



# The Rattler



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## *Placerita Canyon Nature Center* Over 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 2013

#### **Hello Friends,**

PCNCA wants to wish you all the best for the New Year 2013: health, happiness and many good hiking days. This last year was filled up with many changes and as we reflect upon those, we think the best is yet to come.

We are excited to see the start of the docent training on January 8<sup>th</sup> and we are ready to welcome the new students with the same enthusiasm each year. Seeing those fresh faces, eager to learn and become part of the Placerita "family" is always a source of pride for all of us.

We want to thank you for your interest and your support during the past year and we are looking forward to a closer friendship with all our readers.

If you want to have this Rattler sent in PDF at your home, write your email address at nature Center office or send me an email at [evandersande@gmail.com](mailto:evandersande@gmail.com)

It almost looks like spring at the Center with all this fresh green grasses every where, the clear air in the cold mornings. Come and take a look, it is time to go outside!



#### **Good bye Frank Hoffman, Hello Chris Mowry**

Frank Hoffman has taken a new position at Hart Park and Chris Mowry came back to Placerita at the end of November. Frank always was a great hit with the children and the visitors during any program that he would participate in and would get delighted feedback from everyone. We wish him the very best in his new position and we thank him deeply for all his years of service.



#### **Hello Chris**

Chris used to be on staff at Placerita, went to a different natural area for a few years and now he is back so we know that he knows Placerita well. He is an old friend and will do a great job. We are happy to have you back Chris and we wish you all the best.



**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.**



### Let's go Outside

That is the name of my weekly column that is going to be published each Thursday in SCVNews.com.starting in January.

I am very proud and very scared to take on this challenge but Leon Worden proposed this opportunity to me and I could not resist using this great platform to do a little publicity for Placerita Canyon Nature Center. I will remember all I have learned at Placerita to do some Nature Education about the local treasures that appear every season in our beautiful valley.

That all sounds nice and good but with a name like Evelyne Vandersande, you know very well that English is not my first language. I was French, then I became Dutch when I married my husband and now I am American; I speak all 3 languages but I am master of none by now so I have some strong trepidation in writing one page and half every week.

Let's be clear from the start, I am not getting a penny for this but only the glory and the opportunity to try to drag the readers outside and help them to open their eyes to the beauty and interest of Nature. Pam Koch and Heidi Webber have kindly accepted to proof-read my articles and I am very grateful to them. I could not have accepted without their help. At least, I will be flying trapezes with a safety net...

Again, we are all volunteers at the Center and we are in this together. I ask for your help if you have any ideas, suggestion, or ways to improve how I write, please let me know. I have been writing the Rattler since 1998 but those are short little articles, just many of them...one page and half every week is more than intimidating. Please come to my rescue!

### NOTE OF THANKS

For many years, Mr. Richard Green, owner of Green Landscape Nursery on Bouquet Canyon Road, has allowed us to hang banners on the fence bordering his nursery to advertise our many activities.

We want to express our most sincere appreciation! Let's all stop in to say "thanks" to him - and maybe do a little shopping!

### 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 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 [evandersande@gmail.com](mailto:evandersande@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.



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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.

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Thank You!

- Yes! I want to contribute to help fund programs at Placerita
  - \$25 Friend    \$50 Donor    \$100 Sponsor Wall
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- 

Your tax-deductible donations are needed to help fund programs provided by volunteers.  
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19152 Placerita Canyon Road  
Newhall, CA 91321-3213



Where is Chris Sapovchak? If you come to the center you might see his chair empty and wonder where on earth is Chris now, I have not seen him for days? The best thing was to ask him and here was his answer “I am working at Hart Park 3-4 days a week assisting with care of the animals in the barnyard as well as the bison. I am at Placerita at least one day a week possibly two days depending on my hours at Hart.”

Congratulations Chris, this is a very big responsibility and we are all excited for you. Many animals are depending of your good care now. We will come to visit the animal farm and maybe we will see you in action.

### First Rain

It had been such a hot summer that we all welcomed the first rain with glee. It was short but powerful, we even had thunder and lightning, the real thing! Work had been done on Placerita Canyon Road, but a mistake was done on the side of the road and all the rain gathered and tumbled on a hill along the Heritage trail. The hill collapsed and a mud slide came down on the trail. We hope the street will go through some repair soon before the start of the rainy season.



## 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.
- JUNIOR RANGERS** Third Saturday of every month from 9:30 to 11:00 am, for children between the ages of 6 and 12 years old. Learn about different natural wonders both in our science lab and in the field. Each month explores a different topic and we always hike. Call the park office for more information at 661.259.7721.
- 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).



## Butterfly Migration

*Dr. Paul A. Levine*

Virtually everyone knows that many birds migrate. Some birds travel thousands of miles from the top of North America in the Arctic to the tip of South America in Patagonia. Birds, being endothermic (warm-blooded) live for years and often make this same trip multiple times. As such, they can teach their fledglings who in turn teach their offspring. Similarly, large herd animals such as bison in North America and Gnu's and Antelope in Africa also migrate but usually shorter distances as they follow the food sources and the rains. Butterflies, as are all arthropods, are ectothermic. They are cold-blooded and as with many insects, the adult dies in the colder weather along with a lack of nectar sources with the species surviving based on the eggs, caterpillars or pupae which can overwinter in a colder environment emerging in the spring to hatch, resume eating or eclosing (emerging from the chrysalis) as the weather warms up and thus support the next generation.

A few butterflies cannot overwinter in any form and thus must migrate but unlike birds the same butterfly does not make the full round trip once much less multiple times. It often takes four to six generations to migrate from their winter site to their summer site and back again. The butterfly that is famous for migrating is the Monarch butterfly, commonly known as a "Milkweed" butterfly because its host plant is milkweed. Monarch butterflies located in the Eastern and Central United States and Canada migrate to a location in a variety of mountain areas in the Mexican states of Mexico and Michoacan. Those located in the Northwest US and the Rocky Mountains migrate to various sites in California along the Pacific Coast.

Other members of the Milkweed Butterflies also migrate but these are found in Asia. They are the Common Tiger and the Common Crow while other members of this family of butterflies do not migrate (the Queen in the United States, the Plain Tiger in Asia). The stimulus to migrate is not fully known. Like birds, a change in the season, the length of day and a declining food source are all triggers to migrate for those that do migrate. Similarly, while there may be nectar sources in the overwintering location, there is often a limited supply of host plants (the milkweed) causing them to return to their summer homes. This all makes sense until one realizes that the butterflies flying from the Rockies to the Pacific Coast have never been in the Pacific Coast previously and vice versa.



*While the host plant for the Monarch caterpillar is milkweed, the adult will often nectar on any good source like this thistle.*

doesn't happen every year. Over the years, we have seen masses of Painted Lady's migrate for one or two days and then it is over. The most recent major migration was the year of the El Nino in 2005 and this lasted for weeks. The winter grounds for the Painted Lady is northern Mexico and the southwestern deserts in California (Anza Borrego), Arizona and New Mexico. With the heavy rains, the host plants were in abundance (Fiddleneck, Nettle, thistle, sunflower, buckwheat...). As such, most of the caterpillars survived and when they emerged from the chrysalis, were heavy with fat stores. The fat stores is believed to be one trigger causing them to migrate for if they all mated and laid eggs locally, the resultant caterpillar population would outstrip their food source. When migrating, they are often flying 6 to 12 feet above the ground in a northwest direction and it seems like they are on a mission – they tend not to stop until their fat stores are depleted at which point they need to stop to nectar and replenish their internal fuel supply (energy). That is also where they lay their eggs and start the next generation. They also migrate back south as they cannot survive winter but less is known about their southward migration as they are often flying on air currents thousands of feet above ground and not visible to those of us who would look for them, even with binoculars. The Painted Lady and Red Admiral migrations occur both in North America as well as Europe, in Europe they are coming from Northern Africa and since they cannot survive the cold winter weather, each summer they local butterflies found in Washington, New England, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom had to have migrated from more southern locations. They do lay eggs locally and there will be a local summer population, some of which may then migrate south with the cooler temperatures.



*Schematic map of the fall migration pathways courtesy of the US Geologic Survey National Atlas*

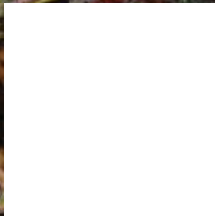
We can often find tens of thousands of Monarch butterflies in eucalyptus groves along the Pacific Coast, one of the closest to Placerita being only a 2 hour drive away in Goleta, CA (Monarch Preserve) along SR 101. Go to [www.goleta.com](http://www.goleta.com) to get more details. The eucalyptus trees are flowering in December and January (perhaps because that is summer in their native home of Australia) thus providing a nectar source for the Monarchs on the warmer days. But Eucalyptus trees are immigrants themselves so where did the Monarchs go previously as migration is not a new phenomenon? Even the colder days do not involve snow and ice allowing the Monarchs to survive winter on the Pacific Coast that would not be possible in the Rockies.

There is another group of butterflies, one that most people do not think about nor generally appreciate. This is the Vanessa family, the most famous being the Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) and a close relative, the Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*). This



*A mass of Monarch butterflies in the Eucalyptus Grove in the Monarch Preserve in Goleta, CA*









Paul A. Levine took the Rattler to River Vocheg in Ecuador

### On the Road With the Rattler



Paul A. Levine went to Taipei, Taiwan to attend and participate in the Asian Pacific Heart Rhythm Society meeting and took his mascot along.



The "Rattler Rocks" at Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park. Thank you Denny!

### Nature Lover's Cookbook

It was just a few years ago that we had fewer docents and our parties were catered affairs. The food was pleasant but on the cold side and there was no variety whatsoever. Turkey, green beans, mashed potatoes, salad and rolls were our Holiday Dinner year after year.

About 5 years ago, the docent training became very successful and all the classes had a little more than 30 new trainees. The crowd was fantastic but we certainly could not afford to have the food catered. We went back to the old system of pot luck that we did in the 1980's and 1990's. The docents made an effort for each party and the food was delicious.

Many docents tried new recipes and people were asking for them. The idea of a cookbook was taking shape...Heidi Webber, Pam Koch and Evelyne Vandersande had a brain storm and decided to give it a try.

Evelyne sent a Trails and Nuggets to ask all the docents to send their recipes, the start was very slow so we turned to our friends and family for their best recipes, this is why there are certain names that you might not be familiar with. Our objective was to have the cook book ready for the Holiday Craft Faire so we could start selling it by then as a fundraiser.

We asked a few printers and checked different prices and we are very grateful that the foundation decided to support our effort financially. We decided to have a horizontal format so it can remain open on your kitchen counter easily, the pages are glazed so they can be wiped lightly and the green cover is protected by a clear plastic page.

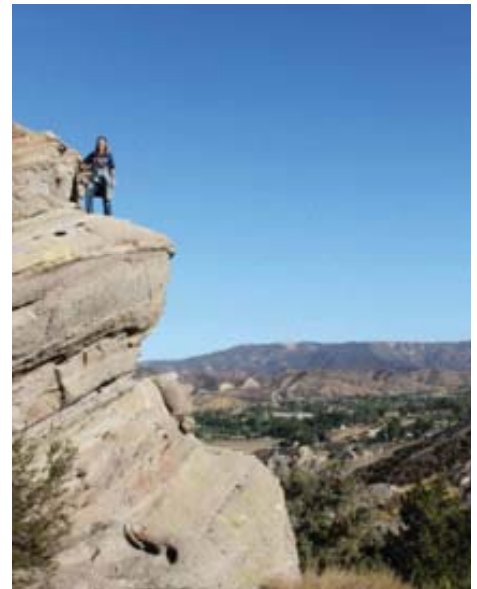
After a few reminders, the recipes started to pour in and we were working overtime as our due date approached. We removed some recipes from friends to be able to include all the recipes from the docents.

November 21st, the cookbook is ready and we are very proud and excited to show you the



finished product which will be available in the gift shop for \$10.00. It was created from cooperative efforts from all the docents. Heidi, Pam and I orchestrated the final product.

Enjoy it and use it, the variety of the recipes is astonishing and you will find a little surprise in the last few pages.



### Vasquez Rocks

Have you been to Vasquez Rock recently? The temperature is cooling off and it might be time to have a look at our neighbor natural area which has so much to offer; striking rocks, large open sky and many trails, even the remains of the Asher house with the BBQ area that nobody had the heart to destroy when the house was removed in the late 1070. You might be interested to see how the new building for the Nature Center is coming along; it should be ready around December. The new docent group is very enthusiastic and they work at both Placerita and Vasquez until their new nature center is ready. We wish them all the best, they are ready to go.

## The American Crow

By Bob Fischer

We see crows so often everywhere and know instantly what species they are, we usually give them little thought except perhaps to find them annoying. But the American crow is quite a remarkable bird and deserves thoughtful attention. The American crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*, is a large passerine (perching bird) belonging to the family Corvidae (crows and jays), and, along with a few primates, has made us re-think our own species' so-called uniqueness within the animal kingdom as the only toolmakers and problems solvers. Jet-black to purplish in color, sleek and nimble in the air, crows have a special place in human history. They communicate about perceived danger so well that successful study of them frustrates all but the most dogged of scientists.

American Crows are familiar over much of the continent. They are common birds of fields, open woodlands, and forests. They thrive around people, and are found in agricultural fields, lawns, parking lots, athletic fields, roadsides, towns, and city garbage dumps. They usually feed on the ground and eat almost anything – typically earthworms, insects and other small animals, seeds, and fruit but also garbage, carrion, and chicks they rob from nests. Their flight style is unique, a patient, methodical flapping that is rarely broken up with glides. Ravens resemble crows but are larger, longer winged, and heavier beaked than crows. Ravens' tails are tapered at the end, giving them a diamond or wedge shape compared to a crow's shorter, squarer tail. This is most notable during flight.

American crows are very social, sometimes forming huge flocks and are rarely seen alone. They are inquisitive and sometimes mischievous and are good learners and problem-solvers. They're also aggressive and often chase away larger birds including hawks, owls and herons. Crows are consummate opportunists. As scavengers, they most likely evolved a close association with wolves and other hunting animals that killed prey and left carcass remains unguarded or abandoned. A logical evolutionary companion of the crow would be humans as humans spread across the globe, crossing land bridges and exploiting the bounty of terrestrial and aquatic environments. We can imagine crows hanging around the campsites or settlements of North America's early inhabitants, exploiting the spoils of hunting or fishing expeditions whenever the opportunity arose. As humans fine-tuned agriculture and settled into larger, more complex landscapes, crows adapted. Obviously, the human-altered environments of North America are well-suited to the crow's way of making a living. Agricultural lands, urban and suburban areas, and all the interfaces between rural and urban, field and forest provide crows with a host of different ways to find food and thrive. And, in fact, American crow populations across the country have generally increased size and geographic range over the last several decades.

Crows are tool users, but they are also toolmakers and problem solvers. Their behavior and apparent ingenuity make them a fascinating group. Brain size increases with body weight, a relationship observed across nearly all animal groups. A corvid's brain size, however, is more in line with that of mammals than birds—and more in line with primates when graphed against its body mass. It's a relationship that undoubtedly figures into what many researchers consider the bird's intelligence in getting along in the world. Like some other birds, crows will drop food items, such as shells and nuts, from the air onto hard surfaces in order to crack them open and get access to whatever is inside. But crows have taken it to another level, placing hard-to-crack nuts on roads in front of passing vehicles, and then retrieving the crushed-open nut.

The same attributes that lend crows their keen intelligence undoubtedly figure in their status as one of the more able predators of songbirds nests—robbing both eggs and nestlings for food. In some studies done in Maryland and the Great Smokey Mountains in the 1980s, American crows emerged as important players in predation of songbirds' nests, especially where the woodlot or forest stands are relatively small. As crows easily adapt to human-induced changes in the landscape, and tend to be highly associated with forest edges, forest-dwelling birds in small tracts of wooded land might face higher densities of crows—and therefore higher nest predation by them—than birds in larger forested areas. As with other long-lived, social animals, crows exhibit behavior that can only be described as play. Reports of crows grabbing an object like a foam toy from a backyard or something as simple as a piece of paper and creating a game-like play of shaking, dropping, and repeatedly retrieving it are common from researchers and birders alike. And the play does not always require such objects; crows are quite content to make use of natural conditions. They've been seen flying hard against a stiff wind, climbing to a certain height, only to let themselves be taken by its currents as they fall earthward in a series of rolls and tumbles before catching themselves and doing it all over again.

A lifelong, monogamous relationship between mates plays off against competition with other mated pairs and offspring for resources and territory. Younger individuals will likely spend much of their time with siblings of their own or another related brood, and even help their parents raise young from subsequent clutches. Seasonally, crows tend to associate with family during spring and summer, only to go off and join large aggregations in fall and winter. Some of these big groups of roosting crows can harbor thousands of individuals.

Both members of a breeding pair help build the nest. Young birds from the previous year sometimes help as well. Three to nine pale bluish-green to olive green with blotches of brown and gray toward the large end. eggs are laid hatching in 16 to 18 days. The babies are ready to fly in 20 to 40 days. The nest is made largely of medium-sized twigs with an inner cup lined with pine needles, weeds, soft bark, or animal hair. Crows typically hide their nests in a crotch near the trunk of a tree or on a horizontal branch, generally towards the top third or quarter of the tree. They prefer to nest in evergreens, but will nest in deciduous trees when evergreens are less available.



*Sources: This was adapted from an article by Robert Rice in the Migratory Bird Center of the Smithsonian National Zoological Park. The entire article can be seen at the web page below. Additional material from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.*  
[http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Featured\\_Birds/default.cfm?bird=American\\_Crow](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Featured_Birds/default.cfm?bird=American_Crow)





## Rick Brammer

### 1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood?

I was born in Bell California, but from age 1 on, lived in Altadena, Ca.

### 2. How did your love of Nature start?

My family always went to the mountains for vacations, from the mountains above San Bernardino, to Sequoia, to Yosemite. We were always in nature hiking and observing.

3. What was your education? I graduated from John Muir High School in Pasadena, attended The United States Military Academy (West Point) for a year (failed my German Final), went to Pasadena City College, then graduated from Cal State University at Los Angeles with BA in Economics, went on for a MBA in Finance and Statistics, but stopped short with a family.

### 4. What is your work experience?

Started out as Financial Analyst with Burroughs, went from there to materiel management in several electronic companies, and at one time had 5 plants' purchasing departments, in 4 countries reporting to me.

### 5. What is your family life?

I am married to a wonderful woman, who consistently signs us both up for volunteering positions. We have three grown children, 5 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild. They live in

three different States.

### 6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why?

I came to Placerita for the first time 5 years ago with my wife and grandson. My wife had taken our children here in the past and wanted him to experience it.

### 7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature Center?

Docent, Raptor Naturalist, Board Member, Hawkman.

### 8. What do you like most about your job at the Nature Center?

Seeing the wide eyes and smiles when I bring Wheelee out. Also seeing some of the children lose their fear of animals.

### 9. What do you not like about the job?

Nothing. People are great, everyone gets along. The only irritation is when you are giving your talk and you get the same question over and over again.

### 10. At Placerita is there some special accomplishment that makes you feels proud?

Getting certified to handle the raptors and being elected to the board by our fellow Docents.

### 11. What is your favorite food?

Two things. In-n-Out's Double-Double and fresh strawberries.

### 12. What is your favorite color?

Blue.

### 13. What is your favorite TV Show? Or pastime?

My favorite TV shows are NCIS and NCIS Los Angeles. My favorite pastime is volunteering at Placerita with the raptors and also the LA Zoo.

### 14. Is there anything else that describes you that we should know?

Since retiring, I have volunteered in five different places, and it has been the most rewarding time of my Life.

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The Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates would like to extend a heart-felt thanks to those who donated to the Nature Center over the last quarter. Our residents also thank you and wish you a very happy New Year!

3<sup>rd</sup> St. School  
Advantage Preparatory  
Tina Alunni  
Anderson Academy  
Bert Corona Charter School  
Daniel Campos  
Castaic Elementary School  
Church of the Latter Day Saints, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward  
Egremont Schools  
Girl Scout Troop 2932  
Girl Scout Troop 352

Helmets Elementary School  
Shirley Morano  
North Hills Co-op Nursery School  
Ocotillo Elementary School  
Pico Canyon Elementary School  
Primetime Preschool  
St. Martin's  
Daniel Torres  
Xema Lutheran School





## Who Got Recognition and Why

All these docents received a plaque or a gift certificate during the holiday dinner to thank them for their effort and to receive an official recognition.

Thank you so much all of you for making Placerita Canyon Nature Center such a very special place and sharing your time and passion with us.

**Rick Brammer:** You can see Rick displaying a hawk at every event and is always ready to give information about the bird that he is handling.

He has been taking care of buying the food supplies for the animals for years and does many outreaches. He keeps track of the hours that the docents are doing volunteer work at the Nature center and gives those hours to the county employees. Rick is also a Board member.

**Jill Goddard:** Jill is one of those quiet heroes at the Nature Center. She designed our logo and the new one for Vasquez Rocks. She does all of our flyers for every event. She can be creative for every situation: a sheet covered with beetles comes to mind and turkey vulture hats for the last "Breakfast of Champions" were outstanding. Thank you so much for all your support.

**Paul Levine:** Paul is the Butterfly Whisperer and has been very enthusiastic in sharing his knowledge. He has shared much scientific information, wrote articles and explains to us how to take photos of butterflies. He also took part in several projects.

**Lanita Algeyer:** Lanita took on the difficult job of scheduling which is extremely important for the docent organization to run smoothly and efficiently. She is in contact with the schools who want to come to Placerita and she has to coordinate the docents for those days. Hours and hours of work! She also managed to organize a few trips for the Docents.

**Jim DeLill:** Jim is every week end at the cabin, explaining about the life and the history of the Walker family. Thank you for such a commitment Jim.

**Deb Clem:** A pirate was in charge of planning the last Open House. Deb showed us how to do this perfectly with so many new ideas and a very creative spirit. It was a perfect day and thank you for all your work Deb. Deb is also an alternate on the Board.

**Helen Walker:** Helen is an enchanting personality, a cross between a forest elf and a medicine woman. She is an invaluable source of information about the plant world and the effect of those plants in our body. She knows the plants that you can eat, that will help your health and enhance your life. We use her knowledge during docent training; during in service and anytime that a plant takes us by surprise. Her enthusiasm and knowledge are a joy to watch.

**Debra Barroso:** Debra has led school groups once a week for 3 years. She is a board member and took the duty of recording secretary. She has worked on different committees: docent room reorganization, docent photo wall and Open House. Thank you Debra.

**Rosemarie Regis:** She has participated in PCNCA Bird Walks since 2005 and started documenting for Bob Fischer in 2006. In 2010; she took over when Bob could no longer lead them. She rarely misses the walks, perhaps about 5 times since then. She says "I love the bird walks."



### Mt. Whitney Presentation

This past summer a group of CHC hiking friends climbed to the summit of Mt Whitney, the highest mountain in the contiguous United States, with an elevation of 14,505 feet.

They shared their experience with us at Placerita Canyon Nature Center with Nikki Dail as the presenter and she shared her beautiful photos and many details about their adventure.

This endeavor required an extraordinary amount of training and planning to accomplish. Thank you Nikki for sharing this beautiful climb with all of us.



### In-service Fall Colors in November

Ron Kraus led a fall hike with the docents from the nature center to the Waterfall Trail. Many people who came to watch Nikki Dail's presentation of her climb to Mt Whitney decided to go on the fall hike after so we were a good-sized group.

While we do not have the spectacular display of color seen in the Eastern United States, we have many subtle and nuanced shades of fall that can be experienced along the Canyon Trail at Placerita.

It was a 2 1/2 hour hike and the colors were beautiful under the morning sun. Many scientific explanations were given about the different plants growing along the trail. Some frustration was shared about certain rare plants that had been cut by the crew working for maintenance along the trail but it still was a very informative and enjoyable morning.

## Lanita Algeyer



### 1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood?

I was born in Long Beach, and grew up in Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley.

### 2. How did your love of Nature start?

My love of Nature started in my Mothers garden where she grew beautiful flowers. She would root plants from cuttings and seeds.

### 3. What was your education?

I dropped out of college when both my parents died about 8 months apart from cancer at age nineteen. I just could not focus on my studies at that time in my life. Moved to SCV in 1973 and when my children got a little older I started taking classes at COC. Transfer to CSUN where I got my degree in education with a minor in geology in 1980.

### 4. What is your work experience?

After graduating I was a substitute teacher in the Saugus school district; however there was a surplus of elementary school teachers so I went back into accounting.

I worked for a local zoological veterinarian for about eight years.

The next step in my life was to start my own business from all the information and experiences I got while working for the Vet. I wrote a training manual for a sixteen-hour certification course for training animal behavior and animal capture using mechanical

snares, traps and remote injection equipment. I conducted training seminars across the United States for animal controls, police departments and on military bases. Then I decided I was tired of traveling across the country with all this equipment. I enjoyed the people and the many different cities I visited, however the equipment was a lot of work.

I then went back to old faithful accounting working for a business management firm where I did the books for high profile clients, actors, producers, directors, writers, talent agents, fashion designers, and musicians. This was a lot of fun because every day was different. Got a lot of freebies in this job like concert tickets and I went to a lot of premiers.

So you can see I have done a lot of interesting things in my life while having a great time doing them.

### 5. What is your family life?

I've been married to my high school boyfriend for 47 years. We have two children. A son who is a firefighter in Henderson, Nevada and a daughter who always said she was going to buy the house down the hill from us. Which she did! We have three grandsons; two in Nevada ages 14 and 18 and one grandson just down the hill that is 9. Our life revolves around our family; we like camping with all the kids and taking trips with them.

### 6. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place?

In 1972 we were looking for a house and nearly purchased a house just up the road from PNC; however we felt the fire danger was high so we bought our home off of Bouquet Canyon. Stopped in at the center, which at the time was quite different.

In the years that followed we visited with our children and love the trees and the open space. I remember a large reptile show you had here back in the late 70's, which really stands out in my memory.

### 7. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center?

"Docent"

### 8. What did or do you like most about your job at the Nature Center?

I like the children and sharing with these children my love of nature.

### 9. What did you or do you not like about the job?

I have not found anything I do not like so far. Take that back I do not like it when the temperature gets over 90.

### 10. At Placerita, is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud?

I like putting together field trips for the docents and seeing them enjoy the outings and I love seeing the calendar filed with school field trips.

### 11. What is your favorite food?

All shell fish.

### 12. What is your favorite color?

Blue like the sky and the ocean.

### 13. What is your favorite TV show?

I don't watch TV because I dislike commercials. I RENT MOVIES.

### 14. Is there anything else that describes you that we should know?

I am a Jack-of-all-trades and master of none. I will try anything that does not involve heights. I will say yes about 99% of the time when asked. I do not know how to say no. I just enjoy life.



### Why are We Docents?

Sometimes, people ask me “Why have you been a docent for the past 26 years. What do you do there? Don’t you resent giving all your free time away?” You cannot go on this outing with me because you have a meeting?” “After all this time, you must be paid something?” Even worse, you can hear “Well, I went to this park and there was nothing happening there. All is dry and dead anyway.”

Those comments make me shudder and I feel I am signing up for another 25 years because the nature education provided at the Nature Center seems to be always in a strong need to be renewed, continued and reinforced with each generation. In California, there is a general awareness of nature because it is around you, available and within easy reach every day of the year.

Even in a large metropolis as Los Angeles, the ocean and the mountains are visible from the freeways. The weather rarely stands in the way of taking a hike and the health culture is strong in California so people spend much time in the outdoors. It is very different in this respect in many parts of the country. Having lived in New York City myself, I know why the New Yorkers end up in Central park on a regular basis...However, understanding why plants grow in certain places and not others while they are in same general area require a certain awareness that the general public does not have and that is only one example among many. More education allows you to better enjoy and understand the world around you.

Education about the environment is one of the goals of the Docent organization, our mission statement is “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”.

Docent training starts in January, it is a very special opportunity to get a first-class education about a wide variety of topics that will make you appreciate your environment much better. Classes are college level and taught by some experts in their fields. They are demanding but extremely rewarding. Look at the flyer and get involved.

Bottom line, you have to be able to enjoy working outside with children...that is not an unpleasant prospect but even if you do not want to work with children, we have other jobs where you could be fulfilled.

Sometimes, we are dealing with so many issues that it is very freshening to receive a letter like this one written by a school teacher after the children attended the program given by the docents. It brings us back to our roots and one of the reasons why we were created.

*“Hi Ron! I received so many great compliments yesterday about our Placerita Canyon Nature Center field trip. The moms loved the docents! The kids were still talking about the animals, plants, and yes, even rocks that they saw and touched. All of you do such a great job! Thanks again for a great day and thanks to all the docents who make it such a fun experience!”*

### Welcome on Board Olivia and Rachael

Two new part-time county employees have been hired to fill the positions of Recreation Services Leaders. We have seen them volunteering at the Center for years so we are very happy to welcome them at Placerita as employees.

Olivia Miseroy was voted Student of the Year at Placerita in 2011. She did the fantastic project of totally rebuilding the Condor that we had hanging from the ceiling of the classroom for years and she has come faithfully to work at the center a few times a week as a volunteer.

Rachael has also come for many years and can be seen handling birds of prey, indoor or outdoor and spending many hours with them. She is an Animal Educator and founded the Sydney’s Legacy (Sydney is a bearded dragon). She has beautiful web site if you want to check her work (Google Rachael Komulainen and watch the great videos from Critter Education)

I have the feeling Olivia and Rachael will feel very much at home at Placerita and we are delighted to work with them.





## A Trip to China Lake

by Michael Elling

It was cold and wet but we had a great time at Coso Mountain Petroglyphs on the China Lake Naval Weapons Station. They were serious about security! Searched our cars bow to stern under the hoods, in the glove compartments and through the trunks. They checked passports and drivers' licenses twice! The petroglyphs were well worth it, however! Thank you so much Bev Browe for planning this trip. It was difficult to do because it is on a Naval Air Weapon Station and much security and clearance needs to be done weeks ahead of time so Bev had to be very careful with all the coordination. We had to stay with a guide at all times and the trip could have been cancelled without much notice if some military action were in progress but the base is opened to visitors who make reservations well in advance to see the petroglyphs and who pass the clearance.

The area was once also home to the Native American Coso People, whose presence here is marked by thousands of archaeological

sites; the Coso traded with other tribes as far away as San Luis Obispo County, California. This locale was also a site used by European miners and settlers whose cabins and mining structures are extant throughout the Station.

The Coso Range Canyons are home to the Coso Rock Art District, an area of some 99 square miles (260 km<sup>2</sup>) which contains more than 50,000 documented petroglyphs, the highest concentration of rock art in the Northern Hemisphere.

No one knows for sure how old these petroglyphs are. A broad range of dates can be inferred from archaeological sites in the area and some artifact forms depicted on the rocks. Some of them may be as old as 16,000 years, some as recent as the 1800s. Designs range from animals to abstract to anthropomorphic figures. Opinions vary widely whether the petroglyphs were made for ceremonial purposes, whether they are telling stories to pass along the mythology of their makers, or whether they are records of hunting hopes or successes, clan symbols or maps.

Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1964, the rock art in Little Petroglyph Canyon provides fascinating insights into the cultural heritage and knowledge of the desert's past. Everything in the canyon area is fully protected, including the obsidian chips and any artifacts or tools, as well as the petroglyphs and native vegetation and wildlife.

Little Petroglyph Canyon contains 20,000 documented images, which surpasses in number most other collections.

China Lake personnel firmly believe that the petroglyphs located within the installation are a treasure and should be shared.

*ref Wikipedia*



## Incidents on the Trail

The mountain bikers won't be on the trail until April or until all the work needed on the Canyon Trail along the stream has been done.

At any time that an accident happens in the Park, where medical help is going to be needed, it is very important to report this accident to the office. Of course, you might want to go to the doctor first and fill out the report later on. This is why I am going to include this form in the Rattler. You can fill out a copy and mail it to the Nature Center at: Placerita Canyon Nature Center 19152 Placerita canyon Road Newhall, CA 91321.

Please keep a copy for your record.

If you have had an unpleasant experience on the trail where you felt threatened or you had fear for your safety, it is also very important to fill out the same report.

This way of communication was recommended to the docents and volunteers by Hayden Sohm, Deputy Director, County of LA, Dept. of Parks and Recreation, and by Kim Bosell, Reg. Superintendent III and Russ Kimura, Park Superintendent.

The docents were told that allowing the mountain bikes on the trail was an experiment and that the situation could be revisited if it was proven that the situation was dangerous for many hikers.

No reports were done in the past and the county will need a paper trail to have proof that many people have suffered from injuries or dangerous situations. Also, it is very important to completely fill out the report. Missing information can make your efforts useless.



Placerita Canyon  
Natural Areas Division

**Trail Incident Report**

Date of Report: \_\_\_\_\_

File Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Trail or Area: \_\_\_\_\_  
Section or Description  
of Trail Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Incident Type: Collision  Injury  Verbal  Near miss  Other

Description of  
Incident: \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

Complainant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Complainant contact information: \_\_\_\_\_

Received by Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

Submitted to Staff person: \_\_\_\_\_

# **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 8th, 2013**  
**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)**



## Trip with Lanita

by Paul A. Levine

The Bittercreek Wildlife Refuge is a National Wildlife Refuge that is closed to the public. The Friends of the California condor play an active role in caring for and monitoring the health and welfare of these birds. They have access and they organize these periodic tours for which a limited number of individuals can participate. Lanita Algeyer learned about this and then coordinated our visit. Thus, unfortunately, people cannot simply go at any time they want to see the Condors. Despite increasing numbers, they are not “home free”.

These pictures capture the essence of the day. Seeing these magnificent birds was awe-inspiring and to realize the effort that so many people have made to protect them from extinction. We learned a new phrase “Get out the Lead” and doesn’t refer to inactivity. It refers to doing everything we can to eliminate lead from all bullets used for hunting so that the animals which are killed but not retrieved by the hunter, when found by the Condors and other predators do not get lead poisoning. We learned that lead poisoning was the continuing greatest threat to the success of bringing back the condors from near extinction.

Vince Gerwe provided information about the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Recovery Program and the environmental threats facing the Condor. Every bird is tagged. A combination of color and numbers are used that are sufficiently large to be seen via a spotting scope or telephoto lens. It is mounted on the leading edge of the wing. This one has its tag on its left wing. Roughly 50% also have GPS tracking devices. The tracking devices are attached to the tail feathers. When these are molted, the device is traced to be recovered and re-utilized. The more white on the undersurface of the wing indicates the relative age of the bird with more white indicating an older bird.



### The Trail Team

A big THANK YOU to Mike Elling, Jim Harris, Jim Crowley and Robert Grzesiak for their help with the Trail Team . Because of their hard work we were able to install some needed steps and landings to the steep switchback section of the Ecology trail. Great job guys!

Ray Orloff is in charge of the Trail Team and he walks on the trail every Monday morning checking for fallen trees or large branches on the trail. He stops to give information to the hikers he meets and remind them of the rules if their dog is not on a leash. Any docents

or volunteers, do not let these photos of “strong men at work” discourage you to join the trail Team! You do not have to join on those projects and if you want to join Ray to walk on the trail, he really would enjoy some company. It is a very lovely time of the year to be on the trail, the first rain had brought much growth and greenery everywhere, the air is clear and crisp: give it a try.





We were on the Local Television of Santa Clarita : Thanks to Leon Worden for conducting a thorough interview with Hayden Sohm, Deputy Director, LA County Parks Dept. regarding the decision to permit mountain biking on the Canyon Trail. Some real insightful questions with some interesting answers. Thank you very much Leon for giving us this wide exposure, we really appreciate your support and thank you Hayden Sohm for taking time from your busy schedule to come to Placerita to explain how this decision was taken.

### Look Where You Walk



This is a rattlesnake, a very good-sized one handled by Chris Sapovchak, Recreation Service Leader at Placerita. Winter is a time when rattlesnakes are less active, however they will come out of their torpor on a warm and sunny day and can stay coiled quietly on a warm rock.

Do not ever think that you can be safe so pay attention. Most people are bitten by a rattlesnake when they put their hands or feet in a place where they cannot see clearly: climbing onto rocks, reaching into a bush, putting their hand in a hole or sometimes, just walking on the trail and not looking at the ground.

This western Pacific rattlesnake is a large one, kept in an aquarium in the museum and fed on a regular basis. It leads a quiet life and it is unusual to see one of that size in the wild. Rattlesnakes spend their lives trying to find food and not to become food for another animal (many birds of prey eat snakes). Luck runs often out after a few years but animals in captivity have a longer life span.

Rattlesnakes are fascinating creatures and we can always learn more about them: Here are a few tidbits:

Mating is a science of confusion. It is believed that female rattlesnakes are on a biennial reproductive cycle, but annual cycles have been noted (Charland, 1989). Male rattlesnakes are capable of mating at any time, except when in torpor, with varying success, depending on climatic conditions.

Females however, have the ability to hold mature spermatazoa within their oviducts for years or until ovulation in the spring (Hayes, 1986).

For a long time a so called “combat dance” was thought to be two snakes mating. In reality the dance involves two male snakes that may entwine their bodies together and lunge at each other with their heads.

The ritual affirms the dominance of one snake over the other yet results in no harm to either snake.

Although this curious act demonstrates dominance and strength, desired evolutionary attributes, no females need be present to witness the act.

To further complicate our understanding of breeding, climatic and geographic variations lead to variations in reproduction among members of the same subspecies.

Several aspects of the reproductive process are definitively known though. Rattlesnakes are viviparous. They keep their fertilized eggs within their bodies until maturation and then give live birth to the young.

A normal clutch of young contains anywhere from 1 to 14 rattlers with an equal ratio of males to females. The birthing season lasts from late summer, around August, through early fall, around October (Diller and Wallace, 1984). At the time of birth the young snakes average 251 mm in length. Number of young is proportional to female body length, and species farther north generally have fewer young (Macartney and Gregory, 1988).

Mating usually takes place in the late spring and summer, coinciding with the peak of male spermatogenic activity. Males must take the initiative to find the females while still searching for a productive home range, whereas females concentrate solely on reaching their home range and finding food (Duvall et al, 1990). Males find females following olfactory cues such as pheromone trails (Scudder et al, 1988) and breed in a polygamous fashion.

Ref : *Western Rattlesnake Natural History*

### **How Did the Canyon Trail Become a Multi-use Trail?**

In October an important meeting was held at Placerita.. Hayden Sohm of LA County parks presented the reasons why mountain biking will be allowed. He explained to us how the process was carefully applied

Although mountain bikes have never been an allowed use on Canyon Trail, multi-use signage showing mountain bikes, equestrians, and hikers was mistakenly posted at the trailhead in 2007. This mistake resulted in Placerita Canyon Trail becoming a popular trail for mountain bikers. When the signage was corrected and this use was removed in 2011, numerous individuals signed a petition to open the trail to mountain biking.

In response to this petition and the high level of interest in opening the trail for mountain bike use, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (County Parks) contracted with The Planning Center | DC&E to complete a Trail Use Change Survey modeled after the process used by California State Parks.

The consultant conducted two community meetings and solicited comments from the public as a part of the assessment process and made the Trail Assessment recommendations. The process used by the consultant and the Department is similar to one developed by California State Parks, but was modified to reflect the County's Trails Manual guidelines and classifications. The purpose of the assessment process was to evaluate the condition of the trail and the trail's sustainability as it pertains to existing and/or proposed uses.

Analysis was done and the decision was taken to open the trail to multi users.

Those are public trails, supported by tax dollars so they should be used by all and the park management had made this decision. However, it is an experience in the making and this decision can be revisited. The bikers will have to walk on the part of the trail used by school groups. Accidents should be reported to the office and a report should be taken by a county employee.

If anybody feels threatened on the trail, they can send a complaint to: [http://parks.lacounty.gov/report card](http://parks.lacounty.gov/reportcard).

The work will start on October 30 and will be supervised by Dwight Lacroix, Facility Operations and Craft Manager.

Ron Kraus and Ray Orloff monitor when construction is being done on the trail.

Let me give you some details about the scope of the work planned on the trail:

Start date: Tuesday, October 30, 2012

Completion: February/March 2013

Multi-use (Hike, Bike, Ride) access: March 2013

- Replacement and installation of signage
- Remediation of erosion and restoration of proper cross-drainage
- Removal of tree hazards
- Minor trimming of vegetation along the trail
- Leveling of portions of existing trail tread for safe footing
- Fencing and barriers along portions of the trail
- Installation of step-over(s) for the "walk zone"
- Installation of pinch points for speed reductions

Sustainability

Start date: As funding becomes available

Completion: TBD

- Trail safety & etiquette workshops
- Armor drain crossings
- Bridges where trail crosses creek
- Punctures where the trail is near creek-bed
- Protection of oil seep
- Minor trail reroutes
- Re-vegetation of user-created trails

#### **Natural Area or State Park?**

For years we were told that Placerita Canyon Nature Center was a natural area.

At the October meeting, we found out otherwise.

State Parks Consistency. Placerita Canyon Natural Area is a unique natural Area as it is the only Natural Area that is a State Park managed by the county. The county's operating agreement with State Parks requires that rules and regulations adopted by the county must conform to and be consistent with the rules and regulations adopted by state parks. State parks typically allow mountain biking on their trails.

It was agreed by the county that a natural and cultural resource inventory would be desirable but expensive. Something to work on for our future....





*The finished product. Just beautiful!*

### **The Pond**

*Paul A. Levine and Fred Seeley*

While the pond was not natural to Placerita Canyon with its lilies and cattails, it was an effective teaching tool for all visitors. It was originally installed by a Boy Scout troop.

Recently problems had developed. There was little swimming room for the mosquito fish to eat larvae or for frogs and toads to spawn, and this year someone



*Eager to check out his newly-renovated home*

poked a hole in the lining of the pond created a leak and water had to be added to it on a daily basis. It was too shallow for the few very cold winter days that we had where fish and other critters would need to go very deep to protect themselves

The Volunteer Service Committee looked into what could be done. It was finally decided that a new 600-gallon round plastic tank originally intended to hold water for cattle and horses would be used. Ray Orloff picked it up a few days before Make A Difference Day so that it would be ready for installation. In addition, Russ Kimura arranged for a load of sand to be delivered to nestle the pond shell in to further protect it.

This also prevented gophers from tunneling under the pool and digging into the pond from below because they cannot tunnel in sand as it would collapse on them.

In preparation for the big event, many hours of detailed muddy labor-intensive work by volunteers at the Nature Center saved every fish, frog and small snail and transferred them to large buckets which also held many of the plants that were removed in preparation for replanting in the new pond.

Saturday, October 27, was Make a Difference Day. There were volunteers from the Chase Bank branches in the Santa Clarita Valley, the Hyatt Hotel and Yahoo .... Russ assigned the contingent from the Chase Bank to work on the pool as this had the largest group of young strong healthy men as lots of digging and lifting would be involved. The Chase group dug in enthusiastically.

Even then, until the project was started, it was hard to imagine how much gravel had to be removed from the base so that the liner could be removed. Then the pond had to be deepened even more before the new tank could be placed.

The work that morning began even before the Make A Difference Day volunteers arrived. The gravel was shoveled and roots removed. The hole for the new pond would need to be deep enough to accept this pond liner. After a day of hard work, the new pond was ready to be enjoyed by all.

The rest is up to Mother Nature and we cannot rush her.



*Digging up the old pond, roots and all*



*Getting the sand into the pond and sides*



*Jack with a level*



### Make a Difference Day

On October 27, crews from Chase Bank, Hyatt Hotel, Yahoo and families converged at Placerita, ready to roll up their sleeves and give a facelift to several areas of the nature center. Teams of eager participants painted, planted and gave us a renovated pond. We want to thank all of you for your hard work to help make our Nature Center the best it can be.



## 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:

Irma Tamayo and Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles - Squirt, the western pond turtle

Daniel Torres - Buddy, the common raven

Golden Oak Community School - Orion, the great horned owl

Allyson Asis - Orion, the great horned owl

Milena Bistic (a holiday gift from a friend) - Cricket, the American kestrel

Laura M. Murray (a Christmas gift from Mom and Dad) - Daisy, the opossum

Victoria J. Murray (a Christmas gift from Mom and Dad) - Daisy, the opossum.

Many thanks to all of you for your generous support

and

Happy New Year!



## 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