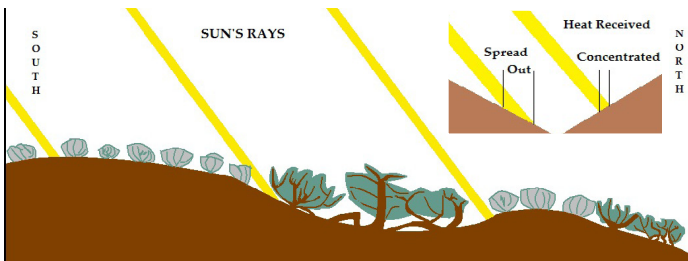




# OAK LEAVES

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 ❖ DECEMBER 2016 / JANUARY 2017



## Growing Conditions Vary Across the Elfin Forest

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair; Diagram By Jean Wheeler

When you visit the Elfin Forest from one of the street ends you may notice the apparent dryness, small size and scattered locations of the plants. The latter are mostly three feet tall or less, and sometimes look as though they are drying out. As you proceed on the trail to the boardwalk, the plants change in variety and size. When you reach the boardwalk and look toward the northwest, you see that the size of plants and their density of growth increase dramatically.

The section of boardwalk that you first encounter was built along the ridge of a big sand dune that the Elfin Forest has grown upon. The change in variety and growth of plant species varies with conditions present. Following the boardwalk down the slope you will encounter “pygmy” oaks that gave the Elfin Forest its name. The first that you see are only a few feet tall, and when you reach the lower level of the boardwalk, they may be much taller. Most

Growing Conditions *continued on page 4*

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## SWAP 2016 Annual Celebration

By Yolanda Waddell; Photos by Bob Meyer

Although trite, it is true that, “A good time was had by all” at SWAP’s 2016 Annual Celebration. Daniel Bohlman, Conservation Director of the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, gave a very informative talk with beautiful images, about the Land Conservancy’s recently acquired Pismo Preserve and the 3,255-acre Eagle Ranch easement in Atascadero.

The food committee produced a delectable array of soups with delicious bread, mini-quiches, veggies with dip, and caprese salad (tomato and mozzarella slices with basil and oil). Desserts included fruit, Ron Rasmussen’s famous home-baked cookies in four flavors, and punch. Thanks to Elsie Dietz who was SWAP’s Event Coordinator in the early 1990s, for joining us and helping to steer this event in the right direction with her excellent menu, and to all who were on the food committee.

“Many hands make light work” was the motto when it came to setting up Switzer Hall in the Morro Shores Community Center for the event. Set-up and take down were accomplished quickly. All eighteen of our volunteers for the event greeted and chatted with almost sixty guests. There were smiles everywhere, and compliments from the guests for the excellent speaker, the good food and the welcoming atmosphere.

The official part of the celebration was accomplished with paper ballots handed to SWAP members as they arrived. Re-elected to the



SWAP volunteers (L-R) Vanessa Nelson and Carla Pool prepare quiches for the Celebration guests.

Annual Celebration *continued on page 2*



## 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, 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 3 p.m. on the 2nd Monday of the month at the Community Room, Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

The next meetings are  
**Monday, December 12,  
and Monday, January 9.**

**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: Bob Yetter

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 Bob Yetter at 781-1196.

# Annual Celebration *continued from page 1*



Board of Directors were Jan DiLeo, Vicky Johnsen, Pat Murray and Ron Rasmussen.

The heroine of the Annual Celebration was Pat Murray, who coordinated the entire event. Pat contacted volunteers, charted their tasks, followed up on every activity, and transported dozens of items from our SWAP storage room to Switzer Hall and back. Thank you, Pat!

*The Land Conservancy's Daniel Bohlman talked about the Conservancy's successes with the Pismo Preserve and the Eagle Ranch.*

## SWAP Board Changes Meeting Day and Time

At a meeting on October 24th, SWAP Board members discussed the possibility of moving our meetings from 7:00 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month to the second Monday of the month at 3:00 p.m. Since all of the current members of the Board can attend an afternoon meeting, the move was approved unanimously. Board meetings will still be held at the Morro Shores Mobile Home Park Community Center, 633 Ramona Avenue in Los Osos. Upcoming meetings are Monday, December 12 and Monday, January 9.

## SWAP TREASURER'S REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015 / 2016

*Prepared by Jan DiLeo, SWAP Treasurer*

### Revenue

|                          |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Memberships              | \$4,460         |
| Special Projects         | 5,285           |
| Donations & Sponsorships | 6,292           |
| Merchandise sales        | 1,354           |
| Miscellaneous            | 82              |
| <b>SUBTOTAL</b>          | <b>17,474</b>   |
| Savings Interest (CDs)   | 36              |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>     | <b>\$17,671</b> |

### Expenses

|                                                                                     |                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Publications (Oakleaves, Guides, etc.)                                              | \$7,237         |
| Storage Unit & SWAP Phone                                                           | 1,716           |
| Cost of goods (T-Shirts, mugs, caps, etc.)                                          | 1,805           |
| Misc. Expenses (booth fees, annual meeting, Conservation projects, education, etc.) | 1,738           |
| <b>Total Expenses</b>                                                               | <b>\$12,807</b> |
| <b>Net Excess (Deficit)</b>                                                         | <b>4,863</b>    |

### Account Data

|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| As of 07/01/2015:              |                 |
| Bank Account                   | \$6,153         |
| CDs (Incl. estimated interest) | 56,918          |
| Petty Cash                     | 50              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                   | <b>\$63,121</b> |
| As of 6/30/2014:               |                 |
| Bank Account                   | 11,130          |
| CDs (Incl. estimated interest) | 56,804          |
| Petty Cash                     | 50              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                   | <b>\$67,984</b> |
| <b>Net Increase (Deficit)</b>  | <b>\$4,863</b>  |

# Los Osos Big Sit! Birders Tie for Second Place

By Yolanda Waddell and Jim Royer

This year, 161 Big Sit! circles participated in this unusual international birding contest on Sunday, October 9th. The groups of birders are called “circles,” because they are required to remain within a 17-foot wide circle while identifying bird species. The circle that reports the most species in one day is considered the winner, although there are no prizes. The Los Osos circle, led by Jim Royer, is located at Bush Lupine Point in the Elfin Forest. With the ability to observe or hear terrestrial, bay and ocean birds, our circle always does well. According to Birdwatchers Digest ([www.birdwatchersdigest.com](http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com)), the Los Osos circle recorded 96 bird species, tying with Pescadero, California. Only the circle in San Blas, Mexico (127 species) observed more birds. The Mexico circle was one of four circles from other countries participating; the other three were Cambodia, Italy and Trinidad & Tobago.

Here is Jim Royer’s report:

“The total for the Bush Lupine Point Elfin Forest Big Sit from Sunday was 96 species. There were no real rarities, with the possible exception of a kingbird that went unidentified. The most unusual birds were probably the juvenile White-fronted goose and two Ring-necked Ducks (unusual on the bay). We had a number of misses on usual birds for the count. Thanks very much to all who counted and/or brought food for the group. Except for a period of mid-afternoon fog, the weather was great and so was the company.”



*During the Big Sit! top local birders kept a constant eye and ear out to add more bird species to their day’s list. The two birders on the right were looking northeast over the hills, hoping to see an eagle. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

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## Elfin Forest Watchers Wanted

By Vicky Johnsen

ATTENTION ALL SWAP MEMBERS: Your presence is requested in our Elfin Forest!

All you’ll need is: a smile, an Elfin Forest Trail Guide and a cell phone, if you have one. Also, if you have them, a SWAP T-shirt and/or an Elfin Forest cap will give you some authority.

There’s a need to keep an eye on the “state of the forest,” that is, to report problems, to encourage visitors to stay on paths, stay off the elfin oaks, etc. Our County Parks Ranger can’t walk through the Forest daily; SWAP Board members and Conservation Committee members visit the Forest as often as they can, but more eyes and ears are needed.

I, personally, like to think of myself as a “roving ambassador” for the SWAP organization when I walk around the boardwalk and on some of the sand trails. It can be rewarding just to be available to answer visitor’s questions, to tell them about our web site, our 3rd Saturday walks, and our 1st Saturday work parties. That information is also on the back of our trail guides and is posted on the boardwalk’s bulletin board.

Generally, most Elfin Forest visitors to the Forest know to enjoy the Forest’s plants, birds and animals from the boardwalk; however, some need reminding. Any serious problems should be reported to the County Parks Supervising Ranger, Bob Yetter, at 805-781-1196. Dogs off leash, vandalism in process or obvious crimes should be reported to the County Sheriff at 781-4550 (NOT 911) as well as Bob Yetter.

If you want to help us keep a presence in the Elfin Forest, call us at 805-528-0392 and we’ll get you started.



*Someone objected to the presence of a fence at Siena’s View overlook and climbed over it, requiring it to be repaired. An “Elfin Forest Watcher” reported this to SWAP. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

# California Thrasher

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

We are lucky to see these very distinctive birds often, singing from the tops of shrubs in our area. But about ten years ago my friend Mike Simms, an excellent birder, stood stunned looking at one and whispering, "What's That?" He knew what it was, of course, but just couldn't believe he was finally seeing one! I replied, surprised by his reaction, "That's just a California Thrasher, Mike." He said in awe, "It's a Lifer!" He'd been trying to see one for months, hearing them in dense brush near his Bay Area home, but had never actually seen one!

Our *Oakleaves* co-editor Yolanda Waddell told me about meeting a group of birders from Colorado who hoped see one in the Elfin Forest. Later in the day she saw them again; they were elated at having seen five California Thrashers!

Several websites report that the California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*) is secretive, usually hiding in dense brush, and Wikipedia states that it is common through much of its range, but rarely seen. All sites mention males are most likely to be seen in spring, singing from the tops of bushes to defend their territories.

Like Mockingbirds, Thrashers are members of family Mimidae. Our California Thrasher has a distinctive song of its own, but also mimics other bird songs often. They repeat another song only once or twice, unlike the Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), who repeats up to half a dozen times before switching songs.

Once seen, these birds are very easy to identify. They are the largest of the thrashers, and the only one occurring west of the Sierra Nevada on the coast of California and Baja California. They are about a foot long with a similar wingspan and including a long, fairly broad tail. Mostly brown to grayish brown, they are a reddish-orange brown below. There is a lighter patch on the throat, streaks on the face, and they have dark brown eyes. The clincher for identification, however, is that fabulously long, downcurved beak.

The California Thrasher feeds on the ground, walking and hopping, usually with tail erect, under and through dense shrubs. It swings that distinctive bill in arcs to shove around leaf litter and dig into dirt in search of ants, beetles, caterpillars, many other insects, and spiders. It also consumes berries, seeds, acorns, and other vegetative matter.

Pairs usually remain together and defending the same territory for several years. They may sing fairly long duets to each other. Their lifespan can be at least nine years. Both parents build a robust nest of twigs, lined with finer grasses, weeds, and tiny rootlets and strips of bark. One year such a nest was observed from our boardwalk in shrubs close to the Fairbanks Monument with a parent tending the nestlings. Both parents incubate 2-4 eggs for about two weeks and both feed the nestlings. The young leave the nest in about two weeks, but cannot fly well for several more days. The male parent often continues to feed the first brood while his mate lays a second clutch.

The California Thrasher remains widespread and common within its range wherever its brushy chaparral and riparian woodland habitat remains. However, there is concern for its future with the continuing loss of such habitats given urbanization of those much-in-demand coastal landscapes.



## Growing Conditions cont. from page 1

other plants have responded to the change in elevation by growing much more densely than those at the entrance of the Forest.

The explanation for variations in plant growth is that growing conditions change as you proceed from the south entry to the boardwalk and then down the slope toward the north. First, the slope that one encounters on entry faces south, and it receives direct sun for most of the year. The result is hot and dry conditions that inhibit plant growth; only some species can tolerate this situation. Once you reach the boardwalk, conditions change. The slope now faces northwest and plants are exposed to prevailing winds from the ocean and less direct heating from the sun. These winds bring moisture, but also the more-or-less continuous wind tends to inhibit vertical growth. The result can be dense growth but only to a height of about five or six feet. The strength of the wind decreases and so does solar heating as you continue down the slope. Plant height and density of growth increase.

At the lowest level near the edge of the Elfin Forest, the oak trees may reach 15-20 feet tall. Their access to water is partly from the wind, but also from underground water from the Los Osos water table. Still, the vertical growth of the oaks is limited by the wind. As a result, the oaks tend to grow sideways rather than vertically. The age of the oaks in the groves is several hundred years. Their source may be partly the result of Chumash planting for a source of food. When the Spanish arrived, the Chumash became less active in the Elfin Forest, so rarely are there "young" oak trees.

When you visit the Elfin Forest take time to appreciate the variety of plant growth that is present and recognize the mixture of conditions that cause this variation.

### 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.

Revisited and updated from October–November, 1999

# Redberry

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

The Elfin Forest plant chosen for this issue is a fairly common but often overlooked shrub commonly called redberry (*Rhamnus crocea*). It is a member of the Buckthorn family (Rhamnaceae) which contains three Elfin Forest genera: *Rhamnus*, *Frangula*, and *Ceanothus*. The family is more characteristic of drier desert areas and many of the genera in this family have very unusual shapes and are often succulent. None of this is true of our three Elfin Forest genera. All are woody shrubs with simple leaves.

*Ceanothus* is the more conspicuous genus because of its showy flower clusters. Blue flowered forms are often called California lilacs while the white-flowered forms are called buckbrush. They are commonly sought after for landscaping purposes. On the other hand, the species of *Rhamnus* and *Frangula* produce tiny flowers with very inconspicuous or absent petals.

In the 1999 original of this article, the genus *Rhamnus* contained two Elfin Forest species, redberry (*R. crocea*) and coffeeberry (*R. californica*). Presently, coffeeberry has been moved out of *Rhamnus* and into the genus, *Frangula* based on technical characteristics including the absence of keels on the winter bud scales and the presence of tiny petals. *Rhamnus* has the keeled winter bud scales and may or may not have petals.

Our redberry is one that totally dispenses with petals. Its flowers are yellow-green and less than ¼ inch across. Flowers occur in dense clusters in the leaf angles (axils). The dark red-brown stems contrast beautifully with the dark green leaves. The leaf size varies greatly from plant to plant. Coastal redberry individuals (such as the ones in the Elfin Forest) have small round leaves with flat margins that display tiny teeth. Small leaved plants, wherever they grow, are recognized as *R. crocea*. This means one can encounter redberry plants throughout California especially west of the Sierra Nevada-Peninsular Range axis.

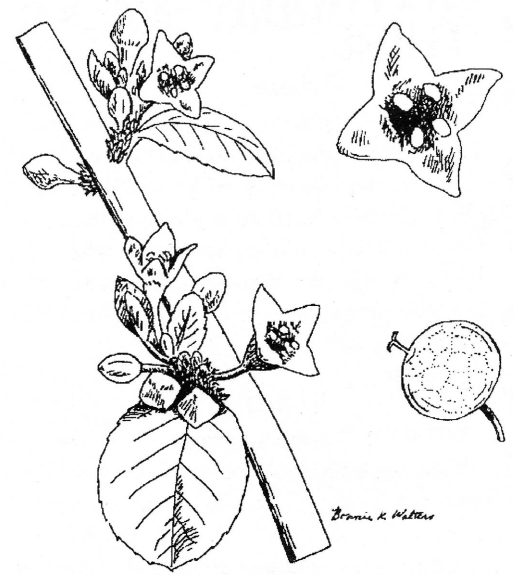
The species reportedly extends eastward into Arizona and south into Baja. Similar redberry plants growing east of the Santa Lucia's have larger leaves with undulating margins and large spiny teeth. These interior red berries are given a different common name, holly-leaved redberry as well as a different scientific name – *R. ilicifolia*. Either way, the two forms have separate ranges and are usually quite distinct in appearance. Coastal redberreries are usually low, densely mounded shrubs, whereas holly-leaved redberreries are taller and more open.


The name redberry comes from the small, usually bright red berries that are produced in the late summer and fall. When in fruit, everyone notices it. The red berries contrast vividly with the dark green leaves. Birds and mammals eagerly eat the berries and people report them to be excellent eating, especially when stewed with meat. I tried a few as a nibble in order to research this article. I found them very pleasant, although the first ones left a somewhat disagreeable aftertaste. However, after a few more, I even got to liking the aftertaste.

Why isn't this low compact shrub with beautiful dark green leaves and contrasting dark red-brown twigs found in more plant nurseries since the colorful berries make an excellent food source for attracting wildlife?

One reason might be because one has to select carefully which individuals to bring into the garden. Most individuals flower profusely, but very few produce fruits in significant quantities. Why? Maybe it is because most of the flowers produce only fertile male structures or stamens. The individuals are functionally male, and male individuals do not produce fruits and seeds. Only a few individuals produce flowers with both female (pistils) and male parts. Of course, only flowers with pistils can produce fruit.

A species that produces both bisexual and unisexual flowers is called polygamous. The polygamous condition in plants is relatively rare. Most species of plants produce both stamens and pistils in the same flower. Such a flower is termed perfect. Slightly less common are species that produce flowers that produce either stamens or pistils, but not both. These flowers are imperfect. Remember that our redberreries produce a few perfect flowers and many imperfect, male flowers. This is the rarest condition of all. In an informal survey along the Felsman Trail on Bishop Peak in San Luis Obispo, I had to pass 25 large red berry plants before I found the first one with a few fruits. My guess is that a redberry individual that produces significantly large numbers of fruits would be rare. In an article on the web, San Luis Obispo County's Las Pilitas Nursery noted that stressed red berry plants also produced few berries.





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Editing assistance by Pat Grimes. Contributors to this issue: Pat Brown, Jan DiLeo, Lannie Erickson, Betsy Kinter, Bob Meyer, Pat Murray, Ron Rasmussen, Bob Rice, Jim Royer, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk Walters, and Jean Wheeler.

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# Weed Warrior Report

By Yolanda Waddell and Ron Rasmussen

## September 3rd – Getting Control of Erosion

Of the eight dedicated Weed Warriors who came in spite of it's being the Labor Day weekend, six took shovels, rakes, and hammers in hand to move sand and fasten down water bars with hoped-for October rains in mind. They were Dave Bowlus, Lannie Erickson, Rich Johnson, Annette Kennedy (a new Weed Warrior – welcome!), Ron Rasmussen and Skip Rotstein. Vicky Johnsen and Dean Thompson did trail trimming.

Thanks to all for a productive work party.

## October 1st – Many Hands Get a Lot Done

Work Party leader Ron Rasmussen had a full agenda of tasks for the October Weed Warriors: trail trimming along the Habitat Trail; boardwalk repair in eight different places; erosion control; and trash pickup along South Bay Boulevard.

Pat Brown and Margot Vandanan, (a new Weed Warrior – welcome!), hiked down to South Bay Boulevard to pick up trash and then joined Vicky Johnsen in trimming shrubs along the Habitat Trail. While there, Pat Brown spotted a small, bright orange lichen growing at eye level on a live oak tree. See her photo in “Elfin Forest Sightings” on page 7.

Prisila and Rich Johnson, Ron Rasmussen, Skip Rotstein, and Pete Schlosser (another new Weed Warrior – welcome!) took care of fastening loose boards and replacing broken screws on the boardwalk. Dave Bowlus and Lannie Erickson dug into erosion control. Much was accomplished, giving the proof to the saying, “Many hands make light work.”

### The Season of Wild Things

By Lannie Erickson

Off to the South the old Sun reclines.  
The wind blows dry sand into sinuous lines.  
Poison Oak sends flares between trunks of pines  
As approaches the Season of Wild Things.

Summer finch molts its glorious plume,  
The better to hide among bare branches' gloom.  
Butterfly larvae close small winter tombs.  
Prepare for the Season of Wild Things.

Coyote basks in a moment of warm,  
Anticipating cold, wet winter storm.  
Migrating geese winged necklaces form  
To greet the Season of Wild Things.

Deer near the forest crop the dry weeds.  
Voles gather up the summer's last seeds.  
Ground squirrels accelerate with eye-blurring speed  
To meet the Season of Wild Things.

Warblers return on their bright colored wings.  
Cricket in grass its parting song sings.  
At night brilliant stars pass silent blessings  
As they turn toward the Season of Wild Things.

As a species of might we must not forget  
We, animals still, owe Nature a debt.  
Preparing and planning, we sniff the air yet  
And pause for the Season of Wild Things.



*In October, new Weed Warrior Margot Vandanan took on the task of trimming vegetation that had grown over the trail.*

*Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



*Replacing a decayed water bar on the 12th Street Trail during the September work party were (L-R) Lannie Erickson, Annette Kennedy and Rich Johnson.*

*Photo by Ron Rasmussen.*

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## Join 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.

# Weather Front Meets Oktoberfest

By Yolanda Waddell and Pat Murray

Every year SWAP sets up its booth at the Los Osos/Baywood Park Oktoberfest that takes place along Second Street on the last Sunday in October. This year, SWAP Board member Vicky Johnsen, a long-time sailor, checked the weather forecast and wrote, “Looks like we’re going to be glad to be UNDER a tent this Sunday. Just dig out your rain slickers and we’ll be all set!” She quoted the PG&E weather forecast that said, “A cold front will move through the Central Coast on Sunday with fresh to strong (19 to 31 mph) southerly winds and rain showers. Total rainfall is expected to range between 0.25 and 0.75 of an inch.”

Vicky and PG&E were correct. Although the sky was fairly clear at 7:00 set-up time on Sunday the 30th (ably handled by Vicky and Craig Johnsen, Pat Murray and Ron Rasmussen), clouds began to roll in by 11:00, and the wind and rain began. Booth vendors could be seen holding onto the poles of their awnings to keep the awnings from blowing down. By 1:30, wind gusts came in at the predicted 30-or-so mph, treating booth awnings like sails. A pelting rain forced our soggy booth workers (Pat Murray, Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell and Danna Weidner) to pack up as quickly as possible. Booth Coordinator Pat Murray phoned Vicky and Craig Johnsen, and Jan DiLeo and Dave Moran, who rushed to our booth to take down the awning and pack all of the booth materials into vans and cars.

We couldn’t argue with Oktoberfest visitors with umbrellas who walked by saying, “Isn’t this rain wonderful?” We knew that



SWAP booth workers (L-R) Danna Weidner, Vanessa Nelson, Deborah Marzetta and Pat Murray stayed cheerful in spite of a rainstorm blowing through during Oktoberfest. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

the plants in our yards were soaking up every drop. In spite of the rain and wind, visitors bought over \$200 worth of T-shirts, sweatshirts and other SWAP merchandise – not bad for a shortened Oktoberfest day. What is more important, our booth workers had good conversations about the Elfin Forest with dozens of passersby. Our thanks to all of the booth workers: Rosemary Baxter, Sharon Bufo, Jan DiLeo, Vicky and Craig Johnsen, Debbie Levi, Deborah Marzetta, Dave Moran, Vanessa Nelson, Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell and Danna Weidner.



## Fascinating Lichen

Pat Brown was helping Vicky Johnsen do trail trimming along the Habitat Trail during the October 1st work party, when she spotted a small orange cluster on a branch covered with lichen. Photographer that she is, she took several photos of the cluster; it was identified by Al Normandin as Slender orange bush lichen, *Teloschistes exilis*. This lichen has been seen in eastern, southern and western United States, as well as tropical and subtropical habitats throughout the Americas. It seems to be vulnerable to pollution, and is disappearing in several areas of the U.S. In the Elfin Forest, with the cleaner air of the California Central Coast, it is likely to survive quite well.

*A colorful lichen, *Teloschistes exilis* (at left), was spotted by Pat Brown on the Habitat Trail. Photo by Pat Brown.*

# Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

*Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler*

The shrubs of the Elfin Forest have been severely stressed by prolonged drought. The expected El Niño of last year did not bring as much rain to our area as we'd hoped and really needed to help in their recovery. However the rains we've just had at the end of this October fell gently and sank in well instead of running off rapidly, which should help. We can, I think, hope for a fairly good bloom from the widespread shrubs called buckbrush in the *Ceanothus* (California Lilac) genus by December. The boardwalk and sand access trails should be surrounded with their white to pale lavender blossoms before the holidays.

Morro manzanitas were among the shrubs hardest hit by the prolonged drought. They and other mid-winter beauties usually bloom around the beginning of the New Year. They came on about two months later than usual last spring. But the manzanitas did show many of their bell-like white blossoms, often blushing with a lovely pinkish glow, once they finally recovered enough to do so. Let us fervently hope the La Niña drought predicted for middle to late winter this year weakens and we don't return to nearly rainless conditions in 2017.

Fuchsia-flowered gooseberries should open in December, or at least by January. They were among the few species to open on their normal schedule last year. Their many long red trumpets provide lots of nectar to the long bills and tongues of Anna's Hummingbirds. These red flower tubes are a major food support in their winter to spring nesting season. I'm writing this in early November, and yesterday I already saw a couple of male "hummers" climbing high above the shrubs and plunge diving, pulling out in a letter "j" pattern barely above the shrub tops. This is their mating call to lady hummers.

By the end of January, California peonies are usually opening their drooping red balls of flowers in the understory, especially near Siena's View and along the 11th Street sand trail. I'd given up on them last spring but then in March they were blooming at last. Hopefully they'll be back on schedule this year.

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 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 host trees and shrubs only for a boost up into the light.

Unusually hot weather throughout the northwest again seems to have slowed the annual bird migration this autumn. We do have some of our beautiful wintering species of ducks on the estuary. I saw quite a few Northern Shovelers and an increase in other species of ducks yesterday, but the bay is not as full of birds as in many previous years by early November. Hopefully numbers and species diversity will be closer to normal by the time this issue is in print and on our website by the first week of December.



*White-crowned Sparrow.*



*Buckbrush Ceanothus (one of the California lilacs).*

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, gnatcatchers, 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.

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 for this winter's festival from January 13-16, 2017, at [www.morrobaybirdfestival.org](http://www.morrobaybirdfestival.org). Registration online started Nov. 4, and is essential for field trips—they fill fast.

Take a break from holiday shopping madness and 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 17, 9:30 a.m.

### – *The Elfin Forest's Past, a History Walk*

Do you enjoy hearing stories about bygone days? As we walk around the boardwalk with her, Los Osos history writer Lynette Tornatzky will tell us about the Chumash, the Mexican land grant for all of the Los Osos Valley, plus the various owners of El Moro and their fallen plans. She'll describe Los Osos/Baywood Park's development under Walter Redfield and Richard Otto. She will also give an overview of all of our town's open spaces and parks, with an emphasis on the unique story of the Elfin Forest and how it came to be. Ask her about a future for parks in the area.

### January 21, 9:30 a.m. – *Animal Tracks Walk*

Join Evan Albright, an animal track expert, in learning who is "tracking up" the Elfin Forest. Visitors will learn how to tell the front feet from the back feet of a raccoon, and how coyote and dog tracks differ. Evan will also demonstrate how to find other signs that a wild resident of the Elfin Forest has passed that way. Attend this walk and develop an awareness of the comings and goings of the Forest's animal, bird and reptile inhabitants – something we wouldn't readily see while walking along the boardwalk.

*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.*



*At the end of his September walk, archaeologist Ethan Bertrando (at right) displayed a collection of artifacts including Chumash mortars and pestles, and stone arrow and spear points. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

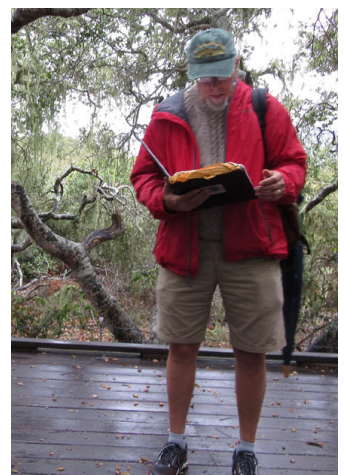


*During his pre-Big Sit! bird inventory walk, Jim Royer (center) spotted a Clay-colored Sparrow in a field north of the boardwalk, much to the delight of the others on the walk. Photo by Ron Rasmussen.*



*Elfin Forest oak grove with an understory of colorful poison oak. Photo by Bob Rice.*

*Historian Bob Pavlik carried on with his literary stroll in spite of the first October rain happening on the same morning. Going along on the walk was Terry Smith, San Luis Obispo poet laureate in 2013-14. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



## Elfin Forest Sightings - Beautiful Oak, Beautiful Poison Oak

On July 2nd, Bob Rice volunteered for the SWAP first Saturday work party, and joined the other Weed Warriors in trail trimming along the lower boardwalk. He was fascinated with the gnarled oak trunks in the groves near him, and took several photos with his smart phone. Vicky Johnsen encouraged him to share an especially nice photo with Oakleaves readers. This photo includes a carpet of bright red Poison oak leaves covering the floor of the grove – not a good place to walk, but certainly beautiful.

# Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter,  
SWAP Database Coordinator

## NEW MEMBERS:

Steve Best\*  
Linda Cordes\*  
John Cosner\*  
Thom & Diane Danfield\*  
Eve Gruntfest\*  
Oscar Sarafian  
Charles & Bernadette Soter\*  
Mary Stone

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

|                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Charles E. Blair*        | Herbert & Debra Holt*   |
| Kay Blaney*              | Jerry Hull              |
| Kate Blickhahn           | Penny Koines            |
| Ray Bracken*             | Jarry & Brenda Kraft    |
| David & Linda Chipping*  | Ms. Christine           |
| Ruth & Les Christiansen* | A. Lancellotti*         |
| Lisa Coffman             | Martha MacGillivray     |
| Mary & Allan Conkling    | Susan McTaggart         |
| Katie & Jerry Davis*     | JoAnne Milburn*         |
| Bernard &                | Jerry Mullins*          |
| Fran Deitchman*          | Karen O'Grady           |
| Stephani Denker*         | Nova Poff               |
| Margaret Diehl           | Rita Robinson           |
| Richard & Charlotte      | Max & Helen Sicher*     |
| Gordon                   | Mary C. Topp            |
| Larry & Pat Grimes*      | Kathleen W. Toscano*    |
| Jan Harper               | The Ungar Family        |
| Jim & Karen Havlena*     | Gary & Marianne Wallace |
| Bonnie Heikes*           | Mary Whelen*            |
| Joyce Heller*            | The Wilde Family*       |

## DONATIONS:

Rosemary Baxter  
System of Systems Engineering & Integration,  
Arlington VA, in memory of  
Mrs. Frieda Murphy  
Yolanda and Jay Waddell, in memory of  
Bob McDougle and Frieda Murphy

*\*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.*

# Remembering Frieda Murphy and Bob McDougle

By Yolanda Waddell

In September, two very special individuals who were devoted caretakers of the Elfin Forest passed away.

**Frieda Murphy** lived with her husband Jack next to the Elfin Forest. She and Jack could be seen walking their two small dogs around the boardwalk every day. They sponsored a bench in Rose's Grove that has a plaque reading, "Enjoy Rose's Grove – Jack and Frieda Murphy and their dog Rod."

Frieda was born in Indonesia during World War II, experiencing a prison camp with her parents. Following the war, Indonesia and the Netherlands, which wanted to take it back as a colony, fought for five more years until Indonesia obtained independence. Frieda wanted to leave that war-torn land and married a young Dutchman who took her to his homeland, where two daughters were born. Then the family moved to the United States, eventually ending up in Los Angeles. After her divorce, Frieda worked for the Southern California Gas Company. Her department head was Jack Murphy; they became good friends and eventually married. After Jack's retirement, the couple moved to Los Osos, to a house that is adjacent to the Elfin Forest.

Frieda loved the Elfin Forest, and often brought a broom to sweep their bench to keep it nice for visitors. She loved all of the creatures of the Elfin Forest. If she saw that something was amiss in the Forest, she would call SWAP to let us know about it. This warm, loving and delightful lady passed away suddenly on September 18th. We will miss her, and we extend our thoughts of comfort to Jack and to Frieda's children.



**Bob McDougle** was a Morro Bay Museum docent in 1998, when SWAP Board members asked him to become the SWAP Treasurer. Oakleaves editor Pat Grimes wrote, "Our new treasurer brings eclectic and extensive experience to the SWAP board. Bob McDougle is a retired aerospace engineer who worked in the industry for 33 years and still found time to indulge many interests. An archaeologist, sailing enthusiast, jazz aficionado, and genealogist, Bob worked on a dig near Barstow for ten years and as a docent at the Cabrillo Marine Museum in San Pedro when he wasn't putting satellites into orbit."

In 1999 when the Chair of the SWAP Board resigned, Bob took on that job as well, until a new Chair was found in 2000. In 2001, the Treasurer of SWAP, Incorporated, the umbrella organization for all SWAP chapters, resigned and Bob added the SWAP, Inc. Treasurer hat. He kept all of our finances in good order until he decided it was time to move on at the end of 2005.

Bob didn't limit his energies to finances while he was with SWAP. He was an active Weed Warrior, served on the Boardwalk Committee while the boardwalk was being built, set up and worked in our information booths, and wore whatever hat was necessary to accomplish chapter goals.

For the past few years Bob has been living at Casa de Flores in Morro Bay. On Tuesday, September 20th, he passed away at age 88. We are saddened by his loss; even 88 years wasn't long enough for such an alive and giving person.



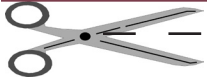
Jack and Frieda Murphy often visited the bench that they sponsored with their dogs Jessa (L) and Jade (R).

Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



## Elfin Forest Caps

One size fits all for these caps. They have adjustable straps in the back and are made of 100% cotton. Two handsome colors are available, forest green or maroon. Each cap has emblazoned in gold across its front the image of one of our coast live oaks, elfin-short but with a wide sprawling canopy, and the words "Elfin Forest Natural Area."



# 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

\_\_\_ @ \$35.00 = \$ \_\_\_

### 5. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

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

\_\_\_ @ \$20.00 = \$ \_\_\_

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

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



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## Holiday Shopping With S.W.A.P!



S.W.A.P.'s beautiful mural design shirts, coffee mugs, and Elfin Forest Hats 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 with 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.

Your donation can reduce your income tax bite and help S.W.A.P. with special projects in the Elfin Forest such as soil erosion control and revegetation with native species.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

I want to help, please call me!

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

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

All donations to SWAP are tax-deductible.

EVERY membership counts!

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