES  
Primetime Preschool  
Judith Rothman  
Semwives Homeschool  
St. Martin's School  
Valencia HS  
Valencia Valley ES  
Valley Home School  
Allan and Sue Wallander



# **Volunteer-Naturalist Training Placerita Canyon Natural Area**



## **Become a Volunteer-Naturalist!**

- *Learn about the natural environment*
- *Teach children about nature*
- *Make a difference in your community*

No special background needed,  
just a willingness to attend training and to volunteer at least twice a month.

**Training Starts Tuesday, January 10th, 2012**  
**Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 12 Noon**

Volunteer-Naturalists attend a 9-week training program. Topics include native plants, ecology, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, geology, history, and interpretive techniques. Instructors include noted professionals in the various fields. The cost of the training is \$45, which includes all training materials (instruction manual, field guide, T-shirt, and related items.) Visit our website ([placerita.org](http://placerita.org)) for further information regarding the Volunteer-Naturalist program.

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

**For further information call or visit:**  
**Placerita Canyon Natural Area**  
**19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall CA 91321**  
**(661) 259-7721**  
**Email: [placeritatraining@earthlink.net](mailto:placeritatraining@earthlink.net)**



*May Everyone Have a Safe  
and Wonderful Winter!  
Your Friends at  
Placerita Canyon Nature Center*



## The Rattler

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



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

NATURE CENTER ASSOCIATES OF  
LOS ANGELES COUNTY