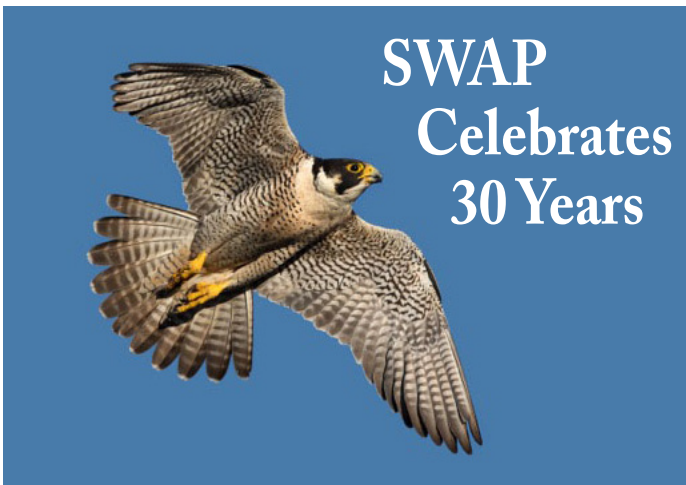




# OAKLEAVES

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 2015/JANUARY 2016



## SWAP Celebrates 30 Years

*This photo of an adult Peregrine Falcon in flight is one of many that Bob Isenberg shared with us while talking about the life cycle of Peregrines. Photo by Cleve Nash.*

By Yolanda Waddell

A few years ago, the SWAP Board of Directors designated our organization's yearly general meeting as an Annual Celebration of the Elfin Forest. This year we also celebrated thirty years as a SWAP chapter. The Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter of SWAP was founded in May, 1985.

A large roomful of people gathered at Switzer Hall in Morro Shores Mobile Home Park to visit with old friends and meet new

30 Years *continued on page 2*

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## Waiting For El Niño

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair



It has now been about 18 years since the last encounter with "El Niño." The winter of 1997-1998 brought abundant rain to the Central Coast and El Moro Elfin Forest. The present unusually warm tropical ocean conditions now promise another encounter. Ocean currents carry the warm water northward. The warm water favors greater than usual evaporation, and the prevailing westerly winds carry the moisture to land in the form of rain. When and if this occurs we can expect a significant growth response from the Elfin Forest vegetation.

The effect of increased moisture was shown this past July when we had a significant rain shower over the area. Prior to the rain, many plants were dormant. After the rain some awoke from their dormancy and entered a growth phase. Examples are Dune Almond (*Prunus fasciculata var. punctata*) and Mock Heather (*Ericameria ericoides*). The Dune Almond sprouted new leaves and fruit, and the Mock Heather produced more flowers. These effects of a single rain shower suggest that an extended rain event like El Niño will be beneficial for most of the other vegetation in the Elfin Forest.

Another likely effect of increased rainfall will be providing work for SWAP volunteers from the germination of non-native seeds that are known to be present in the sandy soil of the Elfin Forest. It will be important to remove any sprouts early in their growth before they mature enough to produce more seed. To address this potential problem SWAP will continue to have work parties on the first Saturday of each month, and possible additional days, to ensure that these non-natives do not become established in the Elfin Forest. SWAP members are welcome to help.

## 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.



## 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

Skip Rotstein, 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 10,  
and Thursday, January 14.**

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.

## 30 Years

*continued from page 1*

*Good cheer prevailed at the SWAP Annual Celebration, with Pat Murray (center) and Jay Waddell sharing a joke with another guest. Photo by Pat Brown.*



ones, eat delicious food prepared by SWAP members, and enjoy a superb slide lecture by Bob Isenberg of Pacific Coast Peregrine Watch.

Bob Isenberg is a well-known expert on the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon after years of exposure to DDT in its environment. The bird now is making a comeback along the Central Coast of California. Bob's excellent talk and superb PowerPoint images by photographer Cleve Nash gave us an increased appreciation and understanding of this marvelous bird. We thank Bob for sharing his knowledge gained from years of observation. For the web site to learn more about Peregrine Falcons and to read Bob's frequent posts of his observations, go to [www.pacificcoastperegrinewatch.org](http://www.pacificcoastperegrinewatch.org).

During a brief chapter business meeting, SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen spoke about the state of the Elfin Forest in 2015. He reminded SWAP members who were present to mark their ballots for election of four members of the Board of Directors. Nominated for the Board were Pat Akey, Patricia Murray, Skip Rotstein (new Board member) and Yolanda Waddell. The annual Treasurer's Report, prepared by Treasurer Jan DiLeo, was printed in the program, and can be found in this issue of Oakleaves on page 5.

Many thanks to Pat Murray for arranging for the use of Switzer Hall for our Celebration, and for organizing the event. Pat's event committee consisted of Pat Akey, Rosemary Baxter, Pat Brown, Jan DiLeo, Jack Fanselow, Vicky Johnsen, Debbie Levi, Dave Moran, Ron Rasmussen, Chris Van Beveren and Yolanda Waddell. Thank you to

Pat Brown for taking photos of the event, and to Cindi Grove of Morro Shores for publicizing our Annual Celebration in the Morro Shores newsletter, *The Waves*.



*Bob Isenberg of Pacific Coast Peregrine Watch gave a very informative PowerPoint talk about Peregrine Falcons at SWAP's Annual Celebration. Photo by Pat Brown.*



# Honoring Long-time SWAP Members, Ray and Sonya Bracken

By Yolanda Waddell

In 1963, Ray Bracken and his wife Sonya took a break from their busy life in Los Angeles to visit the Central Coast. Ray remembered pleasant summertime family vacations in Cayucos and Morro Bay, cooling off from scorching temperatures in Paso Robles. Sonya had never been to the area. As they arrived, she knew it was a place where she would like to live. After some deliberation about leaving Ray's successful commercial art business in Los Angeles, they made the move, buying a lot in Los Osos that would give them a good view of the Morro Bay Estuary.

Ray was born in Iowa in 1931, lived in Chicago and then on a farm in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. When he was twelve, his family moved to his great grandfather's almond and chicken ranch west of Paso Robles. Ray graduated from Paso Robles High School in 1950 and enlisted in the army, earning a Bronze Star after his tour of duty in Korea. While stationed at Ft. Hood, Texas in 1953, Ray contracted polio, then at epidemic level in the nation. After recovering, Ray enrolled at UCLA under the GI Bill. Ray and Sonya met on a double date; they were married in 1959.

Sonya was born and grew up in Florida, and moved to California to major in Theater Arts at UCLA. She came from a family of performers; her uncle Buddy Ebsen was a movie and television actor, including the role of Jed Clampett in "The Beverly Hillbillies." Her mother had a dance studio in Orlando, Florida and her aunts Vilma and Helga operated one in Pacific Palisades.

Once settled in their house in Los Osos, which they designed, Ray and Sonya became involved in their community. Sonya sang with the Trinity United Methodist Church choir for forty years. She served as secretary and board member of the League of Women Voters, and Ray used his graphic art skills to design and illustrate several publications for them.

Ray's interests in land use and planning led him to volunteer for 13 years as a member of the South Bay Advisory Committee. He also served for nine years on the Community Services Area No. 9, a "special district" influencing water and wastewater decisions for the unincorporated community of Los Osos. Following that, Ray spent twelve years as a member of the Los Osos Community Advisory Council, created in 1992 to replace the South Bay Advisory Committee. In 2004, the Los Osos Baywood Park Chamber of Commerce elected Ray as their Citizen of the Year.

When Emily Polk founded Small Wilderness Area Preserves (SWAP) to preserve the Los Osos Oaks in 1970, Ray and Sonya helped support her cause financially and by connecting Emily with local agencies and persons of influence. The Brackens continued to lend their support to the Estero Bay Chapter of SWAP, which closed in 1980 after acquiring the Baptista Ranch, east of Los Osos and north of Turri Road, turning it over to State Parks. Ray and Sonya then sup-



Ray and Sonya Bracken in their back yard. Photo by Helen Jacobsen.

ported the Morro Bay/Los Osos Chapter of SWAP formed in 1985 to preserve the 90-acre "Otto Property" on the northeastern edge of Los Osos. The Brackens were among the first paying members of the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter, and again helped by advising and connecting them with influential organizations and citizens. They have continued their membership throughout the past thirty years.

We are sorry to report that Sonya passed away at home on September 1, at age 84. Her work with the League of Women Voters and other causes, her love of music, witty sayings and love of Ray will continue in the memories of hundreds of friends, family and associates. As a couple, Ray and Sonya Bracken freely gave their time, energy and skills in making their community a better place. SWAP thanks them for their dedicated support of the Elfin Forest through the years.



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Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters and Jean Wheeler.  
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# Soils of the Elfin Forest, Part 2

By Lynn Moody, Ph.D.

*Ed. Note: Part 1 of this article appeared in the previous issue, October/November 2015.*

Two characteristics of sandy soils stand out: low water holding ability (we say the soils are “droughty”) and low in fertility (nutrient content). How do plants cope with the challenge of low nutrient content? The coping strategies are wonders of ecological adaptation!

Nitrogen is a very important macronutrient – meaning that plants require large quantities of nitrogen to grow and thrive. Some plants have developed the ability to form commensal associations with certain bacteria or bacteria-like microorganisms. These soil-living bacteria have the ability to select nitrogen from air within the soil and convert it to organic forms. We call the process nitrogen fixation. N-fixation can also occur with huge amounts of energy – humans do it when they manufacture nitrogen fertilizers, and small amounts of nitrogen are fixed during lightning strikes. However, some bacteria can fix nitrogen by means of specialized enzymes.

Plants in the family Fabaceae – legumes such as alfalfa and soybeans – form associations with nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the genera *Rhizobia* and *Bradyrhizobia*. The Elfin Forest contains legumes, including lupine (*Lupinus*) and deerweed (*Acmispon*, formerly *Lotus*). Some plants other than legumes enter into associations with a genus of actinomycetes, *Frankia*, which is another nitrogen fixer. In the Elfin Forest, the common shrub buckbrush (*Ceanothus*) is such a plant.

When legumes and buckbrush shed tissues such as leaves, the organic matter is decomposed by numerous types of fungi, bacteria, and actinomycetes and the nitrogen in these tissues is converted to a plant-available form. Thus, all the plants benefit by proximity to nitrogen fixers.

Uptake of other soil nutrients is aided by mycorrhizal associations, which are a commensal relationship of certain species of fungi and the roots of plants. Most plants form and benefit from mycorrhizal associations, which allow the plants to take up phosphorus (another important macronutrient), numerous micronutrients, and water. Oaks, giving the Elfin Forest its unique character, are particularly well known for forming mycorrhizal associations.

Since plants do not have closed circulatory systems such as animals have, they rely on the process of transpiration to conduct water and nutrients from their roots to tissues throughout. Water uptake is essential to the process of transpiration – on average, plants use only 10 percent of the water they take up for physiological processes – the other 90 percent is transpired out, into the atmosphere. Water exits plant tissues through openings, called stomata, on the undersurfaces of leaves (carbon dioxide enters plant tissues through these same openings).

Given the demand for water, how do plants cope with the low water-holding capacity of these sandy soils? Transpiration rate increases in response to low humidity, so the frequent foggy coastal weather helps the plants in the Elfin Forest conserve water. Plants also close their sto-

mata, stopping transpiration, in response to water loss and high temperatures among other factors. Many of the plants in the Elfin Forest have waxy coatings on their leaves. These coatings reduce the evaporation of water from the leaf surfaces. The small size of the oaks in the Elfin Forest is in part another response to limited water availability.

Organic matter in soils greatly increases water holding capacity, so by shedding their tissues and making these tissues available for decomposition in the soil, plants are improving their own environment. Finally, in times of extreme drought as California is experiencing now, plants may excise or cut back their own tissues to conserve water. *Ed. Note: This is currently very apparent in most Morro Manzanita shrubs along the lower boardwalk. Each currently has large areas of dried gray-green leaves and stems contrasting sharply with actively growing bright green leaves on darker stems.*

Just as the plant communities continue to evolve and adapt to environmental conditions, the soil evolves along with them. The Elfin Forest is a unique region on the Central Coast, with its roots in an equally unique series of soils.



*Buckbrush ceanothus is common all around the boardwalk and very important in forming a commensal relationship with nitrogen-fixing microorganisms benefiting additional plant species nearby. Photo by Jean Wheeler.*



*In her September Third Saturday Walk, soil scientist Lynn Moody explained that soils that make up the sand spit and Elfin Forest came from sands washed in from far away by ocean currents.*

*Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



# Morro Manzanita

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

Ed. Note: Revised by Dr. Walters from February, 1999 issue.

The presence of the Elfin Forest plant drawn by Bonnie this time is, in my mind, sufficient cause for preserving the Elfin Forest. It is the endemic rare plant commonly known as the Morro manzanita or *Arcostaphylos morroensis*. It is on the California Native Plant Society's list 1B. Plants that make list 1B are those that are considered by the society as being rare, threatened, and/or endangered in California and elsewhere. It made the list because it has a very small worldwide range. It is essentially limited to the decomposing sandstone derived from the fossil dunes that developed against the hills making up the northern end of the San Luis Range. It is found from Chorro Creek in the north to just south of Hazard Canyon in Montaña de Oro State Park. Although fairly common within this limited range, its range has decreased considerably by residential development within Los Osos. The plant does have two safe havens: the southern end of its range is protected by Montaña de Oro State Park and part of the northern extent of the range is protected by the Elfin Forest. In the Elfin Forest, it is fairly common on the middle third of the north facing slope. A few small, straggly plants can be found scattered along the flat top of the hill. A recent effort to give the Morro manzanita protection as a state listed rare plant failed for political and not scientific reasons.

The manzanitas are one of the larger genera in California and San Luis Obispo County. The 2nd Edition of *The Jepson Manual* lists 60 species and numerous varieties within California. *Hoover's Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County*, lists 15 for the county. Of all the manzanitas, the Morro manzanita is one of the more distinctive. It does belong to the largest group of manzanitas--the ones bearing a distinct leaf stalk (petiole) that is topped by a leaf blade base that is merely rounded and not resembling the top of a valentine heart (cordate). Some individual plants do approach this leaf base, especially in the northeast corner of the Elfin Forest. But within this group, the Morro manzanita differs in having bark that is not the typical smooth, dark red to brown color associated with manzanitas. Its bark is loose and tends to hang on in gray stringy sheets. It is also unusual in that its upper and lower leaf surfaces are clearly different in color. The upper surface is bright green and shiny while the lower surface is gray and covered with short matted trichomes or 'hairs'. (I have trouble calling this pubescence "hairs," ever since one of my botany instructors corrected me rather derisively. He said, "Only animals have hair; plants have trichomes.") The plant twigs are also covered with short trichomes as well as scattered long white bristles.

Morro Manzanitas belong to what I call the 'tree' manzanitas. These are large shrubs that produce only a single central "trunk". The trunk extends only a few inches above the ground before it begins to branch many times to form the rounded crown typical of this manzanita. This means that Morro manzanitas do not form a thickening at the top of their roots called a burl or more correctly a ligno-tuber. Burls contain thousands of buds and a few of these buds commence to grow if fire or other hazards kill the top of the plant. Since this manzanita does not have a burl, removal of its crown kills the plant. It reproduces naturally only from seed.



The Morro manzanita is a species that is quite happy in our gardens. Homeowners in Los Osos should be encouraged to use it in their landscaping. Not only is its compact, rounded form elegant, its foliage is full and of an interesting gray-green color from a distance. It bears beautiful white urn-shaped flowers (see page 8) and bright red fruits in season. The fruits are eaten by many species of local birds. Please note that I am recommending this manzanita as a garden plant solely on its merits as a garden plant, not as a way to protect it from destruction from development. I strongly believe that, except as a final, last resort, plant species should never be sold to gardeners as a means to save them from extinction, but only because they have traits that a gardener might find useful.

## SWAP TREASURER'S REPORT 7/1/2014-6/30/2015 Prepared by Jan DiLeo, SWAP Treasurer.

REVENUE	
MEMBERSHIPS AND DONATIONS	\$15,745
MERCHANDISE SALES	1,598
SAVINGS INTEREST	180
TOTAL REVENUE	\$17,523

EXPENSES	
PUBLICATIONS	\$5,014
OFFICE (PHONE, STORAGE, MAIL)	2,379
DONATIONS BY SWAP	2,019
MERCHANDISE FOR SALE (STx Paid)	195
LIABILITY INSURANCE	1,030
CONSERVATION PROJECTS	2,071
TAXES	151
SWAP, INC. SUPPORT	4,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$16,859
NET EXCESS (DEFICIT)	\$664

ACCOUNT DATA	
AS OF 07/01/2014	
BANK ACCOUNT	\$5,669
CDs (INCLUDING INTEREST)	56,566
PETTY CASH	50
TOTAL	\$62,285
AS OF 06/30/2015	
BANK ACCOUNT	\$6,153
CDs (INCLUDING INTEREST)	56,746
PETTY CASH	50
TOTAL	\$62,949
NET EXCESS (DEFICIT)	\$664

# Weed Warrior Report

*Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell*

## September 5th – Much Mulching

With the coming rainy season in mind, we asked the County Transportation Department to bring a load of wood chips to the ends of 11th and 15th Streets. There was serious erosion and a wide patch of moving sand at the 11th Street Forest entrance, and a large amount of sand moving from the Forest onto the street at the end of 15th Street. By the end of the morning, our diligent and energetic Weed Warriors had spread the wood chips into a nice deep mulch at each street end. Meanwhile within the Elfin Forest, Ron Rasmussen, Jack Fanselow and Barrett Holland continued the unending task of keeping the boardwalk in repair. Thanks to them for making the boardwalk safe for all, and to the chip-hurling crew: Jay Bonestell, Lannie Erickson, Vicky Johnsen, Prisila Johnson, Rich Johnson and Yolanda Waddell.



*Weed Warriors used their shovels to spread wood chips instead of digging weeds during September's work day.*

## October 3rd – Keeping People on the Paths

Someone or something didn't take kindly to the symbolic fencing along the 17th Street path, and broke it – probably by stepping on it. The “fencing” is a black cable that is threaded through the eyes of aluminum stanchions. Weed Warrior leader Ron Rasmussen brought fence repair tools and was joined by Rich Johnson and Dave McDonald in wrestling the cable back into place and fastening it. Later the three worked on boardwalk maintenance. Jay Bonestell, Lannie Erickson, Prisila Johnson and Yolanda Waddell collected brush from a vacant lot at the end of 17th Street and used it to block “ad hoc” paths leading off of the 17th Street path. By limiting entrances to the Elfin Forest to just one designated path from each street-end, the vegetation can slowly grow back and flourish.



*Ron Rasmussen (L) and Rich Johnson re-attached a broken symbolic fence cable during the October first Saturday work party.*

## Let's all pull together

*By Lannie Erickson*

The days are getting shorter,  
The nights are cool and long,  
There's dust upon the aster  
As the thrasher chants its song.  
It's been a busy summer  
Full of visitors and fun,  
But in our Elfin Forest  
There's still work to be done.  
We hope that you can join us.  
Our Forest needs some friends  
So others can enjoy it  
before the season ends.

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## 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.



*During the October work party, Prisila Johnson (L) and Lannie Erickson hauled bags of brush to block “ad hoc” paths along the 17th Street trail.*



# The Elfin Forest's Largest Ever School Walk

*Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell*

In September, the SWAP Education Committee received a request from Heather Schultz, President of the Los Osos Middle School PTSA (Parent Teacher Student Association), for docents for a group of about 200 students who were going to walk to, and then through, the Elfin Forest on October 9th. She explained that it was part of a program called STEAM Trek. STEAM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics, and is the focus of education at Los Osos Middle School.

Concern about creating a sedentary student population from hours of study led the principal, Mr. Illig, to create an opportunity for exercise. The Trek was combined with the PTSA's annual fundraiser to purchase needed items for the school and supplies for teachers. Students were encouraged to ask family and friends for donations instead of selling candy, wrapping paper, etc. The students who brought in \$20 or more became part of the group that walked to and through the Elfin Forest. The other students hiked around the school track.

Mrs. Schultz asked for docents because she wanted the 200 students to learn about the Forest that they were walking through. We agreed to station five docents at different places in the Elfin Forest, asking that there be no more than 20 in a group and that the groups be staggered five minutes apart. Our docent team consisted of Education Chair Pat Akey, Pat Brown, Vicky Johnsen, Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell, Jean Wheeler and Chris and Jim Van Beveren.

On the day of the Trek, throngs of students came up 17th Street to the Elfin Forest entrance, where they were greeted by Pat Akey and Yolanda Waddell. At the "Highest Point" deck, Ron Rasmussen gave each group an overview of the Elfin Forest and the estuary. Walking on to Jean Wheeler's station, they learned about the habitats of the Elfin Forest. At Bush Lupine Point, Chris and Jim Van Beveren had spotting scopes ready for the students to view birds in the bay close up. Next, Vicky Johnsen told them about woodrats and woodrat nests. Finally in the lower meadow, Pat Brown told them how the plants of the Forest survive the drought.

Although the docents felt that there were too many students for good learning, there were many thank you's from the students and adults. We have been asked by Mr. Illig to give a presentation at the Middle School multipurpose room before next year's STEAM Trek.



*Docent Pat Brown (standing at right) helped each group of Los Osos Middle School students to learn how the plants of the Elfin Forest survive drought.*



*Many groups of students came and went along the boardwalk during their STEAM Trek walk in the Elfin Forest.*

## 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.



Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

We had the nearly unheard of heavy rain in July, the very good first deeply soaking rain of this season during the first week in November, and El Nino rains are due to start soon. So we should be able to expect a return to our glorious winter floral extravaganza in December and January in our Elfin Forest!

By the end of December, the widespread shrubs called buckbrush in the *Ceanothus* (California Lilac) genus should be surrounding the whole boardwalk and the sand access trails with their white to pale lavender blossoms. Hopefully the Morro manzanitas will have recovered enough to produce substantially more of their lovely white floral bells, blushing with pink highlights, than they were able to show us last year, the fourth drought year in a row.

Cardinal catchflies (formerly known as Indian pinks) are already bright red under the oaks on the lower (northern) boardwalk. By the end of January, California peonies should be opening their drooping red balls of flowers in the understory, especially near Siena's View and along the 11th Street sand trail. When the fuchsia-flowered gooseberries open many long red trumpets to the long bills and tongues of Anna's Hummingbirds, those tiny fliers should be very relieved. These red flower tubes are a major food support to their spring nesting season.



## Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

*Green-winged Teal.*

Coating both dead and living branches of many shrubs and the elfin-sized oak trees for which our natural area is named are symbiotic lichens. The most noticeable of more than 56 kinds identified in the Elfin Forest is lace lichen, dangling like shreds of shawls from the branches and absorbing needed moisture from the frequent fogs of our area. The algae part of the algae/fungi partnership comprising the lichens produces food for both—they are not parasitic, using their hosts only for a boost up into the light.

The unusually hot weather throughout the northwest this autumn does seem to have slowed the annual bird migration somewhat. We do have some of our wintering species of ducks on the estuary, including Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, and Green-winged Teal, but I sense the numbers for sure and perhaps also the variety is not yet up to what I expect to see by the end of November's first week. Hopefully both numbers and species diversity will return closer to normal by the time this issue is in print and on our website by the first week of December.

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.



*Morro Manzanita.*

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 15-18, 2016, at [www.morrobaybirdfestival.org](http://www.morrobaybirdfestival.org). Early registration is already available online and is essential for field trips.

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!



# WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

## Third Saturday Walks

*December 19, 9:30 a.m. –*

### *December's Plants, Lichens and Mushrooms*

Assuming that the forecast of a wet El Niño winter has come true, first-of-the-season vegetation should be sprouting in the Elfin Forest. Local naturalist **Al Normandin** will take us on a tour of the plants and lichens growing next to the boardwalk, telling us what their names are and a little bit about them. If we see any mushrooms, he'll identify those as well. He'll also tell us the monikers of any birds, insects or little critters that we encounter. Only a heavy rain will cancel this walk; if it's sprinkling, put on your poncho or bring an umbrella and come ahead.

*January 16, 9:30 a.m. –*

### *Where Have all the Brant Geese Gone?*

Naturalist **John Roser** has been monitoring Morro Bay's Black Brant population for 18 winters. Morro Bay is one of the few remaining coastal estuaries where the Brant can find their primary food, eelgrass. However, in recent years, much of the eelgrass in the bay has died off. We hope to see some Brants, but not in the numbers of years past. During John's walk, he will share the knowledge he has gained about this marvelous migratory goose. He'll talk about their very long migration flight, their biology, and what has been learned from banding the Brants. Only a heavy rain will cancel this walk; if it's sprinkling, put on your poncho or bring an umbrella and come ahead.

*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.*

## Big Sit! 2015 Report

*By Jim Royer, Captain of the "Pishing In The Wind" Team*

We had a pleasant day of birding, but nothing new for the count or rare for the area. The best bird of the day was the White-faced Ibis Mike Stiles found feeding in the pickleweed. Other unusual species include 2 Greater White-fronted Geese in with a flock of Canadas, a Merlin, and a Common Tern.

The final tally was a lower-than-usual 96 species, with bad misses among shorebirds and raptors. The passerine migration was slow also. Over the years our total has been dropping, despite the best efforts of a very experienced bunch of counters. Still, it was a fun day of birding and socializing at a very beautiful location. Thanks to all who participated! For results from other big sits and general big sit info, see <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit.php>

*Editor's Note: The Big Sit! is an international event hosted by Birdwatcher's Digest; it takes place on the second Sunday of October and pits participating groups of birders against one another to identify the most species of birds in one day. Jim Royer has coordinated our local Big Sit! at Bush Lupine Point in the Elfin Forest each year since 1998. This year Jim's team of expert birders came in fourth. A team in San Blas, Mexico, was the leader with 130 species, followed by a team at Cape May, New Jersey with 121 species, and a Weslaco, Texas team coming in third with 100 species. "Pishing in the Wind" was the only California team to place in the ten highest circle counts.*



*In October, PG&E weather man John Linsey, standing on bench, had much to say to a very attentive group of listeners, about the coming El Niño weather patterns. Later he photographed the group. Photo by Pat Brown.*



*Big Sit! birders spent most of the time standing with binoculars or spotting scopes, intently looking and listening to add bird species to their list. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

## Thank You from SWAP to a Thoughtful Neighbor

The Elfin Forest has many good friends. In October, Pete Sarafian sent the following note:

"Kevin O'Donnell lives near the Elfin Forest on 12th Street. He has for the second time this year donated wood chips for the 12th Street parking area. Kevin even used a small machine to spread the chips uniformly at the street-end area. Let's all thank him for his community-minded donation."

# Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter,  
SWAP Database Coordinator

## NEW:

Astrid Gallagher\*

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

Joan Anderson	Herbert & Debra Holt*
Florence & Karl Appel*	Marsha Houston
Pam Bains*	Arthur Hubbard
Kay Blaney*	Jerry Hull
Kate Blickhahn	Ginny Irving*
George & Cynthia	Penny Koines
Boatenhamer	Jarry & Brenda Kraft
William Bouton*	Debbie Levi*
David Bowlus	Jennifer & Larry Levine
& Beverly Boyd*	Martha MacGillivray
Ray & Sonya Bracken*	Deborah Marzetta*
Roger E. Carmody*	W.G. Mcelhinney*
Susan & Ed Chandler*	Wendy McKeown
Ruth & Les Christiansen*	Melissa Mooney
Katie & Jerry Davis*	Jerry Mullins*
Bernard & Fran Deitchman*	Marcia Munson*
Elsie Deitz*	Melvin & Mary Norby*
Stephani Denker*	Karen O'Grady*
Margaret Diehl*	Rita Robinson
John Dilworth Jr.	Barbara & Robert Rosenthal*
& Carole Maurer*	Max & Helen Sicher*
Lurlie Edgecomb*	Shaunna Sullivan
Gail & Frank Freiler*	& Ron Ruppert*
Richard & Charlotte Gordon*	Mary C. Topp
Larry & Pat Grimes*	Kathleen W. Toscano*
Jan Harper	The Ungar Family
Karen & Jim Havlena*	Yolanda & Jay Waddell*
Bonnie Heikes*	Bobbye West-Thompson
Joyce Heller	Jonathan Wittwer*
Arylane Hill*	

## DONATIONS:

Joan Hughes in memory of her sister, Ann Calhoun  
Yolanda Waddell in memory of Ann Calhoun

*\*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.*

# SWAP Remembers and Appreciates...

Stanley Reichenberg –  
SWAP member for 15 years  
and Weed Warrior in the early 2000s.

Stan enjoyed birding in the Elfin Forest as well as in his own neighborhood. He was an M.D., specializing in internal medicine and pulmonary disease. As one of the very few pulmonologists in San Luis Obispo County, Stan was frequently called after hours to care for emergency patients. He developed an interest in astronomy because of his frequent exposure to the night sky. Stan passed away on September 30, 2015, at age 86. SWAP extends our condolences to Stan's wife, Elizabeth Scott-Graham and their families.

Bill Morem –  
Journalist and champion of the Elfin Forest.

Bill, whose full name was William F. Morem, spent 26 years as editor of The Cambrian and also the Sun Bulletin (no longer published) in Morro Bay. He was opinion editor at The Tribune for several years as well as a columnist, copy editor and reporter. He wrote about the Elfin Forest and SWAP's struggle to raise funds to purchase it during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

*“As a county, we love our open spaces and what that means in the quality of our lives. If part of the bargain is to share our wild places with lions, coyotes and bears, why, that just sweetens the biota.”*

Neil Farrell, now Managing Editor of The Bay News, recalled that Bill assigned him to write about Emily Polk when Neil was an intern at The Sun Bulletin. After telling Neil who Emily Polk was and what she'd done, Neil said that Bill gave him a great piece of advice about interviewing: “Ask her what is the best thing about what she does and what is the worst thing about what she does.”

While Bill was a columnist at The Tribune, he learned about an encounter with a coyote by a neighbor of the Elfin Forest and her dog. He wrote an article about the Elfin Forest, the boardwalk and the fright that the neighbor had when she and her large dog were followed by a coyote that ran after them until they left the Elfin Forest. He concluded the article with an observation that coyotes keep rodent populations in check, but also can go after pet dogs and cats if the pets are left out at night, and will be attracted by pet food left out in bowls and windfall fruit. His thoughtful conclusion was, “As a county, we love our open spaces and what that means in the quality of our lives. If part of the bargain is to share our wild places with lions, coyotes and bears, why, that just sweetens the biota.”

Bill Morem was found dead in his home in Los Osos on Monday, September 14th. He was 63 years old, and touched thousands with his words. SWAP is grateful for his lovely descriptive language about the Elfin Forest, and his attention over the years to the progress in saving and then maintaining the Elfin Forest.





# Great Holiday Gifts From SWAP

Coffee mugs, our new caps, mural T-shirts, sweatshirts, and mural wall prints make wonderful gifts for your loved ones. 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 = \$\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Long Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @\$27.00 = \$\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Sweatshirt (S, M, L, XL) @\$35.00 = \$\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Sweatshirt (XXL, XXXL) @\$37.00 = \$\_\_\_

### 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. ELFIN FOREST CAPS

One size fits all caps with adjustable straps in back, 100% cotton. Two colors, forest green and maroon. Specify color when ordering.

\_\_\_ @ \$15 = \$\_\_\_ Color(s) \_\_\_\_\_

### 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 & Caps each: \$4.00 = \_\_\_

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

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

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## Give SWAP Memberships or Make Tax Deductible Donations

For the person who has everything, a gift membership to SWAP or a donation in the name of your relative or friend would be much appreciated by SWAP as well as by the loved one honored by your generous gift.



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

A life membership with a \$1000 donation earns the Oakleaves newsletter for life and also a SWAP mural T-shirt in appreciation of the major contribution to our efforts.

### MEMBERSHIP FORM

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City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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

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