



O A K L E A V E S

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 ❖ DECEMBER 2010 / JANUARY 2011



The Year in Review

By Ron Rasmussen, Chair

At SWAP's Annual Meeting in October this year we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter. SWAP's loyal membership and volunteers have made possible this record of stability and accomplishment. The construction of the boardwalk, restoration of native vegetation and removal of non-

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Annual Meeting Attendees Learn About Restoration and Outreach

By Yolanda Waddell, SWAP Secretary; Photos by Jean Wheeler

Our Chapter's Annual Meeting and Volunteer Appreciation took place in Los Osos on Saturday, October 16 at El Morro Church of the Nazarene near the Elfin Forest. Guest speakers Anna Halligan, Restoration Ecologist and Shari Sullivan, Education and Outreach Coordinator for Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), presented a fascinating PowerPoint program about the work that they do for the MBNEP.

Anna showed and described some recent restoration projects in the Morro Bay watershed. A goal of many of MBNEP's projects is to reduce erosion of creek banks and prevent siltation of the estuary. MBNEP funded riparian fencing along San Luisito Creek. Badly eroded banks of Walters creek were stabilized with baffles to collect sediment, and then planted with trees, shrubs and native grasses. Efforts to prevent further pollution of Morro Bay Estuary have included removal of illegally moored boats from Windy Cove, and scrapping derelict boats in other parts of the bay before they sank.

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MBNEP Restoration Ecologist Anna Halligan gave a clear picture of the Program's restoration projects at our Chapter's Annual Meeting in October. Photo by Jean Wheeler.



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
- Pete Sarafian, Vice Chair
- Jan DiLeo, Treasurer
- Yolanda Waddell, Secretary
- Pat Akey, Member at Large
- Debbie Levi, Member at Large
- Pat Murray, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly at Sea Oaks Mobile Home Park, 1675 Los Osos Valley Road.

The next meetings are
**Thursday, December 9
and Thursday, January 13.**

All Board meetings are open to the public. To confirm the date, time and location (which are subject to change), call 528-0392.



CONTACT SWAP

If you have questions about SWAP activities or want to volunteer, please call 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:

Bob Yetter

SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger
1087 Santa Rosa Street, SLO, CA 93408
(805) 781-4417

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 Bob Yetter at 781-4417.

Celebrate This Holiday Season with a Gift of Nature—Support SWAP!

By Debbie Levi

Bring in the New Year with an Elfin Forest 2011 calendar or give it as a holiday gift to a like-minded friend or family member. SWAP continues to raise funds to keep the Elfin Forest a welcome, well-maintained, accessible natural home for all residents.

In the past few years, we have assisted County Parks in extending the Boardwalk into Rose's Grove and replanted areas lacking vegetation. We are also developing an Education program so that our school children can grow up to know the beauty and wonders of the Forest. We will continue our conservation efforts, always remembering the importance of maintaining a healthy environment for the diverse plant and animal inhabitants. SWAP invites you to support these goals by purchasing the 2011 Elfin Forest calendar which includes donated artwork from prominent local artists and informative text.

The calendar is selling out fast, so order your gift copies soon. The cost per calendar is a \$15.00 donation to SWAP. Calendars are available at: Los Osos Rexall Drugs, Volumes of Pleasure Bookstore, Los Osos Fitness, Los Osos Flower Market, SAGE Eco-Gardens & Nursery, Miner's ACE Hardware in Los Osos, Sea Pines Golf Resort, Morro Bay Natural History Museum, M.B. Chamber of Commerce, San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden, Coalesce Bookstore and Otter Rock Gifts in Morro Bay, the *Oak-leaves'* shopper page (page 11) or by calling Debbie at 528-1911.

Year in Review *continued from page 1*

native plants have allowed the Elfin Forest to return to near the condition that existed before Europeans came to live in this area. Whether this state will continue still depends on SWAP's members and volunteers. I am happy to report that, in spite of the poor state of the economy, our members, volunteers, and others have continued their support.

Here is a summary of our financial status for the fiscal year July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010.

AS OF JULY 1, 2009

BANK ACCOUNT	\$15,678.71
CDs, Incl. Interest Est.*	44,459.37
Petty Cash	50.00
TOTAL:	\$60,188.08

AS OF JUNE 30, 2010:

BANK ACCOUNT	\$17,672.02
CDs, Incl. Interest Est.*	45,172.43
Petty Cash	50.00
TOTAL:	62,914.45

NET INCREASE	\$2,726.37
PERCENT INCREASE	5.0%

**The actual value of the Certificates will differ slightly from this estimate.*

There are two major contributions to SWAP's good financial situation. First is the success of our 2009 calendar that was sold out by the end of the year. Second is our paid membership, including contributions above the basic membership. At the beginning of 2009 the paid membership was about 350. It has now increased to 370.

What's next? In the second half of 2010, SWAP's new 2011 calendar has been published and is being very well received. Membership renewals are arriving on schedule. We hope this signifies continuing support for SWAP and the Elfin Forest.

Spotlight on Our Volunteers

Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

The Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter of SWAP is proud of being an all-volunteer organization. Over the course of our 25 years as a chapter, hundreds of adults, teenagers and children have given their support to the chapter and to the Elfin Forest. They provide the heads, hands and hearts to make our organization run well and to accomplish its mission. From time to time, as space permits, we will feature one of our volunteers in *Oakleaves*.



At the County Parks Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in September, Calendar Committee member Ann Bonestell's name was drawn to receive a full-year vehicle pass for 2011. Ann was very pleased as she and husband Jay enjoy spending time at Lopez and Santa Margarita Lakes. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Annual Meeting *continued from page 1*

Shari Sullivan spoke of the importance of keeping the community informed about restoration projects. Public involvement and education will increase awareness of reasons for the project, and can increase the number of volunteers to help. Shari said that outreach is a two-way street, benefitting both the organization carrying out the project, and members of the community. MBNEP certainly is a good model of excellent outreach with their Visitor Center, their publications, a good-looking and sophisticated web site, generous funding for projects by local conservation organizations such as SWAP, and a large number of volunteers.

Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian reported that projects in the Elfin Forest during 2010 included plantings to close an old trail between the upper and lower boardwalk, removing cape ivy and doing erosion control at the west end of the Forest, clearing the slope above South Bay Boulevard of veldt grass, and removing thistles and brome grasses from the Don Klopfer Grove next to the Bay.

Other events at our meeting included recognition by Volunteer Chair Pat Murray of SWAP's many volunteers; awarding of "The Golden Trowel" by Pete Sarafian to Ron Rasmussen for his untiring work on the Conservation Committee; and unanimous election by paper ballot of the following Board members: Jan DiLeo (new member), Debbie Levi, Pat Murray, Ron Rasmussen and Pete Sarafian.

Following the meeting, a tasty lunch of sandwiches, veggies, fruit and a lovely cake to celebrate our Chapter's 25th anniversary was served by the food committee (Pat Akey, Pat Murray and Yolanda Waddell). Our thanks to Darren Nichols of Subway for giving us a reduced price on the sandwiches, and to El Morro Nazarene Church for use of their meeting room. Thanks also to Carlocks Bakery for creating the beautiful anniversary cake.

Otis Carter – Trail Trimmer and School Walks Docent

Otis Carter has been a SWAP volunteer since 2007. After retiring to Los Osos from the Bay Area, Otis discovered that he lives within walking distance of the Elfin Forest. He began visiting the Forest regularly, enjoying the quiet and peacefulness. One day he met Trail Trimming Chair Pat Murray, snipping away at a shrub next to the boardwalk, and volunteered to become a Trail Trimmer as well. Now he patrols the Elfin Forest every other day, checking the trails and trimming as needed. He covers the area between 16th and 11th Streets. In addition to trail trimming, Otis keeps an eye out for possible problems, such as the man who was camping in one of the groves, or the youngsters who were riding their bicycles along the boardwalk. Otis, in his calm and matter-of-fact way, advised the "miscreants" that it was best to leave, which they did.

Otis works at Monarch Elementary School as a playground supervisor. When Education Chair Pat Akey learned that, she invited him to join the Education Committee. He is training to be a School Walks docent, and last Spring led a group of Baywood School first graders on an insect walk in the Elfin Forest. Pat Akey and Pat Murray are both grateful to have such an excellent volunteer as Otis on their committees. As for Otis, he is happy to be working in the Elfin Forest, and introduces all of his friends to this very special place.





California Ground Squirrel

Text and Photo By Jean Wheeler, Ph.D.

Our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) does not list the California Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) as being present in the Elfin Forest. Yet this squirrel that I saw while looking into the Elfin Forest from the dirt road between the 11th and 12th Street entrances had a buff to greyish-yellow belly grading on the sides to a mottled greyish-brown on the back. The Western Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*) has a distinctly white belly sharply bounded on the sides by the silver-frosted grey of the upper body.

Furthermore, the Western Grey Squirrel lives in oak and coniferous woodlands, traveling through canopies more than on the ground. Known to be shy, it darts high up a tree trunk when disturbed. It is believed extirpated in some areas of California, surviving chiefly in less populous woodlands or forested areas of mountains and adjacent foothills. I would expect we might find it only in our tallest woodlands on the northern side of the Elfin Forest, such as the Don Klopfer Grove, not in the sparse low shrubs on the south edge.

This squirrel sat in the low shrubs for quite a while, calmly watching me fiddle with my camera. The soil there is very sandy and would favor the burrow systems dug by California Ground Squirrels. Trees needed by tree squirrels--tall enough for cavities or stick nests 20 feet or more above the ground--were nowhere near this squirrel.

California Ground Squirrels look more like tree squirrels than do other ground squirrel species being larger, not striped, and with bushy rather than skinny tails. They're about 15-20 inches long, of which the tail is 5-9 inches. This species lives from Baja California to Oregon and central Washington in most plant communities from the coast into the mountains.

Active in the daytime, when foraging these common ground squirrels stuff food in cheek pouches to carry to their burrows to store for future use. They have a varied diet, focusing on seeds but including leaves, nuts, fruits, and even roots of grasses, herbs, and woody plants. They will also eat grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and caterpillars. Their most likely predators in the Elfin Forest are gopher snakes, hawks, coyotes, and domestic cats and dogs.

Ground squirrels usually have one litter per year with about seven young after a one-month gestation. Their burrow systems typically house several generations of squirrels. Their empty burrows can provide homes for other animals, such as other rodents and snakes.

The burrows and feeding choices of these ground squirrels can cause problems for farmers, ranchers, and suburban gardeners. Their fleas can be reservoirs for bubonic plague, so dead ones should not be handled.

California Ground Squirrels usually stay within about 150 yards of their burrows where they are unlikely to be living alone. The fact that I saw this one about a hundred feet or so inside the Elfin Forest boundary in an area of open low shrubs and sandy soil means more sightings are very likely.

Elfin Forest Sightings:

Reported by Pete Sarafian

The habitual resident Great Horned Owl is back near 11th and 12th Streets, hooting away at night.

A coyote that was struck by a car on South Bay Boulevard in September of this year now consists of only a few patches of hair. A passerby tossed the carcass onto the Elfin Forest hillside along the road. Within two to three weeks, the carcass had been "recycled" by other critters. It looked like a flattened rug with all the bones and soft tissue eaten away. Today it is hard to find, even though it is only inches from the road near the north end of the trail that runs along the top of the highway embankment. Looks like nature is the ultimate recycler.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival's 15th Year

Every Martin Luther King weekend more than 450 birders visit Morro Bay to see, photograph, and learn more about birds. The 2011 Festival will be held from Friday, January 14 to Monday, January 17. It will feature over 110 individual events, including pelagic cruises, boat rides and kayaking on Morro Bay Estuary, van trips throughout the county as well as many informative workshops. New events include birding by bicycle and a series of "Fun for the Family" special events. Birders of all levels are welcome.

Visit the Festival website at www.morrobaybirdfestival.org to find a complete description of all events. The events fill up fast, so early reservations are encouraged. Keynote speakers will be John Muir Laws: "Finding Connection in Nature," and Kara Hagedorn: "Sunshine's Mothering Miracle: Lessons from a Red-Tailed Hawk."

Fleshy Jaumea

By Dirk Walters, Ph. D.; Drawing by Bonnie Walters

The Elfin Forest plant profiled for this issue of *Oakleaves* is one I believe to be among our more overlooked plants. It is *Jaumea carnosa* and it doesn't even have a good common name. I've seen three used: The first is marsh jaumea which indicates its habitat; A second is simply a translation of its scientific name – *Jaumea*, its genus name, and *carnosa*, which is Latin for thick or succulent. Most often it is simply referred to as jaumea. As can be seen in Bonnie's drawing, the leaves of this plant are somewhat fleshy. The genus name is derived from the name of a very poor (financially) but dedicated French botanist, Jean Henri Jaume. Mr. Jaume later added 'St. Hilaire' to his name so he is more commonly referred to in the literature as Jean Henri Jaume St. Hilaire.

Jaumea is a plant of the coastal salt marsh borders where it tends to occur in the higher areas. Its succulent leaves would suggest that it solves the problem of excessive soil salt by accumulating salt in the cells of its leaves. But research in the 1980s showed when salt is added to soils in a greenhouse situation that salt builds up in its roots but not significantly in its leaves. Work in the 1990s showed that Jaumea grows fine in ordinary, non-saline soils as long as it has no competitors. Jaumea was able to survive moderately high saline soil content whereas non-salt tolerant plants could not. The species forms thick patches of prostrate stems that turn up at their tips. The relatively few paired leaves (opposite) are restricted to the short vertical portion of their stems. Roots arise along the horizontal stems as well as from members of an extensive set of underground stems (rhizomes).

Jaumea is a member of the sunflower family or Asteraceae (Compositae). This means it produces tiny yellow flowers in a small tight cluster (head) surrounded by usually three series of broad bracts called phyllaries. Bonnie has drawn two different heads. One of the heads has what looks like petals radiating out from its edge while the other one lacks these 'petals'. If you tried to dissect out those 'petals', you would find each 'petal' to be part of a separate flower. Each flower possesses its own narrow ovary. The ovary has the potential to mature into a fruit known as an achene. In other words, the 'petals' are the showy part (corolla) of the separate outer flowers in the head known as ray flowers.

But why draw two heads? The other head obviously lacks these ray flowers. Both types of heads are found among the plants bordering the Elfin Forest. Which is more common? I have seen many more of the ray-less heads, but this may simply be an error in sampling. Stems bearing heads with rays appear to be more common in the center of jaumea stands. This would indicate that they are formed by the healthiest stems growing in the more optimal portions of its habitat. This may be an example of plants being able to have the "best" of two genetic worlds.

Heads with rays are more visible and thus would more likely be visited by pollinating insects (I've seen mostly bees.) than less conspicuous, ray-less heads. Therefore the heads with rays would



more likely receive pollen from a different plant and this increases its likelihood of being out-crossed. Out-crossing tends to produce seeds with more genetic diversity. In contrast, the ray-less heads are harder to see and often seem not even to open fully. This would lead to less or even no cross pollination and little or no genetic diversity. Therefore, jaumea has the potential of producing variable seed required to survive a variable future while simultaneously producing seed nearly identical to that from which its parents grew.

Jaumea ranges all along the Pacific Coast from Northern Baja California to Vancouver Island in Canada. References to the plant, except for floras, are few. It is even left out of most wildflower books. It doesn't seem to be poisonous to people or livestock, nor was I able to find any culinary or medicinal uses for it. The Jepson Manual suggests that it could be used as a ground cover to stabilize poorly drained areas in full sun.

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? Please report any interesting sightings to your Oakleaves editors at: oakleaves@elfin-forest.org for inclusion in future issues under "Elfin Forest Sightings." You can also leave a message on SWAP's answering machine, 528-0392.



OAKLEAVES

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Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;
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Ron Rasmussen, Jim Royer, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell,
Dirk and Bonnie Walters, and Jean Wheeler.

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SWAP Booth On the Move

Text and Photo By Yolanda Waddell

At left: Ron Rasmussen, Jan DiLeo and Debbie Levi (L-R) greeted visitors to the SWAP booth at the Baywood Park Oktoberfest. Since it occurred on Halloween, Debbie donned one of the SWAP elf costumes, and encouraged people to buy the 2011 Elfin Forest calendar. It sold well.

Between October 31, 2010, and January 14, 2011, our SWAP booth will have been unpacked and set up three times, as follows:

Baywood Oktoberfest, October 31

Since Oktoberfest took place on Halloween, there was a delightful display of all kinds of costumes worn by visitors and vendors alike. Our booth was tended by two elves during one of the shifts. A good crowd cheered on the annual Fun Run, visited art, craft and food booths, took in the display of vintage cars, and enjoyed the music and dance groups. Our booth received many visitors who checked out our 1937 aerial photo of Los Osos / Baywood Park, bought our 2011 calendar, T-shirts and other merchandise, and marveled at the ages of small oak tree sections that were on display. Thanks to our booth workers: Rosemary Baxter, Ann Calhoun, Jan DiLeo, Debbie and Marty Levi, Bob and Sharon Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell and June Wright. Thanks especially to Ron and Jan getting up early to set up the booth at 7:00 a.m., and to Ron, Marty Levi and Jan for dismantling the booth and returning it to storage at the end of the day.

South Bay Community Center Crafts Fair, November 6

For the second year, Debbie Levi organized a crew of volunteers to promote our 2011 Elfin Forest calendar at the annual Crafts Fair at the South Bay Community Center in Los Osos. Booth workers at that event included Ron Rasmussen, who did the setup and takedown as well as tending the booth, Debbie Levi, Pat Akey, Jan DiLeo, Sharon Meyer, Yolanda Waddell and Danna Weidner. Debbie thanks everyone who supported SWAP by buying our merchandise. All proceeds help to further conservation, maintenance and education for the Elfin Forest.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, January 14 – 17, 2011

Booth Coordinator Pat Murray will organize a team of booth workers for this important and interesting event. Our booth, as always, will be located in the festival's Hospitality Room, along with other non-profit information tables. This is a good time for networking with other organizations such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Also, the booths and displays in the vendor room are well worth a visit. Our table's display will feature photos of birds that can be seen in the Elfin Forest. To volunteer as a booth worker at this event, leave a message on our SWAP phone, 528-0392, or e-mail patm@elfin-forest.org.

Trail Guide In Demand

In September, Trail Guide Committee Chair Pat Brown reported to the SWAP Board that her supply of Boardwalk Trail Guides was almost exhausted. 5,000 Trail Guides were printed (7th printing) in May, 2009. Each month, Pat places an average of 300 Trail Guides in two boardwalk dispensers, so each printing of 5,000 lasts about 18 months. Asked for a quote for 10,000, Tom Hay of Hay Printing said we could save about \$300 by ordering a 36-month supply. We then searched for sponsors to help with the printing cost. For the 2010 printing, Alex Benson of Baywood Inn Bed and Breakfast and Leon Van Beurden of Leon Van Beurden Real Estate Investments are our generous donors. We thank them and also Tom Hay for doing an excellent printing job. Trail Guides can be picked up from dispensers on the boardwalk loop at the 16th Street and the 12th/13th Street sand trail intersections.

Education Corner

By Pat Akey, Education Committee Chair

At our committee's October monthly meeting, we said goodbye to our very favorite and committed member, Faylla Chapman. Faylla has taken on the labor-intensive job of coordinating docent training for the local State Park docents. Twice a year, 30 or more docents are trained for a variety of jobs in Morro Bay State Park, Montana de Oro, Pismo Beach and Cayucos Headlands.

Before she left, Faylla presented our committee with an excellent re-organization of our docent manual with additional sections. The next meeting or two will be devoted to calling in all docent manuals and inserting the new sections.

Our need at present is to add active members to the Education Committee. We also need more School Walk Docents. We are planning for docent training in the Spring. If you are interested in joining us, contact Pat Akey at 528-4832 or e-mail PatA@elfin-forest.org. Our meetings are the third Friday of every month at 4:00 p.m.

Peggy Peterson Receives National Award

In October Peggy Peterson, a SWAP Life Member, was honored with a national award, the President's Volunteer Service Award. She was nominated by the San Luis Obispo Symphony. The award was established in 2003 to honor individuals who have "demonstrated exemplary citizenship through volunteering." Peggy's fifty years of volunteer service have been focused mainly on the music community, especially the San Luis Obispo Symphony. But the former eighth-grade English teacher and her late husband Gerry donated heavily to other causes, including our Chapter's effort to purchase the southern 40 acres of the Elfin Forest in the early 1990s. Peggy told columnist Bill Morem of *The Tribune*, "Cuesta, Cal Poly, the Elfin Forest, the Botanical Garden – whatever makes life beautiful, we want to be part of because that's what makes us whole...there's a sense of satisfaction in watching things grow." On being notified that she would receive the award (a certificate, pin and letter from President Obama), Peggy said, "When you have two hands and two arms, it would be terrible to have them glued to your sides. It's absolutely imperative that you use them to serve, to love and to give." SWAP congratulates Peggy, a role model for all of us.



In October, a crew of four "Wood" Warriors loaded chips into Bob Meyer's big truck and spread them at each of the seven entrances to the Elfin Forest. Shown (L-R) are Bob Meyer, Rich Johnson, Prisila Johnson and Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian.



Sponsor a Virtual Vehicle!

The ballot proposition didn't pass, but California State Parks Foundation is asking all their supporters to symbolically "sponsor" the vehicles that could have provided \$18 a year for state parks. Go to <http://www.calparks.org/>

Let's All Pull Together

It's almost the end of the year,
And we have a good deal to cheer.
The weeds all retreat,
From our trampling feet,
We're knocking them down on their rear!

Soon I hope that it will rain,
On Elfin plants in our domain.
But as long as a drought,
Keeps evil plants out,
We really can't moan or complain.

Let's party at Saturday noon,
When completing our work, oh so soon.
We'll all tip a cup,
While finishing up,
And enjoy the view from the dune.

Yours in the cause of conservation, Pete Sarafian

Weed Warriors

*By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chairperson;
Photo by Yolanda Waddell*

Wood Warriors Toss Chips

The October 2010 work party brought out the wood chip hurlers among the Wonderful Weekend Weed Warriors. Thanks to the folks over at Sweet Springs Nature Preserve there were lots of wood chips for the Elfin Forest street end parking lots. A special thanks goes to Bob Meyer for the use of his old pickup truck without which we would not be "in the chips." Bob, with help from Rich and Prisila Johnson and others including yours' truly, loaded two truckloads of chips and took them over to the Forest. There we were met by Jay Bonestell, Steve Cake, Ron Rasmussen, Barbara Rosenthal and Yolanda Waddell. Everyone "chipped in" to distribute the wood chips in the parking areas and trail ends. Hopefully this effort will help keep down dust and prevent rainstorms from moving some of the Elfin Forest into the adjacent streets. Good job Warriors! A big thank you to all who helped.

SWAP First Saturday Work Parties

SWAP First Saturday Work Parties are held at 9 a.m. to noon on the first Saturday of each month. Please dress for wind, fog, or sun. Layers work well. Long pants and long shirt sleeves are good. Sturdy shoes are a must. Meet at the north end of 15th Street at the Elfin Forest entrance. Take care not to park in front of driveways or mailboxes. Call 528-0392.

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Text and Photos By Jean Wheeler



The holidays are here! Not only for us but for the thousands of birds who have finished the frantically busy summer season of feeding not only themselves but a nest full of demanding offspring. They then made long and dangerous flights down from hundreds to thousands of miles north of here to reach our area of mild weather and sufficient food for the winter. Morro Bay National Estuary is one the richest locales for birding in the United States and site of the 15th Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival scheduled for January 14-17 in 2011. As part of the watershed, the 67 acres of woodland we protect is part of the action, and Bush Lupine Point and Siena's View are two of the best places in the region for viewing the thousands of waterbirds and shorebirds flying over and swimming or wading in the estuary.

Virtually all of the water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide (sold for only \$2 on page 11) are present and at peak populations in these two months, as are all the raptors listed, and most of the passerines. Often the water of the estuary seems nearly covered by the flotillas of water and wading birds. The shrubs around the boardwalk can be alive with flitting finches, sparrows, warblers, wrens, bushtits, and many other little brown and little grey birds. Watch for the hummingbirds busily gathering nectar as they pollinate the red tubes of fuchsia-flowering gooseberries. Among the not-so-little birds of the brush are phoebes, thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, quail, blackbirds, and doves.

With the foggy mists of August and September and the light but frequent drizzles and brief showers we've had in October and November, our shrubs and oak trees have greened up nicely. The early and frequent light watering should bring a burst of early winter blooms on our shrubs and sprouting of annuals from the large seed bank last year's abundant rains nurtured.

Bright red flower tubes of the fuchsia-flowering gooseberry will make a cheerful holiday statement. The leaves of this summer-deciduous shrub are already coming out bright green and I've seen tiny flower buds coming on them. I've also seen buds, a few even opening unusually early, on the Buckbrush Ceanothus, among the many species of the California Lilac genus. It is one of the dominants in the maritime chaparral, so its white to lavender flowers will soon nearly surround the boardwalk. The tiny pink bells of the Morro Manzanita (flowers and "little apple" fruit are pictured) are also starting to open. This is a very narrow endemic shrub found only along the coast between Montaña de Oro and Morro Bay State Parks, with the Elfin Forest preserve nearly centering its limited range. The California toyon is also a shrub but grows only in protected areas sheltered by dunes along the lower boardwalk between Bush Lupine Point and Siena's View. It may still have red berries on it in December, which account for a common name of Christmas berry, but with the frequent early light rains it will probably begin to bloom by January. Lower to the ground, look for the small red flower globes of wild California Peonies. These plants are only a foot or so high and usually partly shaded by bushes of the dune scrub or maritime chaparral.

Take a break from shopping and gift wrapping or relax after the happy holiday turmoil. Walk in the Elfin Forest that we protect through our generous donations and active volunteer efforts. Enjoy the burgeoning beauty of our marvelous little winter-blooming wonderland!

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST Third Saturday Walks

December 18, 9:30 a.m. – Geology Walk

Take a journey through time with Jeff Grover, Cuesta College Geology instructor. Jeff will focus on the geologic history of the Morro Bay area from the formation of the ancient morros, or Seven Sisters, to the recent development of the dunes that form the Elfin Forest. He may even give us a glimpse of what the Elfin Forest and Morro Bay will be like in the geologic future. Jeff brings rock samples and draws diagrams of local geologic action. Join us for a lively and informative walk and talk.

January 15, 9:30 a.m. – Animal Tracks Walk

Join Evan Albright, an animal track expert, in learning who is “tracking up” the Elfin Forest. Evan will demonstrate how to tell the front feet from the back feet of a raccoon, and what the difference is between coyote tracks and dog tracks. Visitors will learn to look for other signs that a wild resident of the Elfin Forest has passed that way, such as hairs on a fence or “scoot” marks where the animal squeezed through a fence hole. This walk will open up a complex world of the Elfin Forest’s inhabitants, one that we would never suspect while walking along the boardwalk.

February 19, 9:30 a.m. – Fungus Foray

For our annual Fungus Foray in the Elfin Forest, intrepid leader and fungophile Dennis Sheridan will take us on an exploration of the Elfin Forest floor for wood bluetts, black elfin saddles, earth-stars, golden caps, boletes, poisonous amanitas and many other fascinating fungi. Bring a magnifying lens and, if you have a mystery mushroom in your yard, bring a sample for Dennis to identify. This is not a mushroom collecting walk, as all plants in the Elfin Forest are protected by law. Only a very heavy rain will cancel the walk, and if it hasn’t rained, Dennis will give us an equally fascinating walk examining lichens that grow abundantly in the Forest.

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. Please leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.



Cuesta College biology instructor Robb Tibstra led a reptile and amphibian walk in September. Since most reptiles except for Western Fence Lizards aren’t easy to locate, Robb brought many specimens from the college, including a Coast Horned Lizard encased in plastic that he holds in his hands. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



The October 3rd Saturday walk’s topic was California Central Coast Native Americans. Walk leader Yolanda Waddell demonstrated that the Chumash and other local tribes held their bows sideways rather than vertically as the Europeans did. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

Remembering a Member – Eilleen Bowen

SWAP lost an original Chapter member in September when Eilleen Bowen passed away at age 92. Eilleen, a teacher in Pasadena public schools for 25 years, retired with her husband Charles to Los Osos in 1974. She was a member of the first group of docents at the Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History, eventually serving as President of the Docent Council and Chair of the Natural History Association. The Learning Center of the Museum is named after her, and she organized the museum library and served as its librarian for 25 years. When the Los Osos/Morro Bay SWAP Chapter formed in 1985, Eilleen and husband Charles (who passed away in 1996) became members, faithfully renewing their membership each year. Eilleen was a friend and advisor to many of our Chapter’s members. We will all miss her.

Thank You to Our New and Renewing Members

*Compiled by Betsy Kinter,
SWAP Database Coordinator*

NEW MEMBERS:

JoAnne Schreck-Morse*

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Thomas H. Alden and Marjorie Sinel

Lois M. Barber

Sandra Beebe

David and Rosemary Bentley

Eleanor Brown

Lois Brown

Wendy Brown*

Ann Calhoun* twice

Andrew Chermak*

Marilyn Clark*

Vic, George, and Doris Croy

Kathleen Delzell*

Francesca Fairbrother

Carmen Fojo and Marie Moore

Mary Harrison*

Jim and Karen Havlena*

Gaby and Ken Levine*

Howard and Marlo Miller*

Dorothy Norwood

Karen O'Grady

Carrie Pardo

Mary Pruitt*

Tim and Melissa Rochte

Nancy Ruhl*

Bill and Callie Sandoval

Dr. Jan W. Simek*

Peter and Chalys Stephens

SWCA Environmental Consultants*

Charles Templin*

Rick and Laura Vopatek

Jerri Walsh*

Keith and Beth Wimer

Celia Zaentz*

DONATIONS:

Jacquoline Williams

Doug Stinson

**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.*

*By Jim Royer,
Big Sit Coordinator
Photos by J. Wheeler*

Our local Elfin Forest Big Sit! has been going on for 13 years. We count in shifts from a wooden platform on a sandy hill in the Elfin Forest overlooking Morro Bay Estuary, the sandspit that separates the bay and the ocean to our west, the basaltic volcanic plug Morro Rock to our distant northwest, the fields and scrubland to our east

and the edge of town to our south. It would be a beautiful place to sit and pass the day even without any birds. It fortunately has a wide variety of birds like ducks, terns, gulls, and shorebirds following the tide below us, raptors soaring by at eye level or over the ridges to our east, thrashers and Wrentits calling from the scrub around us, and urban birds sitting on the wires at the edge of Los Osos.

On Sunday October 10, I joined Mike Stiles while it was still dark at Bush Lupine Overlook for the start of the count. A warm onshore breeze came down over the hills to our east and it was warm enough for shorts. Birds were vocal in the estuary below at 6AM, with night herons, Semipalmated Plovers and wigeons calling. The two of us had 41 species by 7AM. In the early daylight that followed, more shorebirds and ducks called as they moved with the incoming tide and land birds such as towhees, Hermit Thrush and sparrows woke up around us.

As it got lighter we began to use our scopes to identify farther away: terns, shorebirds, ducks, geese, grebes and herons. The tides were extreme for the day, ranging from a 6+-foot tide just after noon to a minus tide at about 7:30 PM. We had 94 species by noon, which was a little lower than usual despite the nice weather. Some grebes, ducks, loons and other species had not returned yet and other common residents like Belted Kingfisher were just not moving.

Birders came and went, most staying well beyond their assigned times and some dashing off to see an unusual bird found elsewhere and then returning. We had our usual variety of great food, including fresh fruit, brownies, chips, nuts, cookies and more. It was a social event as much as a birding one and most of the local long time birders showed up. We added two new species to our all-time Big Sit list - Red-breasted Nuthatch and White-fronted Goose. We ended up with a low total - 101 species - because we missed usual "gimmee" species such as Pied-billed and Clark's Grebes, Kingfisher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. Additionally, we had no swallows or swifts. It seems that our totals in past years were also lower when tides were extreme. A great location like the Elfin Forest is not boring even for a full day of counting, and 2010 was no exception. It was a beautiful day of birding in an extraordinary location.

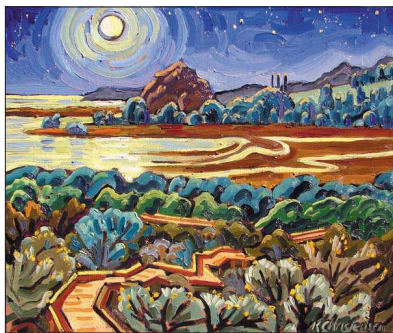
Editor's Note: The Elfin Forest Big Sit! circle came in 4th out of 241 counting circles. Cape May, New Jersey, was first with 139 species. A compilation of worldwide Big Sit! results can be found on the Bird Watcher's Digest web site at <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit/index.?sc=migration>.



Big Sit! Coordinator Jim Royer (center in shorts) led a pre-Big Sit! walk on the second Saturday of October. The purpose of the walk was to learn what birds might be seen the next day at the Big Sit!. He and walk participants sighted 70 species of birds in about 2-1/2 hours.

We'd Like Mail!

We encourage our readers to submit photos, letters to the editor, or interesting and timely information by e-mailing to oakleaves@elfin-forest.org. We look forward to hearing from you. *The Editors.*



Buy holiday presents for friends and family from SWAP!

The money you spend doubles as a gift to conserve the Elfin Forest. The 2011 calendar features images painted by talented local artists of scenes, plants, and animals plus fascinating natural history information in sidebars on each page. Shown is the acrylic "Only the Sound of the Ocean" by Ken Christensen chosen for December. Sweatshirts, T-shirts, and Mural prints also make great gifts, while note cards, post cards, and pocket guides are wonderful stocking stuffers.



SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

See Photos of All Items at www.elfin-forest.org

All Prices Include Sales Tax

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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.

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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.

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

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

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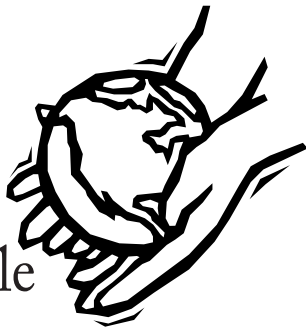
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Your donation can not only reduce your income tax bite, but will help SWAP with special projects in the Elfin Forest such as soil erosion control, revegetation with native species, and boardwalk upkeep.

You could give yourself a life membership by donating \$1000. You would receive the Oakleaves newsletter for life and would also receive a SWAP mural T-shirt in appreciation of your major contribution to our efforts.

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