



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 ❖ APRIL / MAY 2014

The Rains Came Late This Year

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair

The impact of the prolonged drought is evident in many Elfin Forest plants, and also in the non-native weeds. One effect has been to reduce flowering and subsequent seed production. For most native plants this will not be critical since those that are well established perennials will simply “roll with the punch” and wait for next year. The late arrival of significant rain in February and March of this year will ensure that they will survive through the summer months until next fall and winter.

Some non-native weeds, particularly veldt grass, also have been affected by the drought. In recent weeks there has been very little new growth of this weed. Veldt grass is a perennial and, once established, is somewhat resistant to the periodic dry conditions of the Central Coast climate. But without water it cannot grow. Any seeds that have been produced earlier cannot sprout, remain in the soil, and may be viable for years. We expect that there will be significant germination of these seeds. The recent rains may provide enough water for some of those seeds that have accumulated in the sandy ground to sprout now.

There are probably thousands of non-native seeds lying dormant in the Elfin Forest sand waiting for rain. Not only veldt grass but seeds of other non-native annuals and perennials also can be expected to sprout in the next few weeks. At SWAP’s monthly “First Saturday” workdays, volunteers will be busy weeding to ensure that there is not a new infestation of noxious weeds. The removal of these invaders is a primary goal of SWAP’s Weed Warriors.

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Welcome to Three New SWAP Volunteers

Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell

Recently three wonderful community members have decided to volunteer their time in vital areas of the SWAP organization. Here is an introduction to them:

Carrie Arnold – Recording Secretary

Carrie and her fiancée Paul came to Los Osos in August, 2012, bringing to a close their many moves around the country. They met in Detroit – she, a graduate of Wayne State University, majoring in history and he, a telecom technician with AT&T. First they went on a 10,000-mile motorcycle ride, camping in National Parks, through Tennessee, over to Colorado, Montana, Washington State, California and then back to Detroit. They



liked California very much, and after several moves, Paul found a job as an Electronics Technician working for Union Pacific in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. They found just the house they wanted in Los Osos, and Carrie began working at Perry’s Parcel and Gift in Morro Bay as the Store Lead.

One day SWAP Board member Pat Murray stopped at Perry’s to find out shipping costs for our new mural mugs. Carrie remarked to Pat that the Elfin Forest is one of her very favorite places to go for a walk. Pat told Carrie about SWAP and asked

New Volunteers *continued on page 3*

Volunteers Celebrated at February Event

By Yolanda Waddell; photos by David Moran

One of the defining characteristics of our organization is the total absence of paid staff. EVERYONE volunteers time, energy and talent. We are proud of this fact and believe that our volunteers need to be celebrated from time to time. On Sunday February 9, forty-four SWAP volunteers plus their families and friends gathered at the community room in Morro Shores Mobile Home Park for our Volunteer Appreciation Event.

The Morro Shores Community Room was transformed into a lovely banquet hall with tablecloths on the tables (tablecloth rental donated by Craig and Vicky Johnsen), flowers, delightful guitar music played by Jeff Bright, and wine donated and poured by Diane and Herb Filippini of Filippini Ranch Cellars. Two tables full of delicious appetizers were provided by the Volunteer Appreciation Event Committee: Pat Akey, committee chair Jan DiLeo, Vicky Johnsen, Pat Murray, Yolanda Waddell and Danna Weidner. The room was filled with people chatting and laughing and enjoying the food, Ron Rasmussen's homemade cookies, music and wine.

SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen was the Master of Ceremonies for the presentation part of the event. He spoke about the importance of volunteering, especially for the Elfin Forest, and explained that each committee chair would recognize members of their committees who were present. As each committee chair mentioned a volunteer and spoke about that person, a "runner" would carry one of the new SWAP mural mugs and present it to that person. Thanks to Jan DiLeo, Jay Waddell and Danna Weidner for delivering mugs to all 44 volunteers present.

Vicky Johnsen was named SWAP Volunteer of the Year for being involved in whatever needed doing ever since she joined SWAP in 2012. She is a dedicated Weed Warrior, a booth worker, an active member of the Education Committee, and in November of 2013, after a year of docent training, began her own 2nd Wednesday nature walks in the Elfin Forest. Also she joined the Volunteer Appreciation Event Committee, contacting Filippini cellars for wine pouring, renting wine glasses and tablecloths and providing two trays of delicious food. The Volunteer of the Year award is a framed print of an Elfin Forest scene by Ybi Van Ekeren, a Los Osos artist.

A surprise award was made to Yolanda Waddell for her long-term (since 1985) support of SWAP and the Elfin Forest. The award was a lovely glass mug etched with Yolanda's name, the SWAP logo and a saying: "Those who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer." It was nestled in a basket filled with boxes of tea and goodies to go with the tea. Yolanda asked all present to find "people under 70 years of age" to join SWAP and carry forward the care of the Elfin Forest into the next decade of this century.



Vicky Johnsen (holding picture) was most surprised and pleased to be given the Volunteer of the Year Award.



As SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen named each volunteer and spoke about that person's service to SWAP, one of the "runners" (L-R Jan DiLeo, Jay Waddell and Danna Weidner) would deliver a SWAP mural mug to the volunteer.

(Below) The room full of volunteers at SWAP's Volunteer Appreciation Party had much to talk about. Serenading them at the left rear was guitarist Jeff Bright.



New Volunteers *continued from page 1*

her if she would care to be involved. Luckily for us, Carrie had been thinking about volunteering for a community organization. During a conversation with Pat and me over lunch, Carrie agreed to be SWAP's Recording Secretary. She says that she has grown up with computers, playing games with Microsoft Word as a child. In taking meeting notes and writing minutes of SWAP Board meetings, Carrie will fill a very important role for SWAP. Non-profits by law must have minutes of all of their board meetings. We are delighted to have this energetic young woman on board.

Gene (Skip) Rotstein – Conservation Committee

Skip and his wife Leslie lived for 30 years in the town of Morongo Valley, in the California desert. Skip's college degree was in history, but nearby Palm Springs High School needed a biology teacher, so he taught biosciences. That encouraged him to earn a Masters in Teaching Science at the University of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff. The Masters program concluded with a float trip through the Grand Canyon and Skip's task was to trap and tally rats and mice living along the Colorado River.

In addition to teaching, Skip also coached the Palm Springs High soccer team and founded the annual Palm Springs Tram Road Challenge, a grueling 4-mile uphill run.

Retiring from teaching in 1999, Skip spent the next year putting together the Desert Institute, an education program for adults, at Joshua Tree National Park.

Another turn in his life came when Morongo Valley's only hardware store closed and he bought it. Then he moved it to a spot adjacent to a desert nursery called the Cactus Mart that he and Leslie had taken over after her retirement in 2000. Twelve years later, it was really time to sell and retire.

Skip and Leslie camped along the California coast while their children were growing up, and especially liked the Morro Bay area. They purchased a vacation home in Los Osos six years ago, and it became their permanent home this past year. Skip saw a notice about SWAP's Saturday work day and other SWAP events in the Bay News, and joined in. Ron Rasmussen invited him to attend a SWAP Board meeting; after a later conversation over lunch, Skip agreed to join the SWAP Conservation Committee. We are fortunate to have Skip's knowledge, experience and energy all working for the Elfin Forest.



Leslie Rotstein – Education Committee

Leslie Rotstein is a teacher, through and through. She taught all grades, K - high school but her last years were spent at the Morongo Valley Elementary School, a small high-desert K – 6 elementary with around 257 students. There she was focused on 4th and 5th grades and gifted students. In this rural desert valley, located at the gateway to Joshua Tree National Park, children could be seen coming to school on horseback, by bus and on foot. With fewer than 30 children per class, the school was an ideal environment for low-income at risk students.

One advantage of this small school was that Leslie could take her students on quarterly field trips to the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, across the highway from the school. Her students went as “scientists,” carrying clipboards and pencils, magnifying glasses, and tape measures to record all of their observations. Their observations were charted, graphed, compared, researched and written about back in the classroom.

After Leslie retired from teaching in 2000, she volunteered as a docent at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. She designed activities for children that emphasized observation, questioning and recording of information. She also decided to write a newsletter called “Morongo Hardware News” that chronicled community activities. It was an add-on to the Morongo Hardware store that Skip had purchased after his retirement in 1999. After seven years as editor, she turned the newsletter over to the local Chamber of Commerce.

Leslie and Skip's last desert project was the purchase of a run-down nursery called the

Cactus Mart. Skip moved his little hardware store to become part of the nursery. Together they redesigned the nursery, built greenhouses, developed outdoor cactus gardens and added an art gallery and gift store. It became “a destination for your home and garden,” in the words on the Cactus Mart web site. Their final project was a great deal of fun, but also a great deal of hard work. In 2013, the Rotsteins decided they would try real retirement, and moved to Los Osos.

Now Leslie is ready to return to one of her great loves, helping children to know and understand nature. She has joined SWAP's Education Committee, ready to become a student herself as well as to help prepare activities for school walks through the Elfin Forest. Welcome, Leslie!



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, Corresponding Secretary

Carrie Arnold, Recording Secretary

Pat Akey, Member at Large

Erick Amaya, Member at Large

Pat Murray, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly at 7 p.m. at the Community Room, Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

The next meetings are

**Thursday, April 10,
and Thursday, May 8.**

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.



Gabb's Checkerspot Butterfly

Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler, Ph. D.

April and May are the best months to look for butterflies in the Elfin Forest. Of the 26 species of butterflies and moths listed on our website (elfin-forest.org), only the Monarch Butterfly is not listed as flying in at least one if not both of these two months.

Among those most frequently seen in the Elfin Forest are two species of "checkerspot" butterflies, the Variable Checkerspot (*Euphydryas chalcedona*) and Gabb's Checkerspot (*Chlosyne gabbii*). Gabb's is not as abundant, but is still fairly commonly seen in April and is the featured species for this article.

A Gabb's Checkerspot Butterfly has a wingspan of about an inch and a half. The upper (dorsal) surfaces of the wings have rows of various shades of orange checks bordered by rows of smaller dark brown to black checks. The middle row of checks tend to be bigger and a lighter, more yellowish shade of orange. Females tend to be lighter in color than the males.

The lower (ventral) wing surfaces are strikingly different, as is typical for butterflies, with many large white checks and smaller pale orange ones, the checks narrowly outlined in black. The dark antennae have black knobs on the tips. As is diagnostic for Family Nymphalidae, the Brush-footed Butterflies, the forelegs of both sexes are short and cannot be used for walking.

Gabb's Checkerspot is mainly a California species of butterfly, from Central to Baja California in the coastal mountains and western foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Their habitats include coastal dunes and cliffs, canyons, and chaparral. They are often found in moist areas and frequently land on dirt patches.

The adult butterflies may be seen in the Elfin Forest from April to July. They feed on nectar of various flowers, but the females lay clusters of eggs on the leaves of host plants for their larvae. These include several species of the aster family, of which California Aster (*Lesningia filaginifolia*) and Telegraph Weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*) are listed in our "Plants and Animals of the Elfin Forest, a Pocket Guide" sold on page 11.

Larvae hatch from the eggs and eat for a few weeks, then hibernate in the 2nd instar stage over the fall and winter. With returning spring warmth, they actively feed and grow again, then pupate for a few weeks. They emerge as adults flying, mating, and laying eggs again between the next April and July.

The conservation status for Gabb's Checkerspot Butterfly is listed as threatened throughout their range in state and national books on butterflies. Urban and suburban developments have eliminated the species in many areas. However, this species is listed as common in our area in Butterflies of Estero Bay (available by download or as a printed booklet from Lulu.com). This suggests that the Elfin Forest, our local state parks, and several other protected reserves in our area are very important to their survival.

Filaree

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

It is not news that we have been experiencing extreme drought. Most native plants, adapted to drought, are in waiting mode and are not doing much of anything. One type of plant that grows even under these extreme conditions is the weeds. What is a weed? The best definition I know is: a plant adapted to disturbed conditions caused by humans or their livestock.

While working on the drawing for this issue, Bonnie came up with a new definition: a weed just says thank you when you put a sample in a cup of water and continues to grow as if nothing important has happened, whereas native plants tend to begin wilting even before you can get them into water. Weeds have a high tolerance for adverse physical conditions, but usually do not tolerate competition from other plants. Filaree belongs to the lowest classification given to weeds, as it pretty much stays out of little disturbed native vegetation.

The two species discussed here are *Erodium cicutarium* (Coastal Heron's Bill, red stemmed filaree, red-stem stork's bill) and *E. moschatum* (white-stem filaree). The illustration is a composite of Bonnie's new and old drawings plus a digital scan. The large central drawing is of a white-stem filaree growing under crowded conditions. Note that most of its largish compound leaves, attached to the stem just above the root, are oriented nearly vertically. Contrast this with the scan of the red-stem filaree growing in an open habitat without nearby plants. Its leaves are lying flat on the ground. This is how all filaree species orient their leaves when they grow in the open. *E. cicutarium* is listed in the Elfin Forest Guide, but I would not expect to find much of it there today. The species list was made when there was a lot more open ground in the Elfin Forest. Thanks to SWAP's management, succession to a mature, closed canopy is well on the way.

When Carl Linneaus first described the filarees, he put them in genus *Geranium*. Later *Geranium* was split into three genera (*Erodium*, *Geranium* and *Pelargonium*) based on the number of male structures displaying fertile or pollen producing anthers. There are five anthers in *Erodium*, seven in *Pelargonium*, and ten in *Geranium*. The rest of the flower, sepals, petals and female containing structure, gynoecium, differ only quantitatively among the three genera. There is a generalized flower and gynoecium included in the illustration. These are from an early edition of Dr. David Keil's and my plant taxonomy text.

Note the bulges at the bottom of the gynoecium that contain the seeds. Then there is the very long central portion (style) that resembles a bird's beak. This structure leads to the common names applied to these plants, i.e. heron's bill and stork's bill. Seed dispersal is also illustrated. When the seed is mature, the gynoecium begins to dry out. As it dries, it splits vertically into five parts. Each



part contains a basal seed-holding portion attached to its elongate part of the style. When fully dry, the style portion begins to coil upward with increasing speed. By the time the coil and seed have reached the top of the style, it has enough momentum to be flung into the air and away from the parent plant. Most of them will land far enough from the parent to prevent competition but close enough to still have a similar environment.

Dispersal over long distance is risky because the probability of a seed landing in a favorable habitat approaches zero. Long distance dispersal among weeds is contrary to this thinking, but humans carry weed seeds with us and when they fall they will probably be in another human-dominated environment. After the seed-style complex lands on the soil, the style portion continues to expand and coil with changes in humidity. This allows the seed to be pushed along the soil surface for secondary dispersal. The style also can serve as a 'drill' to bury the seed in the soil.

When I first came to California I thought that native California plants were great and the rest were terrible weeds. When I made the mistake of saying "Isn't it a shame that there is so much filaree in this pasture" to a rancher, he quickly turned on me, saying "Thank God for filaree! It is what makes my operation profitable. Cattle love it; it is one of the first plants to appear in the pasture in the spring and it continues to be present throughout the grazing season." I haven't been foolish enough to bad mouth filaree since. Both species are not only good forage for cattle, but are also good for human grazing. The Web tells of people using the young spring leaves like parsley in salads and the roots in various ways. Filaree can be so numerous in grazed pastures that they produce a reddish-pink haze coating the ground. Look for it mid-morning when they are in full bloom and try to imagine how many flowers it would take to create that haze.

Education Corner

By Yolanda Waddell, Acting Education Chair

The Education Committee was very pleased to add a new member, Leslie Rotstein, in February. She is a dedicated educator and will bring new ideas and new life to our committee. Please read more about her in the article, “Welcome to Three New SWAP Members” on page 3.

At a recent meeting of the committee, Vicky Johnsen expressed a wish that the committee’s small library of books and articles would be more accessible. Currently all school walk materials, docent binders, information files and the small library are housed at past Education Chair Pat Akey’s house. The SWAP storage room is overcrowded. We asked if there might be room at the Los Osos Library, and found that they are short of space as well. Any suggestions for solving this problem are most welcome.

Ron Rasmussen gave a “Mind Walk” on February 17 for the Central Coast State Parks Association. The Mind Walks take place at 10 a.m. every Monday morning for the first three months of each year, the idea being that January through March are rainy months. Regardless of the weather, the talks cover very interesting topics and are very popular. Ron’s topic, of course, was the Elfin Forest. Ron has developed an excellent PowerPoint “slide show,” and received several questions after his talk.

Both Ron Rasmussen and Les Bowker gave ecology walks for two different college classes in December and January. We are pleased that colleges near and far want to visit the Elfin Forest to learn about its diverse habitats.

Off-Leash Dog Reminder Cards Available

By Yolanda Waddell

The Elfin Forest is part of the San Luis Obispo County Parks system and is pet friendly, as are all of the county parks. However, San Luis Obispo County has a Dog Leash Ordinance, number



In January, ecologist Les Bowker, holding diagram, led an Elfin Forest walk for Steve Hendricks’ Cuesta College environmental biology class. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



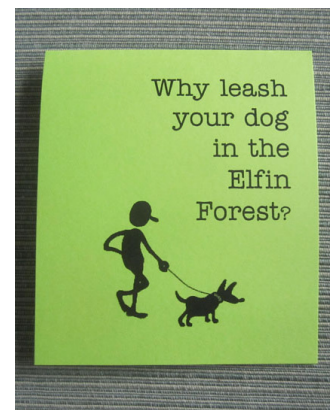
Biology instructor Dianne Purves brought a class from Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa for a walk led by Conservation Chair Ron Rasmussen. Photo by Dianne Purves.

11.04.080 that requires all dogs to be on leash except when they are in dog parks.

If you are a frequent visitor to the Elfin Forest, no doubt you have seen dogs off leash. Some dog owners believe that it is OK to bring a “good” or “friendly” dog to the Elfin Forest without a leash because the dog is “under voice control and won’t hurt anybody.” Those same good dogs can suddenly dash off of the boardwalk and chase a rabbit or scare up a family of California Quail. That is their nature.

Because people don’t like to be lectured, SWAP has created a handout card titled “Why leash your dog in the Elfin Forest?” Only 3-1/2 x 4-1/2 inches in size, the card will fit in a pocket. When the card is opened up, there are six reasons why dogs should be leashed. They are: 1) Leashes protect dogs from becoming lost and from ticks, coyotes and sick or rabid animals. 2) Unleashed dogs can intimidate other Elfin Forest visitors and their dogs. (This has happened in the Elfin Forest.) 3) Unleashed dogs can harass, injure and sometimes kill wildlife. 4) A leashed dog’s keen senses can alert you to nearby wildlife or people. 5) Unleashed dogs increase the probability of dogs being banished from the Elfin Forest. 6) Owners of off-leash dogs can be cited under County Dog Leash Ordinance No. 11.04.080.

If you would like a few of these cards to carry with you when you visit the Elfin Forest, we will be glad to mail some to you. Simply e-mail swap@elfin-forest.org or phone 805-528-0392, giving your name and address.



Weed Warrior Report

By Yolanda Waddell

January – Canceled

Because SWAP and County Parks were in the process of re-examining our mission, and also because we lacked a snail monitor, the January 4th work party was canceled.

February – Weeding, Watering, Yanking

February 1st was a clear day with a beautiful blue sky and no rain. The SWAP Weed Warriors were divided into four work groups by Conservation Chair Ron Rasmussen. Prisila and Rich Johnson were the watering crew, providing liquid life to all 57 of our now 1-year-old native plants at 11th and 16th Streets. Ed and Matt Ellingen joined Ron in tightening some symbolic fencing that had been jumped on and loosened and replacing some cable clamps. Dave Bowlus as a crew of one dug sand away from erosion control bars in the access paths, just in case a heavy rain might come along. The largest crew joined our new “Snail Monitor,” Barrett Holland in removing veldt grass at the very south end of the Forest between 15th and 16th Streets. Barrett, a biologist with SWCA Environmental Consultants, helped us with weeding as well a moving three Morro Shoulderband Snails to safe locations. The weeding team that worked under Barrett Holland’s eagle eye included Jay Bonestell, Pat Brown, Vicky Johnsen, Frances Leitch, Bob Meyer, Charlie Sitton and Yolanda Waddell. Thanks to all of our wonderful Weed Warriors, it was a very productive day.

Let’s all pull together

By Yolanda Waddell

Among the Weed Warriors’ many deeds
Are keeping weeds from dropping seeds
And tending to other Forest needs.

There are tasks such as erosion control.
We’ll stop the sand so it won’t roll
From the top of a knoll and make a hole.
Now if it rains, what will we do?
We’ll don our ponchos and power through.
But if it rains buckets we’ll have to skidoo.

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.



*Matt and Ed Ellingen worked on symbolic fencing during the February work party.
Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



*In February, a team of Weed Warriors pulled veldt grass at the southern edge of the Forest.
Left to right are biologist and snail monitor Barrett Holland, Pat Brown, Bob Meyer and Charlie Sitton. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



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Coming Up in the Elfin Forest



*Text and Photos
by Jean Wheeler*

Normally there are more kinds of plants flowering in April and May than in any other pair of months in the Elfin Forest. With the severity of our prolonged drought, we must not expect anything like the glorious palette of abundant flowers on a bright green backdrop we enjoy in most years.

As I write in early March, so many of our plants are showing few to no flower buds at all and lots of brown leaves. Most have only a few new green ones

responding to last week's heavy rainstorm—the one really major rain so far this season. I just hope April First does not prove me a fool to be hoping for more rains.

Nevertheless, there will be some spring flowers from our marvelously drought-tolerant vegetation. California poppies are already blooming in orange patches here and there. Ceanothus shrubs (buck brush or California lilac) have been showing some of their white to lavender blossoms all around the boardwalk throughout this dry winter, just not nearly as abundantly as we usually see from December into spring. But my walks now show large numbers of flower buds swelling in response to the recent rain. There are some fuchsia-flowered gooseberries sporting red flower tubes, but much fewer and noticeably smaller tubes than usual.

Sticky monkey-flower plants are leafing out and we hope that the heavy rain came in time to support their orange flowers. Other spring plants that we hope respond to the late rain with a light to moderate show of blossoms include coastal dudleya and suffrutescent wallflowers (both yellow), California hedge nettle and cob-



*(above) Variable Checkerspot Butterfly (Euphydryas chalcedona)
(at left) Suffrutescent Wallflower (Erysimum insulare suffrutescens)*

webby thistle (both pink) and the tall blue flower spikes of silver bush lupine.

April and May are the two best months to look for “flying flowers” in the Elfin Forest. One of the most numerous is the Variable Checkerspot Butterfly (pictured) whose bristly black caterpillars with orange dots can usually be spotted grazing on the leaves of their host plant, the sticky monkey-flower. Other butterflies to look for are Gabb's Checkerspot (my natural history discussion with photo of this species is on page 4), the green Coastal Bramble Hairstreak, the Silvery Blue, the black and yellow Anise Swallowtail, the black and cream Pale Swallowtail, and the Moro Blue (near the host for their larvae, the silver bush lupine).

While admiring butterflies from the boardwalk and sand trails, your eyes will no doubt also be attracted by the flight of avian residents. Most of our year-round birds are actively nesting or raising young. Especially likely to be seen and heard are the bright blue Western Scrub Jays, orange and black Spotted Towhees, chattering flocks of tiny fuzzy gray Bushtits, and the large brown California Thrasher with its down-curved beak. Among avian arrivals in April or May from winter homes farther south are Warbling Vireos, Hooded Orioles, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Yellow, Townsend's, and Wilson's Warblers.

The Elfin Forest remains a rewarding walk on the wild side even in this challenging drought year.

California Native Plant Week

From April 12 to 20, statewide California Native Plant Society chapters will offer special events to celebrate California Native Plant Week. Take a look at the CNPS San Luis Obispo chapter's web site for information on their Native Plant Week activities, at www.cnpsslo.org. Also you can celebrate native plants in your very own Elfin Forest at any time during that week. Enjoy the wildflowers that are in bloom during April. See Jean Wheeler's "Coming Up in the Elfin Forest" article above.

Earth Day, April 27

The 24th Annual SLO County Earth Day Fair & Music Festival will take place at El Chorro Regional Park on Sunday, April 27 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free. There will be a Zero Waste Park, Clean Energy Zone, a Kid's Area, an Eco Marketplace, a Health & Well-being Center, and of course, food. The Music festival main stage will feature Burning James and the Funky Flames. It promises to be a lively and fun day. More information at www.earthdayalliance.com.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Second Wednesday Walks

April 9, 10:00 a.m. – Butterfly Basics

April flowers and warmer temperatures should bring out butterflies in the Elfin Forest. Come share the search for the “flowers that fly” with docent Vicky Johnsen, and learn some fun facts.

May 14, 10:00 a.m.

– Through a Magnifying Glass

View some of the wonders of the Elfin Forest that you normally don't see, by looking at lichens, leaf surfaces and flower petals with a magnifying glass. Bring a magnifying glass if you have one, but docent Vicky Johnsen will have a few that can be shared. Prepare to be surprised at some of the things that you see.

Third Saturday Walks

April 19, 8:30 a.m. – Birds at Nesting Time

Springtime is meet-up and nesting time for most Central Coast birds. Join expert birder Mike Stiles in a quest to see and hear male Elfin Forest birds romancing the ladies with song and flying rituals. Mike will identify many birds for us, and will talk about breeding season plumage, mating behavior, nest building practices, and the ways different birds raise their young. This will be a good walk for all levels of birding ability. Note the 8:30 starting time.

May 17, 9:30 a.m.

– Wildflowers with Dirk Walters

Whether or not there have been April showers, the Elfin Forest always has May flowers because the Forest's hardy native plants are used to doing without water. Dirk Walters will take us on a delightful tour of every blooming plant that is visible from the boardwalk in the Elfin Forest. There probably will be bright yellows of fiddlenecks, rush-roses, deerweed, golden yarrow and of course California poppies. White popcorn flowers, pearly everlasting and yarrow plants should have appeared too, as well as pink cobwebby thistles and blue wild hyacinths. The silver dune lupines at Bush Lupine Point should be showing pale blue blossoms that attract honeybees and Moro Blue butterflies. Treat yourself to a springtime experience in Nature's own garden.

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. Only heavy rain will cancel a walk. For more information call (805) 528-0392.



Al Normandin had to give a “Non-fungus Foray” in February because there were no mushrooms to be seen in the Elfin Forest. After describing what fungi might have been seen, he displayed and gave a wonderful talk about lichens. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



At the end of his January walk, Archaeologist Ethan Bertrando displayed trays of fascinating Chumash artifacts. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

“Let every individual and institution now think and act as a responsible trustee of Earth, seeking choices in ecology, economics and ethics that will provide a sustainable future, eliminate pollution, poverty and violence, awaken the wonder of life and foster peaceful progress in the human adventure.”

~ John McConnell, founder of International Earth Day ~

Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

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**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.*

If you recently sent a donation to SWAP and don't see your name in this issue's New and Renewing list, be assured that your gift will be acknowledged in the next bimonthly issue. Gifts are processed by two different volunteers before reaching our editors, and newsletter copy deadline is one month before the date of the issue.

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 for inclusion in future issues under "Elfin Forest Sightings." You can also leave a message on SWAP's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.



In Memoriam

Remembering Jim Brownell, Soil Scientist

*Text & Photo (2012)
By Yolanda Waddell*

He called himself Dr. Dirt. When we knew him Jim Brownell was living in Cambria, retired from CSU Fresno where he was a professor of soils and mechanized agriculture. He was a volunteer at the Piedras Blancas Lightstation and with Friends of the Elephant Seals

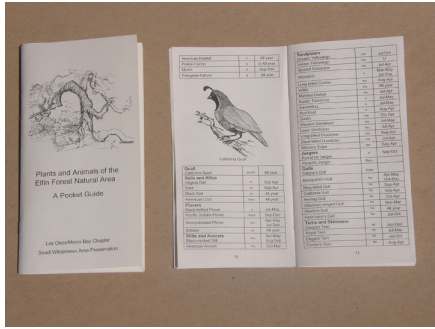


and Cambria Greenspace. But he also gave wonderful 3rd Saturday nature walks in the Elfin Forest, regaling walk participants with astonishing facts about soils, especially Baywood Fine Sand. He added terms like "perched water table" and bentonite (a kind of clay) to our vocabularies, and then gave visual demonstrations of how soils work so we wouldn't forget. He made the science of soils understandable and fun for all. It would have been wonderful for Dr. Dirt's family and the community if he had lived into his 90s, but liver cancer took his life. He passed away on November 4, 2013, leaving four children and spouses, 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. We miss him, and extend our condolences to his family.



Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

Tired of looking at that pile of newsletters and magazines waiting to be read? If you use your computer a lot, we encourage you to take a look at the online version at www.elfin-forest.org. Being able to see the 20 or so photos in full color makes it a very attractive alternative to the black-and-white printed copy. If you miss an issue for some reason, it is there, waiting for you. Simply click on "Forest Library," then "Oakleaves Index" and finally the year and month of the issue that you want to read. Try it – you may like it. Just e-mail us at oakleaves@elfin-forest.org with the subject: Switch me to online.



Useful Pocket Guide Only \$2!

About 4 by 8 inches, SWAP's Pocket Guide is packed with fascinating information. Charts for 200 vascular plants include scientific and common names, months in bloom, colors, and habitats. Also listed are lichens, mushrooms, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Peak months are given for birds and size, months, color, and host plants for butterflies. Other arthropods listed with interesting comments include spiders, crustaceans, dragonflies, crickets and beetles.



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.

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Useful 56-page guide to plants and animals of the Elfin Forest. Lists for mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, arthropods including moths and butterflies, gastropods, vascular plants, lichens, and mushrooms. Some with charts for seasonality, color and more.

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Elfin Forest Sightings – What is This?

As Vicky Johnsen and her walk participants were returning to 15th Street after her 2nd Wednesday walk in February, we spotted a curious sight. Just off of the boardwalk near the Highest Point were some strange sandy eruptions. We placed a pen near them for comparison; they are about two inches across. There are some speculations about what caused them. What do you think they are? Send your answer to oakleaves@elfin-forest.org.



*Tending our attractive SWAP display in January at the Morro Bay Bird Festival were display creator Ron Rasmussen and Rosemary Baxter.
Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

Another April Event -
State of the Bay Conference on Saturday, April 5th, 1 p.m. at the Morro Bay Community Center. Presented by Morro National Estuary Program (MBNEP), no charge.

Wanted: A Few Good People

Help SWAP support the Elfin Forest with just a few hours a month of your time.

Become a Weed Warrior or join our Conservation committee. Our work parties are the first Saturday of every month from 9 to noon. E-mail ron@elfin-forest.org or call 528-0392.

Join our Education and School Walks Committee. We need school walk docents and people to help with our docent training program. Call 528-0392 or e-mail yolanda@elfin-forest.org.

Help with publicity. Put your computer to use for one or two hours each month and send event notices to newspapers and radio stations. Call 528-0392 or e-mail yolanda@elfin-forest.org.

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

Check here to receive the online version only.

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