



# 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 2013**

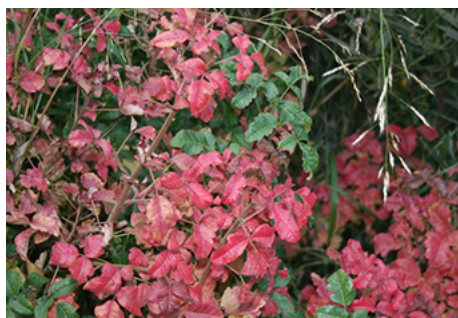
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### **Hello Dear Nature Friends,**

You thought the summer was a quiet time at the Nature Center and that we were all resting under the hot sun? Not at all! This place is vibrant with new projects and I have very big news to announce. We have a firm date for the completion of our new interpretative center which is going to revitalize the space where our old museum used to be. The docents have carefully planned for years what the display will look like and the county has agreed to follow those plans and pay for making the interpretative center a reality. This cooperation is unprecedented and the docents are extremely grateful that their dream is going to become reality by the fall of 2014.

Sunday mornings used to be a little slow, I agree, but not anymore. We have a fantastic new program that represents all that we find so important at Placerita; Community Nature Education. The more people learn about nature, the more respect and interest they will have and it is part of our motto "To inspire a passion, awareness and respect for the environment." Fred Seeley took it upon himself to have this new program started and it is a cooperative effort between PCNCA and the Community Hiking Club. Have a look at the program that is already planned for the whole year.

It was a dry winter and spring and the summer is always warm but we are starting to see the first signs of fall; the nights are getting cooler and some fall flowers are starting to bloom. Yes, we do have a fall in California so come to Placerita to observe the beginning of the change of the season, the foliage is slowly changing color.



**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!**

## Multimedia System

We do many presentations at Placerita and they involve power point presentations, slides, movies, and a need for a microphone and music system.

The system that we had was getting old and did not allow us the flexibility and the technical advantages that we wanted. Ron Kraus and Jack Levenberg looked carefully at all the options and I am proud to say that the docents agreed to pay to have a state of the art system that will make a big impact on all our visitors who attend our presentations. It was just in time for the start of our new Community Nature Education program.

Thank you Ron and Jack.

## Pond Makeover

The look of the pond was very natural but the loose rocks around it were a problem as our visitors were walking to the edges and the stones were falling into the pond. It needed a new look and we want to thank the community workers from LA County who worked under the supervision of Victor Fernandez who was the cement concrete worker and Joseph Barrios who was the cement concrete finisher.

Thanks to their effort the pond has a new look which remains as natural as possible and allows the visitor to come to the edge of the pond in a safer and cleaner manner. This is a very good place to do bird watching in the morning as it is one of the rare spots in the park where they can have a drink of water and take a bath.

## 4th of July Parade

In Santa Clarita we are lucky enough to have a real old fashioned 4th of July parade with horses, balloons, floats, music and fancy cars.

Every year, it starts in Hart Park, goes up Lyons Avenue, turns onto Valley View and ends up in the park next to Hart High School. It is fun; little kids dance along, there are plenty of flags and Placerita Canyon Nature Center would like to join the parade next year.

After all, there are still many people who do not know there is a Nature Center so it is good publicity at a time where school groups are not coming to the center so we can have more time to get the show on the road. If you are interested in helping, please contact Dolores Olson who had this clever idea.



## The Rattler

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

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

or you can e-mail it to Evelyne at [evandersande@gmail.com](mailto:evandersande@gmail.com)

Please e-mail 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.

The Rattler is printed by  
Valencia Printers on Recycled Paper

## Disclaimer

Because there is often limited space on various field trips, we find that we need to enforce the following: All trips and dinner celebrations are open only to Placerita Canyon docents and volunteers who have paid their yearly dues. Many trips can be open to family and friends but only with previous authorization from the person planning the trip. Thank you for your understanding.

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area Park are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial District of Michael D. Antonovich. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, has designated an ADA Coordinator to carry out this Department's compliance with the non-discriminatory provisions of the ADA. For more information you may contact the ADA Coordinator's Office at TEL 213-738-2970 TDY 213-427-6118 FAX 213-487-0380; Upon 3-day request notice, sign language interpreters and related materials in alternative formats (Braille-transcript, large print, audio-record, video-captioning, live-description) or any other reasonable accommodations are available to the public for County-sponsored activities and events.

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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

### The Press Books are Outdated!

For 23 years, I have carefully collected all the articles that came out in the press about Placerita. Those were put in Press books which became heavy and not too many people were reading with passion what happened in Placerita. However, all is there and if you want to make a trip in the past or do some research, you can find interesting facts.

For the past 2 years, Gordon Uppman was updating the books until we finally ran out of books and he decided it was time to enter a new century with our archives. From now on, they will be digital and the news articles will be stored in the brand new computer bought recently by Rick Brammer. (Thank you Rick).

At the end of the year, Gordon will burn a CD for all the news of the year and it will be in the library for anyone interested.

Thank you Gordon for handling this problem. It was time to dust those old Press Books and replace them...but it's still fun to look at the photos from the past.



### Lanita Algeyer

Lanita has a new job; she is going to be in charge of planning the awards that are given during the celebration pot luck at Placerita. Thank you so much Lanita for taking on this new responsibility.

I have had the pleasure to do this for 17 years and while it has been extremely gratifying; I recognize it is time for somebody with new ideas to revitalize this program.

Docents do volunteer work for many different reasons and they are willing to work hard for long hours. However, they do not want their work to be taken for granted and it is important to show them we notice their efforts and to recognize them.

## Fall/Winter PROGRAMS

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>FAMILY NATURE WALK</b>    | Every Saturday from 11 to noon.<br>An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.  |
| <b>ANIMAL PRESENTATION</b>   | Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.<br>See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.  |
| <b>BIRD WALK</b>             | Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.   |
| <b>BIRD WALK, CASTAIC</b>    | The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at <b>Castaic Lake Recreation Area</b> on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.  |
| <b>BLOOMS OF THE SEASON</b>  | 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.  |
| <b>COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB</b> | 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 <a href="http://communityhikingclub.org">communityhikingclub.org</a> |
| <b>NATURE EDUCATION</b>      | 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. September 15: Station Fire Recovery-Corina Roberts. October 20: Who is Eating Whom in the Food Web? - Janet Kubler   |

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



# Breakfast of the Champions

*By Evelyne Vandersande*

A few years ago, Phil Rizzo, a docent at Placerita, felt the summer was just too long without seeing his docent friends. He planned a pot luck breakfast and it was such a good idea that we have kept up the tradition ever since. This year, we had a very large crowd, about 65 to 70 peoples showed up all carrying delicious food so the line for the buffet was well attended.

After brunch we had a little ceremony to recognize all the docents who do outreaches at Placerita and Heidi Webber did the presentation. She is in charge of this program so she could give us a first-hand explanation of what each docent does and what their specialties are. Certificates of Appreciation were given to Andrea Donner, Bill Webber, Jack Levenberg, Rick Brammer, Sandra Balam, Sue Sutton, Bill Sutton, Sue Mayhew and Deb Clem (who was on the East Coast).

Sue Wallander received a special trophy for animal presentations and for the Native American program that she has done for 9 years. Heidi Webber received a trophy for doing so much to support the outreach program that she started about 16 years ago. She does not remember the exact date but all of a sudden, she was doing the outreaches, was in charge and had improved the rules on a regular basis for the protection of the animals.

Jim Southwell told us the interpretative center was going to be ready by the end of 2014 and Jill Goddard showed us the special hats and bags that were going to be the prizes for the winning team.

Each year, Ron Kraus plans a game based on the TV show "Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader?" We are split into teams and we have to answer different categories of question relating to the fauna, flora, history, etc., from Placerita Canyon. Good ways to brush up on our knowledge! The questions were tough and the competition was fierce! The winning team was the Butterfly Raptors. Congratulations to all.

To end up an interesting morning, Olivia Miseroy scared many docents. She hid in a very large animal carrier and pretended to be some wild and crazy bird while wearing an incredible costume of her own making. Only this kind of thing can happen at Placerita!



**TO ALL DOCENTS AT PLACERITA:  
The Nature Center Associates of the Los Angeles County  
invite you To our 2013 Graduation and Recognition  
Awards.**

**Saturday, September 7, 2013  
9.30 am to 11.30 am**

**Eaton Canyon Nature Center**

**1750 North Altadena Drive, Pasadena 91105**

**Sponsored by the Board of Directors and Senior Docents  
Continental Breakfast  
Casual Dress**



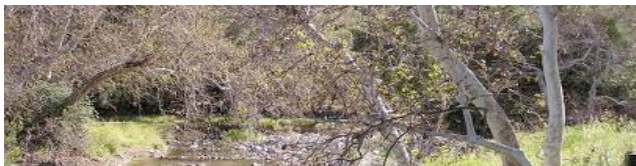
*If you have never been to this ceremony, I really recommend that you do, especially the class of 2013. It is a good way to meet the other members of the Nature Center, you will meet all the official members of the county who always attend this ceremony...it is an important step to support each other as fellow docents and much effort is put into this ceremony so it is so much nicer if it is well attended.*

### **New Computer**

Our old computer was so limited and we had little data storage capacity. Rick Brammer volunteered to change all this and the docents' organization splurged to finally get a computer that gives us much more flexibility. We especially wanted to be able to save so many interesting presentations that are given in the center and centralize all our information and articles to improve our education.

Thank you Rick for fixing this problem.

### **Improvements on the Trails**



Placerita is expecting big changes in the near future on 2 different trails. One is for riparian habitat restoration and the other one is to establish a Golden Braille Trail for the visually-impaired, both to preserve the habitat in Placerita and to expand opportunities for all people to enjoy natural beauty in our natural area.

Two bridges are going to be built crossing the stream along the Canyon Trail so visitors do not have to walk through the stream, disrupting the delicate ecosystem. The trail will be raised to create a buffer to prevent trail users from negatively impacting the stream. On the banks along the stream, native riparian species are going to be planted and nonnative species removed.

A total of \$555,000 will be used for this project, \$300,000 is provided by Supervisor Antonovich.

A total of \$73,500 is going to be used to establish a Braille trail along the last 1/8 mile on the existing Heritage Trail. \$28,500 was given by Supervisor Antonovich, the rest was a grant given by the State of California Habitat Conservation Fund. The Golden Braille trail will include several features: installation of an orientation area with benches and Braille signage describing the trail, audio elements, curb guides allowing the visually-impaired to independently navigate the path, planting of fragrant and brightly colored (for low vision visitors) native flora and strategically placed points of interest to encourage a memorable experience.

Department of Parks and Recreation Russ Guiney wrote "Once completed, these initiatives will further establish Placerita Canyon Natural Area's standing as one of the region's most beautiful and accessible natural destinations for generations to come".

### **Tyler got Married at Placerita**

We all remember Tyler Knapp who took docent training at Placerita in 2011; we remember his excitement when he handled the tarantula for the first time.

As young men tend to do, he had to find a job and did not continue as a docent but part of his heart was still in Placerita. When the time came to do wedding plans, he chose Placerita to have his very special day.

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, Tyler and his bride said their vows in the amphitheater at 5pm and the reception followed in the picnic area. They had a dance floor brought in and the festivities went on till midnight.

We send our warmest congratulations to the new couple and may nature bring you happiness for the rest of your lives.





## Bats are in the News

By Evelyne Vandersande

Bats are getting bad press lately because five were found in the Santa Clarita Valley that tested positive for rabies. Rabies is around, independent of the bats, and we have more bats than you can imagine. But it's a good reminder for you to have your pets vaccinated for rabies (**it is the law**). If you find any dead animal on your property, do not touch it, but call Animal Care and Control at 661-257-3191 and they will pick up the body safely and free of charge.

If you see a bat on the ground, it is either a dead bat or a bat that is going to be killed by a predator very quickly. Bats cannot take off like a bird; they need a little bit of air under their wings to be able to fly. They can crawl onto a bush and that would be enough height for them to manage to fly, but their feet are weak and they cannot walk very well.

There is so much to learn about bats, I am not sure where to start but right away I will give you a good place to go observe them. It is Carlsbad in New Mexico; perhaps you want to take a summer trip there? Hundreds of bats gather and they have 2 programs to observe them: a bat flight breakfast and an evening program. Call the park at 575.785.3012 or Google: Carlsbad Caverns.

The most common bat in our valley is the Mexican free-tailed bat.

Many people do not believe we have bats in Santa Clarita and say they have never seen them. Most of the time, they think they are seeing a bird in the evening but you need to observe a bit more carefully and you will see that no bird has a flight pattern so crazy, erratic, full of energy. ...or it would have to be a very drunk bird! This zig zag flying pattern is used when they hunt because they are catching insects in the air.

When they migrate, they fly in a straight line; otherwise the trip would be extremely long. During migration, they have been observed flying 25 to 47 miles per hour, but they also have been clocked flying 60 miles per hour using tail winds. They can also fly at very high altitude, over 10,000 feet, higher than any other bats. They have long and narrow wings that are well adapted for flight, even their short fur and their ear orientation makes them more aerodynamic.

In our valley, bats take up residence under the bridges over the Santa Clara River, they like the Spanish-style roofs to roost under, cavities in trees and so many little holes under roofs. They seem to like the oak, eucalyptus and pine trees in my neighborhood. I guess many of those large trees probably have little cavities where they can roost. They do not roost in caves in Placerita Canyon but they do in Vasquez Rocks Natural Area.

They are insectivores and they hunt their prey using echolocation. They eat moths, beetles, dragonflies, flies, true bugs, wasps and flying ants. They catch the insects in flight in very large numbers, so they are very beneficial to the environment. One bat can eat between 200 and 600 insects in one night. They are efficient pollinators and while we do not have sugar cane plantations in Santa Clarita, I could not resist telling you that the bat was chosen as the logo for Bacardi rum, to recognize their role of pollinator and consumer of the insects that were damaging their crop. It is a good choice, as the Cuban and Spanish cultures recognize the bat as a symbol of good health, good fortune and family unity.

They are also known as the "guano bats" for the enormous amounts of droppings they produce. If they are in large concentration like in Carlsbad's caverns, it is good business to collect this natural fertilizer. From 1903 to 1923, at least 100,000 tons were removed from there and sold to the fruit growers.

Even with our mild climate, the Mexican Free-tailed bats migrate to Mexico in the fall, returning here around May. They are active the whole year-round and do not hibernate. They mate just before they fly back north and by summer, they separate into bachelor colonies and nursery colonies. Gestation lasts for 90 days, and each female has one pup in June. Mom gives birth while clinging to the roost with both thumbs and both feet. That gave me pause to think when I read that... For about one hour after birth the baby remains attached to the mom by the umbilical cord while his mom licks the baby, sniffs it all over and they learn each other's smell and sound. After that, Mom and pup will always be able to find each other even in a large cave where so many pups are gathered. They recognize each other mostly by smell and when the Mom comes back to feed the pup, she always touches the top of its head with her muzzle, smelling it and exchanging vocalizations for one or two minutes each time.

The pup learns to stay attached to the side of the roost with his feet, hands and teeth. The mother feeds the pup with her milk, giving about a quarter of her body weight in one day. The milk is very rich and the pup grows fast. They learn to fly when they are 4 to 5 weeks old and they are weaned when they are 5 to 6 weeks old.

Even if the Mexican free-tailed bats can be found all over the country in large numbers, they are still a threatened species. They have to face the problems of finding a roost where they can have their young and many of those sites are disappearing: old empty buildings, mine shafts, etc. Their predators are many: red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, great horned owls, barn owls, opossums, striped skunks, raccoons and snakes if they fall to the ground. Their population is declining. Because they eat so many insects, one huge problem is the wide spread use of insecticides which result in reduced reproductive success and death for the bats.

To me bats are a great part of warm summer evenings. I first saw them as a child on vacation at my grandma's in the country, where I was allowed to run outside in the dark. It always was an exciting and slightly scary sight as they would swoop so close to my head. Later on, in summertime at the last Nature Center party in June when we could see them at the parking lot, saying goodbye to our friends for the summer and now when I see them in my back yard.... It's a warm summer evening's excitement to savor before the first cool hint of fall touches the air.

Keep looking, they are around. You'll now know them when you see them!



## Excerpt from Oak Trees: A Heritage in Peril

by Frank T. Hovore

“The scattered oak groves of today are, of course, mere remnants of much larger ancient forests. Before the arrival of “civilized” man there existed a successful balance between the oaks and their natural “enemies;” the trees, the fungus, and the moths have gotten along in a complex living arrangement for centuries, and none seems a major threat to the continued existence of the others. Humans, however, with their overwhelmingly powerful technologies and seemingly compulsive need to dominate the environment, may by design or accident, easily eliminate all three.

Progress has not favored the original inhabitants of our Valley; the oaks and many other species of plants and animals are fading as a result of continual unnatural pressures, and we have long ago bid farewell to Grizzly Bears and Tataviam Indians. Perhaps we would be wise to consider our natural heritage a bit more intelligently as we draw-up our designs for the future; with our ever-increasing knowledge of natural systems and renewable resources, we should be able to interact with our environment sensibly and respectfully, instead of simply imposing ourselves upon it. It will be a great tragedy if we achieve a shallow progress at the expense of our natural resources.”

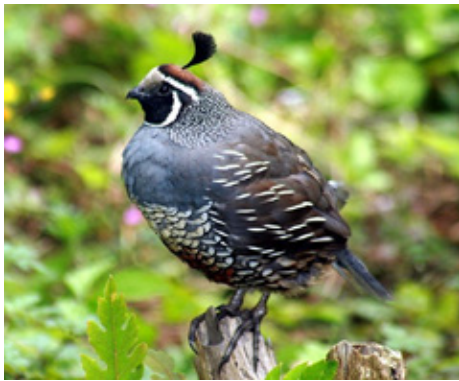
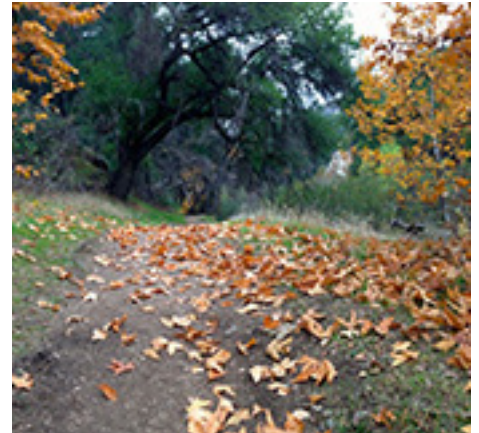


Photo by Wikipedia



## Backyard Birding In Summer

By Bob Fischer

Most of my bird watching in July and August is in our backyard and nearby neighborhoods where I walk for an hour every day. Fortunately, that neighborhood includes a wide variety of habitats, starting with our backyard which has a large lawn, flowers, shrubs, trees and adjacent chaparral covered hillsides.

Even in summer we see an amazing variety of birds in our yard including abundant species like House Sparrows, House Finches, Scrub Jays, Crows, California Towhees, Mourning Doves, California Quail, Anna’s Hummingbirds, Black Phoebes and Mockingbirds. Most of these can be seen almost daily year-round. Not seen quite as often are Western Bluebirds, California Thrashers, Bewick’s Wrens, Nuttall’s Woodpeckers, Oak Titmice and Robins. Occasional passersby overhead are Red-tailed Hawks, Turkey Vultures and an occasional Red-shouldered Hawk, though the Red-shoulder is more likely to be heard calling or flying nearby. A Cooper’s hawk used to visit and our neighbor tells us the Cooper’s haunts

his backyard birdbath and preys on the smaller birds using the bath besides taking its own bath.

Elsewhere, on our morning walk which takes us along the little golf course in Friendly Valley, across the creek running through the golf course, along streets partially lined with oak, ash and flowering pear trees and up to a grove of eucalyptus trees at the end of Avenue of the Oaks, we have seen many, many more species. Most exciting, not always in summer, are Cedar Waxwings, Bullock’s Orioles, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Tanagers and Phainopeplas.

In spring Killdeers frequent the edges of the creek bed, nested and in July tiny round balls of fluff could be seen running after the adult birds. Quail nested on the nearby chaparral hillsides and we have been treated all summer with quail families foraging on our back lawn and around the edges of the golf course, and speckled baby Bluebirds and Robins chased after their parents begging for more food.

One of the great pleasures of all this bird watching is getting acquainted with the behaviors of the different species and learning what kind of habitat niche each prefers. Their habitat preferences seem to be very specific and very narrow in many cases. A gravel covered edge of the golf course attracts Lark Sparrows. After the section was converted to grass, the Lark Sparrows disappeared and I see them occasionally elsewhere. And behavior is sometimes almost as good an identifier as a close sighting. And of course their calls and songs have always been clues if not outright specifiers of identification. The melodic, meandering of a Mocking Bird, the sharp take-off call of a Nuttall’s Woodpecker, the repeated “killdeer” echoing overhead clearly identify the maker of that call whether seen or not.

So even the hot days of summer have yielded many days of delightful, satisfying bird watching very close to home.



Photo by Jess Nikolai



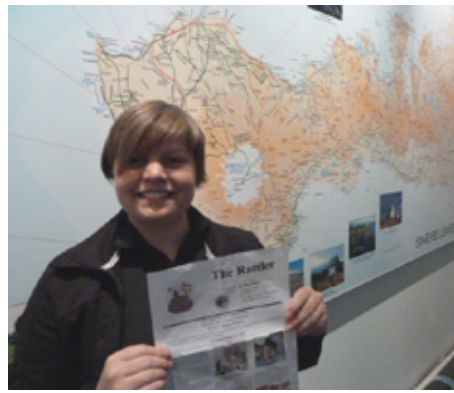
Photo by Wikipedia



## On the Road with the Rattler



Irene Heerlein took a long trip this summer and this photo was taken at Mt. Rainier National Park, Washington.



Here is a local docent at the Snaefellsjokull Nature Preserve and National Park in Iceland holding the Rattler while Mike snapped her photo.



Michael Elling took the Rattler to Iceland “It was cold and raining! The fog was thick and prevented me from seeing very far but all the wild flowers were in bloom and every body was walking or hiking enjoying their summer weather”.



Mike Elling took the Rattler all over in his visit to Minnesota. Here he is underground in several caves (especially Mystery Cave near Harmony, MN) and then to the National Eagle center where they have 5 bald eagles who can't be released into the wild so they educate the public about eagles. It was a wonderful trip.



Michael Elling, Maria Elena Christensen, Denny Truger and Charitha Eragoda went to the Devil's punch bowl on a Moonlight Hike on the day of the Solstice.



Maria Elena Christensen and her son, Denny Truger, Charita Eragoda and Michael Elling took the Rattler to the top of Mount Baldy, 10,064 feet high. Their legs hurt but they never gave up.



“The Rattler” rocks at Glacier Point Yosemite. I went here to see Irene Heerlein and Marcus Heerlein climb Half Dome at Eastern High Sierra. Thank you Denny Truger for taking the Rattler along.



Irene Heerlein went up Half Dome in Yosemite up via the Climbing Route Snake Dyke and she even took the Rattler with her.





## On the Road with the Rattler, continued



Sue Wallander took the Rattler to the Congo and a Slave Museum. The British started the slave trade and built several “castles” along the West Coast. The men and women were kept in horrible dungeons. I thought that most slaves went to America, but Brazil was the country that had the most slaves.



Lanita Lee Algeyer took the Rattler to Carrizo Plain National Monument with a few docents; on this photo you can see Lanita, Bev, Dolores and Bryan. They saw some spectacular wildlife.



### Good Bye Rachael

We are a little sad but happy for Rachael Komulainen. Her last day at Placerita was Friday, May 31, because she accepted a full time position at Hart Park taking care of the animals. We have seen how active she was in Placerita, always helping and making sure that all the work gets done. We just had finally learned to write her name without making mistakes and now we have to say good bye. Lucky for us, Hart Park is close by so we can always visit. Thank you Rachael for all what you did at Placerita.



Ron Kraus wrote: “Jill and I got a tour of the Roloff Family Farm outside of Portland, OR, earlier today. The farm and the man sitting next to Jill (Matt Roloff) are featured on the TV reality show, “Little People, Big World.” Matt and his wife Amy are little people who have 4 kids (one of which is a little person) and the show is about their life running the farm and raising the kids. It’s one of our favorites. Matt is a real hard working, driven guy who many times gets into trouble with his family because all of the projects he has going on all the time. After spending some time with him this morning, he seems just like they show him on TV--always running around supervising and planning projects, but real likeable.”



# Community Nature Education

This program is made possible by PCNCA and the Community Hiking Club under the direction of Fred Seeley, with programing planning assistance by Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel. Programs will be held in the classroom at Placerita at 2pm the third Sunday of each month. The topics may be subject to changes and we will ask you to check our web site or call the center for confirmation.

September 15	Station Fire Recovery	Corina Roberts
October 20	Who’s Eating Whom in the Food Web?	Janet Kubler
November 17	Co-existing with Bears	Kim Bosell
January 19,	California Condors	Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel
February 16	Placerita Canyon’s Tataviam	Laurie Solis
March 16	Geology of Placerita	Eric Indermill
April 27	Butterflies of Placerita	Paul Levine
May 18	Chaparral Fire Ecology-Myths, Misconceptions and Lies!	Chaparral Institute
June 8	History of Placerita Canyon	Ron Kraus



## New Century Oil Well Placerita Canyon



*Excerpt from an article by Leon Worden, SCV History.com 2012*

It's said that it burns brighter and longer than kerosene. It's so clear you can read a newspaper through it. You can even put it directly into your car's gas tank — if your car is a Ford Model "T" or Model "A" with its original engine, anyway. **Nothing quite like it is known to exist anywhere else in the world!**

It's Placerita's white oil, a unique geologic oddity of nearly water-white, light-gravity oil obtained from wells drilled into metamorphic rocks in Placerita Canyon since 1899, and which continues to bubble up from the casing of an old well below the Canyon Trail inside Placerita Canyon State and County Park.

Placerita white oil was an instant phenomenon. Imagine the startled expressions on people's faces when the oil that shot out of that first casing gushed white instead of black!

Typical California crude oil, like the type across the valley in Pico Canyon, had to be refined to produce usable fuels. It sold for about \$1 per barrel at the dawn of the 20th Century. This stuff in Placerita Canyon didn't need such expensive treatment. Folks figured it could sell for \$4 to \$5 or more.

The oil had been piquing geologists' interest for years by the time property owner Frank Walker sent a sample in 1932 for chemical analysis. Walker had been using his own home-made "oil-gas-water separator" to siphon the white oil into a drum for direct use. The "gas" that he separated was natural gas, which he piped into his house.

Walker's crude oil tipped the scales in its richness of light-weight fuels. The 1967 analysis showed it to be 83.3 percent gasoline — with a calculated 73 octane rating — and 15 percent gas oil when refined at 400 to 600 degrees Fahrenheit. The figures coincide with the 1900 and 1932 analyses, which showed a total of 99.82 and 98 percent usable product, respectively even though Walker's 1932 sample had been sitting around and some of the lightest fuels had already evaporated before the sample was tested.

And thus, Walker's oil had an incomprehensibly low residuum of just 0.18 to 0.2 percent.

If somebody could exploit this Placerita product, he'd make a fortune.

A book published in 1900 tells of its discovery: "About six years ago George W. Freeman and Frank Nelson, two prospectors who were sinking for gold in Placerita canyon, were everywhere met by quantities of natural gas, the flow being frequently so strong as to drive them out of their shafts. Finally they decided to cease sinking for gold and drill for oil.

"With a spring pole and a small drill they sunk the first well and were rewarded after many hardships and months of patient toil with a fine flow of oil, different from anything ever found in the state, if not in the entire world. The oil discovered was nearly 50 degrees gravity and about the color of ordinary kerosene. It is a marvel to all beholders, as it can be used either for engine distillate or for illuminant without refining.

A report on well activity in Placerita Canyon suggests that as of 1900, the only other well that would have "verified the wonders of that first strike" was the first well sunk by the New Century Oil Co. — the source of the oil "seep" along the present-day Canyon Trail at Placerita Canyon State and County Park.

The New Century Well No. 1 — and the Canyon Trail — sit about 100 feet downhill from Freeman & Nelson's 1899 discovery well "on adjacent property," according to Redpath. He notes that the Pioneer White Oil Co. had just sunk a well to a depth of 500 feet, with "every indication of success." It showed "great quantities of natural gas," Redpath writes; "a heavy flow of white oil is looked for any day."

Redpath appears to have known his remarks were prospective, acknowledging that "at the present time ... there is but one really extensive producer of oil [in the Newhall area], the Pacific Coast Oil Company" in Pico Canyon. Had Redpath waited a few years, he'd have had a different view of Placerita's potential.

But he wasn't alone in his enthusiasm. When the New Century No. 1 well gushed white on Aug. 25, 1900, a magazine published by the prominent Los Angeles writer Charles F. Lummis proclaimed that this "liquid wealth ... gushed above the derricks at the rate of two hundred barrels a day" (Redpath said 100) "and under the pumps is now steadily producing forty barrels a day. The second well of the company is within a short distance of oil sand and the strike is awaited with great interest by stock buyers and scientists alike."

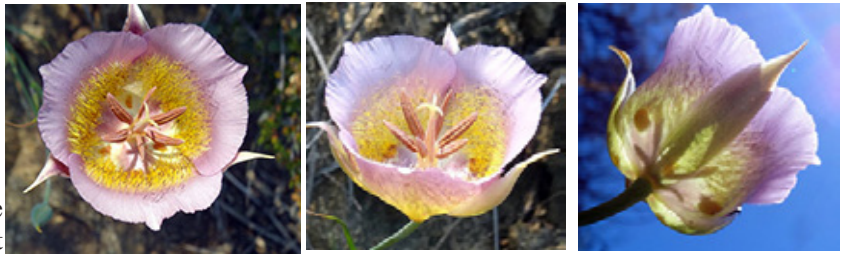
If they waited, they grew old doing it. A total of 11 wells were drilled in Placerita from 1899 to 1912 at depths of 457 to 2,100 feet, followed by seven more from 1912 to 1957 with a maximum depth of 2,325 feet. Most came up dry or showed scant traces. Only the two wells already mentioned — the 1899 Freeman & Nelson well (as the Freeman & Nelson White Oil Co. of Fillmore, Calif.) and the New Century Well No. 1 — appear to have produced any measurable quantity. And if they "steadily produced forty barrels a day," they didn't do it for very long. Most years, they produced just 2.5 barrels per day at best.

One other historic fact in connection to Placerita white oil should be mentioned. According to local lore, samples of it were displayed at the 1876 Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia. There is no shred of evidence to support this claim, while much exists to refute it.



## Intermediate Weed's Mariposa (*Cholochortus weedii* var. *intermedius*)

It was the last day of May and this beautiful flower was just opening on Los Pinetos Trail. Denny H. Truger took the photo and he was hiking with Charita Eragoda and Maria Elena Christensen. The photos are beautiful and the docents had the feeling they had just seen something very special. Indeed, after doing some



research they found out that this plant is "uncommon" (in layman terms, that means rare), that it can indeed be found in the chaparral where it was observed, that it can be more common following a fire and that the flowering time is in June and July. Nice.

## The Community Hiking Club and Placerita Canyon Nature Associates Present The Station Fire Forest Recovery Project

September 18, 2013

2:00 PM

In the Classroom at Placerita Nature Center



When the Station Fire was roaring up the mountain towards Mt. Wilson, Corina Roberts was standing there taking photos! Firemen whisked her away before her home burned. Since then, she's been taking photos of the forest's recovery.

Photographer Corina Roberts has devoted the last four years to this effort with the goal of using artistic images to inspire understanding. She resides in the Angeles and has witnessed the recovery on a daily basis.

The Forest Recovery Project chronicles the natural recovery of the Angeles National Forest from the Station fire of 2009. Examining all of the major biomes within the burn area as captured in still images, the Forest Recovery Project illustrates nature's amazing regenerative ability and examines some of the challenges presented by California's terrain and the present trends of wild-land fire.

See you there! It's fun, it's free, and great for the whole family!

**Directions:** From Valencia, take the I-5 Freeway South to the SR-14 North. Exit at Placerita Canyon Road. Go approximately 2 miles to Placerita Natural Area. You will see a wooden sign and a driveway on the right side. Enter the drive and park close to the building. Meet in the classroom inside the building before 2:00 PM.



### 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:

**Girl Scouts Brownie Troop #6862** - *Miss Muffet*, the California tarantula  
**Ryan Silver** - *Miss Muffet*, the California tarantula  
**Laurel Hall School, Third Grade** - *Orion*, the great horned owl  
**Linda P. Goddard** - *Apollo*, the turkey vulture (Second year of support)  
**Aidan Welch, Deirdre Welch and Isadora Hester** - *Apollo*, the turkey vulture.

**Many, many thanks to all of you for your fantastic support!**



# Open House

By Pam Koch

Face painting had some excellent help this year! Mari Carbajal headed up the team and we were joined by Jim Hazard's son Randy and his girlfriend Rachel. Randy is a makeup artist! We had the cutest kids and a great time. They were very forgiving of our novice skills and happily wearing their new faces--from Spiderman to 'Tiger Girl', to butterflies and snakes. We were always busy which made it a little difficult to get away and see what everyone else was up to. We were stationed next to the kids' crafts and they had a lot of 'customers' and lots of laughter and creative fun.

When I was able to slip away to enjoy a quick lunch I stopped by the telescopes for the first time. Although The Local Group are kind enough to join us each year at Open House, this is the first time I peeked through the sun scopes. It was amazing to see the tiny black dots on the surface of the sun and realize those little dots were several times larger than the earth. Then a peek through the next scope revealed solar flares – huge and majestic.

Our vendor – Hillbilly Taco's was a great success and people loved the food. Jill Goddard was busy at her Caricature post. The Rock Club was rocking out in the classroom and the museum was filled with the down under jungle sounds of the kookaburra. Parking was well managed, gold panning was doing a fine business and clothes were getting washed the old fashioned way at the cabin, plus it was good to see Allan Wallander and Cliff Kelling once again back at the two-man saw.

All of our vendors added to the information on hand and engaged our visitors in nature – topped off by custom guided hikes. What more could one ask for?

Thanks to everyone for participating! Thank you Russ Kimura, Dave Stives, Jeff Crosby, Chris Sapovchek, and Agustin Hernandez for your coordinated efforts to show off our park.

Thank you most of all to our local community of friends and neighbors for supporting our efforts throughout the year. Nature education is near and dear to us. In the words of our friend and mentor, Frank Hovore: "...to our children, and to all children who will come; to all who care – share this canyon of cool beauty; look to the future with a peaceful hope:





# End of the School Year Party

*By Evelyne Vandersande*

That is a very long name, but it was a lovely evening. More than 70 docents and their families came to celebrate the last few school groups before summer recess and all wanted to have a good time together. As usual it was pot luck and the food was delicious and plentiful, the line around the buffet table moved very slowly with all those delicious choices that needed to be made!

After dessert and nice conversation, the result of the votes for PCNCA board members was announced by Dan Kott and Carol Rush; Jim Crowley, also part of the great voting committee could not be there.

The board members who were re-elected are: Jim Southwell, President; Ron Kraus, Vice President; Heidi Webber, Treasurer; Evelyne Vandersande, PR; Teresa Jacobs, Director. Two new board members were elected: Mari Carbajal who took the position of Recording Secretary, and Ray Orloff who has the Alternate Director position. Welcome on the board and thank you for this commitment of hard work for Placerita. We appreciate your dedication.

We were sorry to have to say good-bye to Debbra Barroso who had to resign because of personal commitments, from her Recording Secretary position that she held so well for a few years. Thank you for all your hard work Debbra.

We also said good bye to Jim Harris who held the position of alternate the previous two years.

Deb Clem who was in charge of Open House came to thank all the docents who showed such a great team spirit for this event. It was the most attended and most successful Open House ever. Thank you Deb for putting so much effort and bringing such a fun spirit to that special day.

Then it was time to recognize some people who developed special projects and showed initiative to improve our organization. Awards were given to Beverly Browe, Dolores Olson, Irene Heerlein, Marietta Ewing and Jim Owens.

Jack Levenberg received a special trophy for his body of work.

Marnye Summers could not come at the last minute to receive her plaque and we will try again to give it to her during the Breakfast of the Champions in August.

Russ Kimura gave Jim Southwell and Ron Kraus, on behalf of the county, a very special award for naturalist Program of the Year. Russ told us this award was usually reserved for county employees and it was the first time that it was given to a docent organization; he was very impressed and grateful. We do such a great job that the county officials noticed our efforts. We are quite impressed and very pleased ourselves. Thank you for this splendid recognition.

Pam Koch was called to the stage, she was surprised not expecting a plaque at this stage of her docent career (she had a few awards in the past!) She was presented with a memory album composed by Sue Wallander and Evelyne Vandersande. Many docents contributed by sending letters and photos. Pam is planning to move to Arizona and we wanted to make sure she knew what a tender place she has in our heart and at Placerita. She did so much for our organization that it will be hard to let her go. Pam was much moved and the tears started to flow, but as usual, I was so impressed by the way she expressed herself with dignity, humor, and sincerity. She is in a class of her own and I will always be in awe of Pam.

Heidi Webber received a plant and a huge "get well card" two days before her hip surgery.

Then it was time for one of the major cinematographic achievements from Ron Kraus covering 10 years in Placerita from 2003 to 2013. It was also the first time that our new state-of-the-art audio visual was used and the sound was superb. When the voice of Barbara Streisand singing "Memory" was heard and Ron played the part of the movie showing Frank Hovore in action at Placerita, I do not think there was a dry eye in the house! However, a few minutes later we were laughing at a volcano explosion or dinosaurs running in the park so Ron knows how to handle his audience with dexterity. It was a good evening with many friends and we really had a very special time.



## A Furry Collector



If you could visit the nest of a Dusky-footed woodrat, you would have many surprises.

Let's start with the treasure room; they are not called packrats in vain. They store items totally useless for them but that seems to have had a certain attraction at one time. Pens, bottle caps, bic lighters, shiny pieces of foil wrappers are a few items that were found after opening such a nest. The items are carefully assembled in one special collecting room.

The home tour continues...There is a pantry full of acorns and twigs for their food supply. An interesting detail: some leaves when they are fresh are toxic like the toyon leaves which go in a separate room where they are kept until the toxin is gone and they are ready for consumption. Only then are they brought up to the pantry. There is a toilet and it is never close to the pantry, woodrats poop about 100 pellets a day (One has to wonder how these statistics are made?) When the toilet is full, the scat is pushed away from the nest where they fertilize the ground around the nest.

There is a room to sleep and it is lined with grass and bark; often there are a few California bay leaves if they can be found in the environment or else some very pungent plants to repel fleas.

The woodrat nest looks like a very large tipi with sticks piled together; they can get very large and some studies have been made to look at the seeds left in those nest to find out if any changes in the botany of the area has occurred through the years.

If you see one nest, often there is another one close by. Female woodrats build the nest or take over the nest from the mother which in turn starts another nest close by. Some male woodrats are kicked out by the female after mating, and often build a smaller nest in a tree.

There is very little chance of seeing a Dusky-footed woodrat as they are nocturnal and they shy away from light -- even moon light. They are rather large (10 to 19 inches long but that includes the tail). If you were to approach a nest at night you might hear the noise they make when swooshing around their tails when they are excited or afraid. They use this as a warning device against predators.

They like a dust bath and spread themselves in the dust; they also shed their fur to keep clean.

They do not like being on the ground and if they do they wait after each step to make sure they are safe as they are worried about making noise and becoming prey. They much prefer to travel in trees and on branches and they make their own trail between the branches they use most of the time.

If you look at the photos, you can see their main color is cinnamon, and they have whiskers in six parallel rows. Their ears are thin, round and hairy, and they have sharp claws. Females look the same as males, but the male is slightly larger and heavier.

If there are many males in the same area, the male won't reach sexual maturity. If the male is alone, it will become sexually mature.

The Dusky-footed woodrat is very well adapted the climate in Southern California. Their reproductive period begins in late September until mid-June. This is also the time of the year where we have the most rain and good plant growth so food is plentiful.

Females mate with one single male and the male pairs with the closest female which is sexually receptive. After gestation begins, the female rejects the male and become aggressive toward him so he goes to live on his own in a separate nest which he builds himself. The mother has between 2 to 3 babies who are dependant on her until they are weaned at about 3 weeks after birth; then the young start eating the same greens as the parents.

The Dusky-footed woodrat does not like to be in the open, they shy away from grass meadows and prefer areas that provide good cover and screening. At Placerita, you will find woodrat nests in areas with many shrubs where they will find shade and plenty of branches to navigate and build their nests.

You have to admit that it is an interesting creature with intriguing different habits. The treasure room is always a fascinating aspect of the woodrat and adults, like children, are always very interested when they learn of it.



### Official Dedication of Vasquez Rocks

We are delighted to announce that Vasquez Interpretive Center had its official opening on Thursday, May 30, 2013. Supervisor Mike Antonovich, Russ Guiney County Parks Director and Hayden Sohm Deputy Director were there for the dedication. There was a Tataviam and Chumash blessing, a mounted sheriff patrol was controlling the event, and many docents from Placerita came to attend the long awaited opening from the building. It is with great pleasure that we send our neighbor Interpretive Center and all their docents our best wishes. We know that many happy and interesting events will take place in this beautiful new home for the enjoyment of all your visitors.

*"Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed. We simply need that wild country available to us"* Wallace Stegner.







### A Trip with Lanita to Carrizo Plain

We started our tour on top of a mountain with a fantastic view of Soda Lake with our BLM tour guide. You then hike down to Soda Lake where you can see the salt crystals on the lake. The surrounding area has lots of wildlife and is the home to a vast number of tarantulas. We were told that the hunt of the male tarantula for a mate in mass can be seen at Wallace Creek in late September-early October.

We then went to the Chumash and Yokut pictographs at Painted Rock. This was a very special place; however we were asked not to publicly display any

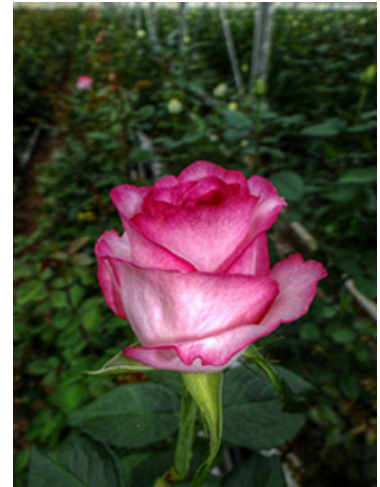
of our photographs because the Native Americans still use the area for many religious ceremonies. You can Google pictographs at Painted Rock and see some pictures; however, it is not like being in the center of these rocks and seeing them for yourself.

This was a great trip. I hope the next time we go there we get more wildflowers. They have only had a little over 3 inches of rain this season, which is their second lowest on record.



### A Trip with Dolores Olson Carpenteria Greenhouse and Nursery Tour

This was a great trip where we viewed the behind the scenes operations of commercial flower growing, from the cultivation, production, storage and shipping processes. It was fun day in Carpenteria visiting the green houses but we had a specially great time eating tri-tip, listening to music and sampling the wine at Western Farms.



### A Trip with Dan Kott



Braving the cold and rain, seventeen docents and their guests visited two interesting locations in San Francisquito Canyon on May 6.

The tour started at the DWP Power Plant 1 hydro-electric generating facility. The plant has been producing power since 1917 from water flowing from Owens Valley to LA via the 338 mile Los Angeles Aqueduct.

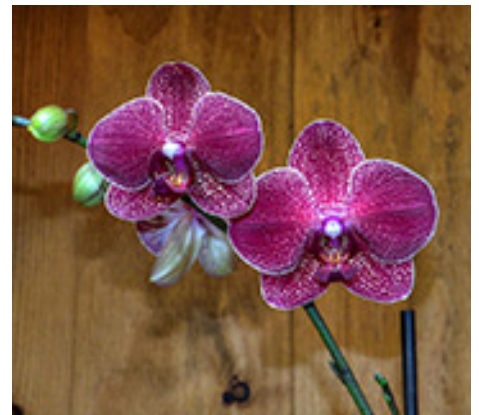
After visiting the plant, the group drove five miles to the old site of the St. Francis dam and hiked to see concrete remnants of the structure. The 185 foot high dam failed in 1928 soon after it was filled. The



impounded water traveled fifty-four miles through San Francisquito canyon and the Santa Clara river valley resulting in a great loss of life and property.

Tour leader Dan Kott worked at the power plant and lived close to the dam site for many years before retiring from LADWP.

Dan, thank you for educating us on the history and technical aspect of the DWP Power Plant and the St. Francis Dam. This visit and your explanations made a deep impression on all the docents who came with you and they were still talking about this visit a few days later.



## Unwelcome Guests

*By Paul A. Levine*

I suspect that a large number of readers of *The Rattler* have hummingbird feeders in their yard. I know that I do – in fact, I have two and I just gave one as a gift to a very dear friend. It is fascinating and enjoyable to sit and watch the hummingbirds swirl around the feeders, the iridescent red, gold and green glinting off of their heads depending on the angle the sunlight hits them.

However, the sugar water attracts more than just hummingbirds. Once they locate this free source of food, the ants have a field day. In addition, it makes it difficult to take the feeder down to refill it without being covered in ants.

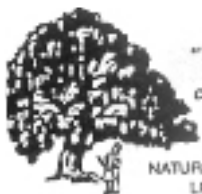
If you have the feeder suspended from a Shepherd's Hook, this is an easy problem to solve. Coat a portion of the Shepherd's Hook with a generous amount of Vaseline jelly and this will prevent the ants from reaching the feeder. One should coat a portion of the Shepherd's Hook where the hummingbirds will not be sitting; I have chosen the vertical segment for about 6 inches. The Vaseline will eventually melt in the heat and flow and may have to be periodically re-applied but if there is no other access to the feeder, the ants have absolutely no way of reaching the sugar water in the feeder itself.



## 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