

# The Rattler



## In This Issue:

**Museum Progress  
A Trip With Lanita  
Docent Training  
Holiday Party**

---

## *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 2015**

---



We send you all our best wishes for health and happiness for 2015.

We hope you will enjoy many days of hiking in Placerita. Maybe some will be rainy days and the stream will be flowing along the trail...dreams are allowed! We want to thank you for your interest and your support throughout the year. What we know for sure is that 2015 is going to be a very exciting year at Placerita for many reasons.

- First the Docent Naturalist training starts on Tuesday, January 13, at 9am and we are ready to welcome the new docent class with open arms. The quality of the training that we have to offer is a great source of pride for us.
  - If you come to Placerita, you won't recognize the place: the patio has been completely upgraded, the animal enclosures are transformed, and the observation deck is graced with two telescopes.
- The Frank Hovore classroom is a remarkable, renewed space which is going to be a fantastic leaning center for the school children and our visitors.
  - The Interpretive Center is newly revamped, there you can review and learn about the animals and plants you see in the park during different times of the day.
  - Plus our gift shop has been reorganized and offers nature-themed gifts modestly priced.

We are all in awe of the result. These projects took many years of effort and planning and the result is even better than our expectations. We will have an official opening in January but come before then for a preview; you will definitely be very impressed.



---

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



### A Trip with Ron Kraus

A very large group of docents went to Eaton Canyon Nature Center to have a special trip with the help of Judy Bass who is a docent at Eaton Canyon. They went on the trails to learn the lay of the land and see the differences between the vegetation at Placerita and Eaton Canyon. They visited the Mickey Long auditorium named after their well loved superintendent. They toured the laboratory where the animal care takes place and they checked out the hand made boxes to transport taxidermy for the outreaches. The trip was so informative and such a success that plans were made to visit the other Nature Centers next year. Thank you Judy and Ron for making this trip so enjoyable.



### Goodbye Debra

Debra Barroso became a Docent in 2009 and was active with the Nature Center through all those years. She even was on the Board of Directors for a few years. She is moving to Camarillo and a little lunch was organized to say Goodbye. As Jim Crowley said it so well: 'You are a wonderful mom and friend and we will miss you. Best wishes with your relocation.' Come and visit Debra; Camarillo is

### A New Display

Our Walker Family history display was installed in the Walker Cabin very recently. Thanks to Jim DeLill for research and Roy Hermann for the fabrication and installation of the display. It will help our visitors have a better idea of life in the cabin when the Walker's family lived there with their 12 children without electricity and running water but with a life full of experiences with the outdoors.



## The Rattler

Editor:

**Evelyne Vandersande**

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 [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.



## Board Members

President:

**Jim Southwell**

Vice-President:

**Ron Kraus**

Recording Secretary:

**Mari Carbajal**

Corresponding Secretary, NCA

Rep: **Fred Seeley**

Treasurer:

**Rick Brammer**

Directors:

**Evelyne Vandersande, PR Chair**

**Bill Webber**

**Heidi Webber**

**Teresa Jacobs**

**Deb Clem**

**Andrea Donner**

Alternate Directors:

**Jacquelyn Thomason**

**Robert Grzesiak**

NCA President

**Jack Levenberg**

NCA Corresponding Secretary

**Lanita Algeyer**

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.

## 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



### Another Change at Placerita

Debbie Walt who was a long time Recreation Service Leader at Placerita is working now at Vasquez Rock. We do miss her but we wish her the very best.



### A Trip With Lanita

Lanita planned months ahead to take seat reservations for the Placerita docents so we could go to the C.O.C. Auditorium to see Jack Hanna in October. Jack Hanna is an American zookeeper who is the Director Emeritus of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. He was Director of the zoo from 1978 to 1993, and is viewed as largely responsible for elevating its quality and reputation. His media appearances, particularly with David Letterman, have made him one of the most notable animal experts in the United States. Hanna, nicknamed "Jungle Jack", is known for his khaki safari outfit, deep tan, and Southern accent. We all enjoyed his show very much, the large variety of animals he brought to the stage and all his explanations.

Thank you for this great trip Lanita.

## 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.
- 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)
- NATURE EDUCATION** An exciting new program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please contact the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. Sunday January 18 at 2pm-Introduction to Birding by Judy Bass from Eaton Canyon or the Audubon Society. Sunday February 15-topicv undecided.
- VOLUNTEER-NATURALIST TRAINING:** Starts on Tuesday January 13, 2015. Classes meet Tuesday and Thursday from 9-noon. See Flyer
- OFFICIAL DEDICATION** The new Interpretive Center. Date to be determined, but it will be January. Call the center.

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



### **A Star will be Born!**

If you visit the Nature Center right now, you will be welcomed by the noise of jackhammers and a busy team of workers handling concrete and new electrical wiring. Outside, on the trail, nature is always beautiful, peaceful, and the autumn foliage shines in the golden light. So my recommendation is to use the trails but walk quickly though the courtyard. What is going on? The new Interpretive Center is taking shape!

If you visited before summer of 2009, you'll remember the original museum. The Nature Center itself was dedicated in November 1971, but the museum was created by the American Association of University Women, who also founded our docent organization. They were the ones who got the funding from large corporations such as Richfield oil. At the time, the museum was actually pretty sophisticated, and Natural History teachers at C.O.C. would visit yearly with their classes. Some of the exhibits were quite high level in their explanations, and were confusing to both youngsters and the general public. Some were so technically complex that they never worked even from day one. So, up to recent times, our museum was classy, if outdated. All was running on the normal course, until the floor needed some repair. For the repairs, the old exhibits had to be taken outside. This trip was fatal. The old display cases felt apart and had to be discarded. We were heartbroken but not defeated, and tried to show educational items in some donated display cases but it was an amateurish effort at best. The Nature Center was going to be renovated; the docents had been accumulating money for many years in the hope of renovating the museum. Maybe now was the time? At this point "museum" did not seem to be our objective any longer. We wanted an Interpretive Center. What is that, you ask?

"An interpretive center is an institution for dissemination of knowledge of natural and cultural heritage."

How perfect for a Nature Center to be a place designed to stimulate the discovery process and establish a connection for our visitors with the nature they are going to discover outside.

Meetings were held, and Museum Design companies solicited by the docents. Soon we got 3 bids for a more modern conceptual design. We had a competition between the 2 finalists, and selected the best company according to their price and their past performance. We awarded a contract for \$35,000 to a company called GGE in San Francisco.

The first phase was to establish what the museum would be for (purpose) and what the exhibits would look like (implementation). We had hundreds of suggestions from the public which were slowly refined to something manageable. Phase one of the conceptual design was completed, including artists renderings of the exhibits.

The County Parks PCNC staff applied for a State Park grant for the Museum project, using the conceptual design material from the project approved by the docents. Subsequently, the County Park was granted \$1 million for the museum project.

At the same time, Los Angeles County, Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich found out that the docents did not have money to go further than the design phase for the Museum, but that they were going to do a lot of fund-raising to make their dream come true. You can only imagine how much the docents were surprised, extremely grateful and overjoyed to get a donation of \$1.1 million from Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich to County Parks to complete the project started by the docents, and make the construction possible.

We have always enjoyed his support and even his friendship on many occasions. Often Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich comes to participate at the docent graduation or sends a representative from his office. He enjoys coming to the park to use the equestrian trails, but this generous response was beyond our wildest dreams.

The County Parks requested the rights from the docents to all conceptual designs and data, and took over the management of the museum project using the grant and the donation monies from the County.

County Parks and Recreation took many months negotiating a budget and a statement of work with Delphi (who had merged with GGE) to get County department and Board of Supervisors approvals.

The County assumed management of the patio portion of the project, while Delphi proceeded with the Interpretive Center exhibit design and construction.

Both the patio and Interpretive Center exhibit projects are scheduled to be completed by January 2015.

Those are a lot of facts to take in, but it's important to have them recorded somewhere so years from now, when we are old and grey and our memories start failing, we can revisit the source and figure out how it all went!

I want to thank Jim Southwell, President of PCNCA, who helped me keep track of all the events in chronological order. Thank you Ron Kraus, Vice President for PCNCA, for your help with some dates. I also want to thank the Museum committee who spends so many hours proposing, correcting and making sure that all will be accurate in the Interpretive Center. I want to thank all of you who worked at making this dream a reality.

And I want to thank all our future visitors who will come to Placerita to see what all this commotion is about. I hope you will enjoy your visit, and that you will be pleased with the new Interpretive Center and that Placerita will shine even brighter in your memory.

## Meet Robert Grzesiak



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

I was born in Chicago, Illinois. I was very much a city boy, and rarely traveled out of the city as I belonged to a large family. Looking back, it really was like living in a small town and I rarely moved further than 10 blocks from my home. I mostly spent my time rooting for the Chicago White Sox and the Cubs, playing baseball, and delivering newspapers. The move to California was not something I looked forward to doing. I had developed a great pride in being a Chicagoan. I tried moving back, but it's true: you can't go back, it's never the same.

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

My love of nature developed very gradually. Cities were the proper place for humans. Cities were where the action was to be found. But, I had difficulty making friends and hiking became something I could do spontaneously for solitude (ironically) and adventure. It was not until I was in my 30s that I began to hike with some consistency. Naturally, I began to be curious about my companions: the geology, plants, and animals I would encounter.

### 3. What was your education?

I will be eternally grateful for junior colleges. As a lackluster, and indecisive student, I spent a lot of time at Glendale Junior College through 2 decades. When my two new friends returned from Vietnam era service and then went to CSUN, I decided to go as well and got an American History B.A. Big mistake. Eventually got another B.A. in Clinical Science (thanks to my wife, Denise) from Calif. State University, at Dominguez Hills.

### 4. What is your work experience?

Well, about 15 years cleaning swimming pools, 10 of which was my own one- man business. I enjoyed it; it gave me a sense of accomplishment every day. Cleaning pools was also a great way to learn about insects, I was always finding unknown creatures in the pools which I would research. I then parlayed my practical pool chemistry experience into hospital laboratory chemistry for the Veteran's Administration. Mostly employed in detecting drugs (Toxicology), but later into detecting diseases through the antibody response (Serology). HIV syndrome had just been identified when I first started, and it became a connecting thread throughout my career in the lab.

### 5. What is your family life?

I have one son, who mercifully knew exactly what he wanted to do in life and how to achieve it. James is a charter airplane pilot who is home to save money for a house.

My wife was a flashy PR gal when I first met her and now is a counselor for community colleges.

And despite what you might think, there were vegetable gardens everywhere in Chicago. So, I like growing vegetables and native plants in the garden.

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

We moved to Santa Clarita in 1988, and I took my baby son on my back on the Hillside trail. I remember being impressed by the beautiful mature manzanitas along the trail. The baby cried as he had before on nature walks, and it was the last time I took him hiking and the last time I visited Placerita until my retirement. I was accustomed to traveling far to hike. When I did return, I was quite mystified by the missing manzanitas that apparently burned in the 2004 fire.

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

I have just been elected to the board as a nonvoting member. And with the board's encouragement I am now an official weeder.

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

Wow, such a nature learning experience, and great, great people of such great talents. But, really it is a chance to share and encourage the enjoyment of this great park.

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

What's not to like?

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

I am proud that I have and do take the school kids on hikes.

### 11. What is your favorite food?

Mostacolli and tomato spare rib meat sauce.

### 12. What is your favorite color?

No specific color, but I sure did like those Crayons.

### 13. What is your favorite TV show? Or music ? or pastime ?

We discontinued the cable TV and pretty faithfully go to the free movies (even current ones not shown in this valley commercially) at COC College every Friday during the school year. Definitely, hiking is my favorite activity.

### 14. Is there anything else that describes you that we should know? Is there any passion or special events in your life that you would like to tell us about?

As a kid in the Chicago limits, my family had a vegetable garden in an empty lot. One night walking the dog in the lot I noticed a hole. My first impulse was to jump on it to crush the opening. I chickened-out, I thought some animal might get me. Next morning, I checked it out. Overnight, the cover over the 5 foot diameter well had collapsed. I stared down into a deep abyss and realized if you can't appreciate nature, at least fear it, the fear may save your life.

# **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 13th, 2015**  
**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: [info@placerita.org](mailto:info@placerita.org)**



### Leon Worden: Lifetime membership.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates pay their dues each year in January to support this great organization. We have the usual categories: seniors, family, students in the amount of 'very reasonable.'

There is another category written on the dues envelope that is never used...and for a good reason. The amount is pretty exorbitant; \$1,000.00 for a life-time membership.

The only life time membership that we have had in over 45 years of existence was taken by Frank Hovore who was the supervisor at the time.

When Leon Worden, from Santa Clarita Valley News, asked casually about membership, we mentioned the regular amounts and jokingly mentioned the Life Time Membership.

We are extremely surprised and very grateful when we received a check in the mail for this amount from Leon to become our second Life Time Member ever!

Leon has been extremely supportive of the Nature Center through all the different problems over the last few years and he has also documented in precious detail all historical information about Placerita. He has been a true friend through it all and invited a few

docents and volunteers from Placerita to write regular columns for Santa Clarita Valley News to give exposure to our Nature points of view. He has been taping our Nature Education programs and now he has become a Life Time Member of PCNCA.

We are overwhelmed and very grateful. What can you say? Thank you so very much Leon for your friendship, your support and your understanding of the goals of the Nature Center. That is a very generous donation and we are so happy to greet you as a Life Time Member at Placerita.



### Refresher Class

Handling animals at Placerita and being able to present them to the public is one of the most important aspects of docent training. The rules from Fish and Game changes on a regular basis but we are lucky to have Chris Mowry who received his certification from Fish and Game to keep us trained according to the new rules in effect. When the school groups come back to Placerita, we always get a refresher class and the class is videotaped for the docents who could not attend so the rules are very clear. Thank you Chris for all your help.



### The Reason We are Docents

We received this lovely letter from a teacher after the children attended our school program at the nature Center. If there is any doubt in your mind why the docents are so enthusiastic and dedicated to their job, here is the answer: the school kids. It is all about the children. Very often, a few days after a school



group attends our program, a thick manila envelope reaches our desk with letters from the children who came to visit, with many detailed drawings of them going on the trail with a docent. We tried to remember what we were wearing on the day to see which docent it was but the pink outfit with the blue hat had us confused and baffled! I must say that those letters are cherished by all of us as one of the most precious treasures and people hold on to them forever. A little child took the time and effort to thank us in a most gentle and creative way; yes, those letters are treasures.

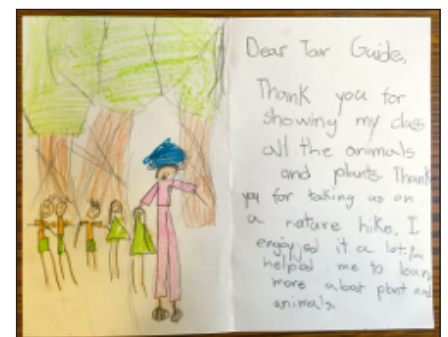
Dear Lanita,

I will be sending in the evaluation form with our check but did not want to wait to say THANK YOU!!!!

Your docent team was marvelous with our 1st & 2nd graders. They were interesting, kind and patient! It was so fun to listen to their conversations on the bus this afternoon on our way home and they were bursting with information and things to share in class. They absolutely SPARKLED with enthusiasm and joy!

Please extend my greatest thanks to everyone who cared for us this morning. I wish I remembered all their names as they are truly angels caring for God's creatures and sharing their joy with others!

Thank you





## Weeding is Fun

On November 3, we had our first meeting of the Placerita Weeders and Trail Enhancement group. We pulled Black Mustard that had died back but that had seed pods still attached. These seeds can remain viable for more than 3 years. We have begun this effort in order to enhance our visitors and docent led school children experience around the Nature Center. By removing the weeds we allow our unique native plants to shine. This group will try to make this an educational experience as well as a fun get together. I am encouraged by the initial support and I invite anyone who might be interested to please join the group

What are we weeding out? We will be weeding only non-native plants. Invasive non-natives are plants that can take over a natural area and dominate. This domination can prevent native plants from returning to the area. Black Mustard fits this criteria as well as the many species of annual grasses. Rip-Gut has grass seeds that are infamous for needling through

socks and painfully poking the skin.

We will focus on those non-natives that are noxious, unsightly, and invasive. Noxious means those that are thorny and generally uncomfortable to encounter. Russian Thistle and Star Thistle are thorny or piercing, whereas an encounter with Hoarhound will leave you with many seed capsules attached to your clothing. Worse is puncture weed with its caltrop seeds that often puncture bicycle tires or become firmly imbedded into the soles of your shoes..

But what is a non-native? Well, technically a non-native is a plant that was not here before Europeans came to California in the 18th century. This may seem an arbitrary and unnecessary distinction to you if you are unfamiliar with the uniqueness of California natives. However, many California plants are found nowhere else in the world (endemic) and form unique assemblages like Chaparral, Coastal Sage Shrub, and post fire latents. Biologists recognize California as a biological hotspot of biodiversity. Not only are native plants unique but many unique species of animals depend exclusively on these plants for food and the habitat they create. By weeding out non-natives, there is less competition for soil nutrients, water, and sun. Weeding will increase the number and diversity of our natives. Who wouldn't want to see a plethora of mariposa lilies?



With the introduction of trails, roads and frequent fires, we actually encourage the spread of the non-natives into disturbed areas. We have many California natives that can compete with these weeds. But, for over two centuries we have treated our natives as weeds or gathered their flowers and have depleted the upper native seed bank. Inappropriate "weed whacking" has been problematic as well. We have been given permission to reseed in this case but only with seeds found in Placerita Park to protect the naturalness of the Park and to protect any specie variants that may exist in the Park. We will re-seed in the meadows or what are now grasslands by the picnic area and adjacent to the Nature Center. We will document what we seed, where we seed, and how successful we are. We will not irrigate, but depend on rainfall only.

We are all novices at this and can use a lot of helping hands with a variety of skills. We hope to involve the community in this effort such as the Boy Scouts and those requiring community service hours. We will be concentrating our efforts for now on the areas and trails in the vicinity of the Nature Center, but long term the stream bed, Canyon Trail and Walker Ranch need to be addressed. And we have a heads up, that when the bridges are installed on the Canyon Trail, there will be funds for weeding in the vicinity. Too, we will need to be careful as Ron Kraus has cautioned that some endangered species may be threatened by our activities. And we can use some help in establishing and maintaining a nursery for seeds.

Our get-togethers for weeding and seeding will be the 1st Monday of every month, 9:00 am. I am excited that we just might be able to make an impact. Oh, and be sure to check out the meadows this coming spring!







## Holiday Party 2014

Because of the construction at Placerita, the Holiday Party took place at Hart Park Hall. We had 64 guests and we enjoyed having a large space to move around in and be able to talk with each other. The buffet was delicious and we want to thank all the cooks who brought dishes to share. After the party, an event of historical importance happened: we all received our county badges after some years of waiting. There was much excitement in the air! Ron Kraus talked about the docent training program that is soon to start. Jim Southwell talked about our new Interpretive Center and Russ Kimura explained how the funds came to make different projects possible. Lanita Algeyer gave gift certificates to the recipients who deserved special recognition for outstanding accomplishments:

Robert Grzesiak volunteered when we needed someone to lead our trail maintenance crew. He has started a program to remove invasive grasses in the meadow and reseed to reestablish native plants. He has been instrumental in getting many docents to volunteer to help in this task. I know when I am on a hike with Robert in the group that he will tell me the names of most of the plants on the trail. His knowledge is vast and he is always willing to share with the rest of us. Even though his health has not been that great Jim DeLill did all the research for the history panels in Walker's cabin so that we could have all the information readily available for the children.

Andrea Donner helps in so many ways. She works with outreach, and sits on the board of directors and is now putting together nature oriented crafts for children when they cannot go on the trails or if it is raining. She also helps with finding interesting places to visit on our docent field trips.

Bill Webber stepped in and helped Teresa with getting the new counter and storage cabinets for the gift shop and then he helped with setting up all the electrical for the annual craft fair last week. Every time something needs to be done, he is there. We would like to thank Allen Wallander for his hard work on helping with the re-modeling of the gift shop and all the hours he worked setting up and cleaning up at the craft fair.

Tracionne Stockhausen-White (Traci) The story is that Heidi attended her first craft fair in 1995 as a new docent and had no clue what it was all about. She was amazed. She told her very artistic friend, Traci, about it and she wanted to come the next year. Since Heidi was working at the craft fair in 1996, Traci came for the first time. She was busy making her wreath and saw some kids having a little trouble figuring out what to do. Traci jumped in, advising them, then telling them to go get ribbon and she would help them with the bow. People around her were soon asking for advice. Each year more and more people were asking for help; her corner of the classroom became very crowded as the lines built up. She now has repeat customers often bearing gifts for her. Kids grew up and came to see her, eventually bringing their own kids.

Finally we decided to give her a corner and control of the ribbon. This is how her very vital roll in the Craft fair evolved and we are truly indebted to her for all she does to make our annual craft fair such a success.



## Falling in Love

Rick Brammer

I fell in love with raptors during the last week of Docent Training in 2009. Dave Stives was flying a Harris's hawk on a tether behind construction fencing in the lower parking lot. The Hawk's name was Wheelie.

I asked how I could do that and he said that it would take training and a test and a lot of supervision. The new federal requirement for the hours needs to handle raptors is between 250 to 350 hours. I have now been handling Wheelie as well as other raptors for almost 5 years and loving every moment of it; yes even when Wheelie digs her talons into my arm. We have developed a special rapport over the years. One time I fainted briefly and when I woke up she

was hovering over me with her wings spread, not allowing anyone to come near me.

The reason she is called Wheelie is she was found 23 years ago in the wheel well of a UPS plane that was on the ground at the Mohave airport. She had apparently flown away from someone who had been training her in the sport of falconry. Dave drove out to the airport, got on a scissor lift, reached to get her tail feathers and came out with a handful of feathers. She was dying at the time. She weighed about 400 oz. or about a third of what she does now. Dave worked on her for over a year to bring her back to health.

The Harris's hawk is a special kind of hawk in that they hunt as a pack, just like the wolves. That is why they are called the wolves of the sky.

It has been fun, educational and painful to work with the raptors over this time and to see the looks on the faces of the children when the buses pull in and they see Wheelie on my arm. Most have no idea what she is but the usual statement is that she is an eagle. I enjoy the questions they have and the fact that they remember me at different events- even without Wheelie.

I handle Wheelie at least three times a week at the center and also at outreaches at schools, libraries and community centers.

All the docents who handle the raptors (owls, kestrels, hawks, falcons and eagles) love and respect the birds and try to make sure that the kids learn and appreciate their respective talents and abilities.

## On the Road with the Rattler

### The Rules are Getting Easier

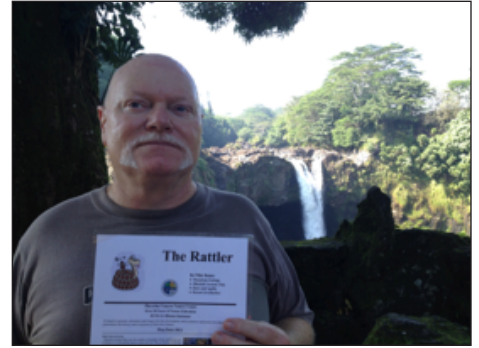
If you are traveling and you forgot your Rattler, you can take a piece of paper and write The Rattler on it, we will know your heart was in the right place and you were thinking about us.



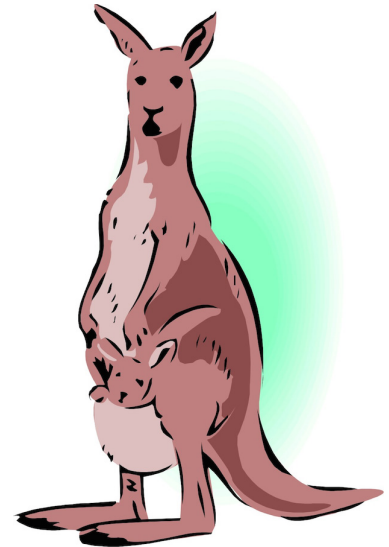
RuthAnn Murthy took The Rattler to Corinth, Greece



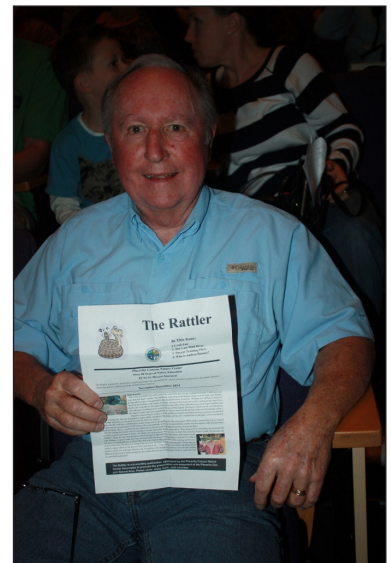
Evelyne is at Escalante State Park Nature Center, Utah.



Michael Elling went on a cruise to Maui and had his picture taken with the Rattler on the road to Hana at Akaka Falls and Rainbow Falls.



The docents went to see Jack Hanna and Ron Kraus took the Rattler with him. It promptly went from hand to hand to Sue and Allan Wallander, Jack Levenberg Nikki Dail and her husband, Lanita Algeyer, Sylvia Altamirano, Andrea Donner, Ron Nichols and his wife, Ron Kraus and Jill Goddard . More docents were at the show but the Rattler could not reach them on time!





*An adult brown pelican with a chick in a nest in Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, US. This species will nest on the ground when no suitable trees are available.*

## Pelicans

*by Bob Fischer*

For me one of the best moments of being at the ocean shore is seeing a flight of pelicans flying close by just above the water. I have always seen pelicans when I have gone birding in the Malibu Lagoon. Of course pelicans will never be seen in Placerita Canyon but that doesn't make them a less fascinating bird worth writing about. They are a very large, impressive looking bird with their long beak and throat pouch. Their beak is the longest of any bird species, from one foot to one and a half feet long, and a body length in the largest species up to six feet with a wingspan up to nine and one half feet.

There are eight pelican species with a scattered global distribution, ranging from the tropics to the temperate zone. The species we usually see at the California coast is the Brown Pelican and, strangely enough as large as it looks with it's 6.5 to 7.5 foot wingspan, it is the smallest pelican species. Pelicans are a very old species with fossil remains having been found in France that date back 30 million years. The closely related Peruvian Pelican lives along the Pacific Coast of South America from southern Ecuador to Chile. It's a little larger than a Brown Pelican, has fine white streaking on its under parts and a blue pouch in the breeding season. Also in California we can see the Amer-

ican White Pelican, one of the largest pelican species. White Pelicans are found along our coast in winter, and also in large numbers in California's Central Valley, at the Salton Sea, and along the Colorado River.

Pelicans are flocking birds, and hunt cooperatively and breed in colonies. Four white-plumaged species tend to nest on the ground, and four brown or grey-plumaged species nest mainly in trees. The relationship between pelicans and people has often been contentious because they are seen as competitors by both commercial and sport fisherman. They have suffered from habitat destruction, disturbance and environmental pollution. They also have a long history of cultural significance in mythology.

All pelicans have their elastic pouches to catch fish, though different species use it in different ways. Most pelicans fish by swimming in cooperative groups. They may form a line or a "U" shape and drive fish into shallow water by beating their wings on the surface. When fish congregate in the shallows, the pelicans simply scoop them up. The Brown Pelican, on the other hand, dives on fish from above and snares them in its bill. As it plunges into the water, its throat pouch expands to trap the fish, filling with up to 2.6 gallons of water. Pelicans do not store fish in their pouch, but simply use it to catch them and then tip it back to drain out water and swallow the fish immediately. The American white pelican can hold some 3 gallons of water in its bill. Young pelicans feed by sticking their bills into their parents' throats to retrieve food.

Though they have an awkward gait on land, Brown Pelicans are strong swimmers and masterful fliers. They fly to and from their fishing grounds in V-formations or lines just above the water's surface. They and the closely related Peruvian Pelican are the only pelican species to perform spectacular head-first dives to trap fish. Before swallowing their prey they drain the water from their pouches, while gulls or terns often try to steal fish right out of their beaks.

Highly social all year, pelicans breed in colonies of up to several thousand pairs, usually on small islands where they are free from terrestrial predators. The male defends a nest site and nearby perches for up to 3 weeks until he attracts a mate, and the pair is monogamous throughout the breeding season. The parents incubate their eggs with their feet. If disturbed suddenly they fly hastily, sometimes crushing their eggs. Pelicans regurgitate predigested fish onto the nest floor for their nestlings, later switching to whole fish once the young are big enough. The young can fly and fend for themselves after 3 months, but take 3-5 years of age to reach sexual maturity.

Brown Pelicans are a living symbol of how successful wildlife conservation can be. They nearly disappeared from North America between the late 1950s and early 1970s because of pesticides entering the food chain. The pesticide endrin killed pelicans outright, while DDT contamination led to thin-shelled eggs that broke under the weight of the parents. In 1970, brown pelicans were federally listed as endangered. The plight of pelicans and other species led to a ban on DDT in 1972 and a reduction in endrin use, allowing pelican numbers to rise.

Though the Brown Pelican is Louisiana's state bird, they had to be reintroduced to that state in a program that lasted from 1968 to 1980. The species reached pre-pesticide numbers by the late 1990s and was fully delisted in 2009, less than a year before the Deepwater Horizon oil spill threatened Gulf Coast populations anew. Since they breed, roost, and forage mostly near shipping channels, they are highly susceptible to oil spills. Disturbance from human activity in their coastal nesting habitats can cause problems, as panicked pelicans often abandon or accidentally destroy their nests.

Hunting was a major cause of death in the early twentieth century, and people still hunt adults and collect eggs on Latin American and Caribbean coasts though these birds are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Abandoned fishing line also threatens this species along with many marine animals. It has been estimated that more than 700 adult and immature pelicans die each year in Florida alone from entanglement in sport-fishing gear.



*Brown pelicans, covered with oil, after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010*

### **It is Becoming a Reality!**

For at least 30 years the PCNCA has been working toward a new museum. We have been plotting and planning and saving our donations to bring this to fruition. Now you can see how far we have come. Thanks to Jim Southwell; this is his legacy project at the center. And thanks to all those on various committees who have worked long and hard. The finished project will be featured in the next Rattler as there will be a Grand Reveal in mid-January.



### **Docent Training is Starting!**

I'm sure we can all agree that a volunteer is somebody who does a job without being paid. But what's the difference between a volunteer and a docent? Docents also do a job without being paid, but they undergo an intensive training process to serve as guides and educators. 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."

How are docents used at Placerita? The docents are in charge of the core program. Four mornings each week, school groups come on trips to Placerita. They are greeted by docents who give them a presentation inside our classroom about the circle of life, explaining the interactions between plants, animals and why the food web is so important. The elements of sun, water and air are the start, providing building blocks for all life on this planet. The children are provided a simple as well as vivid explanation about how all living organisms depend on each other. A presentation with live animals is also done, and there is always enough time for questions and answers. Then the children are divided into groups to walk on different trails, each group lead by a docent. A parent or a teacher walks at the end of the group to make sure all the children are accounted for.

Beyond that, the possibilities of getting involved with other projects are almost endless :doing outreach, patrolling the trails, fighting the never-ending battle against non native plants, organizing special projects, fundraisers, parties, food supplies, taking part in educational programs, planning crafts for children, helping with animal care, organizing the docent room, planning trips for the docents, scheduling school trips, writing articles, documenting the plants that grow in Placerita or updating bird lists.... If there is nothing interesting to you in that list, present your ideas to the board, they have been known to get pretty excited by all kind of new projects!

What would make you interested in becoming a docent? The answer might start in a very simple way "I would like to work with children and Nature". What you might not understand at first is that you are going to learn so much yourself, and it is going to be so interesting, that this new thirst for knowledge is not going to be stopped so easily.

You are going to change the choice of books you read or the movies you watch, and you are going to look at different destinations for your vacations. The other docents at the Nature Center are going to become your friends and allies. You will suddenly have a great group of friends sharing so much with you. Ego disappears at Placerita, there is no competition because we are all trying to do our best with each other's help and support.

Docent training starts Tuesday, January 13. The classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9am to 12 noon. We call our docents "Volunteer Naturalists" and they attend these classes for 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 ([www.placerita.org](http://www.placerita.org)) for further information regarding the Volunteer Naturalist program.

Other volunteering opportunities are available at Placerita Canyon Nature Center that doesn't require the 9-week training program, such as office helper and trail maintenance team member. Bilingual (English-Spanish) volunteers are especially needed.

Quite a program, right? What's not said directly but is apparent immediately is that we also have a good time working together, plus teaching little kids is a lot of fun. Let me share one letter we received from a class and you will better understand why the kids programs are always the most important: "Hi Ron, I received so many great compliments yesterday about Placerita Canyon Nature Center school trip. The moms and the children loved the docents! The kids were still talking about the animals, plants, and yes even the rocks that they saw and touched. All of you do such a great job! Thank you again for a great day and thanks to all the docents who made it such a fun experience!"

Think about it and come give it a try, I can tell you very honestly that it will change your life...and I have been a docent for 28 years!

For further information call or visit:  
Placerita Canyon Nature Center  
(661)259-7721



## Gobble, Gobble, Gobble: The Turkey and our National Holiday

Paul A. Levine



*The turkey is large bird who prefers to stay in the woods going out to the surrounding fields to forage for food.*

Thanksgiving and the main course on many tables is turkey. While the turkey is not native to Southern California, it can sometimes be seen here having escaped or been released from farms and sanctuaries. But what we might see strutting across our front yard as occurred to a friend of mine in Santa Clarita recently are truly wild turkeys, not those that are raised for this national day of thanksgiving. The turkey is the only native poultry in North America.

The wild native turkey had been raised by the Indians in many parts of North America but it is different from the domesticated turkey that is raised for the family feast. The domesticated turkeys are white rather than brown in color, are usually larger than the wild turkey and cannot fly.

The wild turkeys are related to pheasants and grouse. They are large plump birds with long legs, wide rounded tails and a small head on top of a long slim neck. Their coloring is dark with a bronze-green iridescence to most of their plumage. They often have bars of white coloring. They have bare skin on their head. The fleshy skin hanging down from their neck is called a wattle and the skin arising on top of their beak and hanging over the beak is a snood.

Both the wattle and snood become more intensely red when they become excited.

Wild turkeys are native to North America and although found primarily in the east and Midwest as well as extending into Mexico, there are colonies establishing themselves in the west as they have been released to these areas. They travel in flocks and search the ground for nuts, berries, insects and snails. They can often be heard scratching the leaf litter for seeds and insects before they can be seen and one must look carefully to see them.

They live in forests and will roost in trees at night to protect them from predators such as coyotes, raccoons and wildcats. Hence, wild turkeys can fly although they don't fly long distances.

### Some interesting facts about turkeys and Thanksgiving

The males are called Toms or "Gobblers" because it is only the male that makes the gobble gobble sound. Hens or the female turkeys cluck but cannot gobble. During mating season, the males spread their tail feathers like peacocks, puff out their chest and strut about shaking their feathers all in an attempt convince a beautiful young hen to mate with it. Indeed, the Turkey Trot dance comes from the way that the Turkey struts about during mating season.

Turkeys have excellent hearing but no external ears. They can also see in color and during the daytime, their vision is excellent with a 270 degree field of vision making it very difficult to sneak up on a turkey. This is because their eyes are on the sides of their head. With slight turn of their head, they can see all around them. Since they are large birds with a long neck, they can hide in tall grasses with their head just above the top of the grass to let them look around, much like a periscope on a submarine.

A newly hatched turkey is called a poult, a 16-week old turkey is called a fryer and a five-to-seven month old turkey is called a young roaster.

While the Bald Eagle is our national bird and national emblem, Benjamin Franklin wanted the turkey to have this honor.

In 1550, the English navigator William Strickland brought turkeys from the New World and introduced them to England. The coat-of-arms for his family included a "turkey cock"

The first Thanksgiving was a three day feast held in Plymouth, Massachusetts by the Pilgrims in conjunction with the local Indians, the Wampanoags, but it did not include turkey on the menu

The Indians in different parts of America were known to have raised and cultivated wild turkeys for food for many centuries. Turkeys are also native to Mexico and the Aztec Indians were raising them as early as 200 B.C.

Thanksgiving was declared a national holiday by President Abraham Lincoln. It was initially the last Thursday of November. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed that Thanksgiving would be the 4th Thursday of November in an effort to extend the Christmas shopping season.

Since 1947, the National Turkey Federation has presented a live turkey to the President of the United States who pardons it allowing it to live out its life on a historical farm.

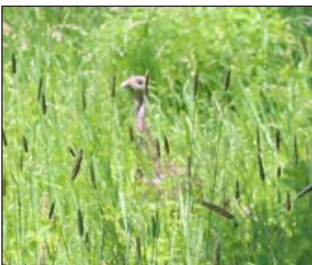
For the domestic turkeys, it takes 76–80 pounds of feed to raise a 30-pound tom turkey. The heaviest turkey ever raised was 86 pounds.

Americans consume 4.2 billion pounds of turkey on Thanksgiving Day or roughly 280 million birds with an average weight of 15 pounds.

A 15 pound turkey has roughly 70% white meat and 30% dark meat.



*A turkey hen with two poult (recently hatched chicks)*



*A turkey in tall grass is able to look over the grass to spot potential predators*

References: Wikipedia; livescience.com; kidzone; infoplease.com

## The Craft Fair 2014

We were concerned because all the construction at the Nature Center prevented us from having our Holiday Craft Fair inside the building. We rented a large tent, got everything ready and before we knew it, the week end arrived. Mari Carbajal was in charge of the event and she did a fantastic job facing a new situation. Here is her comment:

"I would like to thank EVERYONE who helped out with the Holiday Craft Fair. It went fantastically well!! We had a line of about 20 people waiting before 10:00 on Saturday, and Sunday was just as eventful. The tent was a HUGE success, and having the kids' crafts outdoors worked out so nice. Everyone enjoyed being outside. Thank goodness there was no rain. So thank you all again for an incredibly successful event!"



## The Nature Station Committee

by Andrea Donner

A new committee has formed at Placerita Canyon, called "The Nature Station Committee." The purpose of this committee is to enhance the existing wonderful docent program that we have, by encouraging participation with those docents that are either unable to hike, or a little intimidated with taking children and adults on the trail. The committee also would like to provide more of a "hands on" program for the children, to increase learning.

The Nature Station Committee has already had several meetings, and two field trips to Santa Ana Botanical Gardens and Eaton Canyon Nature Center. At Santa Ana Botanical Gardens they set up tables on the trail and provide hands-on activities at each table or station such as making cordage, grinding acorns, or playing Native American games. With the funds from a grant, Eaton Canyon has made boxes with different topics that teachers can check out for 3 weeks. The boxes are filled with many fun and educational hands-on activities that the teacher can use. A different set of boxes were made that docents can use on their walks with the children. They are also used on weekends if a docent wants to engage with the public, and not hike. The Committee learned a lot from both programs and is now motivated to begin making boxes for Placerita. They are also looking into applying for grants, and using the money to buy the boxes and its contents.

Although the Committee is only in the beginning stages, it is comprised of very motivated, enthusiastic docents, and we have done a lot in the few months that we have been meeting. We hope more docents will reach out to lend us a hand; we need all the expertise and knowledge we can get with this exciting new program.

## Crows vs Ravens

Mari Carbajal

The American crow and common raven are omnivorous members of the family Corvidae (genus Corvus). Besides ravens and crows, this family also includes rooks, jackdaws, jays, magpies, treepies, choughs and nutcrackers. There are 30 different species of crows and approximately nine species of ravens, along with numerous sub-species worldwide, with exception of the tip of South America and at the polar ice caps. All corvids are passerine (perching) species.

Corvids (meaning crow family) that will be discussed here are the American crow and the common raven found in and around the Santa Clarita Valley. However, there are some “interesting facts” included that give light to all corvids world-wide.

Corvids are considered extremely intelligent. They have demonstrated tool making, long-term memory, and communication skills within their groups. The brain to body-mass ratio of these two birds is equal to great apes and is only slightly lower than that of humans. Tests have been conducted on both ravens and crows to determine their intelligence.

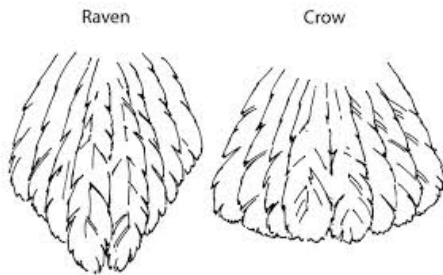
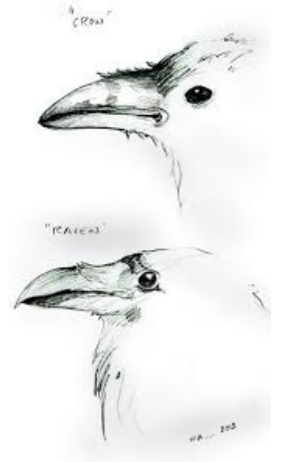
Although they look very much alike, there are vast differences between the two corvid species, both in appearance and behavior.

The raven's beak is designed to tear apart its prey. The crow's beak is not. A crow must wait for something to tear open a find, which is why you see them so often around trash bins. The main differences between the two (although there are many more than what is listed) are: crows are smaller than ravens; ravens are a little darker with a hint of blue; and the easiest way to tell them apart is by observing their tail. A raven's tail is like a fan, where a crow's is flattened at the end.

Over several million years ago, the Bering Land Bridge (Bering Strait) was a land connection over which these birds migrated. This was often possible due to periods where the sea levels would drop. Old and New World ravens isolated and diverged approximately 2 million years ago. In the Pleistocene Age (2 million to 15,000 years ago), Old World jays, nutcrackers, magpies, crows and ravens migrated across to North and South America.

Crows and ravens have been spiritual motivators, cultural drivers (e.g., navigation), objects as interesting scientific subjects, concerns for conservation, and considered pests by many. However, this species helps to deter the pest population in agriculture, and are considered our “cleanup crew” due to their love for road kill and other waste materials left by humans. They play an important role in the influence of human society, and in captivity, after age 2, most crows and ravens have the ability to learn to talk.

Both the crow and the raven are inquisitive birds that are often required to solve the problems they encounter. Experiments have shown that if they need a tool to resolve a problem, they will analyze and figure it out.



### Influence of crows and ravens on human society

The most well-known influence would be that of Edgar Allen Poe's poem, “The Raven.” Poe was actually influenced to write the poem by Charles Dickens, who had a crow he taught to talk.

Superstitions are often woven from tales of crows and ravens. When Alexander the Great came upon – and ignored – a dying flock of crows at Babylon, he was warned that evil would follow, and within two weeks, he died.

In Irish folklore, good luck would be expected to anyone who saw a raven cawing as it flew to their right. Scottish Highlanders hunting deer considered it good luck if they heard a raven. In American Indian cultures, the crows and the ravens are revered and respected

as sacred spiritual creatures.

Crows and ravens were integral to Tibetan funeral rituals. A dead loved one was ceremoniously cut into small pieces and placed on an altar so the birds could carry the pieces to their next life.

During Medieval times, crows and ravens could be seen scavenging on bodies that lie on the battlegrounds. This was considered an omen of bad luck and harbingers of death. During the outbreaks of the Black Death, the medical doctors wore helmets resembling a crow's head. Perfume was added to the beak to reduce the smell of the rotting corpses. In this time, a flock of ravens was called an “un-kindness” while a flock of crows was referred to as a “murder.”

The crowbar was modeled after the sturdy leg of a crow.

The crow's beak, which is efficient for picking up and holding small objects, inspired the design for a pair of seventeenth-century forceps called a “crow bill” which is used to probe into wounds and extracting things like bullets or other foreign objects.

A derogatory slang term for an unattractive older woman is an “old crow” and when you reach the age where you're physically challenged, you become “crow bait” or “raven food.” Soldiers used the term “crows' meat” for doomed soldiers.

The color of the crow and raven's feathers was used to describe a variety of things. Miners would refer to the color of the ore as “crow” rather than as black coal.

“Crowing” was an English term used to describe your stomach growling.

Many other terms are often used, such as “crowing about something,” which refers to bragging, and “as the crow flies” to denote the quickest route of travel between two points.

Crows and ravens are among the most ambitious creatures with much to admire. They should be revered as one of nature's most prized possessions, and not as a derogatory reference in any way, shape or form.

Enjoy nature at its best.



### 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:

Dr. and Mrs. Paul Levine - Squirt, the Western Pond Turtle

Golden Oak Community School "Wise Owl Day" - Catori, the Barn Owl

Victoria Murray - Chester, the Opossum

Laura, Justin, and Jameson Szajner - Catori, the Barn Owl

Drs. Elsa J. Brochmann Murray and Sam Murray - Apollo, the Turkey Vulture

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