



# OAKLEAVES

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 2014 / JANUARY 2015

## SWAP Activity in 2014

*By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair*

**SWAP's financial status** is stable. Our paid membership, as of the beginning of 2014, was 371. Renewing members often enhance their dues with an additional generous gift. Contributions from members are the primary source of SWAP's income. In this fiscal year their contribution was almost \$12,000. Major expenses during the year are for publications (e.g., Oakleaves) \$6,465, liability insurance (\$4,303) and conservation work (\$4,386). A more detailed financial report for the past fiscal year can be found on SWAP's website.

**SWAP's stewardship of the Elfin Forest** has been recognized in meetings of SWAP's Conservation Committee with key County Parks personnel at their offices and recently in a tour of the Elfin Forest. Comments by County Parks personnel at the latter meeting showed high regard for SWAP's activity in the Elfin Forest, and for the Elfin Forest itself. During a stop in Rose's Grove it was noted that the benches needed refinishing. Within a short time later, County workers had refinished the benches. Even though the 90-acre Elfin Forest is a small fraction of the total 14,000 acres of County parkland, SWAP expects to have continuing access to Parks personnel when necessary.

**New Young Volunteers** have joined SWAP. Vicky Johnsen and Carrie Arnold have become active board members. Vicky is also a docent and conducts Nature Walks in the Forest. Carrie has

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## SWAP Celebrates Elfin Forest's 20 Years

*By Yolanda Waddell*

SWAP's state-required annual meeting for members, which we prefer to call our Annual Celebration, proved to be just that on Saturday, September 27th. At least 50 people came to visit with old friends and meet new ones, eat good food including the Elfin Forest 20th anniversary cake, and to hear and see an excellent talk by Morro Bay Museum Manager, Rouvaishyana.

Thanks to a resourceful and energetic event committee headed by Pat Murray, tables were beautifully set with gorgeous succulent planters, trays of delicious food were ready for enjoyment, the punch bowl was full, and the Elfin Forest 20th anniversary cake by baker Meng of Carlock's Bakery was ready to be admired and then devoured. Members of the event committee were Pat Akey, Rose-

*Elfin Forest's 20 Years continued on page 2*



*Baker Meng of Carlock's Bakery did a superb job of decorating the cake for SWAP's 20th Anniversary Celebration. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



## 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

Vicky Johnsen, 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, December 11,  
and Thursday, January 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.

## Attention From the Press

We were pleased that two members of the press attended SWAP's Annual Celebration on September 27th. Neil Farrell, Bay News Managing Editor, was with the Sun Bulletin during the Elfin Forest fund-raising years and gave us support at that time. Judy Salamacha of *The Tribune*, who writes about Central Coast organizations and people, came at our invitation. Both Neil and Judy later wrote articles about the Elfin Forest for their publications. Neil's article appeared in the *Bay News* on October 9, and Judy's column "By the Bay" ran on October 6. David Middlecamp, *Tribune* photographer, covered the Elfin Forest in his "From the Vault" column on October 4, and Nick Wilson of *The Tribune* interviewed Ron Rasmussen in the Elfin Forest and produced a front-page article on October 27.

## Gibson Painting Raffle Extended

As mentioned in the October/November Oakleaves, SWAP was recently given a valuable painting by George Gibson, nationally known watercolorist and Scenic Art Director for MGM Studios from 1934 to 1969. It is valued at \$5,000.

SWAP is holding a raffle for the painting; 100 chances are available at \$50 each. Our original end date for the raffle was November 22nd. However, the drawing will now be held on Sunday, December 14 at the old schoolhouse in Los Osos Community Park, 2180 Palisades Avenue, from 2 to 4 p.m. To see the painting, check our website, [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org) for locations where the painting will be on display.

Raffle tickets can be obtained by calling SWAP, 805-528-0392 or mailing a check to SWAP, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos CA 93412-6442. Donations to SWAP are tax deductible.

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## SWAP in 2014 *continued from page 1*

the role of Recording Secretary at all board meetings. The Conservation Committee has two new members in Skip Rotstein and Jack Fanselow, both of whom live close by the Elfin Forest. Leslie Rotstein (Skip's mate) has a background in teaching and so, naturally, joined the Education Committee.

**State of the Elfin Forest** -- This year has seen, not one, but two cycles of attack by Oak Moth caterpillars (*Phryganidia californica*). In the Elfin Forest the infestation varies from year to year, but in this past year it has been especially severe. Many oaks in the forest have been essentially stripped clean of leaves. In some places (e.g., Rose's Grove) the caterpillars can be a nuisance, but harmless. A research group in the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program at UC Davis has studied the effects of pests like the Oak Moth on affected trees. Although most leaves may be lost, a healthy tree will recover and replace the leaves. In the Elfin Forest one can see this recovery in progress. New leaves are appearing on many of the affected oaks, and can be recognized by their bright green color. By this time of year, the caterpillars have pupated. The chrysalises are concealed in and around the oak groves while the larvae are developing into the adult form.

The drought has affected most of the plants in the Elfin Forest, not necessarily by killing them but by significantly slowing their growth. Non-native weeds are also suppressed and since midsummer the new sprouting of weeds has been rare. It is certain that the seeds of invasive plants, such as Veldt grass, are still present in the sandy soil of the Forest and will sprout with the next significant rains. Loyal SWAP volunteers are prepared to attack these invaders when the "Wet" returns. In the meantime, SWAP volunteers will be active in Boardwalk and trail maintenance, trash pickup, and watering of plants in recovering areas.

## Elfin Forest's 20 Years *continued from page 1*

mary Baxter, Tom Cash, Vicky Johnsen, Debbie Levi, Ron Rasmussen, Leslie and Skip Rotstein, Yolanda Waddell and Chris Van Beveren.

A brief (well, fairly brief) business meeting preceded Rouvaishyana's presentation. SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen welcomed those attending and directed everyone's attention to the Annual Treasurer's Report on the back of the program. As in past years, SWAP has been well-supported by its generous membership with its treasury in the black. SWAP members voted for and elected four members to the SWAP Board of Directors: Carrie Arnold, a new member and currently the Recording Secretary; incumbent Jan DiLeo, our Treasurer; new member Vicky Johnsen; incumbent Patricia Murray, Chair of Property and Records; and incumbent Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair and Conservation Chair.

SWAP "old-timer" Yolanda Waddell spoke briefly about the effort, ending in July, 1994, to acquire the southern 38.7 acres of the Elfin Forest. On July 6, 1994, San Luis Obispo County accepted the land and it became the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area. Some SWAP members involved in that effort were in attendance: Les Bowker, Elsie Deitz, Larry and Pat Grimes, Barbara Machado and Barbara Rosenthal. The business meeting ended with Vicky Johnsen leading the singing of Barbara Machado's words to *This Land is Your Land*, ending with "... the Elfin Forest was saved for you and me!"

Rouvaishyana brought a marvelous display of shellfish, a huge crab shell, posters and photos. In his PowerPoint talk about Morro Bay ocean habitats and the wildlife that inhabits them, he showed photos taken by divers of an amazing diversity of underwater life in and among the pilings near the Coast Guard station. He also spoke about the various possible reasons that eel grass has declined in the bay, one being an invasive form of bryozoan, a mossy marine invertebrate. On the bright side, Rouvaishyana, who also works as a naturalist aboard whale watching boats, said that there have been record numbers of whales off our coast this year.

See more 2014 Celebration photos  
at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org) under Forest Library



*Vicky Johnsen led the singing of Barbara Machado's words to *This Land is Your Land*, ending with "the Elfin Forest was saved for you and me!" Photo by Bob Meyer.*



*Morro Bay Museum Manager Rouvaishyana stands at the table of exhibits he brought to SWAP's Annual Celebration contributing to his keynote address, "Local Bay and Ocean Habitats and the Wildlife that Lives There." Photo by Bob Meyer.*



*Sharon Meyer (at right) gets a laugh from Oakleaves co-editor Jean Wheeler snapping a photo of Bob Meyer, who was taking a photo of Jean. In the background is SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen setting up equipment for Rouvaishyana's talk. Photo by Bob Meyer.*



## Green-winged Teal

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

Among thousands of ducks participating in the winter birding extravaganza on Morro Bay National Estuary, the Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) is one of the smallest and most numerous we commonly see from Bush Lupine Point or Siena's View. At an average length of 14 inches and wingspan of 23 inches, it is the smallest of North American dabbling ducks—ducks feeding from the water's surface by dipping their heads down and their tail ends straight up.

Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) and Ruddy Ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) are about the same size, but are both diving rather than dabbling ducks. They disappear completely below the surface when feeding and usually swim over deeper water farther from our viewpoints. Quite different in coloration, both have large white patches on heads large for their small body size.

Green-winged teal are in breeding plumage while here in the winter. The males have gray bodies with pinkish to orange breasts speckled with brown, and diagnostic are a narrow vertical white shoulder stripe and a creamy yellow triangular patch near the tail. Their heads are small and round, and have a large and bright green patch curving down and back from the eye with dark reddish-brown above and below the green crescent. The bill is thin, pointed, and dark.

The females, as is usual for birds, are a fairly nondescript mottled brown, but do have a noticeable buffy yellow streak below the tail. Both sexes have a green patch on the lower side of the wing near the body, giving them their common name. But the green patch is covered by the brown upper wing feathers most of the time when they are resting on the water.

The related Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*), Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*), and Northern Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*) are the most likely to be confused with the Green-winged Teal, but all are larger ducks. The male Cinnamon Teal, also in breeding plumage while here, is strikingly reddish brown virtually all over, with blue on the upper wing near the body in flight. The male Blue-winged Teal has a similar blue wing patch but is brown on his back and speckled brown below, with a round white hip patch and a white crescent separating his eye and his beak. The Northern Shoveler is larger, with brown sides and belly bordered by white to the front, back and below the wings. He has a white rump, a completely green head, and a large, very broad black bill.

Green-winged Teal feed by poking their heads down to sift food from mud and pull grasses and weeds from shallow water near shore. Thus they come close to the shore of the Elfin Forest. They travel in large flocks in migration and on winter waters. They eat mostly vegetation, although growing young ducks will also seek insects.

This species summers widely from northern shores of Alaska and Quebec south to northern California, the Great Lakes, and Canada's Maritime Provinces. They are fast fliers and migrate in large flocks, males first, females and young later, flying day and night. Some winter on the coastal waters of British Columbia and Alaska. Others winter from the Atlantic to the Pacific south of a line from California and the Great Lakes across to New England. In winter they can be found on waters across the southern states and throughout Mexico. They are already common in our estuary by October, and leave about April.

Very hardy ducks, more than half of the Green-winged Teal population breeds in marshes and ponds of boreal forests in Canada and Alaska. The female lays about six to a dozen eggs in a depression among tall grass, within a few hundred yards of water. Only the female incubates the eggs, which hatch in three weeks, when the male leaves her. She leads her young to water one day after hatching and they fledge in about one month. Females often cooperate to protect their broods from predators.

Green-winged teal remain abundant and widespread, with much of their breeding range virtually uninhabited by humans. They are fortunately a species "of least concern" in conservation status.



## 2014 Big Sit! Report

*By Jim Royer, Circle Captain*

*Editor's Note: Jim Royer wrote the following report for Birdwatcher's Digest, the sponsor of the International Big Sit! There were 12 topnotch birders on his team, which he has named "Pishing in the Wind." The location for the team's 17-foot-wide birding circle was at Bush Lupine Point in the Elfin Forest. The birders worked from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 12th. The weather was clear, mostly calm, cool in the morning and almost 90 degrees in the afternoon. Pishing in the Wind came in fifth internationally with 103 species. Cape May Point, New Jersey was first with 150 species. For more information, see the Birdwatchers Digest website at [www.birdwatchersdigest.com](http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com); scroll down the left-hand column on the home page to find the 2014 Big Sit! link.*

We were greeted by calling shorebirds moving with the incoming tide as we arrived at the wooden overlook count site at 6:00 a.m. The three-part call of Greater Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plover's slurred two note whistles, Long-billed Curlews saying their name loudly, and dowitchers' "keek keek"

*Stalwart birders at Bush Lupine Point seek more species to add to their Big Sit! list.*

*Photo by Jean Wheeler.*

**Big Sit!** continued on page 5

Revisited and Updated from February/March, 1998

# Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberry

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

Bonnie's drawing of the fuchsia-flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosa*) in this issue of *Oakleaves* was drawn many years ago for an annual banquet program at a local chapter of California Native Plant Society. Later, it was used as one component in a figure representing its plant family (*Grossulariaceae*) in Dr. David J. Keil's and my textbook in *Vascular Plant Taxonomy*.

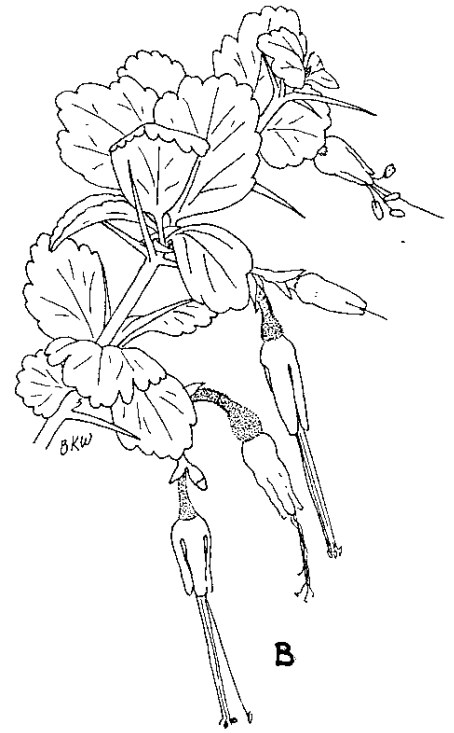
Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry is a shrub with somewhat thick, dark green leaves approximately 1 to 1½ inches wide. The dark red flowers begin to be produced by late November or early December. So, one should be able to find it blooming right now. Its flowers are classic hummingbird flowers--red, tubular and oriented downward. They don't have much scent, but produce lots of nectar. Hummingbirds are daytime fliers that find their flowers by sight. They don't have a good sense of smell, so flower odors are of little value. Being vertebrates, like us, they see red colors best.

Look for fuchsia-flowered gooseberry on moist north and east facing slopes in clearings among oaks or among shrubs of coastal dune scrub. They are especially easy to spot along the lower (northern) boardwalk. Being one of the few native plant species to flower this early in winter, they provide food to Anna's hummingbirds. Anna's hummingbird is our earliest nesting hummingbird, able to nest this early partially because of the nectar provided by this beautiful gooseberry. If you look for hummingbirds, they should be easy to spot. If there is more than one, they will probably be chasing each other. They tend to be very possessive of any food source.

By February or March, the flowers will be replaced by sticky, somewhat bristly reddish berries. Unlike commercial gooseberries, primarily species from Eurasia and Eastern North America, this berry is quite dry and rather unpalatable. Although the berries are not edible, the plant is quite beautiful. It is easy to grow from cuttings taken from the base of stems and is obviously excellent for attracting hummingbirds. Since it is one of our few native plant species commonly sold at commercial nurseries, it can be seen regularly in suburban California landscapes. In the wild, this gooseberry loses most of its leaves during the summer months. However, if given a small amount of summer water, it is practically evergreen.

The genus *Ribes* contains plants that are commonly called gooseberries and currants. The name, gooseberry, is given to species of *Ribes* that bear sharp spines on their stems and sometimes also on the berries. Currants, on the other hand, are *Ribes* that have stems and berries lacking these sharp spines and therefore smooth. Some of us who grew up in eastern United States may remember hearing bad things about gooseberries. You may have heard that "the only good gooseberry is a dead gooseberry." This is because a few species of gooseberry serve as the alternative host of white pine blister rust, a major disease of the commercially important eastern white pine tree (*Pinus strobilis*). This thinking has pretty much been abandoned, even in the East. Foresters found it impos-

sible to eradicate the gooseberry even after years of trying. More important for us, there are no white pines, commercial or not, growing in our area. All white pines in California are mountain trees restricted to moderate to high elevations. These California pines are either of no commercial value or resistant to the rust. Besides, there are over 30 species of *Ribes* in California, nine in San Luis Obispo County. Wild gooseberries and currants are much too common and diverse in the West to have any hope of eradication, even if there were economic pines involved.



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## Big Sit! *continued from page 4*

and "too-too" calls completed the long and the short of the pre-dawn chorus below us. The waking of land birds was signaled by the beautiful and varied song of mockingbirds and California Thrashers, punctuated by the shrill call of the Spotted Towhee coming from thick coastal scrub around us. We had recorded 30 species by 7:00 a.m. just as the light was becoming bright enough for us to look through our scopes and see the birds feeding along the branching tidal channels of the muddy Morro Bay Estuary.

As the day brightened, more land birds sang and the indistinct shapes in the estuary below became shovelers, teal, willets, godwits, terns, herons and other additions to our list, which grew to 82 species by 10:00 a.m. Virginia Rails added their rowdy laugh-like calls from the marshy edge of the bay, but their usual cohorts in concealment, the Soras, were inexplicably absent (or silent). The species additions slowed considerably as we approached our noon total of 92 species.

The hardy stalwart birders of the afternoon fought for each individual addition to the day's list and they trickled in slowly - Lawrence's Goldfinch, Common Tern, Barn Swallow and Bushtit. This year's only completely new bird for our local big sit list (181 species seen since the inaugural 1997 count) was Horned Grebe. Our final total of 103 species came with late afternoon add-ons: Tricolored Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds. The continuing drought and other factors likely contributed to our missing many species we normally record, such as Merlin, meadowlark, pipit, Purple Finch, Sora and snipe. We were satisfied with our species total and to have an excuse to spend most of the day at such a beautiful spot overlooking Morro Bay, on the edge of the Pacific Ocean!



*In October, Cuesta College biology instructor Azalia Dillard requested a guided walk for her Environmental Biology class. Ron Rasmussen (not shown) and Vicky Johnsen (holding the aerial photo) gave a very informative walk. Instructor Azalia is at left. Photo by Ron Rasmussen.*



## Park Aide Doing Trash Patrol

In September, we encountered Park Aide Alice who was patrolling the boardwalk to check for trash. Later she returned with a bucket full of empty bottles that she picked up near Bush Lupine Point. She said that she often finds leftovers from a party at Bush Lupine Point. It's good to know that County Parks is helping SWAP to keep the Elfin Forest clean.

## Mutt Mitt Coordinator Bids "A-doo"



*New Mutt Mitt Coordinator Heidi Kausch (left) receives the final box of Mutt Mitts that Danna Weidner (right) had stored in her garage. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

Since 2011, Danna Weidner has been our very efficient Mutt Mitt Coordinator. She writes grants for funding, controls the inventory of Mutt Mitts and dispensers, places orders, dispenses mitts to the seven block captains and troubleshoots any problems.

Danna and her husband Tom live near the bay in a lovely home that has two drawbacks: it is often foggy where they live; and downtown Los Osos isn't within walking distance. They have now solved both problems by buying a home in the sunny part of Arroyo Grande that is within walking distance of that city's Old Town. They will be settled in their new home by the time this issue of Oakleaves is printed.

Not wanting to leave SWAP in the lurch, Danna found a person to replace her as Mutt Mitt Coordinator, and that person is Heidi Kausch. Heidi recently resigned from being the Mutt Mitt Captain for 15th Street because she sold her house at the end of 15th Street and moved across town. We are grateful that she has agreed to return to the Mutt Mitt Committee as its Coordinator. The seven Dispenser Captains whom she will work with are Gary Frieburg, 11th St.; Scott Danielson, 12th St.; Susan McTaggart, 13th St.; Beth Wimer, 14th St.; Steve Krupinski, 15th Street; Pat and Larry Grimes, 16th Street; and Carolyn Boomer, 17th Street.

Our heartfelt thanks go to Danna and Tom. Tom has helped SWAP whenever we needed something made of wood, as his hobby is woodworking. We wish them a good life in Arroyo Grande and know that they will support other organizations in their new community.

# Weed Warrior Report

*Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell*

## September 5 – Multitasking for the Forest

Because of a good turnout, our September crew of Weed Warriors was able to accomplish a lot. Prisila and Rich Johnson watered the plants at the end of 16th Street; Dave Bowlus shoveled sand from behind water bars on some of the more traveled paths; Vicky Johnsen helped Pete Sarafian remove some green plastic fencing that had been dumped near the 17th Street trail and then did trash pickup along South Bay Boulevard. The rest of the crew pulled veldt grass near the houses between 15h and 16th Streets. One Shoulderband Snail was found and taken to a safe place by snail monitor Barrett Holland. Members of the weeding crew were Jay Bonestell, Pat Brown, Ed Ellingen, Matt Ellingen, Lannie Erickson, Jack Fanselow, Frances Leitch and Yolanda Waddell.



*Snail monitor Barrett Holland's glove transports an endangered Morro Shoulderband Snail to a safe place, away from the Weed Warrior field of action.*

*(At left) Tackling the evil veldt grass in September were (clockwise from upper left) Lannie Erickson, Ed Ellingen, Matt Ellingen, Pat Brown and Jack Fanselow.*



*Bountiful gifts of thanks were much enjoyed by Craig and Vicky Johnsen, Ron Rasmussen, and Jay Waddell, representing SWAP at the recent County Parks Volunteer Appreciation Event. Photo by Y. Waddell.*

## October 4 – Lots of Elbow Grease Used

October's crew was smaller than September's but no less energetic. The three tasks that Conservation Chair Ron Rasmussen said needed to be done were watering the plants at the end of 16th Street; doing erosion control along sand trails to get ready for winter rains; and boardwalk repair. Thanks to Jay Bonestell, Ed Ellingen, Matt Ellingen, Lannie Erickson, and Rich Johnson for showing up, and of course they were able to enjoy lots of Ron's home baked cookies at the end of the workday.

## Let's all pull together

*By Yolanda Waddell*

We need you to come with your caring ways;

First Saturdays we have good work to do.

Of course when we're done you know our reward:

Tasty cookies by Ron and a hearty thank you!



*SWAP's Oktoberfest Booth was popular as always. On duty to meet interested visitors were (L-R) Rosemary Baxter, Ron Rasmussen, Ann Calhoun and Pat Murray. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

# Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Story and Photos By Jean Wheeler

December and January are exciting months in the Elfin Forest. Bird life is at peak diversity and populations. The desperately-needed inch of rain at Halloween, hopefully to be followed soon by more rains, should initiate our major flowering season from the holidays into the new year.

Our area is known as one of the top birding regions in our nation, especially in these winter months. That's why the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, held on Martin Luther King Weekend each year, attracts hundreds of visitors from all over the U.S. and Canada. See the schedule of events and field trips (which include the Elfin Forest) for this winter's festival from January 16-19, 2015, at [www.morrobaybirdfestival.org](http://www.morrobaybirdfestival.org). Early registration for field trips is essential.

Virtually all species of water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) are present and at peak populations in December and January, as 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, phoebes, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and many other little brown and little grey birds. Among the not-so-little birds of the brush are thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, quail, blackbirds, and doves.

By December, some of our larger shrubs will come into bloom. *Ceanothus*, among the many species of the California Lilac genus, is one of the dominant shrubs in our maritime chaparral, so its white to lavender flowers should nearly surround the boardwalk by the New Year.

Tucked along the lower boardwalk is Morro Manzanita, a shrub found only along the coast between Montaña de Oro and Morro Bay State Parks. The Elfin Forest is nearly in the center of its limited range. This species has been very severely devastated by our multi-year drought. Its shrubs are covered by dried brown leaves or branches bare from fallen dead leaves. Already a "threatened" species because of its limited range, small populations, and high human development within that small range, the drought damage is very alarming. Its tiny, bell-shaped, white-pink flowers are normally a highpoint of our winter floral wonderland.

When we do get enough rain (let's take the optimistic approach), the bright red of the Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberry will make a cheerful holiday statement against the greening shrub background.

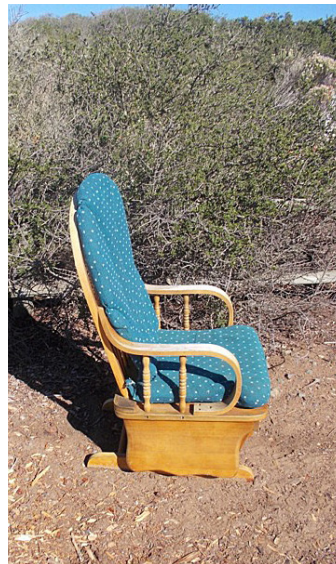
Often coating both dead and living branches of shrubs and trees are symbiotic lichens. The most noticeable of 56 kinds identified in the Elfin Forest is lace lichen. It is looking much more healthy than shrubs and trees now because it absorbs its water requirements from our dense fog. That fog has greatly helped our many shrubs to survive the drought by reducing evapo-transpiration from leaves and by dripping onto the soil to reduce soil water loss.

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. Applaud the tenacity and beauty of our drought-surviving plants and animals!



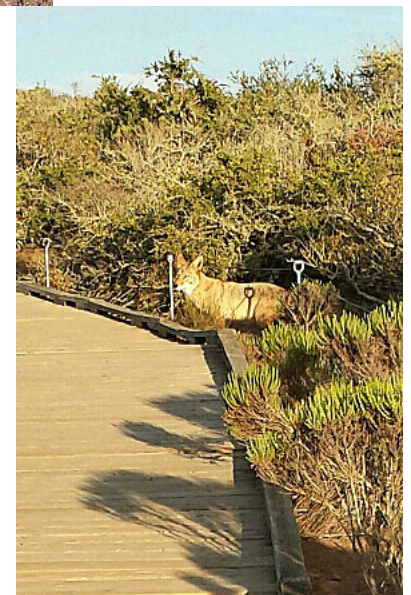
*Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberry (See also page 5).*

## Elfin Forest Sightings Chairs, Coyotes, and Deer ... oh my!



In November, Pete Sarafian discovered this wooden rocking chair at the bottom of the trail below Bush Lupine Point. He hauled it out of the Forest, and County Parks picked it up and took it away. Also, Pete reported that he has seen deer tracks at both the east and west ends of the Forest, and heard a coyote howling at the full moon on November 5th.

A month or two earlier, Lorie Ingan reported seeing a coyote next to the boardwalk staring at her and her small dog that was on leash. Lorie and her dog went the other way!





## WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

*Editor's Note: SWAP docent Vicky Johnsen has decided to discontinue her Second Sunday walks in favor of being a Roving Docent. Periodically during each month, she will tour the Elfin Forest and will be available to answer questions or lead visitors on short walks. If you would like Vicky or SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen to lead you or your group in a walk, phone 805-528-0392.*

### Third Saturday Walks

#### *December 20, 9:30 a.m. – Winter Solstice Walk*

Follow Dr. Jean Wheeler through the Elfin Forest on the day before Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year. Dr. Wheeler has taught thousands of geography students about the relative wanderings of the sun, moon and earth, and what they mean to us in terms of our climates, tides, and the vegetation and animal life around us. With charts and a globe that doubles as a beachball, she will take us on an imaginary circuit around the sun as we circle the Elfin Forest on the boardwalk.

#### *January 17, 9:30 a.m.*

#### *– Geology Talk and Discovery Walk*

Join local naturalist Al Normandin for a talk on local geology that goes beyond the usual Morros and the San Andreas fault. Topics will include local mining, hot springs, waterfalls, and tsunami potential. There will be a display of many local rocks. This will be followed by a discovery walk focusing on winter blooming plants, as well as identifying birds, insects and animals that we find.

*Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at times stated above at the north end (1100 block) of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes, and leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.*



*Jim Royer and his annual pre-Big Sit! walk participants as usual identified about 60 species of birds in a two-hour walk around the boardwalk.*

*Photo by Jean Wheeler.*



*Barbara Renshaw (rear) and sketch walk participants settled on the boardwalk to draw plants nearby. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

## SWAP First Saturday Work Parties

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

## Please Report Elfin Forest Sightings

Have you observed any unusual birds in the Elfin Forest? Mammals? Reptiles? Amphibians? Insects? Interesting activities or footprints of wildlife in our Elfin Forest? Unusual plants? Taken a good photo? Please report any interesting sightings to your Oakleaves editors at: [oakleaves@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaves@elfin-forest.org) for inclusion in future issues under "Elfin Forest Sightings." You can also leave a message on SWAP's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.



*Reptiles are hard to find in nature, so docent Tony Frazier brought some live specimens for participants to see and touch. Photo by Jean Wheeler.*

# Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

## NEW:

Larry Davidson

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

Ray & Sonya Bracken*	Martha MacGillivray*
Eleanor Brown	Deborah Marzetta*
Katy Budge*	Marie McRee
Kathleen Copeland*	Beth & Sheldon Miller*
L.R. Erickson	Burton Moyer & Marilyn Clark*
Gary Giannico*	Alan & Elaine Olson*
Bethany & Don Griffiths*	Bill & Callie Sandoval*
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Jim & Karen Havlena*	Lani Steele
Bill & Meg Henry	Cameron Mitchell Tucker
Arylane Hill*	Jean D. Wheeler*
Arthur Hubbard	Robert D. Wheeler*
Dr. Frank Kurczewski	
Annette Lindeman*	

## DONATIONS:

Mildred Chirman  
Gail Johnson & the Johnson Framing Studio  
Robert "Rosey" Rosenthal

*\*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.*



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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: Curtis Black, Lorie Ingan, Vicky Johnson,  
Betsy Kinter, Bob Meyer, Pete Sarafian, Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell,  
Dirk & Bonnie Walters and Jean Wheeler.

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# County Parks Director to Retire

Text and photo  
by Yolanda Waddell



Curtis Black, GSA (General Services Agency) Deputy Director of San Luis Obispo County Parks changed his title recently. He is now Interim Director, San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation Department. He'll keep that title until the end of December or early in January.

This past July, when Curtis announced that he would retire at the end of September, neither he nor anyone in County Parks knew that Dan Buckshi, the County Administrative Officer, would make a decision to separate County Parks and the San Luis Obispo Airports from the County General Services Agency, making them stand-alone departments. Instead of having a new Deputy Director, County Parks will be led by a full-on Director of County Parks & Recreation. Because of the many changes involved and because the 2015 budget must be developed while all this is going on, Curtis agreed to stay on as Interim Director until a new Director is on board, hopefully by mid-December.

Forty-two years ago, Curtis began his working career as a tree trimmer for Ventura County Parks. After his next job with California State Parks in Ventura as an arborist, he went to work for Arbor Tree Surgery in the Monterey Peninsula, advancing to Assistant Manager. Moving back south, he worked for the City of Oxnard and while there, he obtained a degree in business management. By 1988, he was Supervisor of Parks for Oxnard City Parks and also Oxnard State Beach.

Curtis's next move was to Sunnyvale in Silicon Valley first as Park Supervisor then Golf Superintendent and finally Manager for Parks and Golf. Sunnyvale has 450 acres of parkland, including Baylands Park. It was a good place for Curtis, his wife Ramona, and their two children, and they stayed for twenty years. Their home was in the Santa Cruz Mountains with tall trees all around them. Perhaps it was a 180-foot tree crashing down next to their house during a storm, but more likely it was their now-grown children living in Atascadero and Ventura that made them want to move south. When the San Luis Obispo County Parks Deputy Director position became available in 2009, Curtis applied and got the job.

Looking back at his years of working with parks, Curtis says that his current position and the community it serves are the best of all. He has been impressed by the willingness of local residents to take care of an area and to raise funds to support it. Instead of people making demands, he sees volunteers pitching in to help. He thinks it is because San Luis Obispo County is made up of small communities such as Shandon, San Miguel, Morro Bay and Los Osos where people know each other and work together.

At the County Parks Volunteer Dinner that members of SWAP attended in October, it was clear that the people who volunteer for County Parks hold Curtis Black in high regard. He and his staff have willingly given their time and attention in support of each district's needs. Curtis will be missed by many including SWAP, but he leaves County Parks Department in very good fiscal shape, ready for a new director who, without the extra layer of bureaucracy, will be more free to make positive changes and to focus on maintaining and improving the county's parks and golf courses.



## SWAP Has Great Holiday Gifts!

Mural T-shirts, sweatshirts, coffee mugs, mural prints and the Alphabet Bird Book make wonderful gifts for your young to senior loved ones. Lovely note cards, postcards, and pocket guides make good stocking stuffers! A gift donation or life membership in the name of your relative or friend would also be much appreciated.



# SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

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

All Prices Include Sales Tax

### 1. MURAL SHIRTS

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

Circle Sizes:

- \_\_\_ Short Slv. T-Shirt (S, M, L, XL) @\$20.00 = \$ \_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ Short Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @\$23.00 = \$ \_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ Long Slv. T-Shirt (S, M, L, XL) @\$25.00 = \$ \_\_\_  
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### 2. ELFIN FOREST NOTE CARDS

Original print note cards

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

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. 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.

\_\_\_ @ \$3.00 = \$ \_\_\_

### 4. ELFIN FOREST MURAL PRINTS

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

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

### 5. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

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

\_\_\_ @ \$21.65 = \$ \_\_\_

### 6. MURAL MUG

15- ounce beverage mug with wrap-around mural design, microwave and dishwasher safe.

\_\_\_ @ \$10 = \$ \_\_\_

### 7. PAINTING RAFFLE (see page 2)

\_\_\_ chances @ \$50 = \_\_\_

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

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

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

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

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

Mural Mug: \$6.00 \_\_\_ (If more than one mug, call for shipping cost.)

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SWAP, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442. Call-in orders may also be made: (805) 528-0392.




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S.W.A.P.'s beautiful mural design shirts and coffee mugs make excellent holiday gifts. Mural prints signed by artist Barbara Rosenthal and the Alphabet Bird Book also make ideal gifts. Good stocking stuffers are the pocket guide to plants and animals and lovely notecards and postcards from Bob Meyer's talented photography. Use the order form on page 11 to either call in or mail your order, and your gifts will promptly be mailed to you.

A gift membership to S.W.A.P. or a tax deductible donation in the name of your relative or friend would also be much appreciated.

### 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 *Oakleaves* at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://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. Just e-mail us at [oakleaves@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaves@elfin-forest.org) with the subject: Switch me to online.

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

***Check here to receive the online version only.***

All donations to SWAP are tax-deductible.  
 EVERY membership counts!  
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