



# OAKLEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF FRIENDS OF EL MORO ELFIN FOREST

P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 528-0392 ❖ WINTER 2022-23



## 2022 Annual Celebration

*By Yolanda Waddell and Beverly Boyd*

The 2022 FEMEF Annual Celebration on Saturday, November 12, was a virtual meeting because of continuing effects of Covid-19. Vice Chair Bob Dees coordinated and led the meeting since Board Chair Steve Hendricks was unable to attend. Treasurer Dave Bowlus organized and was host of the Zoom aspect of the meeting.

FEMEF's Board members and other volunteers worked hard to inform all FEMEF members about the meeting. Dave Bowlus and Recording Secretary Beverly Boyd produced meeting invitations and ballots and mailed 150 to members who had not authorized email communications. Database Coordinator Betsy Kinter and Publicity Chair Roger Carmody emailed the invitations to members who had given permission to receive emails from FEMEF.

The meeting began with the Board of Directors election, using digital ballots that could be marked and submitted during the meeting, and then a show of hands when the digital ballot failed to function. Those who were attending the Zoom meeting unanimously elected the slate of five Directors: Dave Bowlus, Roger Carmody, Bob Dees, Student Board Member Allison Fash, and Jeff Reifel. Members who voted by mail also voted unanimously for the five-member slate.

Guest Speaker Allyson Brooks, Community Engagement Manager for the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, gave an informative talk, "Sierra Foothill Conservancy and Indigenous Partners."

**Celebration** *continued on page 2*

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## Our Thanks to Baywood Inn

*Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler*



Nestled along the Morro Bay shore, the Baywood Inn is very close to the Elfin Forest. The owner, Alex Benson, has been a strong supporter of our small wilderness area for many years. He has been a major contributor to the printing costs for several issues of our Trail Guide and has encouraged many of his guests to visit our boardwalk.

Early in 2022, the Inn was able to make a space available in the guest lounge adjoining the front desk to display our shirts and cups, decorated with beautiful murals by artist Barbara Rosenthal. The adjacent photo shows a portion of this lounge, with our shirts and cups prominently displayed near its cozy fireplace. They are made available for purchase from Baywood staff at the front desk, where proceeds are held for pickup by Pat Murray. Pat manages ordering, storing, and selling for all our merchandise (listed on our order form on page 11). Pat tells me she has several times received calls from the desk at the Inn when a guest desired a shirt in a size missing from the supply at the Inn. In response to such calls, she dashes to our storage area and races to the Inn to successfully supply the missing size before the guest departs! Pat reports that since they began early this year, sales at Baywood Inn have very substantially increased our earnings from our merchandise. Thank you, Baywood Inn for your strong support of El Moro Elfin Forest!



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*of the*

*Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest (FEMEF):*

Steve Hendricks, Chair

Robert Dees, Vice Chair

Dave Bowlus, Treasurer

Yolanda Waddell, Secretary

Beverly Boyd, Acting Recording Secretary

Allison Fash, Student Board Member

Roger Carmody

John Perrine

Jeff Reifel

Skip Rotstein

The FEMEF Board of Directors meets monthly. Meeting days and times can vary and will be posted on the home page at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org).

FEMEF Board meetings are virtual and are open to the public. To attend a FEMEF Board meeting, leave a message at 805-528-0392.

## CONTACT FEMEF

If you have questions about FEMEF activities or want to volunteer, please call (805) 528-0392 and leave a message.

A recorded message will give information about our coming activities and other events.

If you have questions, concerns or comments about any problems in the Elfin Forest, call or write: Lasca Gaylord  
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 Lasca Gaylord at 781-1196.



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Elfin-Forest-Preserve/139602329410370>



[https://www.instagram.com/el\\_moro\\_elfin\\_forest/](https://www.instagram.com/el_moro_elfin_forest/)

## Celebration *continued from page 1*

Showing the beauty of the Sierra foothills, she talked about the Conservancy's lands and projects, including working with and including docents from local tribes. The Conservancy oversees 54,000 acres of protected land including historic rangelands, mountains, forests, and native flora and wildlife of the Western Sierra Nevada range. Information about the Conservancy is available at [www.sierrafoothill.org](http://www.sierrafoothill.org).

Reports about FEMEF projects and activities during 2022 included:

- Successful erosion control that prevented sand from washing down paths and into streets.
- Nature walks were given by FEMEF docents for Monarch and Baywood Elementary School classes.
- Trail trimming was done throughout the year.
- Using lumber provided by County Parks, a volunteer crew led by Jeff Reifel replaced several hundred failing boards in the now 23-year-old boardwalk.
- 3rd Saturday walks were begun again, organized by Skip Rotstein.
- FEMEF activities outside the Forest included a talk by Cheryl Dove for the Atascadero Kiwanis Club, regular attendance at LOCAC and its subcommittees, as well as a booth at the Oktoberfest and at a LOCAC event.
- Jeff Reifel led a committee that revised and redesigned the boardwalk trail guide.
- The Oakleaves newsletter editors changed it to a quarterly instead of a bimonthly publication.
- Student Board member Allison Fash set up and manages a FEMEF Instagram account that now has about 150 followers.
- Donations may now be given to FEMEF through Givebuttr. Dave and Roger did the background work to enable this.
- Bob Dees reported that the Morro Bay shoulderband snail has been upgraded from its former status as "endangered species" to "threatened."

## A Gift That is Given Once...

*By Yolanda Waddell, Membership Committee Chair*

To our members:

Emily Polk, founder of Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP, now FEMEF) wrote "A gift of nature is an imperishable gift never lost, worn, stolen, torn – a gift that given once, exuberantly gives itself in return, not alone to the giver, or the receiver, but to all creatures of earth for all time."

With your membership you have given a gift of nature. Without you, there would be no Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest; and without you, the Forest could not have been returned so closely to its original state. Your dedication to the Elfin Forest is evident in each issue of Oakleaves. The asterisks beside many names in the list of new and renewing members indicates a further donation in addition to the membership fee. Many of you have been or continue to be volunteers as well, doing tasks in the Forest and elsewhere that keep both the Elfin Forest and our organization in good shape.

Because of your membership fees, donations, and volunteer work, you are a steward of that very special small wilderness, the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area. Thank you.



# Morro Bay's Namesake Nudibranch

Text by Bob Dees, Photo by Jeff Goddard

Have you ever seen a nudibranch (pronounced noo-duh-brank)? A nudibranch (from Latin *nudus*, naked + Greek *branchhia*, gills) is one of those small (commonly 4.0 to 10 cm long), colorful marine creatures you might have seen undulating in a tidepool or munching away on a sea anemone. All nudibranchs possess shells during the early larval stages of life, but as the larvae grow into adults, they lose their shells or develop them internally. Thus, nudibranchs are among the group of marine invertebrates known as sea slugs, gastropod mollusks without shells.

There are two kinds of nudibranchs: dorid nudibranchs, with feather-like gills toward the rear of their bodies, and aeolid nudibranchs, which breathe through special organs, called cerata, covering their backs. Our own Morro Bay is host to the fascinating nudibranch named *Emarcusia morroensis* Roller, 1972, commonly known as the Morro Bay aeolid. This prepossessing orange-and-brown nudibranch is in the Facelinidae, a family of colorful sea slugs found intertidally or subtidally worldwide to a depth of around 100 feet. A distinguishing feature of aeolid nudibranchs like *E. morroensis* is that the tips of their cerata (from Greek *keras*, horn, pertaining to their pointed shape) contain cnidosacs, small sacs in which tiny stinging cells called nematocysts are stored (photo). Aeolid nudibranchs can discharge these painful and sometimes lethal stinging cells to ward off or to defend against predators.

Like all aeolid nudibranchs, *E. morroensis* does not itself produce the nematocysts in its cerata. The nudibranch acquires the stinging cells by feeding upon cnidarians (e.g., sea anemones, hydroids, jellyfish, Portugese man o' war), marine animals that fire off small, barbed threads into the body of an attacker. (If you have ever been stung by a jellyfish, you have experienced nematocysts!) In most cnidarians, the threads they fire contain poison that paralyzes an attacker's tissues and causes pain. But when an aeolid nudibranch such as *E. morroensis* attacks cnidarian prey, the

nudibranch's body slime protects it from the nematocysts. Once the prey is consumed, its nematocysts are harmlessly passed from the nudibranch's digestive tract to the cerata, where they are stored and ultimately used to capture other prey or to defend against the nudibranch's own predators.

The Morro Bay aeolid is also an interesting animal because of its mating routine. Aeolid nudibranchs exhibit what is known as simultaneous hermaphroditism. That is, the animals can reproduce as either males or females at sexual maturity. When an adult *E. morroensis* meets up with a potential mating partner, they each fire individual darts at one another from their penises. The one whose dart first penetrates the other's body wall is the dominant male; the other is the receptive partner. After copulation, the receptive nudibranch deposits eggs in the substratum, where they hatch into planktonic larvae and eventually grow into adult nudibranchs.

*Emarcusia morroensis* was first discovered and identified scientifically in 1972 by a well-respected conchologist, Richard Roller (1930-1998), who grew up in this area and spent many years collecting shells and mollusk specimens around Morro Bay. You may find examples of *E. morroensis* yourself around the docks and pilings at Morro Bay or in the plentiful tidepools at the local Hazard Canyon beach in Los Osos. The Morro Bay aeolid is just one of several locally-named species including the Morro Bay blue butterfly, Morro manzanita, and Morro shoulderband snail—each of which makes our local ecology wonderfully unique and endlessly fascinating.



*Emarcusia morroensis*. Cnidosacs are stored in the white tips at the ends of the cerata.

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## Adventures of the FEMEF Education Committee

By Barb Renshaw

Current volunteers: Cathy Button, Cheryl Dove, Sandy Green, Vicky Johnsen, Jan Moore, Carol Pilling, Jeff Reifel, Barb Renshaw, Petrea White.

School Tours: Second Grade students from Baywood Elementary, a bilingual school, toured the Elfin Forest in October. The lead teacher, Leila Daniel, arranged the tour by contacting the FEMEF website. Three second grade classes attended, some on October 18 and the rest on October 24. Most of the volunteers listed above participated in the tours. Leila hoped for a bilingual tour, and thanks to Vicky, Jan, and Jeff, with some help from others, we gave them just that. Tour subjects included an English session about seeds, a story in Spanish about co-evolved seed dispersers, and a "Spanglish" session about the formation of the dunes and other visible geological features. The Baywood second grade students will return in spring to learn more about plants and local geology. We imagine that we will again produce a bilingual tour.

Sketch Walks: Cheryl, Vicky, Jeff, and Barb periodically lead sketch walks. We post the schedule for these walks on the website and the bulletin board in the forest. The San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden includes them in its "news" reports.

Elfin Forest Roving Docent: Vicky does a walkabout in the Forest every Saturday, answering questions and pointing out interesting birds and plants to visitors. In November, while checking for erosion from a recent rain, she happened on a Baywood School 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade after-school class that had walked from the school to the Forest. When their teacher mentioned that they were learning about the Chumash, Vicky helped the group to learn what the Chumash ate and how they camped in the Elfin Forest to gather acorns and seeds and to fish.

Volunteers Welcome: Volunteers with an interest in leading interpretive walks or participating with school groups, please email Barb (barb.renshaw@stanfordalumni.org) or visit the FEMEF website elfin-forest.org.

# Ron Rasmussen – A Remembrance

By Dave Bowlus, FEMEF Treasurer

When Ron Rasmussen moved to Morro Bay in 1999, he had newly retired from work as an environmental toxicologist at UC Irvine. Soon he joined the volunteers in pulling weeds, fighting erosion, and doing any other needed work in the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area, the San Luis Obispo County Park protected and maintained by the Small Wilderness Area Preservation, Inc. (SWAP). [Since 2019 SWAP has been doing business as Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest (FEMEF)].

Ron joined the SWAP board of directors in early 2002, and by the end of the year he had been elected Board Chair, an office he held until 2017 when he retired from the Board.

SWAP/FEMEF's mission statement reads as follows: to preserve and maintain the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area; to inform and educate about the natural history of the Elfin Forest and the Morro Bay Estuary; and to promote and support scientific research in the Forest.

In his 15 years as Board Chair, Ron totally embraced the mission. He led with strategic planning, including for major boardwalk repairs and the boardwalk extension into Rose's Grove. He wrote a column for the bimonthly newsletter *Oakleaves*, explaining all the different physical challenges in "preserving and maintaining" the Forest and the challenges in recruiting volunteers and encouraging donor support. He represented SWAP on the Morro Bay National Estuary Program's Implementation Committee and at the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, as well as at countless annual local events, including Junefests, Oktoberfests, and Christmas Parades. During his long chairmanship, he simultaneously served as Board Treasurer (ten years), Conservation Chair (five years), and as Boardwalk Chair (for a shorter period).

Besides devoting himself to administrative duties as Board Chair, Ron joined volunteers in work parties--pulling invasive weeds, revegetating denuded areas, watering the new plants, controlling erosion, and maintaining the boardwalk.

Ron's final column as Chair in the December 2017/January 2018 *Oakleaves* ended a streak of at least ten years. Along with the announcement that he was leaving the Board, Ron committed to continuing service as a SWAP volunteer, promoting SWAP and joining in on the First Saturday work parties. Most memorable to volunteers and longest enduring of his service was his faithfully baking cookies for work party volunteers.

Ron was a gentle man and a gentleman. Since its establishment, the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area has been supported by many devoted and long-serving members, but none can compare to the breadth of contributions made by Ron Rasmussen.

*[Note from Yolanda Waddell:] Ron passed away on September 4, 2022, at age 89. The FEMEF Board extends its sympathy to his daughter Rebecca and grandson, Koen.*



*One of the many times in many years Weed Warrior Ron was on his knees pulling invasive veldt grass. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



*In this celebration in Rose's Grove of Ron Rasmussen's life, his daughter Rebecca was singing the 23rd Psalm, in Hebrew. Standing to her right, in uniform, is Jerry Boots, who played "Anchors Aweigh" on his bugle in honor of Ron's years of service in the United States Navy.*

*Photo by Jean Wheeler.*

## Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest Mission:

Preserve and maintain El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area; inform and educate about the natural history of the Elfin Forest and the Morro Bay Estuary; promote and support scientific research in the Forest.

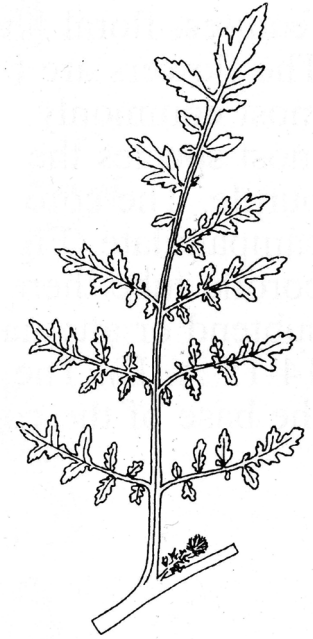
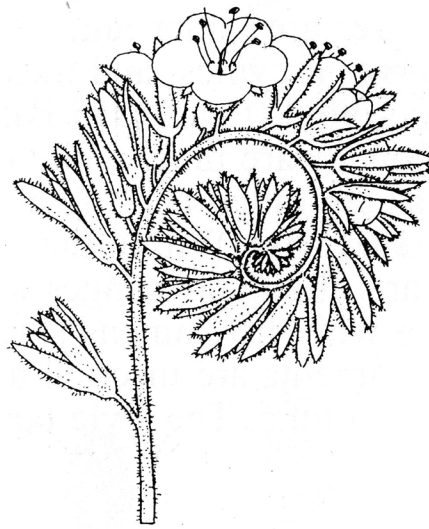
# Common Phacelia

Text revised by Dirk Walters, Ph.D. from his April 2010 article  
Drawing by Bonnie Walters

The plant featured in *Oakleaves* this time is a species from one of largest genera in California, *Phacelia*, which contains over 90 species, many of which have several varieties. Dr. Hoover in his SLO County flora recognized 18 species growing in our county. The generic name *Phacelia* is derived from the Greek word *Phakelos*, which means a cluster. The cluster referred to is the flower cluster or inflorescence. This one is the most easily recognized of all due to its resemblance to the coiled tail of a scorpion. Botanists call it a scorpioid cyme. Cyme is a technical term referring to how the flowers initiate relative to the growing inflorescence tip. In a cyme, the inflorescence tip or apical meristem transforms itself into the first flower, which is then followed by flowers produced from trailing growing regions or meristem. Unfortunately, in a scorpioid cyme, this development pattern is totally obscured without careful developmental study. Phacelias have also been called scorpion weed.

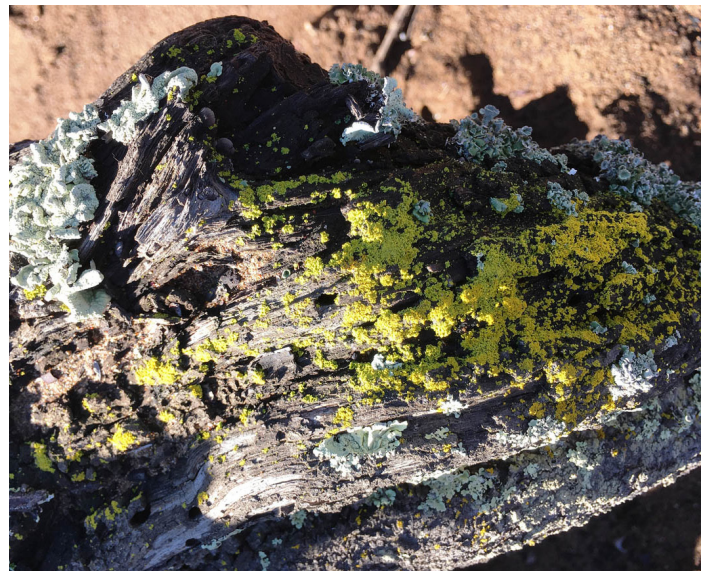
Most California phacelia species have no common names listed. The one Bonnie drew for Dr. David Keil and my 4th ed. *Vascular Plant Taxonomy* is not the showiest but is certainly one of the more common and variable species in our area. It is *Phacelia distans*. In wildflower books it is given the common names of common or fern phacelia and wild heliotrope. Heliotrope refers to a group of garden plant species in the genus *Heliotropum*, which share the same general inflorescence type. Common phacelia leaves vary from deeply pinnate lobed to twice compound and thus resemble typical fern leaves. Flower color varies from dirty white through pale purple to blue. The species is found in almost every open habitat in the county. It can even be found occasionally in the oak woods, although it is rare there. In the Elfin Forest, look for it in the meadow areas where shrubs are widely spaced, and herbs dominate.

Some of you might be wondering why I haven't mentioned the plant family to which phacelia belongs. This is because it has been changed relatively recently. As some of you may find familiar, comparisons of DNA sequences have become more and more efficient in recent years. This has led to a new set of characters with which to assess relationships. However, DNA sequencing is still not a field procedure, so often relationships recognized by this method are not obvious to field types. Up until recently, phacelias have been placed in the water leaf family or Hydrophyllaceae. This family was easily recognized by its conspicuous scorpioid cyme, symmetrical flowers, capsule fruits, and usually compound leaves. Unfortunately, the scorpioid cyme and symmetrical flowers were shared with the borage or forget-me-not family (Boraginaceae). Again, in classical taxonomy books, the borages were placed close to the mint family (Labiatae or Lamiaceae). Borages and mints produce only four seeds in their ovary. The ovary then matures by shrinking around each seed like shrink-wrapped vegetables in the produce section of supermarket. In the past, botanists assumed that flower characters were more important in assessing relationships than were inflorescence characters. As you might be guessing,



the new DNA work indicates that the inflorescence is the more important trait and that the waterleaf family is more closely related to the borage family. Not only that, but DNA evidence also indicates that the waterleaf genera should be totally integrated into the borage family. So, despite what you read in any flower book older than 5 years, *Phacelia* is in the borage family.

If the genera from the two families are integrated together, why is the integrated family named Boraginaceae and not Hydrophyllaceae? This is due to priority rule. The name of the new combined family is the family name that was published first; that is, the name Boraginaceae is older than the newer name Hydrophyllaceae.



## Photos from the Forest

Yellow lichen, with other lichens. Photo by Vicky Johnsen.

# Drone Donated by Bob Meyer for Scientific Research

By Yolanda Waddell

In 2016, then Webmaster and Mapping Coordinator Bob Meyer heard from his daughter, Andrea Woolfolk, about a mapping project by drone that she was conducting at the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve where she is the Stewardship Coordinator. It occurred to him that photos taken by a drone would help SWAP and County Parks to study changes in the Elfin Forest more easily than relying on occasional and expensive aerial photos.

In summer of that year, Andrea's 14-year-old son Coleman came to visit grandparents Bob and Sharon. He brought with him his DJI Phantom 2 drone that he had bought with Christmas and birthday money. It had a camera with a 5-millimeter fisheye lens. Bob felt that this was a good opportunity to fly a drone over the Elfin Forest to see if it would give usable and useful information about the Forest. Larry Iaquinto, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation, provided an official permit to fly the drone over the Forest.

Photos taken by Cameron's drone over a flight path planned by Bob showed that the Forest was under stress from that year's drought conditions. He also noted that he could identify several species of plants by their color in the photos. However, he concluded that a more agile drone with a better camera would be needed to provide a useful scientific survey.

Recently, Bob donated a MAVIC 2 drone to FEMEF. He feels that it will be a very useful tool to help determine the health of the Elfin Forest in years to come. In fact, use of a drone was recommended by Terra Verde Environmental Consulting in its biological assessment of the Forest in 2018. Terra Verde's Report stated, "Recent advances in drone technology present significant opportunities for conducting climate change research at the landscape scale using high resolution aerial imagery. Information such as thermal signature and leaf reflectance that can be recorded using specialized drone-mounted cameras can be used to document and track the health and productivity of an entire community over time. The size, scale, and habitat diversity of the Forest make it an excellent candidate for conducting this type of monitoring, which may be used to inform management decisions in the Forest and, at a larger scale, make predictions about the effects of climate change in coastal Mediterranean ecosystems."

FEMEF is grateful to Bob for his generosity in providing us with this excellent tool that will enable us to conduct ongoing surveys of the Elfin Forest, especially the inaccessible areas.

## 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](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org) or leave a message on FEMEF's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.



*Bob's grandson Coleman Woolfolk launching his own Phantom 2 drone over the Elfin Forest in 2016, with permit from Parks and Recreation, and finding stress in vegetation believed caused by drought.*

*Photo by Bob Meyer.*



*Bob Meyer, taken upon his retirement as Webmaster for SWAP, a position he had created for SWAP and held until late in 2021, when he recruited Jeff Reifel to replace him.*

*Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



## OAKLEAVES

is a quarterly FEMEF publication.

Editors are Yolanda Waddell, Jean Wheeler, and Bob Dees

Layout by Katy Budge

Contributors to this issue:

Dave Bowlus, Beverly Boyd, Bob Dees, Suzette Girouard, Vicky Johnsen, Betsy Kinter, Bob Meyer, Pat Murray, John Nowak, Jeff Goddard, Barbara Renshaw, Skip Rotstein, Mike Stiles, Carol Tuttle-Pilling, Theo Waddell, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk Walters, Jean Wheeler.

Deadline for copy to *Oakleaves* is the first of the month before issue.

If possible, all copy should be submitted by e-mail to: [oakleaf@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org).

# Gardening with California Natives - Coffeeberry

By John Nowak, Horticulturist, and Suzette Girouard. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

The handsome shrub *Frangula californica*, formerly known as *Rhamnus californica* and commonly called coffeeberry, California coffeeberry, or California buckthorn is found within the family Rhamnaceae, the buckthorn family. There are six subspecies recognized in California, as noted on Calflora's website (calflora.org). *Frangula californica* ranges from southwestern Oregon to Baja California, Mexico, and eastward to southwestern New Mexico, and occurs in numerous habitats within its large range.

Here on the Central Coast, especially in Los Osos, coffeeberry (*Frangula californica* subsp. *californica*) grows in the Southern Coastal Scrub region. In the Elfin Forest, it can be found growing alongside California buckwheat, Morro manzanita, Pacific wax myrtle, fuchsia flowered gooseberry, coast live oak, black sage, and poison oak.

Native Americans of our area ate the fruit fresh or dried it for the off-season. The leaves were used to treat dermatitis (such as caused by poison oak), and the bark was made into a tea and used as a laxative. The seeds were also used to make a drink, brewed like coffee, thus the common name coffeeberry.

Coffeeberry grows in many forms, from a shrub to a small tree, depending on the soil type, rainfall, wind, and sun exposure. It prefers semi-shade areas on northern slopes and is frequently found close to or under coast live oaks. But it also grows on dry southern slopes alongside black sage and California buckwheat.

In a garden setting, its dark green leaves create a lush appearance. The new growth has a red color to the stem, turning to brown with age. The flowers are small, yellow in color, and attract pollinating insects such as beetles, butterflies, and native bees. As the fruit develops, it changes from a green color to a dark coffee brown. These fruits provide food for small mammals such as opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) and the big-eared woodrat (*Neotoma macrotis*), as well as ground birds like California quail, California towhee, American robin, and California thrasher.

Coffeeberry is adaptable to many different soil types; however, it prefers well-draining soil. It is considered drought-resistant once established, but young plants require supplemental moisture (beyond seasonal rainfall) to get started. It has few pest problems, but new growth is a favorite for deer and rabbits.

Coffeeberry and its cultivars are available at garden centers where native plants are sold. These cultivars have been selected for various attributes. One example would be *Frangula (Rhamnus) californica* "Eve Case," which is smaller and more compact, with denser foliage and larger berries. It makes a great foundation plant and can also handle pruning. It is not particularly messy, but the fruit will stain concrete walkways. Coffeeberry is a wonderful addition to any garden, native or not.



## Oktoberfest Booth Report

By Pat Murray and Jean Wheeler. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

Steve Hendricks, Bob Dees, Dave Bowlus, Roger Carmody, and Pat Murray arrived on Second Street at 6:00 in the morning to set up the FEMEF booth (with a new FEMEF banner replacing the former SWAP banner) for the return after Covid years of our community's Oktoberfest. Steve, Dave, Roger, and Pat, soon joined by Rebecca Rasmussen and her son Koen, were able to spend much or all of the day in or near the booth, talking to visitors or helping to sell our merchandise. They were ably assisted by members volunteering for 2-hour spans, including Carol Tuttle-Pilling, Bev Boyd, Cheryl Dove (in her "elf" costume), Jan DeLio, and Dave Moran.

As can be seen in the photo, our booth featured many pictures taken in the Elfin Forest as well as all of our merchandize. Our shirts with the colorful mural prints by Barbara Rosenthal attracted much attention, and Pat Murray (left) and Cheryl Dove can be seen helping two customers in the photo. Dave Bowlus and Rebecca Rasmussen had organized a system for using credit cards for the first time along with our cash sales, which brought in well over twice the amount of cash sales for this year, and those cash sales about equaled all sales from prior years. We completely sold out of some of our merchandize.

Dave Bowlus, Dave Moran, Jan DiLeo and Bev Boyd helped Pat dismantle the booth at the end of the day and return everything back to storage after the most successful day our organization has ever had at Oktoberfest!



# Coming up in the Elfin Forest

*Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler*

What a joy to be writing our first issue devoted to the entire season of “winter” in my retirement home near Morro Bay, while remembering the times I waded to school through snow as a child in a suburb of Chicago! Now you, my readers and I in my 80’s, can enjoy some very pleasant walks in this mild and beautiful season around our Elfin Forest.

Our shrubs remain fully garbed in green leaves. Many will open flowers in white and rich colors. Buckbrush ceanothus (in the California lilac genus), will nearly surround the boardwalk with white to lavender flowers by the end of December and will continue to bloom all winter. Morro manzanita shrubs will open tiny bell-shaped flowers, white with a pinkish blush, in more protected areas of the lower boardwalk. Nearing winter’s end, their floral bells will mature into tiny red apple-like fruits (manzanita means little apple). My photo, taken as January gave way to February, shows both the floral and fruit stages on one of these shrubs.

Understory and meadow plants include red trumpets of fuchsia-flowered gooseberries, with lots of nectar for long bills of Anna’s hummingbirds. California peonies will open red floral balls drooping among large green leaves near Siena’s View and along the 11th Street sand trail. *Phacelia* species may have white to blue or purple blooms (see Dirk Walter’s page 5 article on *Phacelia distans*). For cream to yellow or orange flowers, look for California everlasting, golden yarrow, and California poppies.

The springlike vegetation in midwinter of our Elfin Forest and abundant resources of Morro Bay make us one of our nation’s top birding regions. The Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, held on Martin Luther King Weekend each year, attracts hundreds of visitors from the U.S. and Canada, and even some foreign birders. ***The festival is scheduled for January 13-16 in 2023 and early registration is essential for field trips—they fill fast.***

Virtually all species of water birds and wading birds known to our estuary are at peak populations in December through February. Look out onto the estuary from Bush Lupine Point or Siena’s View to spot American white pelicans and both Canada and brant geese. Dabbling ducks commonly seen include northern pintails, American wigeons (pictured from Siena’s View), northern shovelers, and all three teal: blue-winged, cinnamon, and green-winged. 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 several species of sandpipers.

All the raptors listed in our pocket guide (sold on page 11) and most of the passerines are also present in midwinter. Look for osprey flying low over the estuary or perched on sticks protruding from the water. northern harriers, red-tailed hawks, peregrine falcons, and turkey vultures often fly over the estuary. The shrubs around the boardwalk can be alive with flitting finches, sparrows, gnatcatchers, wrens, phoebes, chickadees, bushtits, nuthatches,



*American Wigeons*



*Morro Manzanita*

and many other little brown and little grey birds. Among the larger common birds of the brush easily seen from the boardwalk are thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, quail, and doves.

Take a break from the 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 both resident and migrating wildlife!



## WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

### Docent Led Third Saturday Walks

Masks are optional.

*December 17, 9:30 a.m.*

#### *Lichens Decorating Living and Dead Plants*

Local naturalist Al Normandin will take us on a tour looking for lichens growing around our boardwalk. He'll explain what these complex communities of plants are—with some members photosynthetic and producing food, while other plants in the same lichen, usually fungi, non-photosynthetic. He'll show you an amazing diversity of lichens. Some are thin and almost paint-like, others appear to be thick cushions or even miniature forests, and still others are curtains of feathery "lace-lichens" dangling from our Elfin Oaks.

*January 21, 9:30 a.m.*

Like real estate professionals, retired geography professor Jean Wheeler knows the importance of "location, location, location." She will cover why our position on our planet and proximity to the ocean results in vegetation here looking very like that of four other regions in the world, three of which are way south of the equator. Switching scales, she will also indicate how changes in location bring about such noticeable differences in our plants in short distances as we walk with her around our boardwalk.

*February 18, 9:30 a.m.*

#### *Fungus Foray – Mushrooms and More*

Join fungophile Dennis Sheridan on a delightful exploration of the Elfin Forest floor for fascinating mushrooms such as wood blewits, black elfin saddles, earthstars, golden caps, boletes, and poisonous amanitas. Dennis will take us on a trek to the lower oak grove next to the bay to find these marvelous fungi. Bring a magnifying lens and, if you have a mystery mushroom in your yard, bring a sample for Dennis to identify. This is not a mushroom collecting walk. All plants in the Elfin Forest are protected by law. Only a very heavy rain will cancel the 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.*



*On his annual fungus forays, Dennis Sheridan finds numerous species of mushrooms to exhibit. He provides much information about their identifying characteristics, interactions with species around them, and the importance of their much larger mycelium bodies below ground to their local ecosystem.*



*On the Third Saturday Walk in August, Jessica Griffiths used her spotting scope to help participants explore what birds are up to at that time of year.*

## Stalwart Birders Log 90 Species During Big Sit

*By Mike Stiles, Big Sit Coordinator, and Yolanda Waddell*

The Elfin Forest Big Sit is part of an international one-day event, held annually on the second Sunday of October. Big Sit birders count all species of birds that they hear or see from their chosen seventeen-foot-diameter circle. Our local circle is located at Bush Lupine Point. From this circle the birds that are in the Elfin Forest, the Morro Bay Estuary, and flying over the ocean can be spotted. In the past as many as 122 species were identified from this location, but in recent years the numbers have been lower. The birders count in one-hour shifts, each person bringing a spotting scope and binoculars. This year Mike Stiles was the event coordinator and gave the following report:

"Starting at about 30 minutes before sunrise and ending in the twilight after sunset, our stalwart crew of about 10 birders during the day scoured the area as far as our scopes would allow. With a small surge just around sundown, our total for the 2022 Elfin Forest Big Sit stands at 90 species. Not our highest number for the count, but not for lack of trying.

By the way, there is no sitting involved. It really should be called the Big Stand. Thank you very much to those who joined in the effort."

# Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, FEMEF Database Coordinator

## NEW MEMBERS:

Ann Farrelly

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

Andrea Bersie*	Beth Miller*
Kate Blickhahn*	Marilyn Moore*
Chery & Garyl Dove*	Anne Norment
Judy & Mike Green*	& Lawson Schaller
Larry & Pat Grimes*	Nova Poff*
Tom & Rita Hadjiyane	Sharon Rooney*
William Jankos*	Marcia Shannon*
Richard & Prisila Johnson*	Dennis Sheridan*
George Lusich*	Charles & Sally Sitton

## DONATIONS:

Andrea Davis  
Lori Fash  
Carmen Fojo  
County of San Luis Obispo Parks & Recreation  
– for printing of trail guides  
Halcyon Charitable Fund  
Bob and Sharon Meyer – drone donation

## MEMORIAL DONATIONS

### *In memory of Bernadette Soter:*

Stevia Shaw  
Helen White

### *In memory of Ron Rasmussen:*

Betsy Kinter  
Claudette Saylor  
Flori Schutzer  
theatre dybbuk

### *In memory of Chris Van Beveren:*

Colin Ball & family  
Chery & Garyl Dove  
Joan Lewis,  
Tess Norton  
Mark Osokow  
Rich & Liz Ricci

### *In memory of Connie West:*

Larry & Pat Grimes

*\*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 FEMEF 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 quarterly 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.*



## Cuesta Inlet, Like the Elfin Forest, Needs to be Saved

*By Carol Tuttle-Pilling. Photo by Jean Wheeler.*

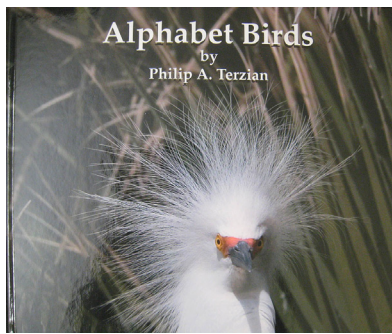
Cuesta Inlet, 13 acres of chaparral, shoreline, and water, was dredged (illegally) in the 1960s in preparation for creating a subdivision of 168 homes on landfill, each home with a private dock. Luckily, not much happened after that. During the last 20-plus years it has been owned by an absentee landlord who let people leave boats there. The dredging makes it an easy place to launch small boats, and many people from all over California take advantage of the free boat storage. The inlet is also a popular place to walk dogs, watch birds, and just enjoy open views of our beautiful bay.

Cuesta Inlet's owner passed away last year. His heirs have put the property on the market for a firm price of \$1 million. Realizing the value of the property to the community, a group of local people got together and formed SaveCuestaInlet.org, a 501C3 non-profit whose purpose is to raise money to buy the property and turn it over to a public entity. The group has talked to the SLO County Parks department, which is interested because there are not many places to launch kayaks and other small boats around the bay.

Although the property is very different from the Elfin Forest, the purchase and management plans are similar. Save Cuesta Inlet must raise the money and inspire enthusiastic volunteers to manage it after it is part of our area's public spaces. There is work to do in cleaning it up, and lots more work if we want to restore it to a more natural shape. But the most important work for the next year will be to raise the money to buy it.

Fundraising is off to a good start. Many generous people have given and more get involved every day. Save Cuesta Inlet volunteers will be at the inlet many Saturdays and at the farmer's market in Baywood on Mondays. You can also donate at SaveCuestaInlet.org

**GREAT GIFTS!**



## FEMEF 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

Large mural design by artist Barbara Rosenthal on both front and back. Black shirt with the words "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. POCKET GUIDE

Useful 56-page guide to plants and animals of the Elfin Forest. Lists for mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, 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

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

### 4. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

With 26 clever verses and superb photos on facing pages, this book is sure to please young and old.

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

### 5. MURAL MUG

15- ounce beverage mug with wrap-around mural design. Microwave safe; hand wash suggested.

\_\_\_ @ \$15 = \$\_\_\_

### 6. ELFIN FOREST CAPS

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

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

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Within and near Los Osos, free delivery may be possible. Shipping costs otherwise depend on zip code and package weight.

*Please call 805-528-0392 to arrange for delivery or shipping.*

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FEMEF, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.

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



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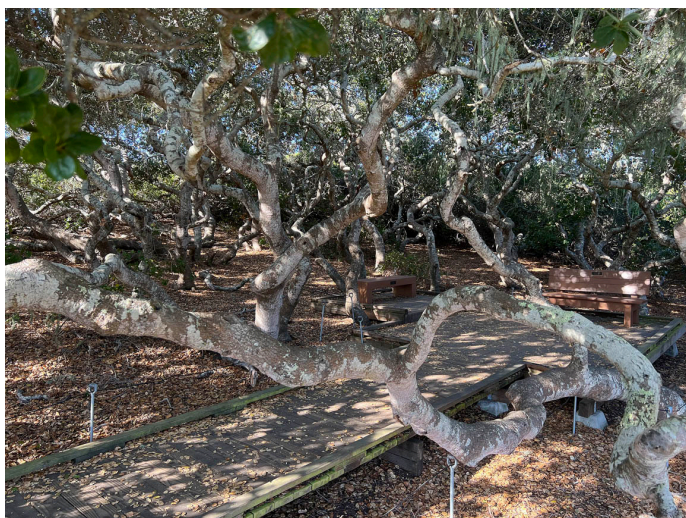
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FEMEF has a new drone! ~ see page 6

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*On seeing this photo of Rose's Grove by Theo Waddell, editor Bob Dees responded, "It's gorgeous. Reminds me of Sir Walter Scott: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave....."*

### Thinking of Switching to Online *Oakleaves*?

We encourage you to visit our online version of *Oakleaves* at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org). You'll see photos in full color, and the text is easier to read on your computer. As an online reader, you'll receive an email when each new issue is posted on our website. Just email us at [oakleaf@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org) with the subject: Switch me to online.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

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I want to help, please call me!

Memberships include a subscription to FEMEF's quarterly newsletter, *Oakleaves*.

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

All donations to FEMEF are tax-deductible.

EVERY membership counts!

Make checks payable to: FEMEF

Mail to: Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest,  
 P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.

# Spittlebugs

*Text by Jean Wheeler, Ph.D.*

The blobs of white foam seen festooning especially ceanothus and coyote bush plants in our Elfin Forest from late spring through mid-summer look like spittle and are created by very tiny bugs, so spittlebugs are what they are called.

The spittle is excreted by the nymph or immature stage of the insect, and each nymph is only about 3 mm (1/8 of an inch) in size. One blob of spittle may be created by just one nymph or by several of them. The nymphs usually hang upside down on a branch, extract fluids from the plants, add secretions from glands on their abdomens, and mix in air bubbles to produce the froth. The bubbly mixture is long lasting, prevents dehydration of the nymphs, and conceals them from potential predators.

By mid-summer, spittle will be disappearing as the nymphs grow into adults. Adults are about a half inch long and hop about on leaves. They land with head up and looking like tiny dull brown frogs, so they are usually called froghoppers. But they have two features called bullae that look like big eyes, located at the tail end just behind the wings, one showing distinctly in Jeff's photo. These may deter predators. There is only one brood per year, and eggs are laid on plant leaves to provide the following year's spittle-making nymphs.

Spittlebugs occur throughout the United States and on many plant species, with about six species of spittlebugs known in California. In the Elfin Forest they occur mainly on ceanothus and coyote bush plants. They do little or no harm to the plants.



*Extreme closeup of "froghoppers" or adult spittlebugs, one showing one of the large "bullae" looking like a large eye near the tail end.*

*Photo by Jeff Reifel.*



*Closeup of a single mass of spittle produced by one or several bugs inside.*

*Photo by Jean Wheeler.*



*Many spittlebugs on a ceanothus shrub. Photo by Jean Wheeler.*