

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.

March-April 2013

Hello Dear Nature Friends,

Spring time started in January. I remember somebody posting a photo from a branch covered with pink blossoms on the Placerita Facebook page for identification. It was the first chaparral currant in bloom and we all celebrated. It was the first sign of spring. Then in succession, new blossoms appeared: wild cucumber, manzanita, sugar bush, wild peony, golden currant. So many beautiful photos and the fast technology of Facebook allowed all of us to enjoy and be delighted to share those first signs of spring coming along together.

The last one, just barely opening up at this time, is the horary leaf ceonothus. I know it sounds like a strange name but soon, very soon the hills are going to be covered with the blossoms and the sight will be so beautiful. They are also called wild lilac so maybe you will recognize them under this name but I am sure you will enjoy the hills covered with bushes in bloom. Spring is such a wonderful season; all is new, fresh and alive, New birds are starting to cross on their migration path and it is the time to watch eagerly for the first Western Tanager of the season. All those first times are so exciting; come to the center to share the fun.



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 Dolores Olson

Dolores planned a trip Hart park to visit William Hart Mansion and the animal barn. So many docents signed up that the group was split in 2 so some toured the mansion while others were in the barn. It was so nice to visit Frank Hoffman in his new park and to see all the improvements that were made. Their docent, Jeff, gave a great tour of the mansion but the guard, who has been there for 17 years had many stories to tell. They visited the whole mansion, including the guest bedroom that William Hart added later on when his 2 great Danes took over his own bedroom.

The weather was beautiful and mild and all docents had a great time. Thank you Dolores.



The Rattler

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If you have an article you feel would follow the interests of this publication, please feel free to submit it. The deadline is the 10th of every other month. Mail your article to:

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

or you can email it to Evelyne at evandersande@gmail.com.

Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

Visit our Internet site at 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.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
Thank You!

- Yes! I want to contribute to help fund programs at Placerita
 - \$25 Friend \$50 Donor \$100 Sponsor Wall
 - I can pledge _____ monthly
 - Please contact me about the Adopt-an-Animal Program
-

Your tax-deductible donations are needed to help fund programs provided by volunteers.

Send your donation to:

PCNCA
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
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A New Entrance Gate

The entrance to Placerita Nature Center got a new look with a wood fence that was erected on the last day of January. It looks very nice and had a natural appearance which we do appreciate and is very fitting for the area. Do not get too distracted looking at the fence when you leave the Center, look again to your right before entering the road: the traffic goes very fast coming down the hill and the visibility is not always good. Always check twice for your safety.

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:

- Susan J. Mayhew - Cricket, the American kestrel
- Larry and Nancy Nikolai - Turbo, the desert tortoise; Apollo, the turkey vulture; Daisy, the opossum; Orion, the great horned owl; and Lady, the red-tailed hawk
- Nickolas Valenzuela - Sandy, the alligator lizard
- Santa Clarita Valley International Charter School, Second Grade - Daisy, the opossum

Many thanks for your support!

(Sue Mayhew has adopted an animal every year since 2010. Larry and Nancy Nikolai have generously supported the Adopt-An-Animal Program since 2006 when it began!)



SPRING PROGRAMS

- FAMILY NATURE WALK** Every Saturday from 11 to noon.
An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.
- ANIMAL PRESENTATION** Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.
See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.
- BIRD WALK** Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.
- BIRD WALK, CASTAIC** The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at **Castaic Lake Recreation Area** on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.
- BLOOMS OF THE SEASON** Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.
- COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB** A non-profit organization that invites all members of the SCV and community at large to: Join weekly planned hikes; Attend monthly nature series educational presentations; Participate in community outreach programs such as Calif Condor micro-trash clean-ups and maintenance of trails and native garden; Partner with groups such as Boys and Girls Club to introduce youth to nature. For more information, go to the website at communityhikingclub.org

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



Charitha Eragoda took the photo of a group of intrepid hikers from PCNCA on top of the Manzanita trail in February.

On the Road with the Rattler



This is just part of the motley crew from PCNCA that visited the Coronado Butterfly Preserve on Saturday, Feb 9. It was a beautiful day.



Even Pedra Sage came from San Pedro for the trip



Jim Harris and Mike Elling visiting China Lake with the laminated Rattler



On the Road with the Rattler: Bev Browe planned a hike at the end of January to Mentryville and all those hikers were delighted to come with her.



The "Rattler" rocks at Elsmere Canyon Creek Trail. Maria Elena Franicevich Christensen wanted to do the hike, but couldn't make it. We decided to bring her along with us. — with Maria Elena Franicevich Christensen, James F. Crowley, Irene Heerlein and Robert Grzesiak.



Lanita Algeyer planed a trip to the monarch butterfly preserve in January and the Rattler came along with Beverly Browe, Sandra Balaram and Paul Levine. They also took a beautiful walk on the buff.



Irene took the Rattler with her to Costa Rica



A beach on the Pacific Ocean



Strangler fig: taken on a hike in the jungle



A hike to the crater rim of Volcano Poas



SCVNews.com

I am very pleased to let you know that all my previous anxiety was for nothing. I am writing an article for SCVNews weekly and it is working just fine and I am using all the fantastic education I received at Placerita all those years. Again, I

want to make very clear that I am not paid to do this but I always hope that a little bit more of nature education can help the world go round and people to be aware of their surroundings.

if you want to check those columns, I am going to explain to you step by step how to do this:

Go to Google and type SCVnews.com

Click on the site and the page will come up.

On the left, you will see a column called "Inside."

Click on Op.Ed/blog then opinion/commentary.

My face will pop up, click on it and you will see my article.

It comes up every Thursday and the column is called "Let's Go Outside".

If you even wanted to check the previous articles, go to the right of the page and click on my face again "Read more from."

I try to keep my articles light and friendly. The aim is to give some scientific information but to sugar coat them so people will continue to read and not get bored. I hope you will enjoy them, I am very proud of some of the photos I took. if you have any suggestions, please contact me, I would love to hear from you and thank you in advance.

County Trail Crew is Working on the Canyon Trail

If you remember my previous articles on this topic, you will remember that the Canyon trail is going to be opened for mountain bikers by the end of March.

The county decided that much improvement needed to be done on the trail to make it safer for the mountain biker's arrival. The docents were reluctant about those improvements as we would have preferred to keep the Canyon Trail in a more nature state but Ron kraus was chosen as the "Go between" the county and the docents to try to preserve nature as much as possible.

Much trimming of trees and bushes was accomplished while the docents tried to preserve rare plants along the trail. One of the passages seems a little bit insecure. A fence was installed in some parts with a ravine on the side but we hope the children won't try to climb on those.

A bench that was buried by mud at Midgate was dug out and at the same spot culverts were installed under the trail to drain the water to the stream, restoring the trail to the pre 2005 wash out.

That is a very good thing....What is not at all an improvement is a rock dam established at the second water crossing. First of all, it would seem that it is a stream alteration that would require a stream alteration permit. Second, if we get the normal amount of rain that we are eagerly waiting for in March, this dam will be washed out.

If we get only a little rain, this part of the stream will become a swamp with very little water going downstream. At this time of the year, it is crucial for the survival of the tadpoles as the frogs are already doing matting calls. However, Ron Kraus assured us that he is in touch with the crew and that he is going to meet with them soon to make sure they are all in agreement. He was told that the crew will not leave and the trail will not be opened to the mountain bikes until the work is done to everyone's satisfaction. Have a look at the photos so you can appreciate the changes, let's be positive and keep our fingers crossed.

The Horse is Fine, the Bridge is Not

On Saturday February 2nd, a horse walking across the bridge fell causing 3 of his feet to go under the wood railing trapping the animal. Firefighters called a veterinarian who sedated the horse while they worked removing pieces of the bridge in order to free the animal.

The horse suffered minor injuries to its lower leg but it did not appear to be serious and the horse went back with its owner.

The bridge will need some repair but it is not serious either!

(ref jholt@signalscv.com)



Backyard Birds

by Bob Fischer

I wrote the original of this article in August of 1999. Since that time the continuing development of the area, especially road building, such as Golden Valley Road and accompanying commercial growth, has impacted the number of species we see. We no longer see Road Runners occasionally which when my parents lived here in the 70s and 80s used to actually dash up and down the street in front of their house almost daily.

Most of my bird watching now is in our backyard and nearby neighborhood where Bea and I walk for nearly an hour every morning before breakfast. Fortunately that neighborhood includes a wide variety of habitats, starting with our backyard which has a wide lawn, shrubs, trees and an adjacent chaparral covered hillside. I keep a species list monthly, and depending on the season, in any one month the number of species seen ranges from about 20 to 30. The all-time record many years ago was 40.

We see an amazing variety of birds including abundant species like House Sparrows, House Finches, Black Phoebes, Crows, Mourning Doves, Scrub Jays, California Towhees, California quail, Anna's Hummingbirds, Bewick's Wrens, and Mockingbirds. Most of these can be seen frequently year around. Not seen as often are Western Bluebirds, California Thrashers, Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Robins, and Flickers. Occasional passersby overhead are Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures. We seem to have a Red-shouldered Hawk that is resident nearby and hear it calling often and occasionally see it. A Cooper's hawk also visits us but less frequently. A neighbor tells us the Cooper's haunts his backyard birdbath and preys on the smaller birds using the bath as a draw besides bathing in it itself.

Our morning walk takes us along the little golf course in Friendly Valley, across the creek running through the golf course and along streets partially lined with Coast Live Oaks and ash trees. We used to walk much further up to a grove of eucalyptus trees at the end of Avenue of the Oaks, where we saw Bullock's Orioles, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Tanagers and Phainopeplas in season. Now where we walk daily we seldom see these species.

In the spring Killdeers frequent the open areas of the golf course, build nests and in late spring tiny round balls of fluff could be seen running after the adult birds. California quail nest on the close by chaparral hillsides and we have been treated sometimes with quail families foraging on our back lawn and around the edges of the golf course. We have seen speckled baby Bluebirds and Robins chase after their parents begging for more food.

One of the great pleasures of all this bird watching is getting acquainted with the behaviors of the different species and learning what kind of habitat niche each prefers. Their habitat preferences seem to be very specific and very narrow in many cases. We have learned that behavior is sometimes almost as good an identifier as a close sighting. And of course their calls and songs have always been clues if not outright specifiers of identification. At night we sometimes hear Great-horned Owls. That "who, who-who" heard at three o'clock in the morning can only be a Great-horned Owl. The melodic, meanderings of a Mocking Bird, the sharp take-off call of a Nuttall's Woodpecker or the repeated "killdee" echoing overhead clearly identify the maker of that call whether seen or not.

Spring is the time of the year when we see the most species with the numbers in March, April and May ranging up to 29 or 30 per month. But even the hot days of summer yield many days of satisfying bird watching. When fall approaches, our summer birds will be joined by several migrating species that will pass through or perhaps even stay and become winter residents like Yellow-rumped Warblers, Juncos and White-crowned Sparrows, adding to our many days of delightful backyard birding.



An Interview with Our Hometown Station

Each year, KHTS AM1220, starts a segment called "Non-Profit Spotlight Discussion." Most of the time Placerita Nature Center is interviewed on the air just before the new class of docent training starts which is a fantastic opportunity for us to get publicity for this event. Again this year, we were able to enjoy this fantastic opportunity and we are very grateful.

The interview was conducted mainly with Ron Kraus, Jim Southwell and Deb Clem. Evelyne Vandersande and Lanita Algeyer were there to show support. Janice Murray of KHTS was happy to see us again this year and are always pleased by the very professional manner that the interview is conducted.

During the interview, many topics about Placerita Canyon Nature Center were covered: History of the property from the time of habitation of the Tataviam Indians in the area, from 450 to 1797CE; Oak of the Golden Dream (1842) Francisco Lopez; discussion of Frank Walker, his wife, Hortence, and their 12 children and how they occupied the area from 1910 to 1959; and eventual sale of the land to State of California as Placerita Canyon State Park. Further discussion took place regarding the programs offered to the public.

The balance between Ron, Jim and Deb was full of information and they were fun, lively and they were obviously having a great time speaking about one of their favorite topics. They are asked to come back every year and the lovely Janice from KHTS was having a good time too.

Thanks go to KHTS, our Hometown Station for doing this great service to us and giving us such a great exposure just before the docent training starts.

Canyon Trail Construction

Some major work was accomplished on the Canyon Trail to accommodate the use by mountain bikes. Some rails are going to be built in February to block the bikers from falling off from some steep incline. We expect the trail to be open to this new traffic in March.





A Trip with Lanita Algeyer

It was on the cold side, at the end of January, but the sun was shining, the sky was blue and the monarchs were flying all around the docents who came to Goleta to see the monarch preserve. They were very lucky that Paul Levine, AKA the Butterfly Whisperer came with them so they could ask any questions and have them answered by an expert. Beverly Browe wrote "What a glorious day! If you have not been to this magical place, you must try to go. Thank you Lanita for organizing this outing." Another trip is planned by Paul Levine on the week end for people who could not go during the week.



The Monarchs are on the Coast

Photos by Paul A. Levine

Monarchy is not taking over, no king, queen or emperor are in Coronado but I am referring to the large migratory orange and black butterflies that are spending the winter in the eucalyptus grove at Goleta.

The docents found out what a fantastic place it is and we had 3 trips planned to visit the monarchs this year.

What is going on: the Monarch butterflies cannot survive cold winter temperatures of the northern states so they migrate south and spend the winter in this grove of eucalyptus. I first arrived there on a foggy day and was looking for the butterflies when I noticed the branches were covered with a sort of brown fur. After a second look, I realized that there were thousands of butterflies amassed along the branches, with their wings closed. As soon as the sun came out, clouds of butterflies rose in the air and I felt like Alice in Wonderland. It was such an incredibly beautiful sight and such a rare experience to be surrounded by all those delicate and colorful creatures that the joy of the memory makes me smile.

The butterflies are here in January and February to escape from the cold weather but they will leave in March so plan your visit now: Take the 126, which will become 101 North, exit Storke Rd/Glen Annie and head south (away from the mountains). Turn right on Hollister Avenue, drive about 1.2 miles and take a left on Coronado Drive. Entrance to the Preserve is at the end of Coronado Drive. It is free and a very easy flat walk but can get muddy so wear good shoes. After the preserve, you can take a very lovely walk on the buff with view of the ocean; take a picnic and have a wonderful time.

Why they are here: It is their roosting spot and they spend the winter there, safe from the cold. It is the only insect that can fly 2,500 miles to a warmer climate. How they can find this roost is a big mystery. Their life span is short so the Monarch coming to the roost this winter are the great-great-grandchildren of the butterflies that left the previous spring. We do not know how their homing system works, we can track their whereabouts because some butterflies get tagged on their wings, the tag can be checked and is proof of the long journey of a specific individual. We came to the conclusion their homing system is a combination of the position of the sun and the use of the earth's magnetic field for orientation.

I posted many photos of the monarchs which is one of the most beautiful butterflies in California (after my magic experience in the grove, I was in love and awe!) I hope you will be able to recognize it easily after that.

Monarch butterflies are poisonous or distasteful to birds and mammals because of the poison contained in milkweed consumed by the larvae. The bright colors of larvae and adults are thought to function as warning colors.

Let's review the life cycle from a monarch butterfly: an egg lasts about 4 to 6 days and the caterpillar breaks out of the egg (this is also known as the larva stage). The caterpillar will eat as much as possible for about 12 to 16 days and will get about 2 inches long. When the caterpillar reaches full maturity, it stops eating. In the case of a butterfly caterpillar, it finds a spot to attach itself using silk. It then splits its skin, just like when it molts, and the chrysalis is underneath. Chrysalis and pupa are often used synonymously. Another miracle will happen when the most gorgeous butterfly emerges, breaking free of the cocoon, letting its wings get some strength before the first flight.

Butterflies are beautiful and incredible insects. Their wings are not well designed for such a long journey, some research indicates they preserve their energy in flight by gliding on air currents as they travel south but we really do not understand how they can handle such a long and dangerous flight when even a rain storm can cause their death.

Take a little drive to their wintering spot, choose a sunny day and you will have an unforgettable experience. I hope that you will be able to appreciate them even more knowing the difficulty of such a long journey.



Class of 2013

The final count is in and the class of 2013 has 17 new students ready to take the rigorous training to become docents at Placerita.

This year again, we have a few students who are training to eventually become docents at Vasquez Rocks and they will need to add a few more classes to learn about the specific differences between the two areas.

We are delighted to welcome this group and we want to provide all the support they need to succeed.

The students have been told their responsibilities: they will have to attend all the classes during docent training. If they cannot be there for one class, they will have to watch and learn from the DVD. All our classes have been registered so all the information is available at all time. They have been shown where the library is so that they can have access to all the material at hand. They know they will have to write a report about a topic of their choice but it has to be pertinent to our natural area at Placerita. They understand that they will have to audit 3 trails with a senior docent. An exam will be taken at the end of the training and those notes will need to be studied and reviewed.

A graduation ceremony will be held on Saturday March 30 followed by a dinner where the spouse and families are very much welcomed. Each student who has completed all those requirements will receive a diploma, their name tag and will become a docent for Placerita Canyon Nature Center or Vasquez Rocks. The new docents have been introduced to the County Staff. They know that they will have to comply with all rules and regulations, policies and procedures from the County of LA, department of Parks and Recreation.

We are all very impressed by their commitment, their enthusiasm and their desire to learn. We are also very pleased because the level of instruction they are getting is college-level degree and they will also have many hands on experiences which makes it a very complete and interesting program.

We cannot wait to celebrate our new class of 2013!

Mari Carbajal
Girard Cohen
Steve Colf
Richard Donner
Yvette Dubois
Penny Hand

Jim Hazard
Lorraine Hendricks Stewart
Suzy Hermann
Brielle Jaramillo
Tana Lampton
Ron Nichols

Jodie Robitaille
Michael Summe
Sue Sutton
Annette Uthe
Connie Viola





Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

and Family Festival

May 11, 2013
10AM to 3PM

- Animal Presentations
- Panning for fools gold
- Guided Hikes
- Face Painting
- Food & Drink
- Free Parking & Admission

Many fun activities for the whole family!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall
(661)259-7721

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**Volunteers of the Year 2012
Ray Orloff and Jack Levenberg**

Yes, this year the PCNCA board voted to elect the Volunteer of the Year for 2013 and we had a little surprise when we had a tie.

Ray and Jack have both been a tremendous asset for Placerita and we are extremely happy and pleased to be able to give to both, the recognition of being the volunteer of the year, which is the highest level of recognition in our organization.

Congratulations and thank you for all your effort. We are all deeply grateful for your dedication to Placerita.

The official ceremony where they will get their award will be on September 7th, at Eaton Canyon.

Why are they Volunteers of the Year 2012?

Ray Orloff

Let me start by saying what an incredible honor it is to be recognized as one of the volunteers of the year. There are many docents worthy of this award at PCNC and I'm not exactly sure why they chose me but I am very appreciative none the less.

I don't generally like talking about myself but I know it will help you do what you need to do. I suppose you would like to know what I've done this past year at PCNC so I will do my best to try and tell you.

I've worked on the Walker cabin. Painted the back door. Made new handles and wheel barrow for the farm equipment. Worked on the pond. Built the grizzly bear enclosure.

The thing I enjoy the most is being out on the trails. One day leading a school group

I noticed a tree branch had fallen on to the trail. It sat there for a week. I talked to the front office about it and learned that the County just doesn't have the budget to have a crew to come out for every little thing. So I asked if I could remove it. They said yes. I realized there was nobody at PCNC taking care of the trails so I started doing some trail grooming on my own. Trimming, digging out water bars, repainting benches and picking up litter. Basically making sure the trails are clear and safe.

From that point I started the TRAIL TEAM. I go out on a weekly basis and check on all the trails. When I come across something I need help with I get more docent help to get the project done. Our last project was putting steps on the steep switch backs on the Ecology Trail. The whole point of the TRAIL TEAM is to be out on the trail and be the eyes and ears of the park.

I've also been very involved with the County trail crew and Ron on the Canyon trail project. Once it is completed I would like to try and have a TRAIL TEAM member patrol the trail to keep an eye on the mountain bikers.

Jack Levenberg

I was really humbled and surprised at being chosen Volunteer (Co) of the year. You do things at the center and really do not think of them as a list of jobs. Things that I do are as follows; Show both the mammals and raptors, participate in school programs, part of the outreach team, PCNCA board member, NCA representative, helped revise the trail maps, searching for Audio/visual equipment, worked on the Craft faire and open house, collected material for making wreaths and crafts, and a member of various committees.

These are some of what I do at the nature center. You get so involved that it is hard to remember just what you do. I enjoy being with the people and working with the children, also going on our adventure hikes.



Nature in Your Backyard

“Redefine your understanding of Nature. Nature isn't “out there” in the forests and woods. You are living on the Earth and all of the Earth is Mother Nature's creature. Don't be fooled by the concrete of the city.

The city is built on Mother Nature's soil and it is still an expression of Mother Nature. Don't tell yourself that in order to appreciate Mother Nature, you have to go “out there” to the forest. Such an attitude shows that you are separate from the whole field of life itself. The human community is part of Mother Nature and the human community dwells in the cities of the many nations of this planet. Mother Nature is everywhere.” *Carolyn Myss*

Danger on the Trail



January and February are a time for adventure and special freedom on the trail. Because of the cold weather, there are 2 enemies of the hiker – though you are probably not going to meet them: the rattlesnake and poison oak. Consequently, this is the time where hikers who do not want to follow a trail - who wants to investigate a new area, go brazenly into unconquered wilderness – probably should not! Of course, it is always much better to stay on the trail because nature does not read the book, and will present you with surprises.

While rattlesnakes do not hibernate, they go into a state called “torpor.” When the weather is cold they go under ground, taking refuge in a burrow where the temperature is more constant, and they usually stay there. However, if there is a warm afternoon, the snake will come

out to warm up. If you go marching through bushes and the snake is disturbed, it will attack to defend itself before you even notice his presence. So hikers be aware.

What about poison oak? At this time of the year, it is only a bunch of dry twigs – how could those cause you any harm? It is true that there are certain areas which are not even approachable in the summer because they are covered with poison oak, so it is tempting to investigate that area in the dead of the winter. There again, I will recommend some caution. What is the chemical that will burn your skin and covert it with blisters if you touch poison oak? It is urushiol oil. I think to understand the problem and to find a solution; we need to concentrate on that point.

Urushiol is viscous, and sticks to things. The dry twigs of poison oak still have some oil on them. If you observe the so-called dead poison oak now, you will see that buds and tiny leaves are starting to emerge, all of them are nice and shiny - and covered with urushiol. The rash that results from the poison plants is a form of allergic contact dermatitis. (Dermatitis is swelling and irritation of the skin.) When this oil comes in contact with your skin, it will bring on a rash and big blisters (see photos) similar to a burn,. It is also quite painful and takes many weeks to clear up. People who are exposed to urushiol for the first time might no reaction; but the body will normally have a full reaction at some subsequent exposure. Urushiol is not only contained in poison oak, but also in Poison Sumac and Poison Ivy. Amazingly, specimens of century old urushiol will still cause a rash, and it can stay active on any surface for at least 1-5 years. One important thing to know is that the palms of your hands don't react to urushiol.



If you touch poison oak/ivy/sumac, do not touch any other parts of your body, especially your eyes. If the eyes are exposed to urushiol, they can swell shut and become extremely painful. The face, mouth, neck, genitals, and eyelids are extremely sensitive to urushiol. These areas will develop very large blisters that can ooze large amounts of fluid. Medical attention is necessary in any of these cases.



So what should you do, now that you have walked into poison oak? The most effective thing to do is to remove all your clothes and put them in a plastic bag and take a warm shower using a soap that does not contain oil (brown soap or dishwashing liquid). While under the shower, scrub under your fingernails with a tooth brush and throw away the toothbrush to get rid of the oil. All this should to be done within 30 minutes of exposure.

That sounds nice, but most of us won't have this luxury of treatment because most of the exposure to poison oak occurs on the trail, miles away from a warm shower with soap. What can we do? One way is to dissolve oil using alcohol. I won't recommend that you carry a small flask of vodka (while some hikers might disagree!) but rubbing alcohol will do the trick. It needs to be applied with a clean cloth (a bandana would be OK) working through the affected area little bit by little, using a clean spot of the cloth each time and plenty of alcohol. Wet wipes will help somewhat. If none of those are available, go to a nearby creek (or use your water). Pick up some fine sand and water and gently rub the area with a paste of water and sand, and that will help remove the urushiol.

Understand that you are removing sticky oil so be thorough with your cleaning and repeat the scrubbing and washing.

There is an old wives' tale about using the underside of the leaf of the Mugwort to remove poison oak. A friend of mine has tried the sand paste followed by mugwort rubbings, and she has not broken out (noting that this is not a clinical trial!).

When you come home, yes indeed, it will be time to strip off your clothes and wash them a few times with hot water and soap. Here is another reason why it's a good idea to wear long slacks on the trail; your body will get more protection.

If you have a dog that was loose on the trail (never a good idea on the trail for many different reasons but we will talk only about poison oak for today) and its fur brushes along poison oak, the next time you pet your dog you could be get some urushiol oil on your skin and develop the allergic dermatitis (or skin reaction). Wash your dog using plastic gloves, lots of shampoo and warm water if possible. Be aware that your dog, jumping on your car seat or on your couch, can also transfer the oil onto furniture, and then when you sit there, you can get poison oak. What a nightmare to wash your furniture!

Did I scare you enough? I need to add that every part of the poison oak can give you a reaction: stem, leaves, berries, roots and even the ashes from burned plants! Actually, the reaction in the case of ashes might even be the worst: if you inhale ashes from burning poison oak, you might have swelling and sores along your respiratory tract, and that doesn't sound like it would be pleasant at all.



Danger on the Trail, continued



California has outlawed burning garden debris so you should be OK on that part, but we also have forest fires and ashes flying in the wind so be aware if you are close to a forest fire. There might be danger in the wind...even touching the ashes can bring a reaction. The ashes can settle on rocks or benches. When a person sits on that object long after the fire, they can get dermatitis from the ashes of poison oak.

Now that we have covered all those terrible facts, it would seem important to be able to recognize poison oak, so there are many photos in the article to help you along. The easiest time of the year to recognize poison oak is in the fall. It turns a beautiful bright red and you won't miss it. In the spring the leaves are new and shiny, juicy with the fresh urushiol but the leaves can be difficult to identify because some are big and some are small and not yet totally developed. That is the time of the year where they can be mistaken for another plant.

In the summer, they can be mixed up in the middle of other plants or bushes and not easy to detect at first glance. You can look at the photos and see the different

growth stages from flowering to fruit-bearing (the fruits are small and difficult to see).

Try to come to Placerita, and look at the sign on the Waterfall Trail and take a picture to see what it really looks like because the first few leaves are opening up. There is nothing like real life experience to have this leaf engraved in your memory. Worst comes to worst and if in doubt, remember the proverb "leaves of 3, let it be". Enjoy safe and healthy hiking through the cold season.



Docents Helping Each Other

by Lanita Algeyer

In January we welcomed a group of twelve docents from the Maturango Museum who had given us the tour at China Lake. I always talk to the people in charge of the group when we visit the different places and invite them to visit us. Nora took me up on my offer to tour of PCNC, although she forgot to confirm with me until Tuesday. I was a little rushed getting a group of our docents together. As you know we have a great group of docents and I will be sending thank you's to all of them for helping out today and giving this group a wonderful presentation. The group had only high praises for our docents today and what a wonderful job they all did.

Vicki Cunningham gave the ecology board demonstration to the group, while Linda Iorger, Deb Clem, Jim Harris, Sue Wallander, and Marietta Ewing showed animals. Beverly Browe, Dolores Olson, and I gave them general talks about PCNC and Dolores and I took them on a hike to the Walker cabin and the Oak of the Golden Dream.

We may have had more docents than needed, however it was super to show them what a terrific group of people we have. The Maturango Museum Docents were very happy with their tour and want to come back when our spring flowers are in bloom.



Thank you Mari Carbajal

Mari is a docent trainee, brand new at Placerita and she is still taking docent training but she is already fulfilling a job. When she found out that I was struggling keeping up updating the lists to send The Rattler in PDF, she volunteered to help to keep them up to date and we are all very grateful for that. Thank you Mari.

Heidi's Note: Mari is also now working in the Gift Shop on Sunday afternoons. Whatagal!!!

Heebie Jeebies

(Before Becoming a Docent)

by Pam Koch

Creepy quickly crawling creatures
Eight tapping feet carrying venomous danger.
Gives me the willies, the creeps, the shivers.
Fearsome, loathsome, carnivorous attacker
Willing to consider any size prey.



Mimicry

By Paul A. Levine

Photos by Paul A. Levine

According to the dictionary, to mimic is to copy or imitate. Mimicry is a close resemblance in color, form or behavior of one organism to another or to some object in its environment serving to conceal or disguise the organism from a potential predator. We see this every Halloween when the children dress up to imitate or mimic something or someone else.



No one would be fooled into thinking that this is a real skunk but would you want to attack, eat or otherwise prey upon this insect (presuming that you did eat other insects)?

Most people and certainly many predators would give the above insect a wide-berth as it looks like a wasp but it isn't. It is a fly and for a predator such as a lizard, a frog or toad, it is perfectly good to eat and it cannot sting because it does not have a stinger. But it certainly looks like a wasp and we all know and the animals all know that one doesn't want to mess with a wasp.

Mimicry in the animal world is involuntary unlike dressing up for Halloween. Over time, coloring, shape (both in the case of the fly shown above) and other features evolve over time as a protective mechanism. Like every aspect of life, mimicry seems simple at first but is actually very complex. One animal is distasteful, is poisonous to others and sometimes both, can hurt the predator as in the case of a wasp while other animals that are perfectly good to eat evolve to look like the distasteful, poisonous or dangerous species. Commonly, animals that are poisonous are brightly colored warning other animals to stay away from it. A classic example is the Monarch butterfly. The caterpillar feeds on milkweed which contains poisons that it tolerates but will make a bird or other animal sick. It also has a bitter taste (according to the books, not based on personal experience). So an animal either learns from its parents or learns for itself after trying to eat one of these butterflies. After that experience, it leaves the other Monarch butterflies alone. In the United States, a second butterfly has evolved that looks very similar to the Monarch butterfly – that is the Viceroy butterfly.



The butterfly on left is a Monarch while the one on the right is a Viceroy. The Viceroy is usually smaller than a Monarch, it has the dark marginal band on the hind wing while the Monarch doesn't have this while the Monarch has black spots on its head and body which the Viceroy doesn't. These are all features that we can recognize, particularly when the butterflies are side-by-side but a bird or lizard will not.



However, it gets more complex than this simple comparison because the Viceroy's host plant is willow and while this may not

be poisonous, it confers a bitter taste. Try tasting an aspirin tablet – it tastes terrible. While the key chemical in aspirin is now manufactured synthetically, it originally comes from the bark of the willow tree. Many predators, after trying this once, will not go back for seconds. Fritz Muller, a German naturalist provided the first explanation. If two species, each of which had a similar defense mechanism (tasting bad) looked the same and by looking alike would confuse a common predator, individuals in both groups would be more likely to survive after one was attacked and the predator tried to eat it. This is termed Mullerian Mimicry.

When we think of mimicry however we think of a harmless species evolving to imitate the warning signals of a harmful species both of whom are preyed upon by a common predator. This is Batesian Mimicry names after Henry Walter Bates, an English naturalist working in the Brazilian Rain Forest in 1848. A prime example is the fly that looks like a wasp.

Batesian and Mullerian Mimicry are the two most common forms of mimicry that we will encounter in the field. There can also be situations where the insect looks like something else such as a dead leaf or bark. While this is technically also mimicry, we usually call this camouflage. The moth shown below looks like the bark of a tree or the mottled appearance of dark ground with lots of pebbles but if it lands in the wrong place, it is readily visible.

As you hike the Placerita trails as well as elsewhere, keep your eyes open for examples of mimicry. That insect that looks like a wasp may actually be something else and nowhere near as dangerous.



Meet Marnye Summers



Where were you born and where have you lived? My roots are in Northern California as I was born in East Palo Alto and raised there and in Menlo Park. Most of my family still lives there but in the 80's I left to finish my college degree at San Diego State and then followed my soon to be husband to the Santa Clarita area. I've lived in Agua Dulce since 1989.

How did your love for nature start? Growing up in East Palo Alto one had to be very aware of their surroundings, as it wasn't the safest area to live, so I think I developed observational skills at a young age. The bizarre and the strange have always interested me but nature wasn't really a calling until I moved from city life to country life in Agua Dulce. I have a passion for the desert in every way and that passion has driven a life long interest in

learning about the world around me. When I was a teenager I went on a school field trip to Death Valley and my love of the desert was ignited.

What is your education? Plagued with learning disabilities I found high school difficult but in my 20's I decided that I wanted to pursue college and started at the local community level. From there I went on to San Jose State and later graduated from San Diego State with a degree in Athletic Training. Later I turned my focus from people training to working with animals and completed a degree in Veterinary Technology at Pierce College. I went on to work many years as a Vet Tech and later started my own pet sitting business, which specialized in pets with special care needs.

What is your family like? I have an amazing marriage of 30 years, and four spoiled rescue dogs.

When did you come to Placerita Canyon for the first time and what do you remember about this place? Other than a brief visit years ago, my first time there was for docent training in 2012. I've been there so often now that I think I am making up for lost time!

What do you like best about your time at the Nature Center?: Every day I learn something new.

At Placerita is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud? I'm big on setting personal goals, so making it through docent training was a big personal accomplishment and I plan on paying it forward!

What is your favorite food?: My husband and I enjoy cooking together on the weekends and we use cookbooks and other sources for recipes, always exploring new tastes and ideas to put on our plates. But if I were stuck on a deserted island and had to pick one food I would say pasta. No, wait... bread. No pasta and bread and fruit. And potatoes. And of course, wine. Wine is an important food group!

What is your favorite color? Camo.

Favorites? Music: Country TV show: Homeland Pastime: Reading, RV camping with my husband and dogs, traveling, hiking.

Is there anything else that about you that you would like us to know? I'm an artist, I've been a lifelong artist and if any one thing describes me that would be it. Over the years I've worked in absolutely every medium imaginable, but for the last decade have concentrated on painted, life size, metal animal sculptures. I cut the metal from flat sheets of steel with a plasma cutter and then paint the art in a variety of styles from pointillist to realistic to modern. Most works I sell are commissions done of the customer's own pet. I donate 100% of the proceeds to animal rescues in the form of consumables and supplies. This is why I named my business Goin' To The Dogs Art because the proceeds truly go to the dogs.

Is there any passion or special events in your life that you wish to tell us about? Several years ago, I became involved with a society that helped solve a cold case murder of a family member. The Vidocq Society is a non-profit organization, whose members are homicide detectives and crime solving specialist from all over the country. They specialize in solving cold case murders, but also promote seminars for detectives, teaching them advanced crime solving techniques to bring murderers to justice and peace to the families of the victims. As a victim of a crime that was, at least partially solved with Vidocq's help, they asked me to speak at one such seminar in Salt Lake City. It was one of the toughest and most important things I have ever done – standing up before a crowd of over a hundred dedicated crime solvers, and speaking with passion about what their selfless work meant to me as a family member. But I did it and will do it again this June in North Carolina. This group is close to my heart and I have overwhelming respect for the members of the Vidocq Society and the great service they do in solving cold cases murders.

Marnye became a very important person at the nature Center since January because she is in charge of the snacks during docent training. She is doing a fantastic job, doing much home cooking for the classes to the delight and deep appreciation of all docents. Thank you Marnye.

With PCNCA help, a New Job for Bryan Miller

After over thirty years in the field of Government finance for cities throughout California I decided to hang up my hat and venture out on my own. After very marginal success trying to start my own consulting firm continuing with government financing I decided to tackle the docent training course held at Placerita in 2012.

I was out of work with plenty of time on my hands so this seemed like a good way to keep me busy during the day. Throughout my life I was introduced to both state and national parks throughout the west as well as introduced to the joys of learning about plants and animals wherever my family travelled.

During my stint in college I always thought I would like to get into the parks or forest service but never really pursued it. In the back of my mind it was always something I dreamed of doing but other life events kept steering me away. Once I quit my desk job and started the docent training at Placerita I realized how much more enjoyable a position working outdoors can be rather than my old career.

With this new found enthusiasm I actively sought out changing my career. With the guidance of Russell Kimura I drove to several State parks handing out resumes and keeping my fingers crossed. Six months later while visiting Bodie State Historic Park in the eastern Sierra, I received a phone call from the State Parks department for an interview. Not really knowing what the job might be I jumped at the chance and one month later I was hired by the State working at the Tehachapi District headquarters assisting with maintenance of several parks including the Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve, AV Indian Museum, Fort Tejon, and Providence Mountain/Mitchel Caverns.

This new career is much more relaxing working with my hands to help maintain a variety of parks. Who knows, I may just end up working as Ranger someday.

I am a fervent believer that some events in a person's life are set in motion to lead us down a particular path. If I had not quit my job and then saw the notice for the docent training I would probably not have seriously pursued a career with the State parks. It just proves what something like docent training and volunteering can lead to.



The Rattler

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

NATURE CENTER ASSOCIATES OF
LOS ANGELES COUNTY