



OAKLEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION

P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 528-0392 ❖ DECEMBER 2018 / JANUARY 2019

Terra Verde Close to Completing Elfin Forest Biological Assessment

By Jan DiLeo, SWAP Chair

Since late June 2018, Terra Verde Environmental Consulting has been conducting fieldwork in the Elfin Forest in order to assess the health of the Forest and its natural inhabitants (plants and animals). Just as humans have their health assessed periodically, the health of natural systems is important as well. As you might expect, the health of the Elfin Forest is affected by the number of human visitors (which has increased over the years), domesticated visitors (dogs and cats), and nearby urban influences such as ornamental landscaping that, although pretty, does not necessarily provide food or forage for Elfin Forest wildlife. As a result, planning documents for the Elfin Forest recommend periodic biological assessments to make sure the Forest remains healthy.

Terra Verde's recent fieldwork has consisted of identifying the location and boundaries of Forest plants and animals and reviewing this information against a previous biological report completed back in 2002. Terra Verde will provide maps and a report that compares what the Forest looked like in 2002 versus today. This information will help SWAP and County Parks determine if the native plants and animals are doing well. Change within the Forest

Biological Assessment *continued on page 3*

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Final Day to Bid on Mural Painting is December 15th

You may have read in the October/November *Oakleaves* that artist Barbara Rosenthal has put her original painting of the Elfin Forest Mural up for silent auction. She created the painting in 1993 to use as a guide for the mural on the east wall of Los Osos Rexall Pharmacy. The mural, funded with a \$2,500 grant from the National Wildlife Federation, was a way to thank the community of Los Osos for support in buying land that is now part of the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area.



Five plastic panels with the names of over 2,000 donors were attached to the mural when it was dedicated. Over the years the plastic has deteriorated, and the panels need to be replaced. It is Barbara's hope that money raised with the silent auction of her painting will cover the cost of replacing the panels. She wants the names of those who supported the acquisition of land for the Elfin Forest to continue to be remembered.

A committee headed by SWAP Board member Pat Murray and including Pat Grimes, Leslie Rotstein, Barbara Rosenthal and Yolanda Waddell organized a traveling display including the painting itself, a history of the project and a bid sheet. The painting can be seen at Rabobank in Los Osos from December 3rd to 14th. The painting will be at Rexall Pharmacy in front of the large mural from 10 am to 2pm on December 15th. The deadline to bid is December 15th at 2 pm.

When this was written early in November, the bid for the Elfin Forest mural painting stood at \$650. Check for the most recent bid on the home page of our website, www.elfin-forest.org. Bidding may be increased in increments of \$10 or more. To bid on the painting, contact pat@elfin-forest.org or phone 805-528-0392.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*of the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter of
Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP)
consists of the following members:*

Jan DiLeo, Chair
Skip Rotstein, Vice Chair
Dave Bowlus, Treasurer
Yolanda Waddell, Secretary
Pat Murray, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly
at 2 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 10,
and Monday, 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: Bob Yetter

SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger
1144 Monterey 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.

Biological Assessment *continued from page 1*

can be good, i.e., the native habitat has stayed stable and is maintaining a healthy diversity or is expanding and maintaining a healthy diversity. Or change can be bad, i.e., the native plants and animals are diminishing and being taken over by invasive, non-native plants and animals. For a natural system to function well you want the native plant communities to be healthy, maintain diversity, and not be overtaken by non-native plants such as veldt grass or non-native animals such as feral pigs.

SWAP expects to have a Public Review Biological Report by the end of 2018 or early in 2019. When the Public Review Report is complete, SWAP will provide Terra Verde's findings and recommendations on our website and in future Oakleaves articles.

One final note: as you might expect, a biological assessment is expensive. It will cost SWAP roughly \$20,000. For a small nonprofit this is a big expense. Thanks to all of you who have helped SWAP over the years. You have made the Biological Assessment possible. If you would like to help with this effort donations are always appreciated. In such a case, please send a check made out to "SWAP" and mail it to: SWAP, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412. On the check please indicate you are donating toward the Elfin Forest Biological Assessment. All donations are tax deductible. Thanks again to our membership for your continued support – you are making a difference.

Board of Directors Election – Please Vote!

In the October/November issue of Oakleaves, a SWAP Board of Directors election was announced for December, with the ballot, below, to be printed in the December/January issue. Following is the status of the members of the Board of Directors at this time.

Board Members No Changes (currently not up for re-election)

Board Member	Elected – Current Term	Term Expires
Skip Rotstein	March 1, 2018 – 2 year term	January 1, 2020
Yolanda Waddell	March 1, 2018 – 2 year term	January 1, 2020

Board Members Up for Election in 2018

Board Member	Term Currently Expires	New Term
Dave Bowlus	January 1, 2019	Jan. 1, 2019 - Jan. 1, 2021 – 2 year term
Jan Di Leo	January 1, 2019	Jan. 1, 2019 - Jan. 1, 2021 – 2 year term
Pat Murray	January 1, 2019	Jan. 1, 2019 - Jan. 1, 2020 – 1 year term

The ballot should be mailed to: SWAP Elections, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412, or scanned and e-mailed to swap@elfin-forest.org. Deadline for mailed or e-mailed ballots is Friday, December 7. Also, ballots may be delivered to the December Board meeting on Monday, December 10, at Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Avenue, Los Osos, in the park's Community Center. Ballots will be counted at the December Board meeting and results will be posted on the home page of SWAP's website, www.elfin-forest.org.

SWAP 2018 Board of Directors Ballot

You may vote for all persons listed below. Please indicate a name if you are providing a write-in candidate. A check or X next to each person's name means "Yes."

YES

- DAVE BOWLUS (incumbent) [TWO YEARS]
- JAN DI LEO (incumbent) [TWO YEARS]
- PAT MURRAY (incumbent) [ONE YEAR]
- WRITE-IN CANDIDATE (ONE YEAR) _____

Benches Looking for Rejuvenators

By *Benchy McBenchbottom*, as told to *Swap Treasurer Dave Bowlus*

We, the benches of the Elfin Forest, have happily accommodated many a bench-warmer. We were designed and built between 2000 and 2012 by Mark Dariz, one of the designers of the boardwalk.

Over the years we've had a few tune-ups and refinishinges, most recently in 2012, when the job was contracted out to the California Conservation Corps (CCC or "The Cees," as we like to call them). That time we were all simultaneously transported to the Cees' workshop. Our total absence probably surprised a few wobbly-legged Elfin Forest visitors. We all came back home painted with a stain called California Rustic, thought by some to be a little too "orange" and not enough "rustic". Still, our paint job lasted for the promised five years.

Now it's been six years. All of us need sanding and refinishing, and a few need surgery to expunge dry-rot, probably the product of all those fog-sun-fog cycles that help make the Elfin Forest so special. So, it is time for us to be overhauled and restored again.

Except for one thing: When I told my story to Dave Bowlus, SWAP Treasurer, he reminded me that SWAP has more treasures in the natural riches of the Elfin Forest than money from dues and donations in the bank. We've got volunteers who work to help maintain our forest, doing many tasks described in Oakleaves reports of monthly Weed Warrior work parties. Dave suggested that there might be other folks who would love to restore a bench. Maybe, he said, the restoration work might be done NOT all-at-the-same-time, just like maintenance on that other orange landmark in our state, the Golden Gate Bridge (a slightly larger, more orange, and— I must humbly admit— more important orange object than an Elfin Forest Bench).

So, here's the call: If anyone would like to take on the restoration of one of us, please email me, Benchy McBenchbottom, in care of swap@elfin-forest.org. Let us know if you'd like to do bench refinishing and/or lumber surgery. (Expertise in orthopedics is not needed!) We look forward to hearing from you. Dave assures me that the Weed Warriors will provide pick-up and drop-off. A can of "official" bench stain (maybe less orange this time) will be provided.



One of the Elfin Forest "Benchy" benches before and after being rejuvenated this November. Photo by Dave Bowlus.

HELP WANTED!

Website Assistants

Do you have past experience in setting up and maintaining a website? Is that knowledge just sitting there, waiting to be used again? Our Webmaster, Bob Meyer, needs help with updating and maintaining the SWAP website, www.elfin-forest.org. He says it helps to know how to work with HTML, but will train you to use it if you aren't familiar with it. Working on the website will involve posting information and photos, and streamlining text and appearance of the website. Interested? Contact bob@elfin-forest.org. This is a volunteer position.

Board Meeting Recorder

The SWAP Board needs a person to take notes and type up minutes of its monthly meetings. Each meeting takes place on the second Monday of the month in the afternoon, and lasts for two hours. This can be a volunteer or paid position. Our current recorder, Beverly Boyd, has generously stepped in to do the job on a short-term basis, and would happily turn the job over to someone else who likes to write and enjoys the challenge of condensing a 2-hour meeting onto three or four pages. If you are interested, contact SWAP Secretary Yolanda Waddell at yolanda@elfin-forest.org.



Photos From the Forest

During the October pre-Big Sit! bird inventory walk, Petra Clayton spotted a Yellow Warbler.

Lace Lichen gracefully draping a Coast live oak caught Rich Johnson's photographic eye.





American Avocet

Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler, Ph.D

American Avocets (*Recurvirostra Americana*) are lovely long-legged birds we can enjoy watching in Morro Bay National Estuary from October to March. They rise into the air in large flocks and swirl down again to feed, wading in shallow water near Bush Lupine Point or Siena's View. About 1 ½ feet long with over 2 feet of wingspan and weighing nearly ¾ of a pound, they stride gracefully through water up to 8 inches deep on their long, blue-grey legs with slightly webbed feet.

We see these birds in winter attire, white except for a couple of very wide black wing bars, meeting in a large black triangle at their pointed short black tail, and they have a long, black bill. That very long black bill is the source of the genus name. It is over twice as long as the diameter of the head, is slender, and is elegantly recurved slightly upward toward the tip. The head is typically held up on the long neck as stylishly as any model on a runway could achieve. On their summer breeding grounds, the head and neck don an orange/cinnamon color.

When feeding, avocets usually swish their long bills back and forth toward each leg as they step forward, a characteristic behavior called scything. The bill is slightly open to glean tiny larvae, aquatic insects and small crustaceans, especially brine shrimp, as well as aquatic seeds, in ocean estuaries like ours. They may plunge their heads down to capture larger crustaceans and small fish. They can also feed while swimming in water too deep for wading. On breeding grounds in summer, brine flies blackening the surface of muddy shores and swamplands may constitute much of their diet.

Winter habitat for avocets is mainly coastal in California and Mexico and from the Carolinas to Florida and around the Gulf of Mexico. In summer, avocets mostly breed on ponds, marshes, and shallow lakes in western United States and east of the Rocky Mountains from Canada's Prairie Provinces south to Texas. Substantial breeding populations on our side of the Rockies include Great Salt Lake, San Francisco Bay, and wetlands of California's Central Valley.

Pairs of avocets engage in courtship on land and on water. The male preens himself with water and displays with crouching, bowing, and swaying with outspread wings, leading to vigorous splashing. Following copulation, this may end with hooking necks, crossing bills, and running forward. Before or during nesting, a trio of birds or two pairs sometimes engage in "circling." They face one another in a circle, call and stretch bills toward one another, while moving in a rotation.

Avocets nest on open ground close to water, often on small islands or

mucky shorelines avoided by most predators. Adults will fly straight at a predator, or run, crouch, and run again to distract it away from a nest. Females typically lay 4 eggs, and both adults incubate them. They dip their belly feathers in water to cool eggs from overheating by the sun on the exposed nest. Female avocets sometimes lay eggs in the nest of another female ("brood parasitism") of their own or even another species. However, a few other species may similarly parasitize nests of American Avocets, and avocets have been seen to raise young stilts as their own.

Young American Avocets are amazingly precocious, downy and leaving the nest within 24 hours of hatching, protected but never fed by the adults. They are already able to line up and follow their parents into the water, swimming, feeding themselves, and even diving to protect themselves from predators when only one day old. They take their first flight at about 4-5 weeks after hatching.

American Avocets once lived across most of the United States, but were extirpated from most of the east by 1900 because of hunting and trapping. Populations are currently considered relatively stable, but there are concerns for the future on the grounds of selenium and methylmercury contamination of wetland breeding areas as well as future impacts of climatic change.

Please Report 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: oakleaf@elfin-forest.org or leave a message on SWAP's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.

SWAP'S TREASURER REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017/2018

INCOME 7/1/17- 6/30/18	#
Membership	\$5,245
Donations, Sponsorships, Special Project	\$12,219
Merchandise	\$875
Misc.	\$1,197
SUBTOTAL	\$19,536
Money Market account interest	\$71
TOTAL	\$19,607
#	
EXPENSES 7/1/17- 6/30/18	
Publications (Oakleaves & guides, etc.)	\$5,802
Storage Unit & SWAP Phone	\$2,184
Other Expenses (conservation, education, booth fees, annual meeting, etc.)	\$12,071
TOTAL	\$20,057
NET EXCESS (DEFICIT)	-\$450
ACCOUNT DATA	
07/01/17	
Bank Account	\$4,486
Money Market account	\$64,018
Petty Cash	\$50
TOTAL	\$68,554
06/30/18	
Bank Account	\$3,965
Money Market Account with interest	\$64,089
Petty Cash	\$50
TOTAL	\$68,104
NET INCREASE (DEFICIT)	-\$450

Sand (or Dune) Almond

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

(Ed. Note: Revised by Dr. Walters from the December 1999/January 2000 issue)

Bonnie's drawing for this Elfin Forest plant is a fruiting twig of the desert dune or sand almond (*Prunus fasciculata* var. *punctata*) and is revised from 1999 *Oakleaves*. It is a fairly common shrub in the drier part of the dune scrub especially around the 15th Street entrance. It is easy to overlook because it isn't very conspicuous. In late summer and fall the sand almond would have lost all its leaves and fruit and resemble only a mound of dead twigs. It is one of our extreme summer deciduous shrubs. That is, it loses its leaves shortly after the rains stop in the spring.

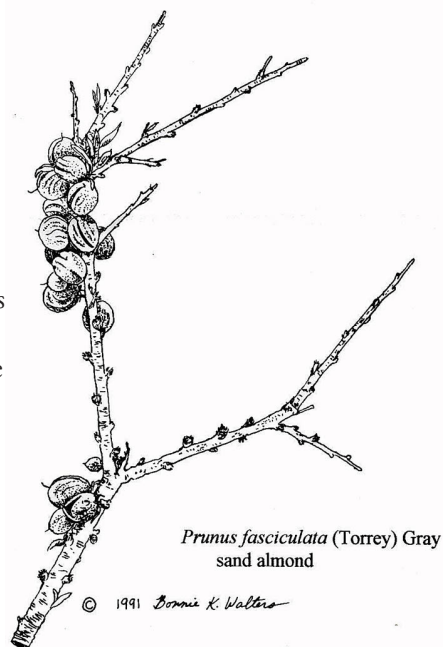
The flowers of the sand almond are borne in small clusters in the leaf angles and tend to be relatively inconspicuous. Their petals are white to pale yellow and up to ¼ inch long. Fruits that are shown resemble small almonds and are a little over ½ inch long. Dry, fibrous pulp around the stony 'pit' would not tempt anyone to nibble. However, kernels inside the pit are large enough that they might be thought worthwhile to collect.

There is some evidence that desert tribes did in fact eat them. However, they never ate them raw! The raw 'nuts', like most members of the cherry, peach, and plum group (genus *Prunus*) contain chemical compounds called cyanogenic glycosides. Cyanogenic glycosides are not generally poisonous until after bacteria in our digestive tracts partially digest them. Digestion causes the cyanides to be separated to form hydrocyanic acid. Red blood cells absorb hydrocyanic acid that prevents oxygen from being released. Most references say that eating a single raw pit would not be fatal, but eating several could be. Leaching removes and cooking destroys the poisonous compound. Native desert tribes probably used both techniques to make the ground nut meats safe to eat. The commercial almond (*Prunus dulcis* or its older synonym *P. amygdalus*) is native to the Middle East and is a fairly close relative. It has been in cultivation for thousands of years and selection has produced many varieties (but not all) that have larger fruits and few if any cyanogenic compounds.

Several of our coastal species can be paired with forms found growing in our interior deserts. If you look carefully at any two groups of individuals of the same species growing in widely separated areas, you will find describable differences in appearance, physiology, and even basic ecology between them. This is certainly true of our coastal and the desert sand almonds. Our coastal plants are more prostrate and possibly possess shorter and broader petals than the same species that grows in the Mojave and Colorado deserts. These differences led Dr. Hoover to recognize our coastal plants as a distinct species, which he gave the name, *Prunus punctata*. The *Jepson Manual*, however, currently identifies our coastal almonds as a variety (*Prunus fasciculata* var. *punctata*).



Dune or Sand Almond with fruit. Photo by Marlin Harms



Prunus fasciculata (Torrey) Gray
sand almond


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Jan DiLeo, Lannie Erickson, Marlin Harms, Vicky Johnsen, Rich Johnson, Betsy
Kinter, Pat Murray, Kristen Nelson, Dr. Nishanta Rajakaruna, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk
and Bonnie Walters, Jean Wheeler, Paula Wright
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What explanation can be given for a single species having a range that contains widely separated (disjunct) populations? That would take lots of study to determine for any given species. However, allow me to make a relatively educated guess about our sand almonds. The sand almond (and several other examples) was widely used by native Californians. I don't think it pushes credibility too far to suggest that the desert almond reached the coast by being carried or traded by these people. Once the isolated coastal sand almond populations escaped into the wild, evolution slowly modified them into the dune almond we see today. I suspect sand almonds were not deliberately cultivated as they are not particularly pretty nor are they abundant fruit producers. In fact, I could only find a single reference to their cultivation and it was from our own Las Pilitas Nursery. It says that, "it is used in revegetation and sand dune stabilization." They added that sand almond should be considered for a wildlife garden with full sun and sandy soil.

Weed Warrior Reports

By Vicky Johnsen, Conservation Committee Co-Chair

September 1 – Eevy, Cape Ivy, Over!

On this September 1st Labor Day Weekend, eleven volunteers came out to SWAP's September Work Party! And what a productive work party it was!

Dean Thompson, Lannie Erickson and our new volunteer, Mike Elder trimmed the lower boardwalk path from the Celestial Meadow area to past Rose's Grove. All that careful work is much appreciated by all visitors and the vegetation benefits from the mindful pruning directed by Dean.

Pete Sarafian had located various Oak Groves infested with Cape Ivy and directed the remainder of the group down below Bush Lupine Point with bags and instructions. Seven Weed Warriors pulled and yanked and tore at the tenacious vines that threaten to strangle and overwhelm whole sections of our Coast Live Oak Groves. The resulting heap of piled-up ivy appeared like a mammoth woodrat midden. I, for one, can't wait to see the photos taken. We made enormous progress thanks to the hard work by: Rich & Prisila Johnson, Jeff Reifel, Cindy Roessler, Skip Rotstein, Vicky Johnsen and Pete Sarafian.

Dave Bowlus focused on the erosion-preventing "water bars" armed with shovel and determination. The group convened back at the 15th street entrance to partake of cookies baked by Craig Johnsen. Thanks for a successful day!

October 6 - "Other Tasks as Needed" (Besides Weeding)

Thirteen volunteers spent the better part of the morning doing various activities as part of the ongoing process of tending our Elfin Forest.

Rich and Prisila Johnson replaced as many boardwalk fastenings as time permitted while inspecting the structure for any signs of problems.

Dave Bowlus led a cadre of Alpha Phi Omega students as well as Skip Rotstein and newcomer, Thomas Reynolds, to areas of the sand trails in need of erosion correction or prevention. Dave gave a brief demonstration of the theory behind sand control before heading out.

Skip Rotstein, Dean Thompson and Thomas Reynolds removed and bagged up plastic mesh remnants of old wattles along the Rein Orchid Trail above South Bay Boulevard.

Vicky Johnsen had the diligent help of Cindy Roessler and Mike Elder in the continual task of boardwalk vegetation trimming.

All enjoyed Craig Johnsen's cookies and the feeling of satisfaction for a job well done!



An erosion control crew hard at work under the leadership of Dave Bowlus (far right) in September: (L-R) Jordan Holmes-Ford, Melissa Carpenter and Jason Mach, members of Cal Poly Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity. Photo by Rich Johnson.



Victorious Weed Warriors (L-R) Skip Rotstein, Vicky Johnsen Cindy Roessler, Prisila Johnson, Pete Sarafian and Jeff Reifels pulled a huge pile of Cape ivy in September. Photo by Rich Johnson.

Let's All Pull Together—Poem

By Lannie Erickson

We wake in the dark and get ourselves wired,
And bundle up warm, if that's what's required,
Then open the door, take breath that is nippy,
Shake the sleep from our heads, force a grin that is zippy.

Then down to the Elfin Forest we go.
For the last time this year we'll make a good show.
We there meet our friends with greetings so warm;
Sturdy good nature's a Weed Warrior's norm.

We've worked well this year, we've seen it all through.
Now there is only a bit more to do
To leave the small forest looking tidy and spiffy.
We'll all work together and be done in a jiffy.

Join 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.

Elfin Forest Visitors: Cal Poly Botanist Conducts Plant Walk

In October, Dr. Nishanta “Nishi” Rajakaruna brought a group of freshmen from the Cal Poly residential communities and members of the Cal Poly Peaks, Plants and Pals Club to the Elfin Forest. Also attending were Cal Poly faculty including Dr. Dave Keil, Dr. David Chipping and Dr. John Perrine as well as CNPS members Cathy Chambers and Al Normandin, and a few local residents.

Dr. Rajakaruna said, “We talked about the natural history of the site and area - the geology, soils, plants, and animals...we had enough scientists around to give students a well-rounded natural history tour of the site.” It was later described as a “fantastic walk!” Dr. Rajakaruna is an associate professor in plant biology at Cal Poly where he teaches general botany and biogeography.



A delighted group of walk participants followed Cal Poly botanist Dr. Nishanta “Nishi” Rajakaruna around the Elfin Forest, learning about the overall natural history of the Forest. Dr. “Nishi” is at the right in the back row. Photo courtesy of Dr. Rajakaruna.

In Appreciation of SWAP’s Members and Volunteers

The SWAP Board of Directors

The year 2018 has been eventful for SWAP. It began with our Board of Directors greatly reduced in numbers, then increased by three members, and then reduced again (see below). Through it all, the organization that you support has remained intact, and is perhaps stronger as a result of many thoughtful conversations about SWAP’s direction and function as a steward of the Elfin Forest under the supervision of San Luis Obispo County Parks.

In the Elfin Forest, at least a dozen Weed Warrior volunteers each month weeded, did erosion control, cared for the boardwalk, trimmed trails and conducted several rebuilding projects of interpretive signs, Mutt Mitt posts, and fencing. SWAP contracted with Terra Verde Environmental Consulting to conduct a biological assessment of the Elfin Forest. Terra Verde has done a thorough and excellent job; we will share the results of their survey with you in 2019.

In August, Cal Poly Pomona botanist Dr. Ed Bobich gave a report of his research on Elfin Forest Coast live oak trees to a full house at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History. The Education Committee provided a children’s activity table at the Summer Solstice event in June, in Morro Bay State Park, and conducted two school walks for Baywood Elementary School second graders in November.

Boardwalk Guide Chair Pat Brown coordinated the updating and printing of 15,000 Guides, enough to last three to four years. Pat Murray and our Outreach Committee worked with artist Barbara Rosenthal to promote the silent auction of her original Elfin Forest Mural painting. Barbara’s goal is to raise enough money to pay for reprinting panels with names of over 2,000 donors who helped to make it possible to purchase 38.7 acres of the Elfin Forest in 1994. Pat also planned and managed SWAP’s booth at the Los Osos Oktoberfest.

It is clear that SWAP couldn’t function without our dedicated volunteers who have given almost 2,000 hours of their time over the course of the year. Nor could we function without the generosity of our members, many of whom donate more than the basic membership

fee when they renew. Treasurer Dave Bowlus recently sent us a list of very generous donations from members, local businesses and King David’s Lodge of Freemasons (see page 10). Our members and volunteers, and other members of the community care deeply about the Elfin Forest. As SWAP Chair Jan DiLeo said in her article about the biological assessment on page 1, you do make a difference. Together we have been able to make sure that this small piece of land will continue to flourish and bring joy to all who visit it. Thank you!

Bill McQuilkin, Leslie Rotstein Leave Board

We regretfully announce that SWAP Secretary Bill McQuilkin and member-at-large Leslie Rotstein have resigned from the SWAP Board of Directors. Bill is now working for California State Parks and is pursuing other interests. Leslie continues to be active in SWAP as Education Committee Co-Chair. She is also a member of the Events Committee.

The SWAP Board thanks Bill and Leslie for their service, which is always a labor of love.



Fuchsia-flowering gooseberry

Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler

Our Elfin Forest normally produces abundantly active bird life on both land and water and a kaleidoscope of colorfully blooming shrubs and herbs beginning around the holiday season. Hopefully we'll have had enough early showers by mid-December to bring a return to something like the wonderful show we normally expect in these months despite the severe shortage of rain in recent years.

Buckbrush (*Ceanothus*) flowers are among the first blossoms to open as autumn ends and winter begins. By the time this issue reaches our website and mailboxes, the boardwalk could be bordered all around with their white to lilac blossoms. Morro manzanitas were among the shrubs hardest hit by prolonged drought, but they did show some of their bell-like white blossoms last year, blushing with a lovely pinkish glow. Hopefully this year their blooming will begin by Christmas, as usual, and come closer to the abundance of more "normal" years. Fuchsia-flowered gooseberries usually also open in December, and their 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 to the hummers in their winter/spring nesting season.

By the end of January, California peonies may be opening their drooping red flower balls among their large bright green leaves in the understory. Look for them especially near Siena's View and along the 11th Street sand trail. Other understory plants likely to be in bloom are the white to pink or lilac rays of asters surrounding their golden disk flowers and the yellow and gold of early California poppies.

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. The festival is scheduled for January 18-21 in 2019 and early registration is essential for field trips—they fill fast.

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. Look out onto the estuary from Bush Lupine Point or Siena's View to spot large American White Pelicans and Canada and Brant Geese. Dabbling Ducks likely to be present in large numbers include Northern Pintails, American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, as well as Blue-winged, Cinnamon, and Green-winged Teal. Diving ducks typically numerous include Greater and Lesser Scaup, Buffleheads,

and Ruddy Ducks. Wading birds commonly seen are Great and Snowy Egrets, American Avocets and many species of Sandpipers.

All the raptors listed in our pocket guide and a great many of the passerines are also present in midwinter. The shrubs around the boardwalk can be alive with flitting Finches, Sparrows, Gnatcatchers, Wrens, Phoebes, Chickadees, Bushtits, Nuthatches, and many other little brown and little grey birds. Larger common birds of the brush often seen are Thrashers, Towhees, Scrub Jays, Quail, Blackbirds, and Doves. Brush Rabbits and Ground Squirrels may be active in the daytime and prints in the sand beside the boardwalk on many mornings reveal the presence of raccoons during the night. Coyotes are frequently observed from or even walking on the boardwalk—if your dog is walking you, be sure he has you on his leash for his own safety!

Take a break from holiday shopping madness and enjoy a walk in the Elfin Forest that we protect through our generous donations and active volunteer efforts!

Los Osos Big Sit! Birding Circle Comes in Second

By Jim Royer, Big Sit! Coordinator

Each year, on the second Sunday in October, local top-flight birders gather at Bush Lupine Point to participate in the Big Sit! – an international event that challenges birding "circles" to spot as many species of birds as they can in 24 hours. The Los Osos group, named "Pishing in the Wind" and captained by Jim Royer, always places in the top 10. This year they came second among 147 international counting circles, with 106 species. Following is Jim's report about their day.

"We started our 22nd Elfin Forest Big Sit before daylight and already had 73 species by 8am. 18 counters took shifts on what turned out to be a beautiful day, as we perched above the Morro Bay Estuary. The receding and advancing tide brought many birds into view below and the breeze blew in a few migrants and raptors at eye level. Our new bird for the count was Reddish Egret, with two individuals feeding across the inlet of the bay. Participants and others kindly brought food, which kept us energized. With 101 species by noon, it was a challenge to find new species in the afternoon (we found only five new ones). Many duck species had not arrived yet in the bay and the slow migration kept our passerine numbers down, but the total was a decent one - due to the efforts of all those who participated!

Anecdotes:

An Osprey carried a big fish in his large talons, right by us at eye level. We watched him tear it apart on a snag below us. A pair of Peregrine Falcons hunted together over the estuary. We could almost feel the breeze as a Merlin shot by us, in pursuit of a poor passerine. Several Red Knots were in scope view with an active Ruddy Turnstone (Ruddy Turnalga?). When the birding was slow we enjoyed the incredible views from our location and the company of numbers of other birders, as many stayed beyond their shifts."

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

December 15, 9:30 a.m. – Estuary / Eelgrass Walk

What is an estuary? Why is the Morro Bay estuary important to the Elfin Forest, and vice versa? A knowledgeable walk leader from the Morro Bay National Estuary Program will explain the importance of this body of water as we walk around the Elfin Forest boardwalk. Carolyn Geraghty, the Estuary Program's Restoration Projects Manager, will talk about the 48,000-acre watershed that feeds the estuary, threats to estuary health, the state of eelgrass, and the Estuary Program's conservation work. Plus, participants will learn how they can help to protect this vital natural resource in their everyday lives.

January 19, 9:30 a.m. – Sketch Walk and Native Plants

Join Barbara Renshaw and Jeff Reifel for a stroll along the Elfin Forest boardwalk. Take in views of the Morro Bay estuary, oak groves, expanses of coastal sage scrub and chaparral, and the volcanic Morros beyond. In the Rose Bowker Oak Grove enjoy ancient gnarled Coast live oak trees. Barbara and Jeff will tell you about native plants along the way and choose a few favorite places for sketching. No drawing experience is necessary. Bring a pad of drawing paper, colored pencils or pastels, and some drinking water. Bring a camera too. You'll be pleased to discover the artist hidden inside of you. Rain will cancel this walk.

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 closed-toe 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 or if you use a wheelchair call (805) 528-0392.



Participants in the pre-Big Sit! bird inventory led by Jim Royer (left) searched the bay for bird species to add to the inventory list. Photo by Jean Wheeler.



During his 3rd Saturday walk in September, Al Normandin stepped off of the boardwalk to explain why Black sage plants lose their leaves in the summer. Photo by Paula Wright.



Photo From the Forest

Jean Wheeler caught a Cormorant confab taking place on a snag in the bay.



Cal Poly soil scientist Dr. Daniel Johnson takes a soil sample in Rose Bowker Grove, explaining humus and organic matter hold water and nutrients for the oaks. Photo by Paula Wright.

Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW MEMBERS:

Anne Avril & Dan Haifley*
Marlys McPherson*

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Bob & Linda Bailey*	Francesca Fairbrother*
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Kathryn Bay*	Jypsy Joe Johnson*
Sandra Beebe	Sandra Mason*
Katy Budge*	Bob & Barbara Schwenoha*
Robert & Gail Davis*	Peg Smith*
Cheryl Dove*	David & Helianthe Stevig*

DONATIONS:

Alex Benson and the Baywood Inn – SWAP brochure sponsor
Tamara Snow
Mary Lou Wilhelm for 2018 biological assessment
Skip & Leslie Rotstein for Ed Bobich lecture at the Morro
Bay Natural History Museum

In memory of Barbara Machado:

Katy Budge
Kris Dilworth
Larry & Pat Grimes
Carrie Pardo
Jana Peterson
Edmund & Pamela Watkinson

**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.*

In Memoriam

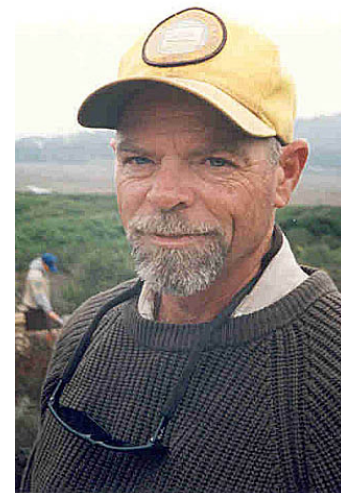
James "JT" Taylor

Text and photo
by Yolanda Waddell

In October, the builder of the Elfin Forest boardwalk, JT (James) Taylor, was taken from us by cancer at age 62. JT was working for the California Conservation Corps (CCC) as a Project Crew Supervisor in 1999, when County Parks contracted with the CCC to build a looped boardwalk over old sand trails in the Elfin Forest. Faced with the daunting task of carrying all materials and tools into the Elfin Forest and tailoring the boardwalk to fit the narrow and winding trails, JT and his crew worked with skill and awareness of the Forest's plant life and wildlife. The resulting sturdy boardwalk is, other than one section, ADA compliant and accessible by wheelchair from the end of 16th Street. Almost 20 years later it stands as a monument to the skills of JT and his crew.

JT was born in Pittsburg, California and grew up in various communities in the San Francisco area. After serving in the Air Force, he joined the CCC in 1977. Soon he was hired as a staff member, teaching corps members such skills as flood and fire management, CPR and first aid. In 1987, he came to the CCC's Los Padres Center on the grounds of Camp San Luis Obispo, where he was a Project Crew Supervisor. He became a specialist in constructing boardwalks, building others at Sweet Springs in Los Osos and at the Elephant Seal viewing area in San Simeon.

Always congenial and kind, with a quick wit and great understanding of human nature, JT was very proud of the corps members in his crews. Because of him, they went on to lead productive and successful lives. Those of us in SWAP and County Parks who worked with him were inspired by his can-do approach and impressive knowledge of how things go together. We were also grateful to have known such an inspiring person as JT. We are sad to lose him and send our condolences to his wife Madeline and their families.



Masons Give Generous Donation for Elfin Forest

Freemasons of King David's Lodge in San Luis Obispo, as part of their Fall 2018 Philanthropy Program, have recently donated \$2,000 to Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP) for support of the El Moro Elfin Forest in Los Osos. This is part of the Lodge's annual philanthropy and scholarships of over \$50,000. SWAP volunteers support the Elfin Forest, by providing docents, trail guides, and work parties, as well as special walks open to the public, including school and youth groups.

George Brown, Secretary of King David's Lodge presented the check to SWAP Secretary Yolanda Waddell, board member Pat Murray, Conservation Chair Skip Rotstein, and past conservation chair Pete Sarafian.



Mural Coffee Mugs

Our 15-ounce beverage mug has Barbara Rosenthal's gorgeous Elfin-Forest mural wrapped all around the cup. Microwave and dishwasher safe, it's great for coffee, hot chocolate, or just about any other beverage you choose. See below for this and other great gifts for yourself, friends, and relatives.



SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

See Photos of All Items at www.elfin-forest.org

All Prices Include Sales Tax

1. MURAL SHIRTS

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

Circle Sizes:

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2. 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 = \$___

3. ELFIN FOREST MURAL PRINTS

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

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4. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

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

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

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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.

Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

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

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