



# OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF THE LOS OSOS / MORRO BAY CHAPTER OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION  
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 528-0392 ❖ AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2012

## SWAP and SLO County Collaborate in Elfin Forest

By Ron Rasmussen

SWAP Chair and Conservation Committee Chair

Most visitors consider the Elfin Forest to be a single 90-acre entity, but the Forest is technically divided into three parts. The northern 41 acres, including 23 acres of bay salt marsh, are included in Morro Bay State Park. About 11 acres, including Bush Lupine Point, belong to the California State Lands Commission. The southern 38 acres belong to San Luis Obispo County. This is the section that in 1994 was purchased from a private owner with funds raised by SWAP and the people of the surrounding community. When the purchase was finalized, SWAP offered the land to County Parks to ensure the permanent preservation of this important area. The County accepted on the condition that SWAP would continue to oversee and maintain the parcel. SWAP accepted the condition and since July 1994 has continued to care for the Forest under the County's Adopt-A-Park program.

The County-owned section was and is the most important part of the Elfin Forest. The reasons are that (1) it was the most heavily impacted by inappropriate use prior to 1994; (2) it was full of non-native plants that were crowding out the natives and (3) it is the area seen and used (and abused) by most visitors coming to the Forest. Now most, but not all, of the non-native species have been controlled or removed, and judicious use of fencing has greatly

*SWAP and County continued on page 4*



*George and Pat Brown enjoy their bench.*

## Stories of the Boardwalk Benches The Browns' Bench in Celestial Meadow

Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

When the opportunity came up to purchase the last available Elfin Forest bench in 2011, Pat and George Brown knew that it would be an excellent way to honor their parents. It pleased them that the bench would be located in the Celestial Meadow, where one can look out over the meadow and toward Hollister Peak beyond the Forest, while enjoying the quiet.

Pat Brown's parents were Ruth and Bob Smith, who lived in Orville, Ohio. Pat said that Orville is known as the home of Smucker's jellies and jams and that her uncle was a purchasing agent for that company, buying sugar by the railroad carful. Pat's mother died in 1972. Her father, Bob, always came to the Elfin Forest when he visited Pat and George, who live in Los Osos. He

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## SWAP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*The Board of Directors  
of the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter of  
Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP)  
consists of the following members:*

Ron Rasmussen, Chair  
Jan DiLeo, Treasurer  
Yolanda Waddell, Secretary  
Pat Akey, Member at Large  
Pat Murray, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly  
at the Community Room, Morro Shores  
Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

The next meetings are  
**Thursday, August 9,  
and Thursday, September 13.**

All Board meetings are open to the public.

To confirm the date, time and location  
(which are subject to change),  
call (805) 528-0392.



## CONTACT SWAP

If you have questions about SWAP activities or  
want to volunteer, please call  
(805) 528-0392 and leave a message.

A recorded message will give information  
about our 3rd Saturday Walks,  
Work Saturdays, and other events. If you have  
questions, concerns or comments about any  
problems in the Elfin Forest, call or write:

Mark Wagner

SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger  
1087 Santa Rosa Street, SLO, CA 93408  
(805) 781-1196

Owners of dogs off-leash can be cited. If you  
witness dogs off-leash, vandalism or obvious  
crimes, call the County Sheriff at 781-4550  
or Mark Wagner at 781-1196.

## Browns' Bench *continued from page 1*

lived in San Luis Obispo the last three years of his life, passing away in 2004. Members of the SWAP Board knew him as the person who counted out Boardwalk Trail Guides into packs of ten and slipped rubber bands around them so that Pat, the Trail Guide Committee Chair, could more easily keep monthly track of the number of Trail Guides placed in the Forest.

George's parents, George and Lois Brown, owned a farm near Santa Clara, California. George junior (who was always called Brownie, not George) is a third generation native Californian, and grew up on the farm. He said that U.S. 101 went through the middle of their farm. In the early days, it wasn't a problem, but after 101 became a large freeway, they had to cross from one part of the farm to the other by going under the freeway. Both George senior and Lois Brown visited the Elfin Forest numerous times when they came to visit. The last time George senior visited the Elfin Forest he was in a wheel chair. He passed away in 2004, and Lois now lives in San Jose, California.

I asked the Browns how they met, growing up two thousand miles apart. They answered that they were both students at Michigan State University and moved to California after they married. George worked for many years for the San Luis Obispo County Office of Emergency Services, and Pat taught nutrition at Cuesta College.

Both Pat and George are retired from their long-time jobs, but George is now working part time for the County Health Department in emergency management, developing procedures and logistics. He also volunteers for the Boy Scouts, giving training for Boy Scout leaders. Pat is pursuing a passion for photography and teaches photography classes. She is also active as the SWAP Trail Guide Committee Chair, as a SWAP school walk docent and as a 3rd Saturday walk leader. When they have a moment, sometimes they go to the Celestial Meadow to sit on their parents' bench, enjoying the Forest that has meant so much to their entire family.

## Wildlife Corridor Partners Video

*By Yolanda Waddell*

Marla Morrissey, leader and one of the founders of the Morro Estuary Greenbelt Alliance (MEGA), has begun a project to document the progress of the lands that are included in the greenbelt. The Morro Estuary Greenbelt is a corridor of preserves that connects Morro Bay State Park and Montaña de Oro State Park, encircling the community of Los Osos, and the project is called Wildlife Corridor Partners.

The land in the greenbelt contains imperiled coastal dune habitat, 40 threatened and endangered species of plants and animals, watershed lands vital to the health of the Morro Bay Estuary, prime scenic view sheds and pathways for passive recreation. This rare ecosystem is so important that it was cooperatively protected by a partnership of government agencies, a land trust and private donors. Funds that were gathered for the greenbelt project are now in an endowment held by the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation.

The Wildlife Corridor Partners project will include a web site and a video featuring interviews of representatives of the greenbelt landowners. The landowners include Bureau of Land Management, California Coastal Conservancy, California Fish and Game, California State Parks, Los Osos Community Services District, Los Osos Middle School, Morro Coast Audubon Society, San Luis Obispo County Parks and private landowners.

SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen agreed to be the representative for County Parks to speak about the Elfin Forest. The videotaping was done in May at the Inn at Morro Bay. Each speaker was interviewed by three graduates of the original Los Osos Middle School Earth Club, now in their early 20s. Those being interviewed were given two to three minutes to describe the land that they are responsible for, what is being done to protect the property, and what the organization, agency or individual landowner needs from the community.

When completed, the video will be posted on the Wildlife Corridor Partners web site that is now "under construction." Also on the web site will be a map detailing the properties included in the greenbelt, the landowner names and contact information. Oakleaves will publish an announcement later in the year when the web site is up and ready. Each year the landowners will be interviewed again to give an update on the condition of their property and the progress in restoring it.



# County Parks Arborist Gives Orientation

*Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell*

San Luis Obispo County Parks arborist Chuck Woodard recently met with five members of SWAP's Trail Trimming Crew and Conservation Committee members Ron Rasmussen and Bob Meyer to give instruction in pruning shrubs and oak trees along the Elfin Forest boardwalk and paths.

SWAP trail trimmers had been concerned that shrubs adjacent to the boardwalk were looking like trimmed hedges. They wanted the plants next to the boardwalk to look more natural, but needed to trim back branches that were growing over the boardwalk or paths. Also, they were uncertain about the best way to trim Coast live oak trees.

Chuck Woodard explained and demonstrated how to select a branch or twig to cut. He said that the aim is to cut branches that are growing toward the boardwalk and to leave branches that will grow away from the boardwalk or path.

Lead trail trimmer Pat Murray remarked that there is much work to be done in clearing out older branches of shrubs and oaks in order to allow for future growth when the next rainy season arrives. She will ask Chuck to return and give the trail trimmers additional instruction. Participating in the orientation were Ralph and Loisann Cass, Rich and Prisila Johnson, Pat Murray, Bob Meyer and Ron Rasmussen.



*Trail trimmers attending Chuck Woodard's orientation were (L-R) Ralph Cass, Rich Johnson, lead trail trimmer Pat Murray, Prisila Johnson, Loisann Cass and Ron Rasmussen. Chuck Woodard is at the back.*



*County Parks arborist Chuck Woodard demonstrates a trimming technique to (front to back) Loisann Cass, Bob Meyer, Prisila Johnson, Ron Rasmussen and Rich Johnson.*

## Introducing Park Ranger Brian Wilder

In June, County Park Ranger III Brian Wilder paid a visit to the Elfin Forest and took a tour with SWAP Board members Ron Rasmussen, Pat Murray and Yolanda Waddell. Brian was recently transferred to the County Parks Pecho District from Santa Margarita Lake. He lives in Los Osos with his wife and two daughters and has visited the Elfin Forest many times, but was unfamiliar with SWAP and wanted to learn about issues relating to the Elfin Forest.



The Pecho District includes many County parks, such as Cuesta Park in San Luis Obispo, El Chorro Regional Park, the Elfin

Forest, and several parks in Cayucos and Cambria. As a Park Ranger III, an advanced-level position, Brian is responsible for the administration, operation and routine maintenance of high-usage parks or parks that include all levels of service and recreational facilities. Because his schedule includes several County parks, he will keep an eye on the Elfin Forest, but won't be able to establish a regular presence. However, SWAP is grateful to have him contact us and learn about our projects and problems in the Forest. We look forward to working with him in the months and years to come.

reduced erosion and poor usage practices. However, as the recovery and beauty of the Forest has become better known the number of visitors has increased. Now there are several thousand new visitors every year, and with the boardwalk, many local residents are daily users. These facts require continued collaboration between SWAP and County Parks to maintain the Forest in a nearly pristine state and to ensure the safety of visitors.

Readers of *Oakleaves* know that the need for care of the Elfin Forest and its boardwalk is continuous. When SWAP recognizes or is told by visitors of a problem County Parks is notified and, if necessary, consulted regarding a remedy. Before undertaking significant construction or modifications it is necessary for SWAP to meet with our primary contact person, Shaun Cooper, Senior Parks Planner, at County Parks. For example, the need for last year's boardwalk repair was identified by SWAP and was planned in consultation with Mr. Cooper and Mike Anderson of the California Conservation Corps (CCC). Both are also planning the upcoming repair of boardwalk steps and installation of handrails. SWAP's role is to identify needs and then work with the county to see that they are met.

The Elfin Forest plant community also needs some maintenance. As is obvious to visitors, plants tend to overgrow the boardwalk. To keep the boardwalk clear for strollers and wheelchairs the plants must be trimmed. It is not appropriate just to cut the plants back because this would be unattractive and may give the appearance of a hedge. A County Parks Arborist, Chuck Woodard, has been consulted to train SWAP's volunteer "Trimmers" in the proper way to trim the plants, including some oaks, so that they maintain their natural appearance (see article on p. 3. Mr. Woodard is available to us for consultation or to give a hands-on demonstration of his craft.

Any area open to the public is at risk for vandalism or inappropriate behavior. Unfortunately, the Elfin Forest is not an exception. Some visitors do not even consider their actions to be harmful. SWAP is limited to how these problems can be addressed, and therefore must depend on County or State Park Rangers for help. Mark Wagner, Senior Park Ranger for the Pecho District that includes the Elfin Forest, and Brian Wilder, Park Ranger III, are SWAP's primary contacts for problems. Examples of problems that might be encountered are damage to the boardwalk or trees or actual camping in some of the oak groves. Dogs off-leash are a particular problem since they leave their droppings in the Forest and may attack Forest animals or other dogs that are leashed.

This summary is meant to show that, while SWAP's mission is to care for the Elfin Forest, we cannot do it by ourselves. You can help by becoming a volunteer. Call SWAP at 805-528-0392 or visit our website, [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org) for more information about SWAP and the Elfin Forest.

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*"A society is defined not only by what it creates, but by what it refuses to destroy."*

*— John Sawhill, former president/CEO of The Nature Conservancy*



## Western Fence Lizard

*Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler, Ph. D.*

Commonly seen doing their "push-ups" along the toe rails of our boardwalk especially in the hot summer months are Western Fence Lizards (*Sceloporus occidentalis*).

The range of this species is focused on the state of California, with outlying populations from the Columbia River Gorge in Oregon to northwestern Baja California and inland as far as Nevada and western Utah. They live in grasslands, farmlands, brushy habitats, woodlands, and coniferous forests from sea level to as high as 10,000 feet, but typically not in severe deserts. They even occur offshore on some islands. Of six recognized subspecies, ours is the Coast Range Fence Lizard, *S. o. bocourti*.

Western fence lizards are about 8 inches long, at least half of that being the tail. Seen from above, their color can vary from sandy or greenish brown to blackish, with darker blotches appearing as stripes across the back and along the sides. Adult males have bright blue bellies and throat patches, giving them a nickname of "blue bellies." The blue throat patches are absent in females and juveniles and small in males of our coastal subspecies. Being of the "spiny lizard" genus, they have many sharp scales along their backs and sides. The undersides of their legs are yellow.

"Push-ups" done by the males flash their blue throats and undersides, attracting females. During the mating season, adult males will defend a home territory from interloping males. They mate in the spring from the second year on. Females lay up to a dozen and a half eggs between April and July, which hatch around August. Food for the species consists mainly of insects and spiders. In winter they hibernate briefly here on the coast, longer at colder higher altitudes.

Predators of fence lizards include snakes, birds, and some small mammals. The lizards' habit of sunning themselves reveals them to these predators, but their quick reflexes often aid in their escape.

In the last few years, these lizards have become of much greater interest than just for their lovely blue bellies and their gymnastic antics. It was noticed that Lyme disease incidence is lower in areas frequented by Western Fence Lizards, despite high densities of the vector ticks in the same areas. It was learned that a protein in their blood kills the bacterium that causes Lyme disease, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. When ticks bite the lizards, the protein in the blood consumed kills the disease bacteria lurking in the digestive system of the ticks, and their bites can no longer infect humans with Lyme disease.



# False Brome

Text and scanned image By Dirk Walters, Ph. D.

The plant profiled in this issue of *Oakleaves* is native to Eurasia and as most might guess, a weed by any definition one could imagine. It prefers to grow in open or disturbed habitats and as far as I know, it is not used by humans for anything. I suspect it's not even a good forage grass because of its spindly stems and small scattered leaves. I actually haven't seen it in the Elfin Forest and it certainly doesn't grow anywhere near the board walk. This would be because the Weed Warriors would have pulled it out, or more likely, it couldn't compete with the perennials and shrubs that now dominate there. If I were to look for it, I would look around the edge of the Elfin Forest where it borders roads, vacant lots or poorly kept yards.

The plant is *Brachypodium distachyon*, commonly known as false brome. The genus name translates as short (*Brachy-*) foot (*pod*). Why foot? In order to answer this, I need to take up the common name, false brome. Brome grasses belong to the large, common genus, *Bromus*. Brome grasses have their tiny flowers (florets) tightly packed together in small elongate clusters known as spikelets. In the illustration, the spikelets are the flat flags near the tip of the 'stems'. Note also, the spikelets below the end one appear to be attached directly to the 'stem'. If this were a true brome grass, those lateral spikelets would be themselves at the end of a visible, even conspicuous, stalk. Therefore this is the 'false brome' because it lacks the stalked lateral spikelets or its spikelets are on a 'short foot'. The plant itself is relatively short (less than a foot tall) and straggly when it grows out in the open by itself. When it grows with lots of others, they form a loose thick mat up to a couple of feet tall.

The illustration used for this discussion is a scan. A plant was collected in the field and slapped on a computer scanner that produced the image. So how did I select the plant to be scanned? Here I need to do a bit of back-story. Back in the 1960's when I was in graduate school the method in vogue for determining relationships was numerical taxonomy. Numerical taxonomy took advantage of the computing power found in the newly available mainframe computers. Personal computers were still a dream! It involved measuring as many possible characteristics (at least 20) and then asking the computer to use modified statistical programs to determine which groups shared the greatest set of characteristics and which the least. I hope it seems reasonable that this methodology would group the plants sharing the most characteristics together while separating those sharing few. Modifications of these methods are still in use today, only instead of physical appearance and chemical characteristics used then, now DNA based sequences are preferred.

What has this to do with my choice of the plant to be scanned? My advisor, Dr. Charles Heiser, worked with sunflowers (*Helianthus*). I suspect most of you know that sunflowers tend to be very large plants, often over 2 meters (6 feet) tall. Dr. Heiser wanted to do a numerical taxonomic study on sunflowers found



in the world's herbaria. These dried specimens were collected over years, decades and centuries. He wanted to compare them with sunflower populations growing at the time of his study. He collected sunflowers very carefully so that they truly represented the population of living sunflowers. When he did this and then did the analysis, he discovered that his contemporary populations showed characteristics that were always significantly greater than those same characteristics measured in populations of herbarium specimens. What was his explanation? Over the centuries collectors had been selecting (probably unconsciously) smaller plants to collect so that the collected plant would fit on the standard herbarium sheet (12in x 17in) The fact that I selected a smaller than normal plant to fit the scanner has a long history.

*Editor's Note: By clicking the orange button that says "New!" on the elfin-forest.org web site home page and selecting Brachypodium distachyon, you can see close-ups of the spikelets of False brome as well as a map showing where in California this invasive plant occurs.*

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## Elfin Forest Sightings: Unlawful Crop



In June, some marijuana plants were found growing in a less accessible area of the Forest. The Sheriff was notified and a deputy removed the plants. Needless to say, the "farmer" was undoubtedly disappointed. In July, our Weed Warriors hauled straw wattles to the disturbed sandy plot. They installed four 20-foot wattles to stabilize the slope as best as possible. Photos and a description of the process will appear in our October/November issue of *Oakleaves*.

Parents – here is an idea for a learning experience for children old enough to read.

When visiting the Elfin Forest, take the children on a “Trail Guide Scavenger Hunt.” Ask them to find the numbers on the boardwalk toe rails that match the numbers in the Trail Guide, and then have them read what the Trail Guide says.



Third grade teacher Judy Neuhauser encourages her students to experience the meaning of “gnarled” by tracing the path of a Coast live oak branch with a finger. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

## Education Corner

By Pat Akey, Education Chair

This May, we had 40 Baywood Elementary School first graders for a field trip. Our studies included the insects of the Elfin Forest. The students were able to use magnifying glasses and information picture cards provided by the Education Committee to identify each insect we found. Our groups also learned how to identify poison oak, saw a woodrat nest and talked about woodrats, and learned about lichens in Rose’s Grove.

Two delightful and educational field trips on June 12th and 13th were led by Judy Neuhauser, 3rd grade teacher from Monarch Elementary school, and Pat Brown, experienced docent from SWAP’s Education Committee.

Judy has prepared a curriculum that truly involves the children’s feelings about nature. For example, instead of telling the children about the leaves of plants, she asked them to feel and smell the leaves of several plants, and then asked them to talk about the differences. She told them that scientists identify plants in just that way, by learning the appearances of each plant. Learning by experiencing can be done with various subjects in the Elfin Forest.

Pat Brown helped her group of students to learn about woodrat nests and woodrats, and to find many of the nests that are in the Elfin Forest. Thank you to Judy and Pat for a very informative hour and a half.

## Please Report Elfin Forest Sightings

Have you observed any unusual birds in the Elfin Forest? Mammals? Reptiles? Amphibians? Insects? Interesting activities or footprints of wildlife in our Elfin Forest? Unusual plants? Taken a good photo?

Please report any interesting sightings to your Oakleaves editors at: [oakleaves@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaves@elfin-forest.org) for inclusion in future issues under “Elfin Forest Sightings.” You can also leave a message on SWAP’s answering machine, (805) 528-0392.



Baywood Elementary School first graders engaged in an activity called “Who lives under this log?” during their insect walk in the Elfin Forest. Photo by Jean Wheeler.



## OAKLEAVES

is published six times per year beginning in February.

Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler; layout is by Katy Budge. Editing assistance by Pat Grimes.

Contributors to this issue: Pat Akey, Pat Brown, John Brunner, Marilyn Freiler, Vicky Johnsen, Betsy Kinter, Bob Meyer, Pat Murray, Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk Walters and Jean Wheeler

Printed at Hay Printing, Morro Bay on recycled paper.

Labeled and mailed at Achievement House.

Deadline for copy to Oakleaves is the first Wednesday before the month of issue.

If possible, all copy should be submitted by e-mail to: [oakleaves@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaves@elfin-forest.org).



## Veldt Grass Vanquished ... For Now

Text and Photos By Yolanda Waddell

In May and June, two hard-working crews clambered up and down the slope above South Bay Boulevard during the First Saturday work mornings. Their goal: to eliminate all visible veldt grass plants from the street up to the Orchid Trail that runs along the top of the slope. They almost succeeded. By quitting time on June 2nd, only a few clumps of the nasty grass remained at the southern end of what is considered to be part of the Elfin Forest. There is a dramatic contrast that's visible to passers-by, where the Elfin Forest stops and the untended slope dominated by veldt grass begins. Everyone, Weed Warriors included, can enjoy the sight of a native plant habitat without veldt grass on the western side of South Bay Boulevard until next Spring. Of course when the rains come, the Weed Warriors will be back out there battling the evil grass, since its seeds last in the ground for years. Thanks to Jay Bonestell, Dave Bowlus, Steve and Karin Cake, Paulette Edwards, Lannie Erickson, Vicky Johnsen, Rich and Prisila Johnson, Bob Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Brandon Sanders and Yolanda Waddell for being SWAP Weed Warriors with a lot of pull.



Dave Bowlus joined the sturdy hill-climbing team of veldt grass pulling Weed Warriors in May. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

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## Vandals on a Tear

We are in the midst of what Conservation Committee member Bob Meyer calls “Silly Season.” He said, “Certain types of vandalism are quite predictable by looking at the calendar, especially the school calendar. Summer vacation, Easter vacation, and the start of school are always peak times for vandalism in the Forest. The vandalism is not limited to the Forest. It is a general community problem.”

On June 13, during a school walk, Trail Guide Committee Chair Pat Brown saw numerous pieces of our Boardwalk Trail Guide strewn like confetti among the shrubs below the Siena's View overlook. She laboriously gathered the pieces and restocked the then-empty 13th Street trail guide box. On June 18, Conservation Chair Ron Rasmussen made an inspection tour of the Elfin Forest and saw more trail guide pieces, again scattered below Siena's View. He opened the green fence below the overlook, waded through the shrubbery and collected all the pieces.

At this writing, we are not sure if the young vandals are through with their destructive antics. We also hope that summer activities in the community of Los Osos will keep youngsters busy. In the meantime, SWAP members will be patrolling the boardwalk frequently. We ask that our members who visit the Elfin Forest notify us immediately if you see that vandalism has taken place. Call our message phone, 805-528-0392.

*If you see vandalism in progress or obvious crimes,  
call the County Sheriff at 781-4550.*

*Thank you for your help.*



Weed Warriors Steve and Karin Cake drove to Los Osos from Pismo Beach to help out with the June veldt grass pulling fest on the slope next to South Bay Boulevard. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

## SWAP First Saturday Work Parties

We invite you to join us on any first Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon at the north end of 15th Street in Los Osos to enjoy satisfying physical activity in fresh air amid lovely surroundings. Please dress for wind, fog, or sun. Layers work well. Long pants and long shirt sleeves are good. Sturdy shoes are a must. Take care not to park in front of driveways or mailboxes. To request more information, call (805)528-0392.



# Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

*Text and Photo By Jean Wheeler*

Our average annual rainfall is about 17-18 inches (depending on the length and starting and ending years of records consulted). Typically less than 5% falls between May through October. May averages well under half an inch, June and July a tenth of an inch or less, September about a third and October about three-quarters of an inch (first rains arrive as early as October in some years). August and September are thus nearly the end of the dry season and also among the warmest months of the year.

Many of our flowering shrubs and herbs have adapted so well to this aridity that they are still in bloom or even peak in these dry months. And seeds set by earlier bloomers are providing food for birds and other animals, including rapidly maturing offspring of this year.

White and yellow flowers tend to dominate the shrubs now. Coyote brush has both, the yellow flowers being male and the white ones female. Dune buckwheat also has white flowers, aging to pink, then rust or brown by October. The tiny flowers of ground-hugging California croton are also white.

The signature flowers of these months are the yellow mock heather, which blooms almost exclusively in August and September. California goldenrod is also in bloom. Pink flowers may still be seen on pink everlastings, California asters, and California hedge nettles.

California coffeeberry is especially attractive in these months along the boardwalk between Bush Lupine Point and Siena's View. The colorful berries appear yellow at first, darken to red and finally turn a richly beautiful black. Another bright red berry growing on shrubs in the same area is hollyleaf cherry.

Reptiles are most active in these warmest months, so look for garter, gopher, and California king snakes and enjoy the amusing pushups by western fence lizards along the toe rails of the boardwalk.

Among the resident birds active now, those most demanding attention are as usual the California scrub jays flashing blue and shrieking loudly. California Quail may be heard calling for chi-CA-go and scurrying through the underbrush.

Other resident birds actively flitting through the brush are Bushtits, Bewick's Wrens and California Gnatcatchers. White-crowned, Chipping, Lark, Savannah, and Song Sparrows are here at this season, as are House and Purple Finches, Lesser and American Goldfinches, and Anna's Hummingbirds.

Spotted Towhees (see photo top left) often cling to the tops of shrubs for a few minutes giving their loud buzzing call. They are beautiful birds with black heads, black backs with white spots, reddish-brown sides, and white bellies. Their relative the California Towhee is basic brown and usually stays low, as do the brown Wrentits. In bushes most of the time but fairly often seen calling from branch tops is the California Thrasher, brown above and buff below with a long down-curved beak and a long tail.

Also, begin to keep an eye out for the earliest arrivals of birds migrating south for the winter. Several species of ducks and some wading birds begin to arrive as early as August, and more come in September.



*Spotted Towhee*

## More Elfin Forest Sightings:

*From Weed Warrior Vicky Johnsen; photo by Marilyn Freiler*

Being a Weed Warrior is not JUST about pulling Veldt Grass! The chrysalis in the photo below is a Variable Checkerspot butterfly (*Euphydryas chalcedona*). It was attached to a piece of litter paper beneath a manzanita bush above South Bay Boulevard. I had promised myself that after I filled my second bag of invasive grasses, I would collect as much trash as I could from the immediate area. Luckily I looked closely at this piece of paper and found the chrysalis hanging on by a few invisible threads!

The chrysalis rested comfortably inside a pupery that a friend and neighbor, Marilyn Freiler, has set up with various other chrysalides undergoing pupation. My chrysalis became a beautiful Variable Checkerspot butterfly!

The photo of the newly emerged butterfly shows the underside of its wings. Its upper wings are black with white and orange spots. I had never followed this whole chain of magical events, which I know many grade school kids do here in the USA (my grade school was in Venezuela).





# WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

## Third (and Second) Saturday Walks

*August 18, 9:30 a.m. –*

### *Small Mammals and Rodents*

Dr. Francis Villablanca, Curator of Birds and Mammals at Cal Poly, will lead a walk in the Elfin Forest focusing on small mammals that inhabit the Forest, including the Dusky-footed Woodrat. There are about twenty species of small mammals known to live in the Forest, but few are seen because most hunt and feed at night. Dr. Villablanca will point out evidence that they are there, and share stories and information about the part they play in research being done at Cal Poly, and how they survive in a small wilderness like the Elfin Forest.

### *September 15, 9:30 a.m. – Marsh Ecology*

Twenty-three acres of the El Moro Elfin Forest are actually salt marsh lands. Join botanist Dr. Dirk Walters for an adventurous hike beginning at the north end of 15th Street in Los Osos and ending in the salt marsh adjacent to the rest of the Elfin Forest. You'll see many plants that are different from the ones usually observed from the boardwalk, such as pickleweed, salt grass, frankenia and goldenbush. Bring rubber boots – just in case.

### *October 13, 8:30 a.m. – Pre-Big Sit! Bird Walk (Second Saturday – Note earlier time)*

Jim Royer will lead us on a bird inventory walk in preparation for Sunday's Big Sit! This international event hosted by Birdwatcher's Digest ([www.birdwatchersdigest.com](http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com)) pits participating groups of birders against one another to identify the most species of birds in one day. Our Big Sit! takes place at Bush Lupine Point. Join Jim on Saturday in finding and identifying 60 or more species of birds throughout the Elfin Forest and in the Morro Bay estuary. Regardless of your birding experience, you'll come away knowing more about birds, their calls, their habits and habitats.

### *October 20, 9:30 a.m. – Archaeology*

Archaeologist Barry Price will take us time traveling into the pre-Spanish past of Central Coast inhabitants, the Chumash and their ancestors. Barry is a vice president and principal archaeologist at Applied Earthworks in San Luis Obispo, and specializes in historical and prehistoric archaeology. Walking along the boardwalk, he will tell us the fascinating story of the ancient peoples who camped in the Elfin Forest 1,000 years or more ago. He will bring artifacts that show the industry and culture of the Chumash and other indigenous tribes on the Central Coast. This walk will reveal a complex world of the Elfin Forest's past inhabitants, one that we would never suspect today.

*Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at times stated above. Park at the north end of 15th Street (16th Street for wheelchairs) off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Walks begin on the boardwalk at the end of the 15th Street path. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes, and leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.*



*In May, botanist Dirk Walters stopped at the eastern end of the boardwalk to talk about Chamise, a chaparral indicator plant. With its tiny leaves and profuse white late spring blooms, it is a spectacular Elfin Forest wildflower. Photo by Jean Wheeler.*



*During her June sketch walk, artist and naturalist Barbara Renshaw stopped in Rose's Grove to show walk participants her "collage" drawings of several plants on the same page. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

## Make the Switch to Online Oakleaves!

As of June, 115 SWAP members have opted for the online version. On your web browser, type in [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org) and click on the "Forest Library" button. Then click on the current issue of Oakleaves, with the pictures shown in full color. Back issues are archived there too and there is a subject index. If you are comfortable with reading Oakleaves on your computer screen, just send an e-mail to [oakleaves@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaves@elfin-forest.org) with the words "Online version only" in the subject line. We'll email you when each issue goes online. Thank you for switching nearly \$2 per copy in printing and mailing costs to conservation of the Elfin Forest instead!

# Thank You to Our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

## NEW MEMBERS:

Pam Bains  
Benjamin & Patricia Hansen\*  
Dr. Frank E. Kurczewski\*  
Keith E. Kurczewski\*  
Lisa Winn  
Dave & Julie Wolter\*

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

Joan Anderson*	Phillip and Joyce Kerce*
M. Bertrand and R. Dodge	Aya Kimura
Carolyn Boomer	Sally and Randy Knight*
William Booten*	James Landreth*
John Brunner*	Ms. Teddy Llovet
David and Linda Chipping*	Wendy McKeown
Ruth and Les Christiansen*	Sheila C. Montooth*
Mary and Allan Conkling	Melissa Mooney*
Margaret Diehl	Marcia Munson
Cheryl Dove	Brian Nofziger*
Lurlie Edgecomb*	Julie Orr*
L.R. Erickson	Randall and Shirley Palmer*
Molly and Ted Fainstat*	Rebecca Rasmussen*
Siegrid Fenn	Barbara Renshaw*
Phyllis M. Foulstone*	Rita Robinson
Mr. Woody Frey	Bill and Callie Sandoval
Nada Fuller	Dean Thompson
Bethany & Don Griffiths	Shaunna Sullivan and Ron Ruppert*
Chet and Lee Grimes*	Alyce Thorp*
Tom and Rita Hadjiyane	Norma Wightman
Marsha Houston*	Celia Zaentz*
Jim & Heather Johnson*	
Laura Kass*	

## DONATIONS:

Ginny Dobias in memory of Ernest Eddy  
W.C. McElhinney

*\*Thanks to those listed above who donated more than the \$25 (regular) or \$15 (senior or student) membership dues. The additional donations will be used for special projects in the Elfin Forest.*

## SWAP Calendar Gone for Good (2012 still available for \$2)

The sad news is that no one has stepped up to be Chair of the SWAP Calendar Committee, and the era of beautiful Elfin Forest calendars is over. Retired Calendar Committee Chair Debbie Levi can look back on the committee's accomplishments with pride. Not only did Elfin Forest calendars grace the walls of hundreds of SWAP members and others in our communities, but the income provided a financial cushion that allowed our chapter to fund numerous projects in the Elfin Forest.

There are still quite a few unsold 2012 calendars in our SWAP storage room. Rather than let them sit in their box, how about buying a few to give to friends and family for the unbelievably low price of \$2 each? This calendar is now a collector's item. We'll deliver to Los Osos and Morro Bay. Call us at 528-0392 or use the order form on page 11.

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## New Feature on Elfin Forest Web Site

*By Bob Meyer, SWAP Web Master*

On May 31, I attended the MBNEP (Morro Bay National Estuary Program) Central Coast Invasive Species Action Network workshop. It covered new tools available in the Calflora (UC Berkeley) web site. The instructor was one of Calflora's developers.

One of the new things available at Calflora is a means of creating a database of plants for a specific area that can easily be made available via the Web with all kinds of bells and whistles.

Once created, the database is easily maintained and can be linked to other web sites. The list appears with all the plants entered along with photos from the Calphotos web site (and links to other photo sites - Google Image, Flickr, and Picasa). The database can show the bloom period for each plant. By clicking on a plant's name you are shown a rather complete list of taxonomic data for that plant, including access to its 2011 Jepson Manual page. There are many other features that can be discovered with a bit of searching.

I created a database link for the vascular plants of the Elfin Forest and published it on our web site. There is a link on our home page at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org). Click the orange button with the word "New!" next to it, and you will see a list with two photos of each plant. That same link is also available under "Vascular Plants" in the Flora and Fauna section of the web site.

*Editor's Note: We're interested in what you think about our web site and would like to receive your comments at [oakleaves@elfin-forest.com](mailto:oakleaves@elfin-forest.com).*

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## From One of Our Members

Former Santa Barbara Chapter and SWAP, Inc. Treasurer John Brunner sent us the following note with his membership renewal:

*"Greetings from Santa Barbara. I hope everyone is in good spirits and healthy. Hi to Ron and Yolanda and the rest of the SWAP Board. Great newsletter - I really enjoy the informative articles."*





## Beautiful Notecards & Postcards Available from SWAP

Five lovely photos taken by Bob Meyer are available either as color notecards with envelopes or as color postcards. For either postcards or notecards, you can order sets of all five views or as many as you want of any one (or more) of them using the form below.



# SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

See Photos of All Items at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org)

All Prices Include Sales Tax

### 1. MURAL SHIRTS

Mural design by artist Barbara Rosenthal on both front and back. Words on shirt: "El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area" above mural and "Small Wilderness Area Preservation" and "Los Osos, California" below mural.

Circle Sizes:

- \_\_\_ Short Slv. T-Shirt (S, M, L, XL) @ \$19.00 = \$ \_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Short Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @ \$22.00 = \$ \_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Long Slv. T-Shirt (S, M, L, XL) @ \$23.00 = \$ \_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Long Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @ \$25.00 = \$ \_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Sweatshirt (S, M, L, XL) @ \$25.00 = \$ \_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Sweatshirt (XXL, XXXL) @ \$27.00 = \$ \_\_\_

### 2. PHOTOS OF THE ELFIN FOREST

Original print note cards

\_\_\_ @ \$3.00 or \_\_\_ set of 5 @ \$14.00 = \$ \_\_\_

Printed postcards

\_\_\_ @ \$1.00 = \$ \_\_\_

Indicate No. per View(s):

- \_\_\_ All 5; \_\_\_ Don Klopfer Trail; \_\_\_ Ocean View;
- \_\_\_ Wild Hyacinth; \_\_\_ Horned Lizard; \_\_\_ Dudleya

### 3. POCKET GUIDE

Useful 56-page guide to plants and animals of the Elfin Forest. Charts for bloom season, form, color, and habitat for 200 vascular plants plus lists of lichens and mushrooms known to occur. Habitat and peak months seen are charted for 187 birds. Also listed: 28 common mammals; 10 reptiles; 4 amphibians; 19 butterflies and moths (charted by size, months in flight, color, and host plants); 104 other arthropods and 7 gastropods.

\_\_\_ @ \$2.00 = \$ \_\_\_

### 4. ELFIN FOREST MURAL PRINTS

Signed prints by artist Barbara Rosenthal, image size 4 1/2 x 16 1/2 in; mounted on foamcore

\_\_\_ @ \$25.00 = \$ \_\_\_

### 5. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

With clever verses and superb photos, this book is sure to please young and old.

\_\_\_ @ \$21.65 (including tax) = \$ \_\_\_

### 6. 2012 CALENDAR *Remainder Sale*

Local photographers featured in this 9"x12" calendar.

\_\_\_ @ only \$2 = \$ \_\_\_

### Shipping costs within zip 934 \_\_:

Bird Book, \$2.77 (book rate) per book = \_\_\_

Pocket Guides & Note Cards \$1.50 = \_\_\_

Mural Prints on Foamcore \$5.00 = \_\_\_

Shirts each: \$4.00 = \_\_\_

Calendars: \$2.75 for 1, \$3.75 for 2 = \_\_\_

For more calendars or shipping costs outside 934 \_\_, call (805) 528-0392

### TOTAL OF ORDER

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Call-in orders may also be made: (805) 528-0392.

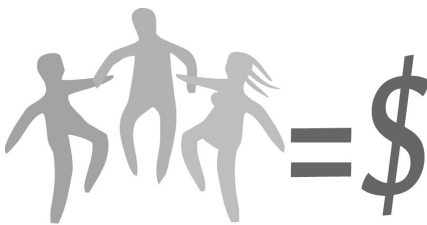
New plant database on SWAP's web site – see page 11.

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## Do You Still Belong to SWAP?

Every membership helps us to be more convincing to foundations and government agencies when we ask them for funds. They all want to know “How many members do you have?”

Please look at your mailing label on the flip side of this page for the date when your membership expires. If it's time to renew, use the form in the box to the right of this one to support SWAP for another year. Notice you can check to receive only the online version of Oakleaves (with photos in full color!) to switch more dollars from mailing costs to conservation efforts.

Timely renewal of your membership helps us to save on postage and the time needed to send a renewal reminder by mail.

Thank you for supporting SWAP and the Elfin Forest!

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

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I want to help, please call me!

Memberships include a subscription to SWAP's bimonthly newsletter, *Oakleaves*.

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EVERY membership counts!

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