



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 2009 / JANUARY 2010

The Rain Came (and Went)

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chairperson

A welcome rainstorm on October 13 was typical of the Central Coast rain pattern, except that it was unusually severe for that early in the rainy season. SWAP member Bob Meyer's rain gauge measured 3 inches of precipitation on that day. In an average year we get about 15 inches of rain, but it arrives in storms like that one and in between are dry periods. After the "rainy season" there are about nine months with no significant rain. In spite of this dry climate, the plants in the Elfin Forest and in other coastal chaparral areas seem to do very well. A closer look at them will show why.

The most obvious feature is the generally small size of most plants even though they may be decades old. Lack of moisture and poor soil is the main reason. The effect of these conditions can be seen by comparing the size of plants along the upper boardwalk with that of plants along the lower boardwalk where more soil moisture is available. Those plants lower down the slope (nearer the water table and facing northward, away from the hot sun) are very clearly larger and appear more lush.

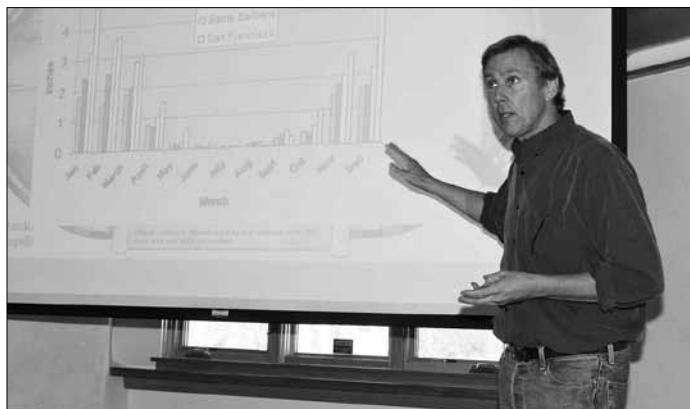
A closer look shows that many plants have developed unique features to survive the infrequent rains. Most plants have very small leaves that limit the surface area for loss of moisture by evaporation. Examples are buck brush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*) and

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SWAP Annual Meeting Filled With Information

By Yolanda Waddell; photos by Bob Meyer

For the past few years, our chapter's annual meeting has taken place on the third Saturday of the month, right after our 3rd Saturday walk. This year our 3rd Saturday walk leader, California Chaparral Institute's Richard Halsey, was also the guest speaker for our meeting.



Richard Halsey, Director of San Diego-based California Chaparral Institute, gave a compelling talk about the value of California's chaparral and coastal dune scrub ecosystems at SWAP's Annual Meeting in October.

During Halsey's PowerPoint and video presentation, "The Chaparral, a New Way to Look at Life," he spoke about the goal of the Chaparral Institute: to increase conservation, protection and preservation of shrubland ecosystems. He stated that he is quite impressed with the Elfin Forest and SWAP for the care that we have given to the Forest. He also discussed several common myths about chaparral, the principal myth being that chaparral needs fire to "renew" and clean out "built-up" or "over-grown" vegetation. Contrariwise, old-growth chaparral does not "need" fire to remain healthy; dense coverage of the soil conserves water and nutrients for fresh new growth in the upper canopy every year. Also, Halsey opposes the belief that past fire suppression has led to an unnatural

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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 / Treasurer
Pete Sarafian, Vice Chair
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 on the 2nd Monday at 7 p.m. at the Community Center of Sea Oaks Mobile Home Park, 1675 Los Osos Valley Road.

The next meetings are
**Monday, December 14
and Monday, January 11.**

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:

Chuck Lowe

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 Chuck Lowe at 781-4417.

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accumulation of vegetation. Instead, chaparral has difficulty recovering with less than 20, preferably at least 30, years between fires.

Following Halsey's presentation, Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian gave a PowerPoint report on the past year's projects in the Elfin Forest. Using a map of the Forest, he pointed out areas where improvements have been made and work has been done. Projects during the year included installing 140 plants in a former cross-trail; spraying heavy growths of cape ivy and asparagus vine; replacing and maintaining erosion control bars and fencing; and removing veldt grass from the southern edge of the Forest.

In celebration of SWAP's volunteers, Pete awarded new work gloves to the Weed Warriors who were present and gave "golden trowels" to five of the Weed Warriors:

Jay Bonestell, Rich Johnson, Bob Meyer, Ron Rasmussen and Yolanda Waddell. Yolanda, filling in for Volunteer Chair Pat Murray, awarded a pair of work gloves to Trail Trimmer Jerry Ambrose and thanked the many volunteers who make our all-volunteer organization run smoothly. She also presented the Board's "Above and Beyond" award to outgoing board member Bob Meyer, who during the past year worked on the Conservation Committee, the Calendar Committee, Oakleaves (providing photos), the Rose Bowker Grove boardwalk extension as a monitor, and also is SWAP's web master.

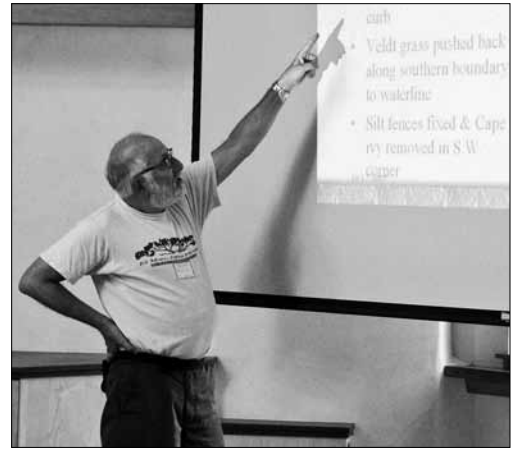
Board members Yolanda Waddell and Pat Akey were elected unanimously by paper ballot. A food committee consisting of Pat Akey, Pat Murray and Yolanda Waddell catered the reception and received rave reviews for their tasty offerings. This year's meeting was held in the lovely Oak Glen Pavilion at the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden.

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chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*). Most also have hard surfaces and waxy or oily coatings on their leaves to further reduce moisture loss by evaporation. Others, like black sage (*Salvia mellifera*) and sticky monkey flower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*), lose their leaves entirely over summer and wait until the rains actually arrive before reviving. Some, like mock heather (*Ericameria ericoides*) and California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), have a growth pattern resembling an upside-down umbrella. When the rain comes, it collects on the broad top of the plants and runs down the branches right to the trunk and into the ground where it can be easily accessed by the roots.

There are some plants that actually hoard water in wet years, and they can survive through many dry years. An example is the wild cucumber or man-root (*Marah fabaceus*) that is common throughout the Elfin Forest. This plant has a large underground tuber where water and nutrients are stored. Even in drought conditions in springtime, this plant will send up its vine with bright green leaves and prickly fruit. Soon after the fruit is produced the vine and leaves die off and the plant is dormant until the next spring. Any rain that soaks into the soil will be saved until needed.

On your next visit to the Elfin Forest look closely at the many different plants and notice how they have adapted to our Mediterranean climate here on the Central Coast.



Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian summarized the year's work projects for attendees at the SWAP Annual Meeting.



Ron Rasmussen (in the picture) set up an excellent presentation of SWAP photos, sale items and other materials for the Morro Photo Expo in October. If you see Ron, ask him how he managed to hang our banner on that wall. Photo by Martha Blasingame.



SWAP's information table at the South Bay Community Center Craft Fair featured our 2010 calendar as well as note cards, pocket guides and our mural print. Shown L-R are Yolanda Waddell, Ron Rasmussen, and Calendar Committee Chair Debbie Levi. Photo by Alon Perlman.

SWAP Booth at Oktoberfest

By Pat Murray

Many folks gathered from near and far to enjoy the warm sun at this year's Oktoberfest, held in downtown Baywood. The morning started off with the annual race. Folks lined along the streets shouted out cheers of encouragement to many ambitious participants of all ages in their efforts to run, jog, or walk, some even pushing strollers. All of Second Street between Santa Ysabel and El Morro was blocked off and packed with light-hearted folks enjoying various types of art and craft booths, indulging in good food and drinks, watching dancers and musicians perform, and looking over the display of cars of various vintages.

Once again one of SWAP's crowd pleasers was our 1937 large aerial photo display of Los Osos. Giving folks a straight pin and watching them try to locate where their home would have been during that era is very entertaining. One of several successful items for sale was our 2010 Calendar. Our beautiful mural shirts, photo note cards, pocket guides, and mural prints were other items for sale.

Sharing what SWAP is and does with new folks by handing out our newly revised brochures and other information is always a pleasant experience, appreciated by many. Two hour shifts were enthusiastically staffed by Ann Calhoun, Rosemary Baxter, Les Bowker, Yolanda Waddell, Debbie Levi, June Wright, Charlie Sitton, Pat Akey, Ron Rasmussen and Pat Murray. Without our volunteers, SWAP could not participate in events like this. Bravo to all!

Editor's Note: Other SWAP booth activity during October and November included an information table at the first annual Morro Photo Expo held at the Morro Bay Community Center on October 23rd and 24th. The table was staffed by Ron Rasmussen, who set it up, and Yolanda Waddell. On November 7th, Debbie Levi organized a crew of volunteers to promote our 2010 Elfin Forest calendar at the annual Crafts Fair at the South Bay Community Center in Los Osos. Booth workers at that event included Pat Akey, Debbie Levi, Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell, Danna Weidner and June Wright.

Revised Brochure

Under the watchful eye of Property and Records Chair Pat Murray, our SWAP brochure recently underwent a thorough revision, including a new photo by 2010 calendar photographer Lori Steed on the cover. As in the past, we received contributions to finance the cost of printing from some generous donors. They are Leslie Lee of Morro Bay Realty, The Morro Bay Realty Group, and Jim Marshall Insurance Agency in Los Osos. The new brochure was printed by Hay Printing and is now available at the Los Osos and Morro Bay Chambers of Commerce, the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History and the Morro Bay National Estuary Program visitor center on the Embarcadero.

Dusky-footed Woodrat

Texts and Photos By Jean D. Wheeler, Ph. D.

Painting at right by Ron Klinger

from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America,

© Princeton University Press (2002)

The dusky-footed woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes*) is sometimes called a packrat for its habit of collecting shiny objects to treasure in its brushy home, such as the ring this little fellow is shown carrying in the painting of him by Ron Klinger.

Best known for the large, conical, multi-roomed piles of brush they build and live in, adults are solitary. The brush nests are at least 2-6 feet high with similar diameters at the base, yet only one female adult lives in even the largest. In the Elfin Forest, the homes are woven among outer branches of live oaks or other shrubs that reach to the ground. SWAP member Mia Simmons is shown on a walk with your editors pointing to one of 16 such nests she showed us. She and her husband have discovered 23 such nests near the boardwalk! The easiest to see, pointed out by docents on school walks and 3rd Saturday walks for years and shown in my photograph on this page, is under the oak grove at the intersection of the main boardwalk with the spur to Siena's View.

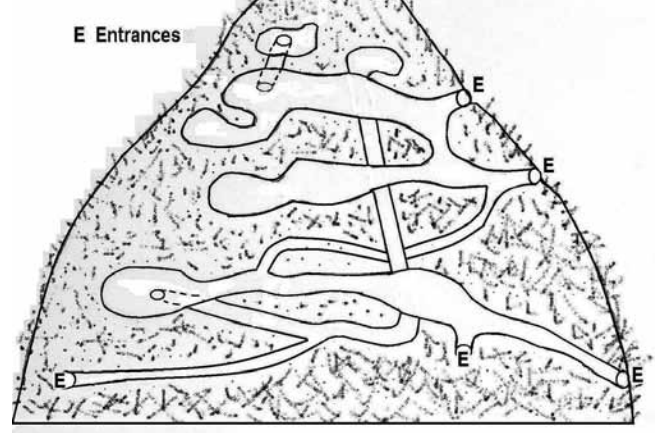
These huge nests contain many passages and rooms, modeled in the diagram, including at least one nest room, latrines, and several storerooms for foods. There are multiple exits as escape routes from predators such as snakes. These mostly nocturnal rodents feed on a variety of seeds, acorns, nuts and fruits, green vegetation, and fungi. Some rooms may be allocated to storage of oak leaves until the toxic chemicals of these leaves leach out, and they become edible.

A mother shares her home with 1-4 offspring for only the first two months, after which the young move into nearby brush homes, still close to their mother. Most litters are born in the spring, but some as early as January or as late as October. Woodrats live about 3-4 years. When a mother dies, usually one of her offspring will take over her house. Woodrat houses are known to have been maintained for decades by several generations of the same family.

Woodrats are food for foxes, coyotes, large snakes, and especially owls. Their nests provide shelter for insects, spiders, even salamanders and lizards. Research has shown that species diversity is increased with the presence of woodrat houses. As you follow the boardwalk through our Elfin Forest this winter, look under the live oaks and especially where their outer branches descend to mingle with the branches of surrounding shrubs. See if you can detect these brushy apartment complexes with their woodrat landlady and diverse invertebrate and even vertebrate tenants.



Woodrat Nest



(Mia Simmons) and her husband have discovered 23 (woodrat) nests near the boardwalk!



Rushes

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

Bonnie's drawing this time represents a group of plants commonly called rushes. True rushes are all in the genus, *Juncus*, which is one of two California genera in the family, Juncaceae. The rushes are generally classified as grass-like (graminoid) plants. In our area, graminoid plants include three major families – grasses (Poaceae), sedges (Cyperaceae) and rushes. The primary characteristics that hold these three families together are their minute to tiny flowers and the unusual structure of their leaves. The grasses and sedges have minute flowers totally hidden behind one or more tiny (less than ¼ inch) bracts and are devoid of a typically recognizable perianth. In contrast, the rushes have slightly larger flowers with an obvious perianth (under a magnifying glass).

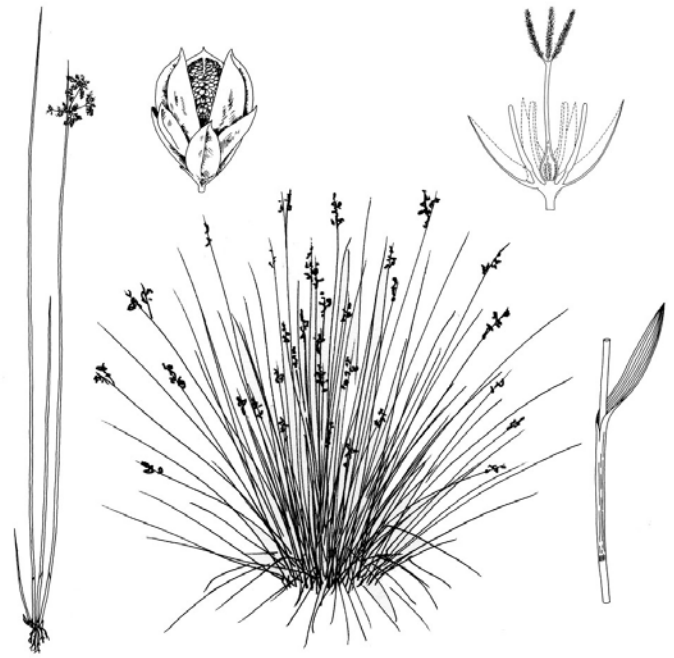
However, it's the unusual leaves that I want to emphasize here. Graminoid leaves consist of a basal hollow cylindrical sheath that encloses the stem and a narrow free distal portion called the blade. My guess is that some would only recognize the blade portion as the whole leaf. This is because the sheath is usually tightly pressed against the stem such that the outer layers of the sheath are mistaken for the stem surface.

The sheath is most easily observed in the grasses, so I challenge those who don't believe me to go out and find a grass stem and gently pull the blade away from the stem. In grasses, the sheath has a split down the cylinder opposite where the blade attaches to the sheath and this allows the sheath to easily be pulled away from the stem. In the true rushes (*Juncus*) the sheath is not split (closed) and in the path rushes (*Luzula*) the sheath is split (open).

Why such a long discussion of leaf sheaths? It is because the particular group of true rushes being discussed appears not to have any leaves at all. First, this is because the basal leaves lack blades but do have the sheath. Note the circle drawn near the base of a pair of stems to the left. This circle represents the top of a sheath. Another anomaly is the fruit cluster (inflorescence) appearing to come out of the middle of a smooth portion of stem. This is impossible! What is really happening is that the inflorescence is arising from a node hidden by a sheath. This sheath does have a blade! It is the hollow, sharp-pointed extension of the stem seen arising beyond the inflorescence attachment. "Terminal leaf blade resembling an extension of the stem" is the first characteristic in most keys to *Juncus*.

I am discussing the perennial members of *Juncus* that produce only leaf sheaths at their stem base and a terminal leaf blade appearing as a continuation of the stem. This type of rush comes in two growth forms depending on the length of the underground horizontal stem (rhizome) produced before sending up a new aerial stem. The drawing to the lower right shows what happens when the rhizome is so short as to be practically non-existent. This growth pattern produces a clump. Longer rhizomes produce isolated stems that sprout-up over wide areas.

In our area we have three common 'clump' rushes and two common 'turf' rushes. The tallest and most restricted of the clump



rushes is what I call pike rush (*J. acutus*). It is found only at the upper edge of the salt marshes around the South side of Morro Bay and in a few dune depressions from Morro Bay South. Pike rush is the only rush of this group that is listed by name in the Elfin Forest species list. However, I expect one or both of the next two species are hidden under the name "*Juncus* spp."

The other two clump rushes are to be expected in almost every seasonally moist habitat from pasture to woodland. The taller of the two has a green stem, is distributed throughout the Southwestern U.S., and is known as the common rush (*J. effusus*). The shorter one is restricted to California, has gray-green stems, and is commonly known as California rush (*J. patens*).

The most common 'turf' rush produces aerial stems that are less than a foot high and is currently being recommended as a native substitute for lawns and groundcovers. It is *J. lesseurii*. The last long rhizome rush produces very tall, thin aerial stems as well as long, thick orangey rhizomes. This is the basket rush (*J. textilis*) whose rhizomes were used extensively by Native California peoples in their exquisite basketry. Dr. Hoover records this last rush as growing in only two localities in SLO County.

All rushes prefer moist to wet soils, but at least the ones specifically mentioned above will also tolerate moderately dry soils. The clump rushes offer unusual décor to a landscape whereas the turf rush can produce a dark green cover over an area not heavily trampled.

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.



Elfin Forest Sightings

Pat Brown joined the Weed Warriors for the August monthly work party, and was pulling veldt grass near the 16th Street Elfin Forest entrance, when out of a clump of veldt grass hopped a large female spider with an egg sac. She scrambled for cover, scooted across Pat's leg (Pat was seated), and then paused, maybe to get her bearings. In that moment, Pat took her picture, which you can see adjacent to this article. Dennis Sheridan has identified her as a wolf spider.

Wolf spiders range from about 1/2 inch to 2 inches in length, are hairy, and are typically brown to gray in color with various markings or lines. Wolf spider mothers carry their large egg sacs around with them. When the young spiderlings hatch they climb onto their mother's back and ride around until partially grown. Wolf spiders are not poisonous, though as with all spiders, bites may cause reactions in some individuals.

Education Committee Corner

By Pat Akey

During 2009, the Education Committee met on a monthly basis and successfully completed SWAP's first Docent Manual. The manual focuses on California State Standards in Science as mandated by grade level. The Education Committee extends special thanks to Dave Bowlus, Yvette Bileaudeaux, Faylla Chapman, Debbie Levi, Paul O'Connor, Yolanda Waddell, Jean Wheeler, and two dedicated teachers—Cheryl Dove and Wendi Craig.

Currently, SWAP offers school walks, including hands-on activities, to interested school groups. Transportation funds are available if needed. If you are interested in scheduling a school tour or volunteering to work as a docent, please contact Pat at 528-4832 or e-mail pata@elfin-forest.org.

Revegetation Progress Report

By Bob Meyer, Conservation Committee Member

This past winter SWAP planted some 140 native seedlings consisting of Black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), Mock Heather (*Ericameria ericoides*) and California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*). The plants were installed in an abandoned sand trail that crossed the boardwalk loop in a north-south direction. A few of the plants have died, with recent survival being Black sage - 43 (90% of what we planted), Mock heather - 35 (81%), and California sagebrush - 43 (63%). Forty-eight of the seedling locations have additional plants starting from the seeds that were scattered near the protective wire cages. By next spring more should be sprouting.

The seedlings are being watered by an automatic drip system with two lines going to the vicinity of each seedling. Toward the end of the dry season watering was reduced to 30 minutes twice per week, i.e. 1 gallon per week per plant instead of 2 gallons per week per plant as in the beginning. It appears that sagebrush doesn't like too much water, but apparently skunks do. There is evidence of them digging around the wire cages in search of insects in the moist sand. Also, it's quite apparent that the pre-existing native plants along the trail are enjoying the water. Most everything within 10 feet of the replanted trail looks green and is flowering nicely. Beyond 10 feet, most of the plants are very dry and dormant looking in comparison.

Perhaps the best way to revegetate an old trail would be to install two or three parallel runs of drip tape, scatter some seed, and water lightly for a couple of years. Presto! New growth will emerge.

Oakleaves E-mail Address

At the request of your editors, the SWAP computer guru, Bob Meyer, set up an e-mail address for Oakleaves to make it easier for you, our readers, to submit photos, letters to the editor, or interesting information. You can reach us at oakleaves@elfin-forest.net. We encourage you to contribute to what is really *your* newsletter.



OAKLEAVES

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

Contributors to this issue: Pat Akey, Martha Blasingame, Pat Brown, Betsy Kinter, Debbie Levi, Bob Meyer, Pat Murray, Alon Perlman, Ron Rasmussen, Jim Royer, Pete Sarafian, Dennis Sheridan, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters, and Jean Wheeler.

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oakleaves@elfin-forest.org.

Weed Warriors

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chairperson

September Warriors Clobber Cape Ivy

In September the Wonderful Weekend Weed Warriors walloped a worrisome weed. The Warriors who did a good job slowing the spread of Cape ivy included Jay Bonestell, Dave Bowlus, Lannie Erickson, Prisila and Rich Johnson, Frank Klein, Bob Meyer, Alon Perlman, Dar Reynolds, Pete Sarafian and Yolanda Waddell. Cape ivy has been spreading along the freshwater zone that surrounds the northern border of the Elfin Forest. Only frost, herbicide and the Weed Warriors have been able to control this pest plant somewhat. The work party ventured down below Bush Lupine Point to attack the pesky ivy in an area where it has been spreading over the past half-decade or so. The crew pulled up massive quantities of the ivy in three closely spaced areas. Although good progress was made, much of the ivy continues to grow in the jungle of willows and other plants that exist in the wet zone close to the Bay. This area is difficult to reach, let alone work in. The vegetation is so thick that extermination of the ivy is not practical. The best that we can hope for is some degree of control and isolation. With our efforts the Elfin Forest remains as pristine as any area nearby. Thanks to all. We couldn't do it without you!

October Work Party Prepares for Winter

In October the conservation work party tackled two tricky tasks. The Weed Warriors both pulled weeds and cleaned out water bars along the street-end sand trails. Each winter, heavy rains wash out of the Elfin Forest along the slopes that lead to the street ends. Often in the past, sand and mulch were carried out into the streets that border the Forest. Several of the Warriors raked sand and trenched along the water bars to allow them to divert rain water into the Forest shrubs, rather than out into the streets. The rest of the work crew continued to pull up Cape ivy in the extreme southwestern corner of the park, down by the Bay. About one-quarter acre of ivy was pulled up and stacked into piles for later herbicide treatment to kill any sprouts. The work was difficult with blackberry vines all over the area. Cape ivy remains in inaccessible areas, but all that could be reached was yanked, extending down into the salt marsh reeds. It was a good effort that netted lots of vines. Joining in the carnage were Jay Bonestell, Dave Bowlus, Lannie Erickson, Prisila and Rich Johnson, Ron Rasmussen, Dar Reynolds and Pete Sarafian. The area looks better and better due to SWAP volunteers and their commitment to the Elfin Forest.

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-sleeved shirts 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.



Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian (shown above) and his Weed Warriors pulled many bags of Cape ivy that they found growing in thickets at the Elfin Forest's west near the estuary.

Alon Perlman (below left) passes a weed bag to new Weed Warrior Frank Klein during a marathon session of Cape ivy pulling during September's work party at the west end of the Elfin Forest.

Photos by Yolanda Waddell.



Let's All Pull Together

Hope you are all full of.....
Thanksgiving bird,
But for a moment, I must have a word.
Your last chance is here,
To get into holiday cheer,
By helping the Forest we all hold so dear.

Please come to the north end of old 15th Street,
Off of Santa Ysabel in Los Osos is where we meet.
Dress in layers to withstand wind, fog and sun.
Wear long pants and sleeves--poison oak is no fun.

Sturdy shoes are a must to protect your l'il piddies,
You may bring work gloves and hand tools,
but we have some for you kiddies.

We provide the water and also a snack,
So at least that is one thing you don't have to pack.

Yours in the cause of conservation, Pete Sarafian

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Story and Photos By Jean Wheeler

Mild winter temperatures combine with the onset of winter rains to accelerate the pace of life in the Elfin Forest in December and January. The leaves greening up from the three inches of rain we received in that unusually generous early storm in October got us off to a great start, and should allow plants to produce plenty of food for an excellent floral display.



Among the earliest flowering plants of each new season are the fuchsia-flowered gooseberries (pictured). The bright red color of the fuchsia-shaped flowers clustered along branches with small green leaves and lots of sharp thorns make this shrub easy to spot. You have to look more closely to find our wild peonies, another early bloomer, growing barely a foot high under bushes in the dune scrub or maritime chaparral. These California natives are small herbaceous plants with small reddish flowers hanging down, not the large mounds with big showy flowers of garden fame. Buckbrush ceanothus also comes into bloom during these months. A shrub widespread in the Elfin Forest, its flowers are white to very pale lavender, not the vivid blue of species known as California Lilacs growing wild elsewhere in the state or as garden cultivars. The California toyon is also a shrub but grows only in protected areas sheltered by dunes along the lower boardwalk near the Siena's View intersection. It may still have red berries on it in December, which account for a common name of Christmas berry, but with the early deep rains it will probably begin to bloom in January.

Our area is known as one of the top birding locales in our country, especially in these winter months when diversity of birds and populations of many (it's tempting to say most) species are at a peak for the year. That's why Morro Coast Audubon sponsors the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival in January each year. Virtually all of the water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) are at peak populations in these two months. So are all the raptors listed, and a great many of the passerines. 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 those fuchsia-flowered gooseberries. Among the not-so-little birds of the brush are phoebes, thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, northern mockingbirds, quail, blackbirds, and doves.



Up to eight topnotch birders at a time, including Big Sit Coordinator Jim Royer, right, kept their spotting scopes and binoculars trained on birdlife in the bay, the air and the Elfin Forest.

Big Sit Report

By Jim Royer; photo by Yolanda Waddell

Twenty-one birders gathered at Bush Lupine Point on Saturday, October 11, for the annual Big Sit, which was started by the New Haven Bird Club in Connecticut. Birders count all species they hear and see in one day from a 17-foot diameter circle. We have been doing this bird count for 15 years, and counts are spread across this country and in some foreign countries.

Starting at 5:30 AM, we birded by shifts from our vantage point overlooking Morro Bay Estuary. We had a panoramic view of most the bay, the sand spit which separates the bay from the ocean, the hills and pastureland of Morro Bay State Park, the coastal scrub of the Elfin Forest and some of adjoining residential Los Osos.

Our highest number of species for a one-day count has been 122. Only Cape May, New Jersey, has exceeded this total in North America on Big Sit day --they had 146 species this year! We have observed a total of 172 species over the years of this annual one-day count.

The tides for this count fluctuated minimally and we started with high overcast that cleared somewhat in the afternoon; visibility was good for the entire count. Our only handicaps were the lack of much tidal movement and the lack of passerine migration; this limited our variety of species. We had as many as twelve birders and eight scopes at a time searching in all directions for species, but it was a slow day despite our enthusiastic efforts. The final total was 107 species - only slightly less than average due to some great efforts by the counters.

Our Big Sit, however, is more than a bird count. We also use the "sit" to spread the word to visitors about the great diversity of habitat and bird species present here. Also, this was (to a small extent) a fundraiser for SWAP, the group that preserved and manages this scenic and species-important piece of nature. We were fueled by scrumptious food including fresh strawberries, pita chips and hummus, homegrown grapes, and tomatoes from Fresno. We finished at sunset with sparkling wine and a toast to our beautiful coast.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

December 19, 9:30 a.m. – All About the Estuary

What is an estuary and what is being done to preserve and protect the Morro Bay Estuary and adjacent habitats? Shari Sullivan, Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Morro Bay National Estuary Program will tell walk attendees about the work of the MBNEP and the healing of the Morro Bay Estuary. She will lead walkers to the Elfin Forest's overlooks to view the results of silt buildup in Morro Bay, talk about the effects of pollution on the Bay, and explain the connection between Forest and the Estuary. She'll also introduce walk participants to "denizens" of the Bay, and tell us how local residents can help to protect this important natural resource.

January 19, 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 which are the front feet or 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 16, 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 blueets, 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 about the 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.



During the pre-Big Sit (second Saturday) bird walk in October, Big Sit Coordinator Jim Royer (left, with binoculars), Susan Chandler and Valerie Endres were among a group of eagle-eyed walk participants who spotted 76 species of birds in two hours. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



California Chaparral Institute Director Rick Halsey (right, gesturing) talked about the differences between chaparral and coastal dune scrub, and the forces that influence them during his October 3rd Saturday walk in the Elfin Forest. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

Celebrate 14th Annual Bird Festival

Being held from January 15-18, 2010, the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival is sponsored by MCAS and gives you the chance to join local and national birding experts on a variety of field trips and workshops. Field trip group sizes are limited, and the Festival also offers workshops aimed at sharpening your birding skills, as well as evening programs with outstanding speakers. To register and for more information, go to www.morrobaybirdfestival.org, or call (805) 772-4677. Both the brochure and online registration are now available. The registration deadline is December 31, 2009 but early sign ups are encouraged

Coastal Cleanup Ticking Along

Pete Sarafian proved to himself once and for all that deer, deer mice, and ticks are alive and well in the Elfin Forest. After beating through brush looking for access to the salt marsh to clean up the shores of Morro Bay during Coastal Cleanup day in September, Pete looked down to find himself hosting four live ticks. Evidently, there are enough deer and deer mice running around the Forest to feed the tick population. Hopefully, trespassing hominids also will find the going too hazardous to continue to molest the brush off our boardwalk.

Thank You to Our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW MEMBERS:

Mr. and Mrs. Roy Bayly*	Danna Weidner
Roy Blaney	Sigmon & Sadako Whitener
Julie Miller and Larry Kleiger	Rachael Yon
Karen O'Grady	

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Karen Beatty and Frank Ausilio*	Jim and Karen Havlena*
David and Rosemary Bentley	Kirsten Holmquist*
Andrea Bersie	Herbert and Debra Holt*
Charles E. Blair*	Dorothy Norwood
William Bouton*	Barbara Renshaw*
Joanna Frawley*	Barbara and Robert Rosenthal*
Robert and Marilyn Freiler	Peter and Chalys Stephens
Woody Frey	Tomoko Sugano
Gary Giannico*	Gewynn and George Taylor*
Richard and Charlotte Gordon	Charles Templin
	Bonnie and Les Wamsley

SPECIAL DONATIONS:

Beth Currier

Chevron Humankind (*matching gift from Kathleen M. Delzell*)

**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.*

Celebrate With a Gift of Nature!

By Debbie Levi

Bring in the New Year with an Elfin Forest 2010 calendar or give it as a holiday gift to a 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 2009, we extended the Boardwalk into Rose's Grove to offer improved conservation and increased accessibility to the beauty, sounds, and smells in nature. We hope to provide benches in the Grove soon. Additionally, we are continuing to develop our Education program so that our school children can grow up knowing 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 2010 Elfin Forest Calendar. The 2010 calendar features the pho-



Remembering Our Members

By Yolanda Waddell

Two of our early and much-loved members passed away in September: Bill Jackson and Patricia Wieman. During the early days of our SWAP chapter, when we were putting all of our energies into purchasing the Elfin Forest, these two helped out in very different ways. We will always be grateful for their support.

William (Bill) Jackson

Bill was born in December 1928 and died on September 18, 2009 at age 80. During his working career, he was a beloved high school principal in Santa Barbara. On retirement in 1989, he purchased a home in Los Osos along with his sister Barbara Machado, and became a mentor to new teachers in this area. When his sister Barbara joined the SWAP Board as our Development Director, Bill became the best "gofer" that SWAP ever had. If something needed to be done and everyone else was busy, Bill would take care of it; one time he helped to carry a harpsichord on a stretcher to Woodrat Hall (now the Rose Bowker Grove) for a baroque concert. His cheery voice and positive attitude boosted our morale and helped us to believe that we really could accomplish the task we had set out for ourselves – saving the Elfin Forest.

Patricia (Pat) Wieman

Pat Wieman and her husband Harold were a loving couple for 66 years. Harold, who encouraged us to form a SWAP chapter in 1985, died in March 2008. Pat and Harold focused their energies on projects in Morro Bay and the Natural History Museum, but they always had time to listen to our problems and provide common-sense advice. Pat prepared cups of tea; then she and Harold would cheer us on in our endeavors. Pat's children, Beth and Jim Wieman, sent us a note saying that Pat died peacefully on September 2, 2009. They said that she felt content and complete, having lived a full life.

tography of 22 accomplished San Luis Obispo County photographers and includes informative and educational text. The cost is a mere \$15.00 donation to SWAP. Calendars are available at: Los Osos Rexall Drugs, Volumes of Pleasure Bookstore, Los Osos Flower Market, SAGE Ecological Landscapes, ACE Miner's Hardware in Los Osos, Art is For Everyone (Baywood), San Luis Obispo Botanical Gardens, The Photo Shop in SLO, Coalesce Bookstore in Morro Bay, the Oakleaves' shopper page (see pg. 11) or by calling Debbie at 528-1911. Also, look for our booths around town and SUPPORT SWAP!



Holiday Gifts for Family, Friends, and SWAP

Buy holiday presents for friends and family from SWAP and the money you spend doubles as a gift to SWAP that helps us conserve the Elfin Forest. The 9" x 12" calendar features artistic photos of scenes in the Elfin Forest and wonderful close-ups of plants and animals we enjoy all year as well as fascinating natural history information in the sidebars on each page. Shown here is the photo by Abe Perlstein chosen for December in this beautiful calendar. 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

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 photo note cards by Bob Meyer

___ @ \$3.00 or ___ set of 5 @ \$14.00 = \$ _____

Original photo postcards by Bob Meyer

___ @ \$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

___ @ \$20.00 = \$ _____

5. 2010 ELFIN FOREST CALENDAR

Enjoy these views by gifted local photographers all year around!

___ @ \$15 = \$ _____

Shipping costs within zip 934 __:

Calendars, \$2 each _____

Pocket Guides & Note Cards \$1.50 = _____

Mural Prints on Foamcore \$5.00= _____

Shirts each: \$4.00 = _____

For shipping costs outside 934 __, call (805) 528-0392

TOTAL OF ORDER \$ _____

(Please print when filling order, and indicate how many of each)

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Make checks payable and mail to:

SWAP, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.

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

SWAP items make great holiday gifts!
Check out our shoppers' options on page 11.

Los Osos / Morro Bay Chapter
SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
A Non-Profit Public Benefit Corporation
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Double Your Giving with SWAP Memberships

For the person who has everything, a gift membership to SWAP or a donation in the name of your relative or friend would double as a gift to SWAP and the beautiful small wilderness area we work to protect. Just use the membership form to the right of this box.

SWAP Elves to Swagger in Cowboy Hats!

The theme of this year's Los Osos Holiday Parade, to begin at 10 a.m. on December 12, is "The Wild, Wild West." Appropriately, elves representing our little wild area on the western shore of America will be wearing cowboy hats and carrying a "Wild, Wild Elfin Forest" sign in our town's annual parade. Have fun while volunteering to decorate our wagon ahead of time. Try on one of our elven costumes, and enjoy swaggering down Los Osos Valley Road and throwing candy to kids cheering from the curbs! Let us know if you'd like to be part of this delightful event. Call 528-0392 and leave your name and phone number.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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City/State/Zip _____

Email _____

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Defender \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steward \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Champion \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Protector \$75 | <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seniors & Students \$15 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$1000 | |

I want to help, please call me!

Memberships include a subscription to SWAP's bimonthly newsletter, *Oakleaves*. All donations to SWAP are tax-deductible.

EVERY membership counts!

Make checks payable to: SWAP.

Mail to: Small Wilderness Area Preservation,
P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.