



# The Rattler



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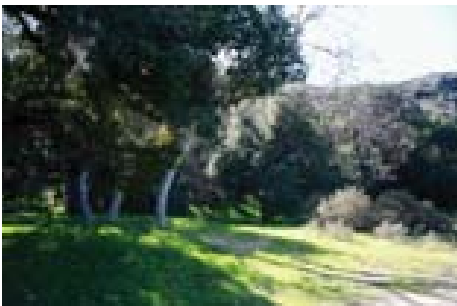
## *Placerita Canyon Nature Center* Over 50 Years of Nature Education

### *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 2014**

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### **Hello Nature friends,**

My deadline to finish the Rattler is February 10 so maybe we will have torrential rain from that date to the time when you will receive the March/April Rattler; however, I am a little bit skeptical. We are in our 3<sup>rd</sup> year of drought and the result is starting to be very evident around us.

Last year, the stream was dry the whole year around and I had not seen that for 30 years. We have to remember that even if no water is seen on the surface, water can be found underground but it does not help the frog or bird population. We are seeing fewer birds during the bird walks. The spring flowers are opening up but they are smaller in some places. The nesting season has already

started; protection of the species and reproduction are crucial and even with lack of water, the beat goes on! Survival of the fittest is one way to improve the species during hard times.

We have the same philosophy at the nature center. We have come to the conclusion that we need a docent training each spring to renew the ranks of docents! We need a certain number of dedicated trained volunteers to support the many programs and special events at the center. Each year, we offer an intensive training covering many topics of nature education and the new class needs to complete many requirements. We are very proud to announce that 20 new students rose to the challenge and we are sending all our best wishes to the class of 2014.



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**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 Bit of History

Shirley Morano

Once a week, usually on Tuesday, I drive from my home in the West San Fernando Valley (Winnetka) to the Nature Center. I spend four hours in the staff office answering the phone and watching over things when staff members need to step out of the room for a few moments. It is delightful to be part of a facility that houses a center that I have been part of since the latter part of the 1960's.

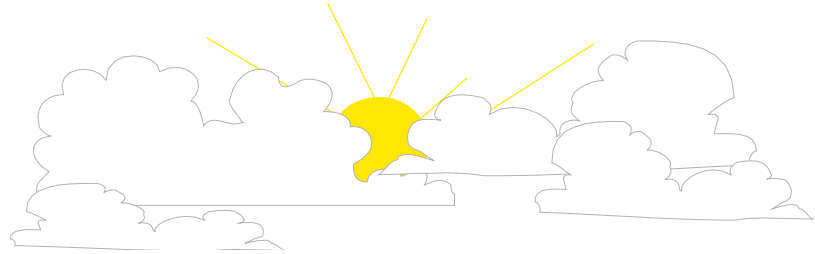
There was no building at that time but plans were being developed to erect one. Families in the San Fernando Valley were the first members of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates and lived in places like Reseda, Northridge, Granada Hills, Canoga Park, etc.

Our children were part of the original nature classes held first in the Valley and eventually in the building that was dedicated in 1971.

I am proud to have been a member since the beginning and to have donated to the efforts to start the original museum.

I am pleased at this time that I am still able to make a small contribution to the PCNCA and to the Nature Center. The staff and the docents of today are outstanding and appreciated by the County of Los Angeles and the local residents living in homes that did not exist locally in the 1960's and early 1970's.

I am grateful that I will be able to see the new Museum at the dedication. I hope for a few more years that I can continue to enjoy and be part of this outstanding facility and the wonderful people that are part of making it special.



## 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.



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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  
Newhall, CA 91321-3213

Don't Forget to



Spring Forward on March 9!

**Accident**

The first mountain biker accident outside park boundaries happened on Viper, which is a trail just outside the park, above the Manzanita trail.

The young man fell from his bike and his neck was badly hurt, he did not have feeling in his hands and feet.

Luckily, his girlfriend was with him and by chance, her cell phone worked. You need to know that there is no cell coverage in some parts of the wilderness area.

Chris Sapovchak, Recreation Service Leader at Placerita, was able to call 911 for help and explained the situation. A helicopter arrived on the trail with a rescue team bringing a full body cast.

We are very relieved to be able to say that the young man recovered from his injury. Please use the buddy system when you go hiking or biking; it saved this young man.

## 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](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. March 16: Geology of Placerita Canyon with Eric Indermill. April 27: Butterflies of Placerita Canyon with Dr. Paul A. Levine AKA Dr. Monarch

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



### Eileen Blanchard

August 20, 1924 – January 25, 2014

We are saddened to tell you that Eileen passed away suddenly. She was a docent from the class of 1991. After the training, she went on the trails with the school children for many years until her asthma robbed her of this pleasure. She told me “I can talk with the children or I can walk the trail but I cannot do both at the same time!” Then she became active with the special events; she was always helping with the bake sale with her friends Ella and Gretta. She

would send email to Heidi and me on a regular basis and sometimes, would attend our holiday dinners.

She was always cheerful, pleasant and dedicated. Being part of Placerita was very important for her and she would promptly pay her dues each year to be able to still figure on the Docents list and be aware of all the news.

Placerita had a special place in her heart and she had many great memories of the people and the work that she did there.

We will miss Eileen greatly, she was a woman of convictions, and we loved her and respected her. She had been a friend for many years, always had an upbeat attitude and a sweet smile.

She is survived by her two children, five grand children and six great-grandchildren.

Comments from a few of the docents who remember Eileen:

*Very sad to hear this. Eileen was still fairly active when I started as a docent at Placerita in 2002. I remember her working the bake sales at special events. I also saw her volunteering as a poll worker at Friendly Valley during elections. She was always friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable. (By Ron Kraus)*

*What a lively, wonderful, spirited soul she really kept all of us on our toes! (By Jill Goddard)*

*Eileen often emailed me with compliments about the Rattler and other things. She also called, especially if she had something for Bill (aka The Squirrel Whisperer). Last summer she called about an orphan her neighbor found. We went over to get him. Another time it was about a stray cat, really large that we decided was either a Bengal or Savannah. We were going to go get it when she found the owner. She was also proud of her Friendly Valley bobcat and often spoke of watching him. (By Heidi Webber)*

*I was pleased and surprised to see Eileen at the Time Capsule Ceremony (Aug 25, 2011) at the groundbreaking for the Newhall Library. She and Ron and I posed for a picture. Eileen was very community minded and quite active in the local Women Republican’s group. She had the inside scoop on local politics and I admired her very much (by Pam Koch).*



### Placerita Canyon Nature Center on the Air

by Jack Levenberg



On Jan 6th, 2014, radio host Janice Murray welcomed Docents Ron Kraus, Jack Levenberg and Kathryn Kazmer to do a presentation of what is happening at Placerita Canyon. This is the first of the series explaining the different volunteer organizations in our valley and we are always very grateful that we have this chance for special publicity just at the beginning of docent training.

The show is done at the mall, close to the food court and it is always fun to watch the team in action. One of the topics covered was “What does it take to become a Docent?” Ron explained some of the requirements: the 9 weeks of classes and the duties of a Docent. We also discussed the many programs available at Placerita, specifically the Family Nature Walk and Live Animal Show on Saturdays, the Bird Walk on the second Saturday of the month, the Community Education series on the third Sunday of the month and the Blooms of the Season wildflower walk every 4th Saturday of the month.

Jack talked about the new Interpretative Center that will be installed by Dec 2014, the planning that was involved and the many meetings with the contractor to refine the displays and wording which will be included in the final presentation. Finally Ron and Jack gave a brief history of Placerita Canyon.



### Shana Radecki

We are so very sorry to have to let you know that Shana from the class of 2009 passed away. She was 28 years old and had been diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer about a year ago. Her mom took care of her in Billings, Montana.

You might remember Shana: she joined the docent training class with a very good friend of her father who acted like an uncle for her: Rick Bardwell.

Shana had a wonderful curiosity, was delightful with the children and her beautiful spirit brought all of us joy. We also found out that Rick Bardwell passed away a while ago. We had lost touch with them when they moved to San Diego for a new job.

Very sad news indeed.

## On the Road with the Rattler



Mike Elling took the Rattler to the Amazon River

I recently returned from a cruise down the Amazon River. One night, we went out in small boats and looked for Caimans. We found one, brought it aboard, discussed its characteristics, then put it back into the water so it could find its mom. It was about 2 feet long and 2-3 months old. It posed with me for a Rattler photo!



This is from my French Guiana adventure. The local kids would come alongside the ship's tender in a small boat and hold up their sloths so we could take photos with them for a dollar. This sloth seemed interested in the Rattler.



A group of early-riser docents when up the Los Pinetos trail and took the Rattler. Thank you Irene and "the guys"

Denny Truger was at Red Rock Canyon and the Rattler went along.



Jim Crowley took the Rattler to Spain, Morocco and even Gibraltar where he enjoyed the typical British telephone booth.



Placerita Canyon Nature Center

# Open House

and Family Festival

May 10, 2014  
10AM to 3PM

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

Many fun activities for the whole family!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall

(661)259-7721

[www.placerita.org](http://www.placerita.org)

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**Irene Heerlein**

My family and I came to the US the end of 2010 after having lived in Singapore for 7 years. Originally from Germany we just love to travel and explore new countries with their culture, nature and people. I did not have a working permit for the first two years so I needed to do something in order to keep my high energy level a bit on track.

Since I always loved nature and animals I thought it might be a good idea to complete the Placerita Docent training which I did in 2012. I had a great time educating kids about ecology, animals and plants in our park. Especially I enjoyed the younger ones as I have a child in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade myself (or maybe it was just the fact that I did not have a high-level

vocabulary in English).

I have also helped with the Open House and prepared the Treasure Hunt two years in a row. In 2013 I assisted Ron with administrative works for the new docent class which I also did for the first two weeks in 2014. In the meantime I found a part time job at a newly opened rock climbing gym in Santa Clarita where I am coaching the Youth Climbing team.

I have decided to move on and I have accepted a full time position at a local medical company in Santa Clarita, so there is unfortunately no time to continue with the new docent class as well as leading school groups on their hikes during the week.

I certainly will miss this part of my life together with all the fun hikes I had with some of the great people from Placerita. But I am not leaving the state or country so I have planned to be at any dinner party we will have or assist at any event which will fall on a weekend. I will still continue my hiking, rock climbing and other outdoor activities since this is what I love to do. Lastly, I would like to use this opportunity to give a super big Thank you to the whole PCNCA; this is a fantastic group with a great mission and very special people.



### **So much is Happening!**

Once you pass the door from Placerita Nature Center's front patio, you enter a courtyard where many changes are going to take place. The mews that are there (we do not use the term "cages") are going to be twice the size with a smaller mew in between for a kestrel. They all will have a more natural look with trees and pea gravel on the floor. They will have a drainage system so they can be hosed down daily.

When you come in, the area on your left will be occupied by a large enclosure; it is not yet certain if it will be a flight area or a community enclosure with different birds but it will have the same natural look.

The tortoise habitat is going to get a new look with wrought iron on the side so the tortoises can look through and they will have a roof to protect them.

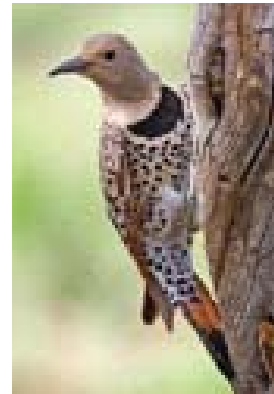
There is a room toward the back, on the right, with a door which will be the bird observation deck furnished with 2 telescopes, one of which will be for people with disabilities. A large mammal enclosure will be there, maybe for a raccoon, and we will also have an aquarium display.

Many exciting projects are in the works and they are all being done under Dave Stives' supervision so that all the rules from the Department of Fish and Game will be respected.

## The Northern Flicker

by Bob Fischer

The Northern Flicker is one of my favorite birds. It is a large woodpecker that has markings so striking that getting a close up look is especially thrilling. Although it lives year round in our part of California, it is not abundant and many weeks may go by between sightings. On my last sighting in early November there were three together at the top of a large leafless tree making viewing very easy. But they were not very active. They may have been resting from a night of migrating. The Northern Flicker is one of the few North American woodpeckers that is strongly migratory. Flickers in the northern parts of their range in Alaska and Canada, move south for the winter, although a few individuals often stay rather far north. The flickers we see in the west are “Red-shafted” since the underside of their wing feathers is red. In the eastern states and the far north the underside of the wings is yellow and they are called “Yellow-shafted” Flickers. These northern Yellow-shafted Flickers migrate to the Midwest and eastern U. S. in cold weather. Oddly, the Northern Flicker is the only woodpecker species without “woodpecker” in its name.



On walks, don't be surprised if you scare one up from the ground. It's not where you'd expect to find a woodpecker, but flickers eat mainly ants, digging for them with their unusual, slightly curved bill and long barbed tongue. When they fly up you'll see a flash of red color in the wings and a bright white flash on the rump.

The red-shafted and yellow-shafted forms of the Northern Flicker formerly were considered different species. The two forms hybridize extensively in a wide zone from Alaska to the panhandle of Texas. A hybrid often has some traits from each of the two forms and some traits that are intermediate between them. The Red-shafted Flicker also hybridizes with the Gilded Flicker found in southern Arizona and Mexico. Like most woodpeckers, Northern Flickers drum on objects as a form of communication and territory defense. In such cases, the object is to make as loud a noise as possible, and that's why woodpeckers sometimes drum on metal objects. One Northern Flicker in Wyoming could be heard drumming on an abandoned tractor from a half-mile away.

Look for Northern Flickers in woodlands, forest edges, and open fields with scattered trees, as well as city parks and suburbs. In the western mountains they occur in most forest types, including burned forests, all the way up to the tree line. You can also find them in wet areas such as streamside woods, flooded swamps and marsh edges.

Northern Flickers eat mainly insects, especially ants and beetles that they gather from the ground. Flickers often go after ants underground (where the nutritious larvae live), hammering at the soil the way other woodpeckers drill into wood. They've been seen breaking into cow patties to eat insects living within. Their tongues can dart out 2 inches beyond the end of the bill to snare prey.

Other invertebrates eaten include flies, butterflies, moths, and snails. Flickers also eat berries and seeds, especially in winter, including poison oak and ivy, dogwood, sumac, wild cherry and grape, bayberries, hackberries, and elderberries, and sunflower and thistle seeds.

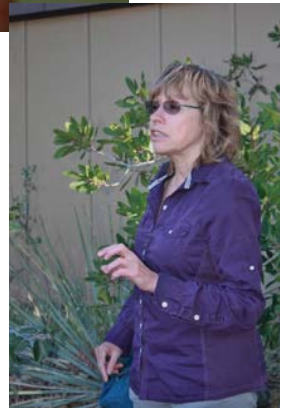
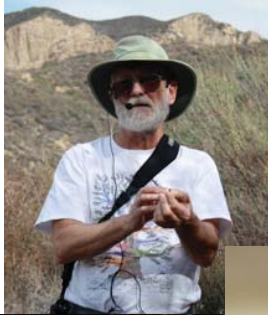
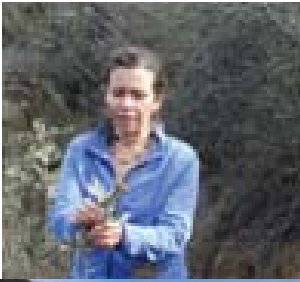
Flickers lay 5 to 8 eggs in a nest in a cavity they carve in a dead or diseased tree from 20 to 100 feet above ground. Both sexes help with nest excavation. The entrance hole is about 3 inches in diameter, and the cavity is 13-16 inches deep. The cavity widens at bottom to make room for eggs and the incubating adult. Inside, the cavity is bare except for a bed of wood chips for the eggs and chicks to rest on. Both male and female incubate the eggs which hatch in 11 - 13 days. Once nestlings are about 17 days old, they begin clinging to the cavity wall rather than lying on the floor. The young are ready to fly in about 25 days. Unlike many woodpeckers, flickers often reuse cavities that they or another species excavated in a previous year. Northern Flickers have been known to nest in old burrows of Belted Kingfishers or Bank Swallows.

Northern Flickers don't act like typical woodpeckers. They mainly forage on the ground, sometimes among sparrows and blackbirds. When flushed, flickers often perch erect on thin horizontal branches rather than hitching up or around a tree trunk. Flickers do fly like most woodpeckers do, rising and falling smoothly as they intersperse periods of flapping with gliding. Early in spring and summer, rivals may face off in a display sometimes called a “fencing duel,” while a prospective mate looks on. Two birds face each other on a branch, bills pointed upward, and bob their heads in time while drawing a loop or figure-eight pattern in the air, often giving rhythmic wicka calls at the same time.

*Credits: Cornell Lab of Ornithology., USGS Patuxent Bird Identification InfoCenter., Wikipedia., National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America,*



# Docent Training 2014



## The Grey Fox, a Survivor



Our supervisor Chris Mowry heard some screeching noise outside the office. Two grey foxes were fighting but by the time he came back with his camera, they were gone. The grey fox is an animal that is plentiful, not endangered, but we rarely see it. Why is that? First of all, it is crepuscular which means that it comes out around sunset and sunrise so you might not be on the trail at that time of day. It can also be nocturnal.

It is very interesting to learn it can climb trees, so even if you hear some noise, you might not think about looking up and you will miss it. It is the only animal in the dog family that can climb a tree. It climbs by grabbing the trunk with its forepaws and scrambling up with the long claws on its hind feet. Once it reaches the tree canopy, it jumps from branch to branch. It can also wait for prey sitting in the tree. It comes down the tree by descending slowly backward the same way your cat would do it.

I find the term “grey fox” a little misleading because there is a strong reddish cast to its coat. What we call “the red fox” is more prevalent on the East coast and there is one easy characteristic that pinpoints the difference right away: The red fox has black stockings, the grey fox does not. At one time, the grey fox was the most common fox in the East and can still be found there, but the red fox has taken better advantage of the human development of the land where agricultural areas are now prevalent. The grey fox can be found from Southern Canada to the Northern part of South America (Venezuela and Columbia). It is not found in the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains or eastern Central America.

Some of you might have seen the smaller Channel Islands fox (*Urocyon littoralis*) on the islands off Ventura. It is assumed that a grey fox reached one of the Islands a long time ago, and the breed took a different evolutionary path in order to survive the harsher living conditions on the islands. All the same, they are both members of the genus *Urocyon*, which is the most primitive of the living canids.

They appeared 3.6 million years ago. Other animals that were around at this time were the giant sloth, the elephant-like *Cuvieronius*, a large headed llama and the early small horses... which have all disappeared. But the little grey fox is still around and doing very well, thank you. Scientists found they all lived in the same time period when they discovered fossil evidence on a ranch site on Graham County, Arizona. They must have had a joyful day when they made this discovery!

Even more extraordinary, the grey fox migrated to the north of the United States in association with the Medieval Climate Anomaly warming trend. Around 1000AD the Vikings did some settlement in Greenland but the warming trend was 200 to 300 hundred years later, so how did the grey fox come here? Did they come from Russia to Alaska? Your guess is as good as mine, but it is very intriguing.

Genetically, after chromosome testing, it was shown that the grey fox is also associated with 2 ancient lines: the East Asian Raccoon dog and the African Bat-eared fox. When I read things like this my imagination goes wild, and I try to imagine those trips and connections in faraway lands a long time ago.

I will stop dreaming about all those unanswered questions and will cover a few things we know for sure about the grey fox.

Male and female look the same, but the female is somewhat smaller. A black stripe runs along the bushy tail that ends in a black tip. They have a black muzzle and look like a small dog, with short and powerful legs. Adults weight between 7 and 11 pounds. They are from the dog family and they mark their territory with their feces and urine.

You might never see a grey fox on the trail, and you might rarely see a coyote, but you can be sure that you will see plenty of coyote scat. The fox feces are smaller and sometimes glossy depending on the last food they have eaten. They are less plentiful than the coyote scat, but once you have identified one, you will be able to recognize it again. Google grey fox scat; you can look at photos that will do a better job than my most exact description! Very often you will not see the animals, but being able to identify scat is an art that can tell you who came by when you were not watching.

Females become mature when they are one year old and the breeding season starts in February until March. The father will take care of the female and bring back food to feed his family, the females stay with the pups. They have from one to seven pups and when the pups are 3 months old, they can start hunting with the parents. The family lives together until the fall, then the kits are sexually mature and become independent of the parents. Grey fox are solitary during the winter. Their life span is 6 years in the wild and 12 years in captivity.

They are omnivores, so can eat many different foods: berries, nuts, insects, rabbits and they are useful to the environment because they eat many rodents. The grey fox will bury his food if he has a surplus, and will mark the spot with urine so he can find it later on. In area of dry chaparral like Zion National park in Utah, the grey fox survives just fine by being insectivorous and herbivorous so it can be resourceful. Even in different climates, fruits and berries are important parts of their diet.

The main predator of the adult grey fox, I am sorry to say, is man. But the pups must hide from hawks, eagles, owls, bobcats, coyotes and dogs.

A grey fox likes to sun itself up in a tree, sleep in a hollow tree or an abandoned burrow. May be you have walked past his hidden place without knowing it, but I am happy to report that they are doing fine, their population remains constant and is not threatened. I wish them long and happy lives.





**A Trip with Lanita**

Lanita put out a sign-up sheet to go to Disney ranch and it was filled up the same morning. It was very exciting to go on the other side of the fence to pay a visit to our neighbors and check out the Disney property. It is a rare chance so everybody who was at the center wanted to go. Only a small group is allowed but we are going to ask if we can come back soon. Thank you so much Lanita Algeyer for giving us this opportunity to go “next door” to take a peek at the very interesting large property from Disney that we usually only see from Placerita Canyon Road.



**Ancient Enterprises**

How the Prehistoric Tataviam Survived and Thrived in an Ancient Landscape

This very interesting lecture was given by Dr. Laurie Solis on February 16 at Placerita. She is an archeologist and Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at College of the Canyon. She has 15 years of experience as an archaeologist working for large environmental firms. She has conducted numerous investigations and excavations on Tataviam sites, as well as hundreds of other sites throughout the Great basin. In addition, Dr. Solis has worked with several California Indian Tribes and she is the author of the book “Tataviam: People who face the sun” which is the only book ever published on this local Native American group.



The lecture did cover archaeological evidence as well as ethnographic evidence. Tataviam artifacts, such as manos, metates, projectile points and scrapers were shown and children were able to participate in hands-on activities.

The room was full and much interest was shown. We were delighted to have the lecture taped by Leon Worden from Santa Clarita Valley News who is planning to have the segment shown on the local television station.

The DVD will be kept at Placerita Canyon Nature Center for future reference and nature Education.

**Blooms of the Season**

It’s the most wonderful time of the year—except for Christmas of course! Wildflowers are blooming and it is all so lovely. So take a hike and see what is out there. Below are some of the beauties that are currently blooming in the park.

*Photos by Ron Kraus*



Chaparral currant



Wild cucumber



Hairy ceanothus



Wild peony



Golden currant



## Heritage Trail and Braille Trail

Let me start with a past history. More than 30 years ago, the Heritage Trail was a little hiking trail and the docents saw the need to have a few fund-raisers and approached larger companies for some help to have the trail cemented to help people with walking difficulties to have access to the Walker cabin and the Oak of the Golden Dream.

We did not have too many users in wheel chairs but we had many enthusiastic young mothers with strollers who showed up. We even formed a “Mommy and Baby” group. They would meet once a month with a docent who would give them a little talk on the trail. In 1988, docents David and Joycelyn Turner, saw the need for a water fountain on the trail and paid for it.

This is what happened in the past.

Now, this is what is going to happen in the future: part of the trail going from the crossing after the Walker cabin to the Oak of the Golden Dream is going to become a Braille Trail. At the start of the trail, there will be a staging area with a map in relief of the trail where blind people will be able to feel with their hand what the trail looks like to be able to better navigate.

Signage about plants and the Oak of the Golden Dream will be done in braille. There will be a reproduction of the Oak of the Golden dream as a maquette so again blind people will be able to get a feel of the tree by touching it.

A special curb will be constructed along the trail so somebody with a cane, will be able to feel the sides of the trail in both directions. People who are close to losing their sight, plants with strong smell and bright colors when in bloom will be planted.

We have been very lucky to have the help of a state park interpreter who is legally blind coming to Placerita to give us suggestions and instructions so that our plans will be adequate. No other parks have tried to have such a comprehensive trail so we are very proud of this project.

However, we have a few problems that need to be addressed and those are going to be expensive. When the trail was done more than 30 years ago, ADA rules did not exist. We need to do some changes to be ADA compliant.

The grade of the slope going to the tunnel is too steep for a wheel chair so that needs to be regraded. Also we sometimes get mud slides coming from Placerita Canyon Road, just before the downhill slope. Mud on top of cement is slippery so this danger needs to be prevented. We are plugging along trying to find solutions to those different problems but it will be a trail to be proud of when all is completed.

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## Nature Series Presented the California Condor

Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel



The Placerita Nature Center Associates and the Community Hiking Club combined their efforts to present an educational program about Condors in January. The program was attended by nearly 150 individuals, including several Boy Scout Troupes. After the presentation, the Boy Scouts, parents, and other interested individuals attended a micro-trash clean up on Bear Divide, near Placerita. Nearly 17 full bags of trash, glass, and metal bits were recovered and removed from the delicate habitat.

Sixty years ago, the last condors left Santa Clarita. In 2013, a mated pair returned to a cleaner forest, with better habitat, looking forward to rearing the first chick in the area in decades. It is imperative that everyone visiting the Angeles National Forest, and the Los Padres Forest be diligent in packing out any trash that they bring in, or see that others may have left behind.

The California Condor is the largest bird soaring high above Western North America. They have been known to soar 150 miles a day in search of food. So, it would not be uncommon to see them at the Grand Canyon one week, and in Santa Clarita the next. However, most of our local condors merely soar from the Sespe Wilderness to Santa Clarita and back.

An adult condor’s wingspan can be 10’ across, and they can weigh between 18-31 lbs. They can eat 3-4 lbs of meat at a sitting, and they eat only carrion. While they do not have a good sense of smell, they do have incredible eyesight, and this is how they find their sources of food.

A condor can soar 15,000 feet high. Since they almost never flap their wings, they are often mistaken for planes up above. But they are able to zero in on a carcass at that height, and are also attracted to the glitter of micro-trash. Micro-trash, which contains bits of glass, metal objects such as pull tabs and bottle caps, can kill a condor and condor chicks. In addition to micro-trash, lead pellets and bullets when ingested can kill them. High tension are also dangerous to their survival.

Condors used to inhabit the entire United States, British Columbia, and Baja California. When they were brought into captivity for a specialized breeding program, there were only 22 condors left. Out of these, there were 3 separate clans. The biologists in charge of the

programs have had fantastic success, and there are now 400 condors in both the breeding facilities and flying free in California, Arizona, and Baja. Kudos to the biologists who have worked so very hard to return this amazing species from the brink of extinction. I encourage everyone to visit the Los Angeles Zoo, The San Diego Zoo or Hopper Canyon to view condors in captivity. And, if you visit the forests, remember, it only takes one little piece of micro-trash to kill or maim one of these critically endangered birds. Their fight is not yet over. You can help.





### **Class of 2014**

These students have been attending classes, learning and showing great interest. Many of them still have to do some audits on the trails, do their report on a topic pertinent to the Placerita area and pass the exam. To do so they will have to review carefully their notes to be ready for the big day.

A graduation ceremony will take place on March 29 followed by a dinner where they will be recognized. Each docent who has completed the requirements will receive a diploma, their name tag and will become an official docent.

We are very pleased to have welcomed at the Placerita training 2 docents who will be active at Vasquez Rocks. The basic training was provided at Placerita and they will have received further education to learn the fauna, flora and geology so specific to that area.

We are proud to be able to work hand in hand with our neighbor Nature Center. We are impressed by the class of 2014, their commitment, their enthusiasm and their desire to learn.

I am proud to introduce the class of 2014:

Bill Algeyer  
Stephen Beecher  
Kim Beecher  
Mara Cohen  
Roxanne Correa

Christy Cregut  
Michelle Dearing  
Dan Duncan  
Dov Gertzweig  
Jennifer Glasso

Doug Holm  
Marilyn Matlen  
Jackie Mayfield  
Chris Miller  
RuthAnne Murthy

Claudette Newman  
Jo Ellen Rismanchi  
Mona Ruberry  
Veronica Solache  
Bruce Wahl  
Darrell Wanner





*This California Sister knows that it also needs various salts as well as water. Since nectar does not have any salt, it stops for a quick drink on a local sweaty hiker.*

## Essential but NOT Sufficient Dr. Monarch

It is a typical summer day in Santa Clarita. The sun is shining, the thermometer is hovering in the low 90's and you decide that you are going to take a hike on one of the trails at Placerita Canyon. Even though you start early before the sun has risen high in the sky, the day quickly heats up and you are sweating profusely. It has been estimated that in severe heat and with marked physical exertion, a person can lose as much as 1 ½ quarts of water in an hour. But you are prepared. You remembered to bring your hat, you lathered up with suntan lotion with a SPF of at least 30 if not higher and you are wearing sturdy shoes for although many of the trails are relatively flat, they are still uneven and there are some dips and rises. Most

importantly, you brought water. Is this sufficient?

The answer is NO, this may be essential but it is not sufficient! When you sweat, your body loses more than just water. It also loses electrolytes – a fancy medical term for various chemicals or salts that are normally found in the body and are essential for the function of our body. Some of these electrolytes include sodium and chloride, the two major ingredients in salt. There is also potassium and magnesium as well as a few others. If you don't also replace the electrolytes that are lost in the sweat, the water that you drink will dilute the remaining electrolytes in your body contributing to weakness, fatigue and muscle cramps both at the time as well as later in the day. It may also contribute to fainting or nearly fainting despite your reliable drinking water.

Gatorade was originally developed by the University of Florida (the Gators) for their athletic teams to replace both the water and electrolytes that are lost during both practice as well as the actual athletic competition. Since then it has been commercialized with added flavoring and colors to appeal to the mass market. There are a number of similar products on the market today. On a personal level, I dislike "Gatorade" straight so would dilute it 50:50 with water and bring that. But if you are going on a protracted trip and will not have access to stores, I have found something that I like even better. These are electrolyte tablets that come 12 to a tube and can also be broken in half to make it easier to add to a water bottle. The one that I am familiar with is manufactured by Camelbak™ and can be purchased at Sports Chalet although I have not researched other similar products or stores.

Animals like deer go to salt licks. Even the lowly butterfly with a brain the size of a pin-head if not smaller will look for salts since these are not found in nectar in any sufficient concentration. So please, when you are planning an outing to either Placerita Canyon or any other location in the world, in addition to taking sufficient fluids (water), please remember to take your electrolytes either as a premixed drink or in the form of tablets that can be added to your water. The combination of WATER and ELECTROLYTES is both essential and sufficient. While the electrolyte tablets are unpalatable by themselves, water is not but water alone is NOT sufficient.

**Disclaimer:** Dr. Monarch is Paul A. Levine MD, Docent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center who in his other life is Professor of Medicine at Loma Linda University School of Medicine. The



Package of electrolyte tablets to be added to water

Dr. Monarch will be presenting "Butterflies of Placerita" on Sunday, April 27 at 2pm in the classroom at Placerita as a part of the on-going Nature Education program. Come join us.



### Something about Mari

I grew up in Southern California's Race Track country with a family that adored and supported pets and nature. Our house was on one and a half acres that appeared to all my friends as a smaller version of the Arboretum. We had large Himalayan Pines and plenty of heavy shrubs in which to discover bugs and lizards.

My parents always encouraged me to explore nature at its fullest. One of my fondest memories is of my father who would include me in growing his Victory Garden every year. I remember one year while planting, I had my first encounter with the neighbor's geese hissing through the fence – they fascinated me. Although they were off limits, it was always a treat to be allowed to climb another fence to visit the neighbor's aviary full of parakeets and finches.

We had a large cemented reservoir, built for orange groves years before. I'll never forget one of my favorite pastimes -- going into the bottom of the "pond" full of rain-water and catching toads.

I lived in the Bay Area during my college years. Every chance I got, I found myself driving up to Marin County along the coast, or to Muir Woods to hike and absorb the spectacular gifts of nature. Always a nature lover, and of course an animal lover as well, I have looked for every opportunity to enjoy what is natural and learn from it.

In August 2012, I retired and the following January, I saw the opportunity of a lifetime, to take the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Docent/Naturalist classes. Being part of Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Vasquez Rocks Natural Area is the best retirement present I could have given myself. There is so much to absorb. Nature is never ending. Every walk or hike, every time I sit and just listen, I learn more and more – and the best part is that no one has to say a word.

Between the two centers, I keep very busy. My fellow docents and the county staff from both parks are like family. Since I graduated from the classes, I lead hikes with school children, work in the Gift Shop, help create trail maps, I'm a member of the PCNCA Board of Directors, was Chairman of the PCNCA Holiday Craft Faire in 2013 and will gladly do it again. I maintain the Rattler's distribution, and this year I helped with the administration of the new 2014 Docent/Naturalist classes. It's so awesome to see the eagerness in the new faces. At Vasquez Rocks I'm the Editor of Rock Talk, I Chaired the first Community Day in 2013 and will Chair it again in 2014. My latest project is to Chair a new program that we are very excited about for the VRNCA - creating our own Docent/Naturalist Program that will begin in April 2014.

Getting involved with all of the wonderful people that make up these organizations is such a pleasure. And in between doing all of this, I still get to take walks in some of the most breathtaking places in California.

Nature is a beautiful gift!



## 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:

**Nick Valenzuela** - Squirt, the Western Pond Turtle

**Susan J. Mayhew** - Turbo, the Desert Tortoise

**Tyler and Ryan Molina** - Sandy, the Alligator Lizard

**Larry and Nancy Nikolai** - Lady, the Red-tailed Hawk, Orion, the Great Horned Owl, Daisy, the Opossum, Apollo, the Turkey Vulture, Cricket, the American Kestrel, and Sandy, the Alligator Lizard

**Felix Grossman and Felix Ventures** -- Orion, the Great Horned Owl (in honor of Frank Hoffman), Catori, the Barn Owl, and Cricket, the American Kestrel

Many thanks to all of you for your generous support!

(This is the second year of support from Nick, and Sue has adopted an animal every year since 2010. Larry and Nancy have generously supported this program since 2006 when it began!)



## 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