



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.

September/October 2014



Hello Nature Friends,

Before we knew it, summer came to an end and fall is around the corner. It was a hot summer and we are suffering from a severe drought. For the first time in its history Santa Clarita Valley is on water restriction with alternated dates when we can water our yards. The park is very dry also however you can see the chaparral plants are very well adapted to this weather and berries have started to appear on many bushes. May be you can take a hike on



the hills and see which plants could adjust in your backyard using less water. Late fall is a good time for planting in our area.

In other news Jim and Diane Southwell got an exciting preview of the displays that will be coming in December to our new Interpretive Center. The old exhibits were dated and broken in our old museum. The new exhibits will explain and interpret the various ecosystems found at Placerita Canyon Natural Area, hence the name "Interpretive Center." This is the result of years of work, designs, and input by committees, research, design revisions, and the search for funds. It will be very satisfying to see all the displays being installed. It is going



to bring Placerita once again to the top of your list of "destinations to visit" because it will be very interesting and informative; a new place to bring your children to better understand their school programs. Although we saw only pictures the displays look very realistic and taxidermy animals will complete the exhibit.

Enjoy the new season, new colors are starting to appear on the foliage. Have a great fall!



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.

Junior Volunteer of the Year: Toby Bazan

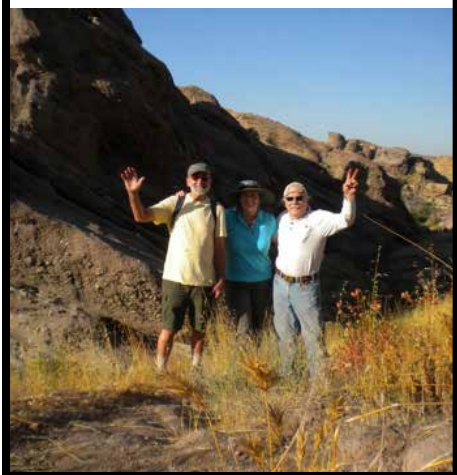
We are happy to recognize Toby Bazan. He has proven to be a very reliable young man who is at the center very faithfully every week. He was selected by the county employees who have been able to appreciate his efforts and see him work. He has another paying job as park attendant at Magic Mountain but he organizes his schedule to still be able to volunteer at the center. Since his childhood, plants and trees have been a real passion for him and he is always ready to share this love and the information he knows. Thank you Toby for all your time helping the center to be a better place.



Bill Sutton

We were all very sad and surprised to hear that Bill Sutton, from the class of 2012, passed away on May 3rd at his home with his friends and family by his side. He will always be remembered for his enthusiasm and love of nature and children who came to our park to discover its treasures.

Bill had been diagnosed with liver cancer in November 2012 after contracting hepatitis C as a young man in the Navy but he defied the odds by staying energetic and healthy many years beyond what was predicted. We are honored to have gotten to know Bill at Placerita, he was truly a gentleman in the best sense of the term with a gentle sense of humor and a great human being. Our deepest condolences to his wife Sue, also a docent at Placerita.



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
Newhall, CA 91321-3213



Another Trip with Lanita;
Lanita put together a great outing on August 11 with 15 docents from the Nature Center. They went to visit the Wildlife Learning Center in Sylmar; many went to lunch after that and had a great time.

At the Wildlife Learning center, biologists teach the public about life sciences and the environment. It is a small zoo where you can observe a great variety of animals. Throughout the afternoon, friendly biologists gave training talks on the hour and facilitated close up interaction with various critters.

It was interesting to find out that Deb Clem did some rehab work there, years ago. Thank you Lanita for another interesting trip.



FALL/WINTER PROGRAMS

- FAMILY NATURE WALK** Every Saturday from 11 to noon.
An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.
- ANIMAL PRESENTATION** Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.
See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.
- BIRD WALK** Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.
- BIRD WALK, CASTAIC** The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at **Castaic Lake Recreation Area** on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.
- BLOOMS OF THE SEASON** Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.
- COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB** A non-profit organization that invites all members of the SCV and community at large to: Join weekly planned hikes; Attend monthly nature series educational presentations; Participate in community outreach programs such as Calif Condor micro-trash clean-ups and maintenance of trails and native garden; Partner with groups such as Boys and Girls Club to introduce youth to nature. For more information, go to the website at communityhikingclub.org
- NATURE EDUCATION** An exciting new program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please contact the center at 661.259.7721 to verify.
Sunday, September 21 at 2pm- Bees and Pollinators - presenter: to be announced
Sunday October 19 at 2pm-Mountain Lions by the Mountain Lion Foundation
Sunday November 16 at 2pm- Introduction to Birding by Judy Bass
- SPECIAL EVENT** Annual NCA Recognition Event on Saturday, September 6 at 9.00am (see article)

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

How did this Obsession Begin?

Sue Wallander

Every day I boil up one and one-half gallons of nectar for our resident hummingbirds. Why did I ever get involved in this messy, sticky business?

A few years back, a female hummingbird built her nest in a rose bush in the front yard. It was waist high and about 2 feet from a perch where our cat sunned himself in the afternoon. I figured that she must be a new mom and might need some help. We put the cat indoors and set out a feeder so she didn't have to go far for food.

She laid one egg and 2 weeks later the baby hatched. Three weeks after that her one baby was off and flying. We would see mom and baby occasionally after that. She evidently fed it for a short time after fledging.

You could tell the baby because of it's begging behavior. It flapped it's wings at mom.

We were lucky to buy a good feeder. There are so many bad ones out there. The one we bought and now continue to buy are from a company called "First Nature". The feeder is easy to thoroughly clean because it comes apart. The bottle has a wide mouth and is either 16 or 32 ounces. The 2 bottom parts look like 2 saucers which screw together and the bottle screws into them. I don't need a special brush to clean them. The First Nature Feeders have 10 ports so 10 birds at a time can feed.

Right now in July and August I must fill each 32 ounce container every day. You can almost see the liquid go down as they lick up the nectar. During the winter and spring there are not as many birds as a lot of them migrate. I might only fill the container half full but I make sure to wash them every third day so mold doesn't develop.

Occasionally an aggressive male will impale himself in a screen. I pull them straight back and hold them for a moment before releasing them. It's amazing how light they are. Even the largest Anna's doesn't weigh an ounce. They weigh less than a nickel.

In March, we are looking forward to visiting Ramsey Canyon near Tucson, Arizona. Our hummingbirds that migrate spend time there before heading back in April or May. I have a first cousin that helps with banding the birds in that area. It has been on my bucket list.



Chris Miller and Bill Webber at the Sylmar Library Summer Reading Program

Animal Outreaches of Placerita

Heidi Webber

PCNCA has always had, as part of their core program, schools coming to the nature center for a fun and educational day. This is an extremely popular program with the schools in the Los Angeles, Santa Clarita and Antelope Valley.

For various reasons, sometimes the school is unable to come to us, so we go to the school! We also make appearances at community events such as the Sheriff's Chili Cook-off and BBQ Cook-off, River Rally, and Emergency Expo, which is part of our Strategic Plan, promoting Placerita.

Bill and I have been quite fortunate in that we have been able to develop a great team to help or even do the outreach for us if we are unavailable. In 2013 we reached over 7500 people.

If we have been invited to a school or other organization, we take the raptors, snakes and spiders along with static displays such as the pelts and skulls.

When we first started doing this about 17 years ago, public was allowed to touch, very gently, the snakes and opossum or skunk if one was available. Over the years, fish and game has restricted us to where none of the animals are allowed to be touched. This last summer we also lost the rattlesnake; I imagine it was felt that it was too much of a liability in case one got loose. These common-sense restrictions are

one reason why I purchased pelts because the children especially, need to be able to touch something!

So that is the boring version of what we do. The fun part is the kids! And the younger they are, the more charming they can be.

We have had little girls tearfully ask where such-and-such's mommy is. Immediately all the other little girls get teary-eyed until we explain that mommy and daddy live happy lives in the wild. Once, Bill was on his knees with the tortoise, but all the little boys were interested in was the tread pattern of the soles of his shoes! Bill has had to stop asking the younger grades how many vertebra a giraffe has (in comparing the head-turning ability of an owl) and all of a sudden, the subject is on giraffes and elephants.

Yes, we adhere to Fish and Game rules and regulations—in fact, we carry a current copy of our permits at all times—but we always end up having so much fun educating a whole new generation to the joys of nature.

In closing, if any of the docents would like to join us, let me know. You don't have to be cleared to handle as there are a lot of other things you can do while the rest of us are giving the presentation.

Big Event at the Ford Theater

Russ Kimura



As part of Ford Theaters' Big World Fun Summer Series 2014, Placerita participated in their July 12 event. We provided an hour-long presentation before the show, which featured Chinese dance and music by the Shin Dance Company. Our role was to provide five animal presentations and an art craft.

Approximately 300 Ford Theater patrons who came to see the Chinese Dance Company were greeted by Placerita Canyon Nature Center staff, Deane Dana Friendship Park staff and the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates.

Russ Kimura was the organizer and helped Deb Walt with the plant pressing craft. William Mercado, Brian Garcia and Bill Kahl were the snake handlers. Chris Sapovchak, Linda Ioeberger and Sandy Balaram were in charge of the birds, starring Tid-Bit the American kestrel, Catori the Barn owl and Orion the Great-horned owl.

The craft activity is a plant printing technique using a traditional Japanese form of art called "Gyotaku" which means fish printing.

The guests of this Ford Theater presentation enjoyed a free animal show and got to participate in doing this hands-on Japanese art.

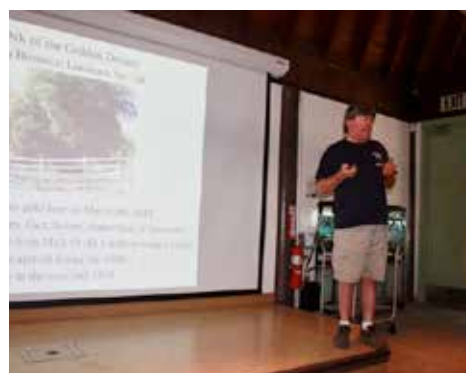
Photos by Gennia Cui, the Future Collective.



Nature Education Program June 8th History of Placerita Canyon

by Ron Kraus.

Nicely done Ron. He was filmed by SCVNews by Leon Worden himself. Ron is officially a star! We found out many new facts about the history of Placerita Canyon and we also did a lot of review. It is always so important to brush up on all those facts to make sure it is all accurate.



New Construction on the Way

If you have not been at the center for a while, you will be surprised when you come to visit. Construction has started on the patio. What was the cause of the delay? Nests, nests everywhere! Spring is nesting season and as soon as one nest was empty for a few hours, another bunch of eggs was laid in the same nest. What can you do but wait for the next babies to take flight? Finally we reached the day where all the nests were empty and work could begin. Since then, much has been accomplished and we can see daily changes.

Before anything can be done in the museum space, the floor needs to be completely removed. A wood sub floor had been installed many years ago and it collapsed under the concrete layers. That needs to be removed for a fresh start to install linoleum. All the present exhibits need to be removed for one week from the area for this to happen.

At the amphitheater you will notice that all the benches have been repainted and that was done as an Eagle Scout project. However, those benches have to be securely bolted in place to rebuild the rows. PCNCA will take care of the cost using Frank McDaniel Memorial funds. Frank would have been pleased and it is very fitting as Frank's main interest at Placerita was helping and managing the Eagle Scout projects for many years.



Volunteer of the Year: Lanita Algeyer

This is the highest distinction of the year given to a docent and it is done by a board vote to select the best among many extremely qualified docents. Lanita, we are proud that you are receiving this award for 2014 and the many jobs that you do at Placerita are of crucial importance to keep the Nature Center running smoothly. You do all of this quietly and gently and we would not notice apart from your emails sending us the school schedules on a regular basis.

I was afraid we'd forget some of the jobs that Lanita does so I interviewed her. Tell us what you do Lanita:

- I book field trips for the schools and I schedule docents to cover those dates.
- I helped to set up the gift shop according to the new county standards on weekends. I took the training to learn how to operate the cash register and established a class to train other people.
- I give awards for docents who have shown initiative at the center or for outstanding services during the different dinners throughout the year.
- I put together fieldtrips for the docents a least every other month and I try to get good deals on prices such as getting a campground for free if we volunteer.
- I do whatever is needed.

In addition to all this, she is also the Corresponding Secretary for NCA. Thank you, thank you so much. Without all you do and especially scheduling the docents to cover the school trips and your communications with the schools, our most important program would be non existent.



Goodbye Heidi, Hello Rick

Heidi Webber became the treasurer 18 years ago. It was her first time at the Nature Center and her first day of Docent Training. It was also the day of the PCNCA board meeting and she was passing by at the end of the meeting when she was told "You have an honest face. Would you like to be our treasurer?"

Taken by surprise, she accepted and she was voted new treasurer on the spot. You have to remember we were a much smaller organization at the time, but we were wise enough to notice a great person when we saw one!

Heidi, you have done a fantastic job for 18 years, you have seen the finances from PCNCA going very low and climbing up again but through it all, you kept all our accounts scrupulously in order. Thank you for keeping our books for 18 years.

Rick Brammer has very kindly accepted to be our new treasurer. He has done this professionally so we know we are in good hands. Thank you so much Rick for taking such a responsibility, we are all very grateful.



A Trip with Jim Southwell

On August 13, a group of docents went to the Hollywood Bowl for a James Brown Celebration. Some of band members were the original members who helped created that "Soul Power" sound. We had a lot of fun and danced in our seats under the stars in a pleasant summer LA night.

We all had a picnic before the show and Sue Wallander introduced us to Cesar Soto. Sue was Cesar's 3rd grade teacher and he came with his niece Maya. Pretty cool to see Cesar and his 3rd grade teacher toasting a glass of wine together after all those years!

Thanks Jim for organizing such a fun trip. Jim Southwell is President from Placerita Canyon Nature Center but his favorite motto is "If we are not having fun, we are not doing it right" and this evening lived up to our expectations!



Open House by Deb Clem

I want to personally thank all who participated in the Placerita Nature Center Open House. It was a huge success thanks to the great team of volunteers and staff. There was a nice calm and constant flow of attendees. I loved watching the MAGIC happen.

Just a few samples....

- The musicians I scheduled, Tom as our regular and Dov brought a friend, merged and created beautiful music that infused throughout the patio.
- Jill decided to join the kid's area in the observation deck. It was cozy and busy little bees working hard at creating their works of art thanks to Andi's gift of craft ideas.
- Irene had to make a huge shift to move to out back of the patio but it didn't stop her in providing the best Treasure hunt!
- Marilyn was in her element sharing and reading books to kids.
- Teresa, Jack, and helpers created a great spread for the rummage sale and raffle.
- Mara and Jackie took full initiative to get information and greeted the attendees with zest and enthusiasm setting the stage for a great experience.



Thanks for those who stepped up to the plate at Walker cabin, the bean bag toss and archaeological dig.

There was nothing for me to "manage" once the structure was set. The magic was each one of you that gave your special perspective and gifts.

I want to give extra thanks and praise to Roxanne for being there Friday to help set up and move tables with me as well as being the first volunteer to help in the morning then stay all day!

These things are what make the magic happen. I am so GRATEFUL and honored for being a part of such a team.



Recognition Event

All the docents and volunteers from Placerita Canyon Nature Center are invited to join the other members from NCA Nature Centers to attend the Annual NCA Recognition Event to be held at Eaton canyon on Saturday, September 6, 2014. Breakfast and social hour at 9.00 am and recognition at 10.00am.

If you have been a docent for two calendar years, you will be receiving a certificate of recognition for your service at Placerita (docent class of 2012.) If you have been a docent for one calendar year, you will be receiving a certificate of recognition for your service also (docent class of 2013.) All new graduating docents from the class of 2014 will also be recognized for their completion of the docent training. There will also be awards for those completing five year, ten year, fifteen years and twenty-five years. So lets all get out to celebrate the recognition of all those great docents.

Eaton Canyon Nature Center
1750 N. Altadena Drive
Pasadena, CA 91107

The list of first and second year docents getting recognition is too long to enter here, congratulations to all but I will only enter the "older" docents:

Five years: Debbra Barroso, Sima Berstein, Linette Brammer, Rick Brammer, Sue Mayhew, Jim Owens, Norm Schweitzer.

Ten Years: Dianne Henry, Janet Kubler, Sue Wallander.

Fifteen Years: Nikki Dail, Roger McClure

Twenty-five years: Donna Fagan

Thanks to all of you for your dedication to Placerita Canyon Nature Center, we are deeply grateful for your help making Placerita a better place.



Progress Report on the Museum Displays

By Jim Southwell

To my great pleasure, I visited Delphi headquarters in Alameda with County Parks representatives to view the status of the exhibits. They are very impressive even in their unfinished state which is about 90% complete. Exhibit animals are now the long lead items to complete each exhibit, but on schedule for a December installation.

As you know, those displays will be part of our new interpretative center and classroom.

It was exciting to see what they have done with the displays and how they are coming along. For example, the rocks, the color of the slopes are very realistic; the painting of the chaparral is very finely done with many details. The nocturnal display with the sky lightening up to reach dawn is just lovely.

The exhibits are made in sections that will be put together at the Nature center. They will be brought up on a truck and assembled by Delphi who will follow the truck. They are much further along that I thought. The museum and the classroom will need to be closed off during the construction that should take place in December. We very much look forward to be able to enjoy our new interpretative center and new display in the classroom by the end of the year.



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:

Santa Clarita Fun for Fours Preschool—Catori the Barn owl

Girl Scouts Brownie Troop 7002—Viper the rattlesnake, Turbo the desert tortoise, Chester the opossum and Lady the Red-tailed hawk.

Craig and Melissa Wagener—Sandy, Alice, Moonshadow, Rosie, Squirt, Sylvester, Viper, Cricket, Turbo, Speedy, Catori, Chester, Buddy, Apollo, Orion and Lady.

Many thanks to all of you for your support!

A Conversation with Dan Kott



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

Born in Los Angeles but my family (I have a sister) soon moved to Boulder City, Nevada for four years. We came to the Santa Clarita area shortly before I started elementary school, settling in San Francisquito Canyon where my dad worked at the hydro-electric power plants.

2. How did your love of Nature begin?

Creeks, chaparral, and rocky canyons were our playground while growing up in the National Forest North of Saugus. Nature was right outside and often our pets were the local snakes, lizards, spiders, and frogs. Our family often visited National Parks and camped in the desert once or twice a year. Later in school while taking natural science and biology classes, it became clear how really interesting and important spending time with nature was to me.

3. What was your education?

After moving to San Fernando Valley, junior and senior high were at Sylmar followed by many classes in community colleges. While attending Pierce Community College with a machinist major and concurrently as an Operating Engineer apprentice construction mechanic, I quit school to take a job with a company building freeway bridges in Sylmar. Just months later the 1971 earthquake destroyed the bridges and ended the job. After a few more construction jobs I went back to school, this time a Natural Resource Management major.

4. What is your work experience?

After working at carnivals, carwashes, school kitchens, and an auto assembly plant, A PM custodial job with LAUSD finally fit well for me as a newly married student. We were watching many of our friends fleeing the city, moving to other states and areas in order to live

more “naturally” but most were having trouble finding jobs, living in poverty and returning to SoCal. I became aware the LA DWP still offered jobs that provided the ability to live in some pretty nice rural areas. I took the tests and training and within a couple years my wife and I were living in San Francisquito Canyon. Although I had many different positions at other hydro plants, I continued to live in “the canyon” until retiring 30 years later.

5. What attracted you to becoming a docent?

When I read about the Placerita Docent Program I knew this would be a good match for me even though I had only driven into the area once. I had previously enjoyed being involved in an extensive tour program for students at power plant facilities that included quite a bit of nature and history content.

6. What do you like most about being a docent?

It is very rewarding seeing kids learning about nature and to be part of it. Also the docents and employees at Placerita are the best. It is nice being around the Nature Center because of the competence, support, and kindness of everyone involved.

7. In what ways are you involved at Placerita?

Besides guiding children’s tours at the park, I have enjoyed assisting in the Holiday/Christmas events and Open House. I have also been on the election committee of the PCNCA Board of Directors the last couple years.

8. What is your family life?

Married to Linda who has an adult daughter (Melisa) with two excellent daughters. My own daughter (Jocelyn) and twin sons (Erik and Dustin) account for another 5 grandchildren as young as 2 years, all really wonderful kids.

9. How do you like to spend your time?

Much of my time involves family of course. Grandchildren are a great blessing and each of them has events that are important to attend. We never stop being parents and time with adult children is important and rewarding too. I am also involved in church and other activities.

10. What are your other interests and activities?

A little of a lot of things: hiking, bicycling, body surfing/boarding, camping/fishing, backpacking, cooking, motorcycles and old cars. Travel is fun too, when possible. I have not seen enough of Europe, and New Zealand is a place I would like to go. Of course there just isn’t enough time to do it all.

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

I always have had an interest and to some degree involvement with the St. Francis dam. As a child and through elementary school (Saugus) I lived at the DWP housing area at Power Plant 2 (PP-2) an area destroyed less than 30 years earlier by the 1928 disaster. Our close neighbor Ray Rising was one of the three PP-2 area survivors of the 1928 disaster so there was always an awareness of the story. Later as a DWP employee my job required that I assist people doing research related to the disaster and other DWP history. Because of that exposure, in the last 30 years I have had the privilege to work with most of prominent researchers, writers, and experts. I have gained enough knowledge to occasionally give basic tours of the location. A number of our Placerita Docents have gone on tours where we include historic PP-1. I hope we can organize additional tours in the near future. It is exciting right now that Congressman McKeon has just introduced a bill that would authorize a national memorial to commemorate those killed in the dam failure disaster.

Rattlesnakes – Friend or Foe

Paul A. Levine



This Southern Pacific rattlesnake was coming on to my front porch when I was taking out the trash.

My father who I have all the respect for in the world grew up in New York City with its asphalt jungle and was never exposed to the wonders of nature all around him. He would proudly proclaim that there were only two types of snakes that he disliked – “live ones and dead ones”. As much as I respected and loved my father, he was wrong! Unfortunately, there are still a large number of people who feel like he did.

There seems to be an increased number of rattlesnakes seen in the hills and valleys around us this season. Indeed, they are showing up our own proverbial back or, as in my recent experience, front yards. As such, I thought it valuable to review some facts about rattlesnakes and where appropriate, our local resident--the Southern Pacific Rattlesnake as well as correct some common myths so that everyone will be more knowledgeable if not more comfortable with the snakes that live in our local hillsides and even backyards.

Rattlesnake, indeed all snakes, begin to appear locally sometime in March and can be expected to be active through October. If November, December, January and February are particularly warm, we could see them all year.

As a group, rattlesnakes are known as pit-vipers. They have a heat-sensing depression (pit) between their nostril and their eye with which they can detect warm blooded prey such as mice, rats, shrews, gophers and the like. If a person is in proximity to a rattlesnake, it will recognize the person as (a) a heat source and (b) far too large to eat. As such, it really doesn't want to waste its poison which also initiates the digestive process for the rattlesnake when it needs that poison to capture its next meal. It is estimated that 25% of rattlesnake bites are dry – no venom is injected but it is still good advice to have this checked out and not wait until symptoms start to develop. Bottom line, the snake does not want to waste its poison on something that it cannot eat. So it will only strike, in this setting, if frightened or provoked.

Rattlesnakes have a characteristic appearance. One cannot totally rely on coloring as other snakes such as the Gopher Snake has similar patterning. Rattlesnakes tend to have a relatively heavy body compared to the thinner bodies of our non-poisonous local snakes such as the Gopher Snake and California King Snake. The non-poisonous snakes also have a head that is no wider than its neck. The rattlesnake, however, has a diamond-shaped head. This is where the poison glands are located and give the rattlesnake head its characteristic appearance.

Our Southern Pacific Rattlesnakes tend to be relatively non-aggressive. They would just as soon sneak away than get into a fight, particularly with an animal larger than itself. Still, if provoked or frightened, it will strike back in an effort to protect itself. If you encounter a rattlesnake on the trail while hiking or even in your own back yard, simply stop and slowly move backwards away from it. Snakes can feel vibrations so stomping heavily on the ground will send a message you are quite large so it would rather sneak away. If encountered in your backyard, do NOT try to catch it. Rather pay attention to where it goes, keep your children and pets inside and call Animal Control (661-257-3191).

If out hiking and you come across a fallen tree across the trail or a large boulder but not so large that you couldn't step over it, resist the urge to simply step or jump over it. Snakes like to hide under fallen logs and in the tight space between the ground and a boulder. If you step over it, you can frighten the snake and it will strike. It need not first rattle its tail nor does it need it assume the strike pose particularly if your boot/foot is in close proximity to its head. Hence, also do not go barefoot or wear flimsy sandals when in the field. Never put your feet or your hands where you cannot see them. Step-up on to the log or boulder. This will create vibrations which will give the snake some warning even though it hasn't seen you yet. It may then begin to rattle which is a warning to you that you should back off and not continue in a forward direction, at least not until the snake has left the area.



Head and neck region of a Southern Pacific Rattlesnake. Note that the back of the head is 2-3 times as thick as the neck.

Rattlesnakes are an important part of our eco-system. They consume large numbers of mice, rats, gophers, small ground squirrels helping to keep the number of these animals and other vermin in check. They also serve as food for larger predators including the Red-tailed Hawk, coyotes, roadrunners, and even other snakes, specifically the King snake which is resistant to the rattlesnake venom. It has been estimated that only 20% of young rattlesnakes make it to their second year due to predation, habitat destruction and extermination campaigns.

Rattlesnake bites are the leading cause of snakebite injuries in the United States. However, they rarely bite unless provoked or threatened and if treated promptly, are rarely fatal. In the case of a rattlesnake bite, do NOT place a tourniquet between the bite site and the central part of the body. Also, do NOT cut into the bite and “suck-out” the poison as had been recommended decades ago. First remain calm which is easier said than done. Next call for help. If you have a cell phone and there is reception, call 911 and inform them that you have been bitten by a rattlesnake and then where you are. If in the field, you may need to hike out for them to reach you or even to get cell phone coverage. When hiking in the field, it is best to have a companion along for multiple reasons, this



Head and neck region of a Gopher Snake. The head is about the same width as the body.



A small rattlesnake was encountered on a trail at Placerita Canyon having just killed a lizard (lower left on the photo). Rather than "stand its ground" and protect its meal, it abandoned the meal in an effort to get away and avoid confrontation.

tail.

The bottom line is that rattlesnakes and other snakes are our neighbors. They help to keep the vermin population in check. They are an important part of the local ecosystem. They do not want to fight with you, they would much rather go on their way and do their thing. But if you insist and threaten or provoke them, they will strike back to protect themselves.

One additional point, do not handle the head of a recently killed rattlesnake. There may still be reflexes and dead snakes have been known to bite. Also, if not careful, you could accidentally puncture a finger or other body part and envenomate yourself even from a dead snake.

References: Rattlesnakes – Wikipedia; www.californiaherps.com; California Division of Fish and Game at www.dfg.ca.gov; Rattlesnake avoidance training for dogs, www.mountainstrust.org; www.highonkennels.com

Note: Except for the Black-tailed rattlesnake, all the other photos were taken in Hidden Valley.

being only one of them. If at all possible, get a picture of the snake (most cell phones have camera capability), particularly in areas other than Santa Clarita as different snakes require different antivenins. A family member or friend can also drive you to an Emergency Room but it is better to call 911. The emergency team can radio ahead and they often know if the nearest hospital can or cannot handle a snake bite. If not, they will then take you to the hospital that can handle this problem whereas time is lost if you go to the nearest hospital and it is not equipped to care for snakebites.

What about dogs? When hiking in the hills and trails around Santa Clarita, keep your dog on a leash. The dog is more likely to encounter a rattlesnake off the trail than on the trail. There are aversion programs available for dogs, usually given in the spring when rattlesnakes first start appearing. Most veterinarian offices can provide information about such programs. Also, there is a rattlesnake vaccine available. Again, check with your vet

It used to be said that one can determine the age of a rattlesnake by counting the individual buttons that make up its tail. This is a myth. A new button forms each time the snake sheds its skin and if it has plenty of food, it may shed its skin multiple times in a season. The buttons may also break off.

Further, one really does not want to get sufficiently close to the snake to count the number of buttons that make up its



Classic strike pose by a Black-tailed Rattlesnake in SE Arizona. We saw it crossing the road and just had to stop the car to get some pictures. It was exposed and felt threatened by a whole car load of people approaching it so it assumed the strike position and vigorously rattled its tail.



A Trip with Lanita Algeyer

On June 16, a large group of docents went to the Chumash Indian Museum in Thousand Oaks on a trip planned by Lanita. We all thank you for this great idea, Lanita.

Gray Wolf, their guide gave the group an overview of the museum, they were able to see many artifacts and got some history lesson about the Chumash. Outside they had a chance to visit the village, learn how their homes were built and they could explore some art caves where painting done by the Chumash still adorns the walls.



Chester

We have an opossum at the Nature Center. Chester was found in a swimming pool and he was much too young to be released in the wild. Chester had his debut with the Saturday Animal show on June 21, the day of the summer solstice and he was wonderful.

Opossums have a short life span, usually 3 years long so come to the center to visit and enjoy this rare opportunity.

Young at Heart
Paul A. Levine



Nature has magical healing powers. These healing powers are magnified through the staff, docents and volunteers at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. I know this very well since becoming involved with the Nature Center in January 2012 when I joined the Docent-training class. I had come off of a very bad year – my wife of 40 years having passed away just a year previously and the future was bleak. The magical properties of Placerita Canyon Nature Center were literally rejuvenating.

In December 2012, as part of what became the forerunner of our monthly Community Nature Series open to the public at no charge, I gave a presentation on butterflies of Southern California. It was well attended. Another Docent, also from the Class of 2012, brought a friend, Susan, who had also been widowed and introduced us. We had both been unenthusiastically looking towards a lonely future. But, through the wonder of Placerita Canyon, life became even more magical – we started dating. I even got Susan to go on a hike on the Canyon Trail- and my emotional years began to recede further every time we went out. Walks, concerts, shows, musicals, movies and dinners – just being together – it was all magical.

There is a song first popularized by Frank Sinatra titled “Young at Heart”. It starts “Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you, if you are young at heart.” I proposed to Susan in late 2013 but ever since we started dating and my becoming even more active at PCNCA, I have been feeling younger every day. Our wedding was Sunday,

August 17 – a beautiful typical sunny southern California day at the Clubhouse in Bridgeport (Valencia) and Susan and I danced our first dance as husband and wife to “Young at Heart”. Our fairy tale has come true.

We really wish all the docents and volunteers from PCNCA could have been with us but the venue was simply too small. Attending representing the Nature Center were Wendy and Hugh Langhans, Linda and Steven Ioerger, Jill Goddard and Ron Kraus, Evelyne and Johan Vandersande and, the Yenta (that is matchmaker in Yiddish) Andrea Donner and her husband Richard. Oh, let’s not forget The Rattler who was with us on our first hike on the Canyon Trail, on our trip to New York when I proposed to Susan all duly documented in prior issues of The Rattler and now, of course, at our wedding.



Mike Elling took the Rattler to Red Rock, Nevada. Gorgeous weather, superb hiking!

On the Road with the Rattler



The Rattler made it to Mt. Pinos with Dan Kott, Jan and Ron Nichols, Maikel Summe, Maria Elena Frankicevich Christensen, Michael Elling, Charitha Eragoda, Denny Truger, Bob Balaram and Robert Grzesiak



Ruth Ann Murthy took the Rattler to Bryce Canyon at Sunset Point



Dr. Paul A. Levine took the Rattler for a butterfly study trip to Columbia.



Larry and Nancy Nikolai took the Rattler to Juneau Alaska at the top of Mt. Roberts

End of the School Year Party and Results of the Board Election



The first Saturday of June, we always have a party to celebrate the end of the school year and to find out the result of the vote for the board.

I remind you that only half of the board gets elected each year and that a position lasts for 2 years, only ; the alternate directors are elected for one year. We hope that brings more cohesiveness to our organization. See the listing of the new board members elected in June 2014. Jim Crowley, Dan Kott and Carol Rush (good luck on your move, Carol) did a fantastic job with the elections and we appreciate that they handled the situation so smoothly

Rick Brammer
Deb Clem
Andrea Donner
Jack Levenberg
Fred Seeley
Bill Webber

Elected Alternates:
Robert Grzesiak
Jackie Thomason

Lanita Algeyer had 3 gift certificates for docents who were noticed to be exceptionally helpful this year. She gave recognition to Marilyn Matlen for being always at the center, early and ready to help with all the school trips, to Mona Ruberry for taking over membership and updating the contact list and to Nikki Dail for taking over Trails and Nuggets.

I was totally taken by surprise when Jim Southwell presented me with a huge Quarter Century Cup, from the PCNCA foundation. I guess after 28 years, I have outlived all recognition possi-

ble! This is very impressive and I was delighted, happy and very grateful.

Then we had a lot of fun with a fashion show showing different vest options...more pockets than you can imagine on all those vests! A vest of your choice can be chosen to be the new Placerita uniform with the addition of the new owl patch.

To finish the evening Ron showed us 3 short movies from the Foot Hills fire that destroyed most of Placerita 10 years ago as we are reaching that sad anniversary.



As usual, those movies were extremely well done, they brought back memories of a difficult time and we were all happy to see the many good changes 10 years later (new building and more growth in the park.)

Even if we had more school groups coming later on in June, we celebrate the end of the season with all the docents before many of them disappear on trips for summer vacations.



Nature Education

There was a time when Judy Bass knew nothing about natural history or even birds but in the 25 years that she has been a docent at Eaton Canyon, she became an expert on birds and birding.

Now that she is recently retired, she can spend more time with her special love. She has taught birding to Eaton Canyon and Placerita docents, has led bird walks for Pasadena Audubon, and is a volunteer at the Natural History Museum of LA County skinning birds and preparing study skins.

She did a presentation at Placerita on August 17 to explain the differences and similarities between Crows and Ravens. We learned how to tell them apart and we found out how amazingly intelligent they are.

Do not miss the next program about reptiles and amphibians on Sunday, September 7 at 2pm.



Bear in Towsley Canyon:

This picture, albeit a bit dim, was taken on the trail in Towsley Canyon by two hikers. We tend to forget that 30 minutes from the Valencia mall, we have areas of wilderness where this kind of encounter is possible. Towsley Canyon borders East Canyon and the two add up to a large piece of safe territory for a bear to survive. While a bear is mostly content eating berries, roots, foliage, acorns, ants, eggs from nests and carrion, we also know they can catch young deer fawn. There are many of those in East and Towsley right now. A bear was killed a few years ago trying to cross Interstate 5 in the same area, so we know they are there but they do not look for human confrontation and are seldom seen. They are known as California Black bear and their color varies from tan to brown to black, with an occasional white chest patch.

Bears mate in June and July but they have a great adaption system if food is not plentiful - like this year due to our 5 year long draught. It is called "delayed implantation." The female can carry the fertilized egg for awhile, until she feels that is safe to reproduce, and only then does the egg start to grow into a fetus. If she is not fat enough by the time she starts to hibernate, the egg will spontaneously abort.

In California, the females reproduce when they are 4 to 5 years old and they have 2 to 4 cubs per litter. They are born in February when the sow is hibernating and they stay together nursing in the den until April or May. In the wild, the life span of a bear is about 18 years.

Bears hibernate; female bears definitively have to hibernate if they have cubs. In the Sierra, at higher elevations, males and females will both hibernate. Food is not available in the middle of the winter, so there is no other option available. I am not sure about Towsley Canyon, since food is available year-round. In doing my research, I read that "if the winter is mild enough, males may wake up and forage for food." Until some research is done on the local population, I will refrain from any conclusion.

The peaceful encounter with a bear in Towsley Canyon was not on the little loop trail used by many hikers, but way up on the ridge. I do not think you are any danger of going hiking there but I feel it's useful to repeat some precautions. Basically, the behavior that you would use if you do encounter a bear is the same as for a mountain lion. If the black bear approaches, try to show that you could be dangerous. Make yourself big, raise your arms, and open your jacket. Yell at the bear; make noise with whatever you have at hand, perhaps pots and pans from your campsite. Though it is unlikely, if the bear attacks, you should fight back using branches, rocks or camping equipment.

If you are visiting bear habitat and you are hiking, make noise to give a bear a chance to go away. Most black bears try to avoid confrontation so give both of you a chance to avoid it. Never keep food in your tent and use a bear proof garbage can. Do not run from a bear, it triggers a reaction where you become the prey. Face the bear. If you have small children, pick them up. If you can, put them on your shoulders.

We do not see them often, however they are here and doing fine. Surveys done in 35 states show that they are in every one of those states and even increasing in population except in Idaho and New Mexico where black bears were not found. They tend to remain in sparsely settled and forested areas. Their range is continuous in the northeast from the Appalachian Mountains all the way to Virginia. We know they are in all the mountainous areas of the Sierras. They have even been spotted in Ohio!

I can tell you that coming from western Europe where it is totally impossible to see a bear, driving to Sequoia Park for the weekend and being able to see one from the safety of our car, is a wonder that you cannot comprehend if you have had that opportunity all your life. We really are surrounded by the miracles of nature, even in Santa Clarita.



What I Did on My Summer Vacation

Sima Berstein, a docent since 2009, has moved to Orange County 8 miles from the beach. Good luck Sima we will miss you and your native garden.

Olivia Miseroy: She was hiking ... "The trip was along the Pacific Crest Trail from the Devil's Postpile in Mammoth to over Bishop pass. It was a total of 94 miles over the course of 8 days while carrying around 40 lbs"

Jim and Dianne Southwell had their third great grandchild (keep in mind that they got married at a very young age!) Jackson Ryder was born to their grand daughter Brittney & husband Nathan Van Deventer.

Jill Goddard and Ron Kraus celebrated their 40 years anniversary and went to happiest place on earth "Disneyland".

Jack Levenberg became a Grandpa for the second time. Baby Rhys was born at home on 7/16 at 12:07am; he weighed 6lb 14oz

Nikki Dail went on a long trip in Germany in August.

Bob Fischer went through many tests for his heart and is now waiting to have a pacemaker installed.

Linette and Rick Brammer drove their Toyota Prius back to Tennessee with all of their grandson's belongings to start college in the fall. Prius was packed from the rear to the driver's seat and a bike on the back.

Trip took 2 weeks and 5500 miles.

Chris Mowry finally moved in his new house with his family after a long escrow period. He now lives in Antelope Acres.

Debbie Walt and her husband Michael celebrated 40 years of being together. They celebrated the day by doing body surfing and having a lot of fun.

Heidi Webber took a road trip in June with her friend Gerie Clay. They went to Tacoma, Wa. to visit with both their friends and relatives.

Bill and Heidi Webber celebrated their 46th anniversary on August 16.

Paul A. Levine married Susan on August 17th.



Breakfast of Champions:

Phil Rizzo is not with us anymore but he had a clever idea and we keep up the tradition. He thought the summer was just too long without seeing his Placerita friends. Because our work is centered mostly around school groups visiting the center, we miss each other during summer vacation. What about planning a pot luck breakfast to see all those Champions, the docents! Good idea, we are always ready for a party and now Ron Kraus added something really fun called "Are you smarter than a fifth grader?"

This year, Ron found questions and answers while reading all the reports the new students have to write before becoming docents.

All I can tell you is that the questions are often complex but it is a great way to review facts before the start of the schools' fieldtrips to Placerita. We were separated into 4 teams and the

competition was fierce but good humored. Sometimes, we all scratched our heads in unison listening to some questions!

Thank you Ron, we know it takes a lot of preparation but it was really terrific, we all had so much fun with this game.

Jill Goddard, each year, makes an incredible artistic contribution in designing caps for the winning team which, this year, was the Leaping Lizards. Jill made cap with a paper mache horned lizard on top. Only in the Nature Center can you admire this very special creative interest but they are really impressive. Some people wear their winning cap year after year to meetings and they become prized possessions.

Jim Southwell made a presentation at the end of the breakfast about the new exhibits he went to see for the remodeled interpretative center (see article.)

Deb Clem presented her new program, "Walking Meditation". She would appreciate any feedback.



The food was delicious and a great thank you to all the chefs; there were many delicious dishes and we came back to refill our plates. Ron was a little bit disappointed because there were no deviled eggs but we promised we will do better next time! Thank you to all who arrived early to help set up. Phil, it was a great idea to have a breakfast in the hot summer months to see our Placerita friends and we continue the tradition in your honor.



Doctor Butterfly

Paul Levine is an expert about butterflies and moths and became very skilled at taking their photos. He used to collect them but changed his approach after noticing that their environment was threatened and was disappearing.

In April, Paul did a presentation at Placerita for the Nature Education program about the local butterflies and moths. His photos were superb and his explanation of this complex topic was simple, clear and straight to the point. Thank you Paul; that is such an interesting and fantastic way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Dianne Erskine Hellrigel from the Community Hiking Club was also at the presentation and so was Chris Mowry, Supervisor at Placerita.



Donations to Placerita

Once again, the residents of Placerita Canyon Nature Center wish to thank those who so thoughtfully thought of them when it came time to donate. All funds, unless otherwise requested, go toward the care of aforesaid residents. They thank you as do the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates.

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Bethel Christian School
Canterbury ES
Carpenter Community Charter School
Carver Middle School
Cedar creek ES
Centers for Learning
Chaparral ES
Christ Lutheran Preschool
Discovery School
Germain St. ES
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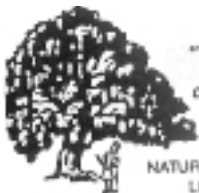
Sycamore ES
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Bill and Heidi Webber
M. Wong

AUTUMN PREVIEW



The Rattler

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

NATURE CENTER ASSOCIATES OF
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