



OAKLEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF THE LOS OSOS / MORRO BAY CHAPTER of SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ♦ (805) 528-0392 ♦ APRIL / MAY 2005

Predator / Prey Cycles in the Elfin Forest

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair



Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles
© California Academy of Sciences

An ambulance screams along South Bay Boulevard, and from the oak groves along Los Osos creek comes an answering chorus of yelps and howls. The resident family of coyotes voices their territorial claim, or perhaps just their high spirits. Previous issues of Oakleaves have noted the presence of this predator/scavenger and a few more comments may be useful to indicate why "The Trickster" has appeared in the Forest.

Coyotes are native to North America, and have likely been cautious associates of humans since the

latter arrived on this continent. They subsist largely on small animals, but will eat carrion, and may attack livestock if desperate. Their natural home is open country or brushland, so the area around the Morro Bay estuary is prime habitat. The secluded Elfin Forest is an excellent place for a coyote to raise a family, safe from larger predators, with a current abundance of rabbits.

In the past 2 or 3 years, before the arrival of the coyotes, the number of rabbits in the Forest has increased significantly. Their activity is indicated by their droppings, and from widespread evidence of browsing on young grasses and weeds. In fact, they may be helping in the battle against the invasive Italian thistle by eating the young immature seed

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Visitor Comments

In February, SWAP member Betty Daugherty and her long-time friend, Alaskan artist Rie Muñoz, went for a guided walk in the Elfin Forest with Yolanda Waddell. Rie brought her sketchbook along, but was too busy looking at the wildflowers and birds to sit down and sketch. Later she said, "I enjoyed it very much and learned a heck of a lot. And it was mighty exciting seeing that small rabbit (a Brush bunny) and the large BEAUTIFUL Egrets." Since she has relatives living in the area, Rie comes for one or two months each winter to enjoy the Central Coast. Her delightful stylized paintings can be seen in the Robert Gray Gallery on the Embarcadero in Morro Bay.

Also, Bob Field, who will co-lead our June Solstice walk with wife Joan, reported the following: "I've been on the boardwalk a lot this winter because some of my favorite dirt trails are too wet and muddy. One day I met a retired physician from Pennsylvania on the boardwalk who plans to move here and wanted to know what poison oak looks like, so I took him to station number three (marked on the boardwalk rail to match the Trail Guide)." Needless to say, the visitor from Pennsylvania was appreciative.



Betty Daugherty (left), an original member of our SWAP chapter, and her visitor, artist Rie Muñoz, enjoyed a shady moment in the Woodrat Hall oak grove.

Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Predator / Prey Cycles continued on page 2



SWAP's Venerable Founder Will Turn 95 in July



SWAP members Pat Sarafian, Linda Young and Yolanda Waddell recently paid a visit to Emily Polk, SWAP's founder, at the Atascadero Christian Home.

Emily, who will be 95 in July, can't get around the way she used to, but still has a fantastic memory and tells great stories.

She would enjoy having visitors.

Shown in the photo are (l-r)

Emily Polk, Pat Sarafian and Yolanda Waddell.

Photo by Linda Young.



Where To Call, Where To Write

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

A recorded message will have 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:

Chuck Lowe, SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger,
1087 Santa Rosa Street, SLO, CA 93408, (805) 781-4417.

If you witness vandalism or other crimes,
call the County Sheriff at 781-4550.

Predator / Prey Cycles *continued from page 1*

heads. The wily coyotes have discovered the tasty food source the rabbits provide, and have moved into the forest for a season or two. When the rabbit population will no longer support the coyotes, they will probably move on. Thus, a natural cycle is occurring in the Forest, with first the rabbit population increasing, then the coyotes, followed by the decline in rabbits and departure of the coyotes, followed by a rise in rabbits, etc., etc.

Some visitors and nearby residents may be concerned about the presence of a wild predator so close to homes and often near strollers on the boardwalk. There is little or no risk of attack to people, but small pets are another matter. Coyotes see cats and probably small dogs as legitimate prey animals. If pets are allowed to run free in the Forest they are very likely to be taken by the coyotes. Therefore, while coyotes are present nearby residents can ensure the safety of their pets by keeping them indoors at night and on leash during visits to the Forest.

Finally, we at SWAP consider the presence of the coyotes to be a great sign of success in our efforts to maintain the Elfin Forest. The re-growth and proliferation of native plants has reestablished an environment in which natural cycles can occur. Your support has made possible the appearance of the "Prairie Wolf" in the Forest. If you see or hear them you can take some credit for their presence. Remember that they are only visitors, as we are, and that the Elfin Forest is their home.

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OAKLEAVES

is published six times per year beginning in February.

Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;

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Editing assistance by Pat Grimes.

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Pat Sarafian, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk & Bonnie Walters,
Jean Wheeler, and Linda Young.

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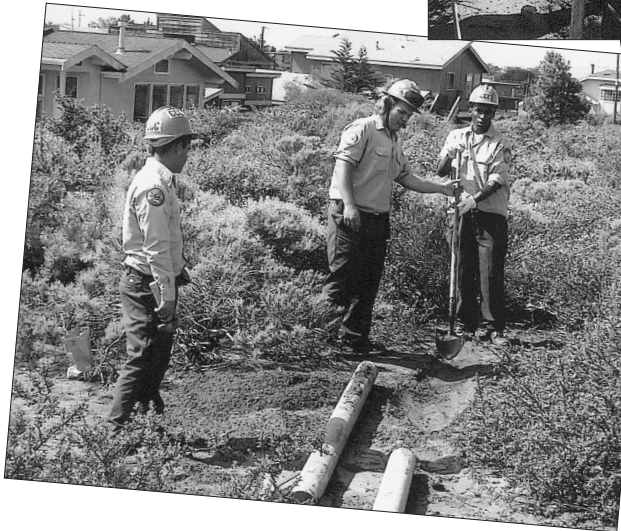
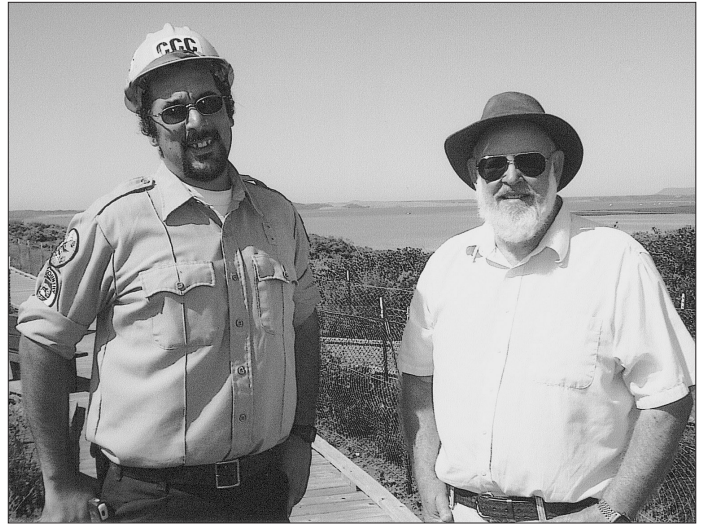
Corps Installs Erosion Bars

*By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair;
photos by Yolanda Waddell*

At the end of February, the California Conservation Corps (CCC) came out to the Elfin Forest to work. The main part of the project was to add more erosion bars to areas that showed signs of erosion. The chief work area was along the 13th Street trail, but the 14th Street trail and the Orchid trail were improved by digging deeper trenches near water bars as well.

Finally, the CCC continued their veldt grass removal on the highway embankment along South Bay Boulevard. The project was overseen by crew leader, Kiva Vigil, who supervised most of last year's large conservation project in the Forest.

Ed. Note: One year ago this month, all of the environmental organizations in San Luis Obispo County were worrying about how they could function if the proposed closure of the Los Padres CCC Center actually happened at the end of June. Then on April 29th, after four months of anxious phoning, letter writing, faxing and e-mailing by SWAP members and hundreds of concerned citizens in San Luis Obispo County, then-Assemblyman Abel Maldonado and then-CCC Director Wes Pratt announced that that the Los Padres Center would remain open. The CCC Corpsmembers cheered, and everyone else breathed a sigh of relief. We are all grateful that they are still around to work on needed projects such as the one described by Pete Sarafian. When you see CCC Corpsmembers working around the county, give them a high five and let them know how great they are.



*Clockwise from top right are:
Crew Chief Kiva Vigil and SWAP Conservation Committee member Bob Meyer who oversaw the project;
Working on 13th Street were (l-r) Ben Burns and Yajaira Luna;
Installing water bars on 14th St. Trail were (l-r) Bobbie Hawthorne and Michael Gresham;
On 13th Street were (l-r) Edgar Murrió, Specialist Matthew Peterson, and Anthony Huston, Jr.;
and digging a drain in the Orchid Trail were Timothy Halstead, Jr., and Kevin Parish.*

Weed Warriors Hassle Grasses

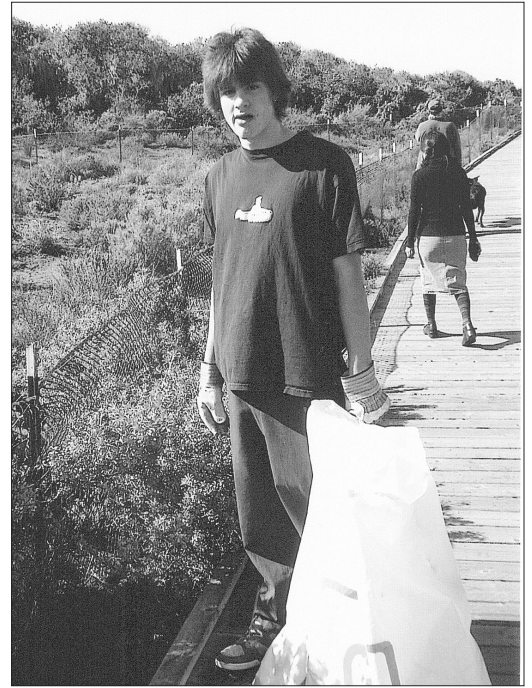
By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

The February 2005 weed party was a snatching success. A sizable group of SWAP members turned out to pull weeds. Because of the heavy rains this year (can you believe it?), the weeds are way out in front of our efforts. The invasive grasses have gone to seed in February. Normally they don't do this until late March or April at the earliest. The work site was the usual infestation around the west end of the Elfin Forest north of twelfth and thirteenth streets. Joining in the effort were Donna Banks, Rosemary Baxter, Jay Bonestell, Bob and Sharon Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Pete Sarafian, Nancy Severson, Kyle Swanson, and Linda Young. Warriors managed to haul out several bags of nasty invasives.

At right:

First-time Weed Warrior Kyle Swanson filled his bag with veldt grass and other invasive plants during the Saturday weeding day in February.

Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Los Osos / Morro Bay Chapter

SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION

Newspaper Picks Up Rasmussen Articles

SWAP members who live in Los Osos, Morro Bay or Cayucos will have an opportunity to see SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen's excellent articles in The Bay News. The articles, which have already appeared in issues of Oakleaves, will be included monthly in a section called The Back Page, under the heading, "Tales from the Elfin Forest." The Bay News is a weekly, delivered to homes in the three communities on Thursdays. The SWAP Board of Directors is pleased that Ron's articles, about issues concerning the Elfin Forest, will reach a wider audience.

Let's All Pull Together!

*Although things are beautiful and green,
Some plants in the Forest are obscene.
We intend to make short work,
Of the things there that lurk,
And are foreign, invasive and mean.*



*Please come out, and show up at nine,
The morning of Saturday is fine.
Dress for sun, wind and fog,
Sturdy shoes, gloves (no dog).
The pleasure will all be mine.*

I look forward to the pleasure of your company,
Pete Sarafian

SWAP First Saturday work parties ...

are held at 9 a.m. to noon on the first Saturday of each month. Volunteers should meet at the north end of 15th Street. Dress for sun and wind and bring work gloves if you can. Some work gloves, tools and drinking water are provided. Call 528-0392.

SWAP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

Ron Rasmussen, Chair
Pete Sarafian, Vice Chair
Bob McDougale, Treasurer
Yolanda Waddell, Secretary
Bob Meyer, Member at Large

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The SWAP Board of Directors
meets on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 p.m.
at the Coast National Bank, 1193 Los Osos Valley Road.

The next meetings are

Monday, April 11, and Monday, May 9.

All Board meetings are open to the public.
To confirm the date, time and location
(which are subject to change), phone 528-0392.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

April 16, 9:30 a.m. – Butterfly Walk

Butterfly enthusiast Bill Bouton will take you on a butterfly hunt in the Elfin Forest. He'll tell you how to identify the common butterflies of the Elfin Forest, and will give you hints on photographing them.. During the walk you might see Variable Checkerspot caterpillars munching on leaves of the Sticky monkey-flower plant, and Moro Blue butterflies hovering around silver dune lupines. Bring a hand lens and, if you have one, a pair of close focusing (5-10 ft.) binoculars. Check out the butterfly images at Bill Bouton's web site: <http://community.websshots.com/user/bbouton43>.

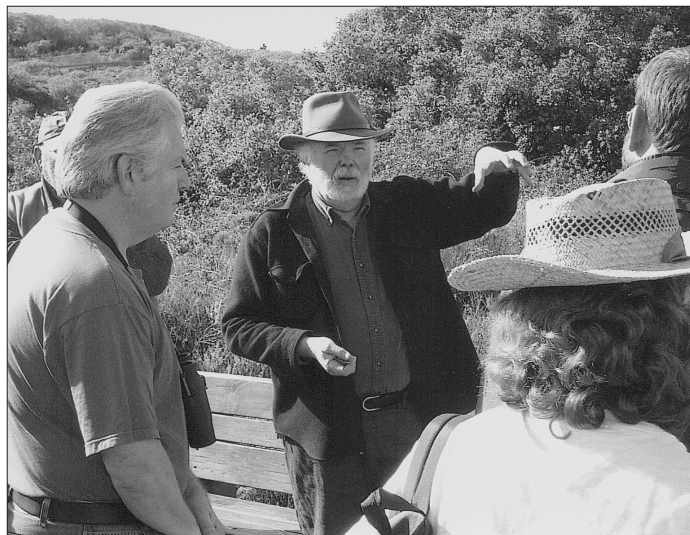
May 21, 9:30 a.m. – Wildflower Walk

Dr. Dirk Walters, Cal Poly botanist and author of a botany text, will take us on a wildflower walk during a perfect month for Spring wildflowers in the Elfin Forest. Come along and enjoy the bright yellows of Fiddleneck and Rush rose, the blue of Silver dune lupine, the whites of Popcorn flower and Pearly everlasting, and many more. As one of the Central Coast's best plant raconteurs, Dirk will share a choice piece of information about each plant species. He writes columns on native plants for SWAP's Oakleaves as well as the California Native Plant Society newsletter. Don't miss this one!

June 18, 9:30 a.m. – Solstice Walk

Summer Solstice is upon us! Bob & Joan Field will lead a Solstice walk based on the theme that the diversity, abundance, and distribution of life depend on seasonal changes and the interactions of sunlight and water. This time, Bob will emphasize the influence of the oceans on everything you can see in the Elfin Forest and Joan will highlight seasonal changes in the plants. The new content of the program should interest those who attended their winter solstice walk.

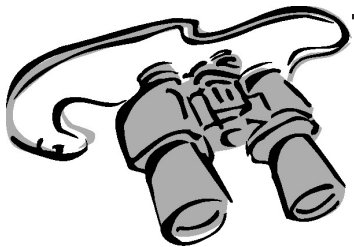
Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at 9:30 a.m. (unless otherwise noted) at the north end of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes. We ask that you not bring dogs or other pets. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.



Above: During his ecology walk in January, Les Bowker points out how much shorter the Coast live oaks are at higher elevations in the Elfin Forest than where the group is standing, due to less water and more wind.

Below: In spite of wet weather, twenty-two people showed up for Dennis Sheridan's Fungus Foray in February, dressed for rain. Holding the umbrella for Dennis is Tim Rochte, while Bob Meyer (left, in wide-brimmed hat) prepares his camera for wet weather, and Pete Sarafian enjoys Dennis's joke.

Photos by Yolanda Waddell.



CALLING ALL BIRDERS — YOUR SKILLS ARE NEEDED!

Break out those binoculars and spotting scopes and join other experienced shorebirders for the Morro Bay National Estuary Program's Volunteer Monitoring Program (VMP) spring shorebirding effort. The VMP is seeking volunteers with shorebird identification experience for a census on Saturday, April 23rd from 8:30 am to noon.

Under the coordination of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, shorebird surveys were conducted in Morro Bay between April 1988 and August 1994. Using the same protocol, the VMP has continued the effort with spring and fall surveys since 2003. Observers will be observing from land with spotting scopes, from kayaks or canoes on the

water, and from the Sandspit and Morro Strand from Morro Rock to the Rocky Point (Northpoint). Collecting these data will provide a view of the variability of shorebird numbers seasonally and annually, with the overall goal of tracking long-term trends. Shorebirds are an important bio-indicator of the health of the bay and the Pacific Flyway.

If you are interested in participating, please call Chris Long or Ann Kitajima at the NEP office at 772-3834.

Please respond by April 8th to participate.

Holly-leaf Cherry

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

The plant profiled for this issue of Oak Leaves is a fairly common, but rarely abundant, shrub or small tree. It has many common names including California cherry, California laurel cherry, Spanish wild cherry, mountain evergreen cherry, holly-leaf cherry, and "islay." One reference indicated that the name "islay" is probably derived from one of the native California languages. It would have come to us via the Spanish.

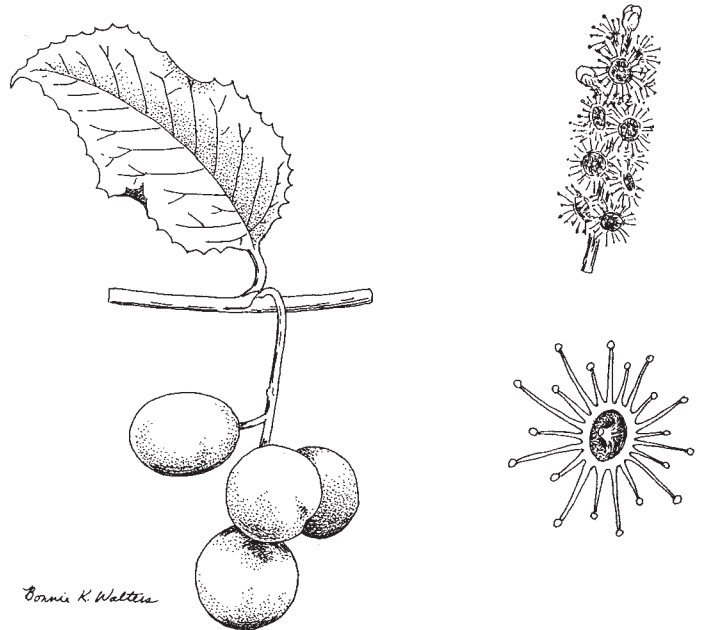
In our portion of California, the plant is most commonly known simply as holly-leaf cherry and this is a direct translation of its scientific name, *Prunus ilicifolia*. The genus name, *Prunus*, is the ancient Latin name for the plum with which the cherry shares its genus name. *Prunus* contains a number of other cultivated stone fruit crops including the peach, apricot, and almond. The first part of the specific epithet (*ilici-*) is derived from the genus name of true holly or *Ilex*. The rest of the 2nd name (*folia*) simply means leaf.

In the Californias, holly-leaf cherry is found from Napa county south through the Coast Range into Baja, Mexico. It is partial to brush communities including coastal scrub, dune scrub and especially chaparral. In the Elfin Forest it can be seen from the boardwalk around Bush Lupine Point and on the way to the Siena's View overlook. It appears to be restricted to the crest of the slope above the salt marsh.

The holly-leaf cherry produces bright evergreen leaves. However, like many California shrubs, it loses many of them during the dry summer months. The smallish flowers are produced in March and April and by fall, the plant is producing "cherries" an inch or so in diameter. These are said to have a sweet tasting, but very thin, flesh. It is reported that the red to yellow fruits stay on the plant for a very long time and this increases its appeal as a landscape plant.

The fruits are too large to be efficiently collected and/or eaten by our native birds, so I assume omnivorous mammals, such as raccoons, coyotes or bear, eat most of its fruits. Since these animals would not be welcome in large numbers near human habitations, it seems reasonable to me that their persistence on the shrub is actually a measure of animal population size. I further guess that if we could set up a transect beginning at the edge of a housing addition and ending far out in native shrub lands, we would find that the cherries disappeared rapidly in the wild and persisted near our houses. In other words, our transect data would be actually giving us an index to the health of larger native fruit-eating mammal populations. The faster the fruit disappeared the greater the number of mammals present.

Lee Lens, in his book, *Native Plants for California Gardens*, indicated that holly-leaf cherry was already being used in landscaping long before the first records appeared. All the books on landscaping indicate how forgiving it is. Although it prefers well-



drained soils, it is able to tolerate heavy soils. It is able to survive without water in the summer, but it keeps its good looks best with limited summer water. It even tolerates pruning. In other words, the plant seen in our gardens is essentially identical to the ones that grow in the wild. Most of the books recommend its use as a background specimen or even as a hedge. So, although it has had a long horticultural history, I was able to find no evidence of any sustained selection. It seems to be such a beautiful plant as is and is so tolerant of garden conditions that gardeners have seen little need to select garden specific varieties. That said, one source suggested that one way to "improve" it would be to select for thicker fleshed fruit. Of course, then the fruit would disappear as quickly from our garden plants as I assume it does from plants growing in wilderness areas.

Elfin Forest Sightings: Heavy Rains Awaken Blooms

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

(Ed. Note: This was written at the beginning of March)

Take a walk in the Elfin Forest as soon as you can. It is as green as can be. Many plants are blooming earlier than you can imagine. Many flowers seem to be at least a month early. The ceanothus plants already are in seed and have completed their blooming. Other plants in bloom now include peony, black sage, wallflower, monkey-flower, everlasting, silver dune lupine, fiddleneck, and popcorn flower. (There probably will be others soon, as well).

Thank You to Our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Wendy Brown, SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW MEMBERS:

Pat Brock Diener
Carmen Fojo*
Valerie Germanis*

Craig Griswold*
Bonnie Heikes
Merril Lynn

Terri Middlemiss*
Rick & Laura Vopatek
Karen West*

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Florence Appel*
Katherine R. Baker*
C.J. & Grace Beigle*
Michael C. Bondello*
Les & Rose Bowker*
Eleanor Brown
Phyllis M. Foulstone*
Woody & Adele Frey*
Tom & Rita Hadjiyane

Kirsten Holmquist*
Clement H. Jeffrey*
Charles & Laura Kass*
Aya Kimura*
Howard and Donna Krueger*
Annette Lindeman*
Lois & Frank Martinez*
Dorothy J. Norwood
Lori Olson*

Donald S. Parham*
Barbara Penner*
Barbara & Robert Rosenthal*
Max & Helen Sicher*
Shaunna Sullivan
& Ron Ruppert*
The Ungar Family*
Linda Young

**Thanks to those listed above who donated more than the \$12 membership dues.
The additional donations will be used for special projects in the Elfin Forest.*



SWAP Shoppers Order Form

1. MURAL SHIRTS (Older Design) - circle sizes

Words on shirt: "El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area,
Small Wilderness Area Preservation, Los Osos, California"

___ Short Slv. T-Shirt (med., Lg, XLg, XXLg, XXXLg) @ \$15.00 = ___
___ Long Slv. T-Shirt (med., Lg, XLg, XXLg, XXXLg) @ \$17.00 = ___
___ Sweatshirt (med., Lg, XLg., XXLg, XXXLg) @ \$25.00 = ___

2. MURAL SHIRTS (New Design) - circle sizes

___ Short Slv. T-Shirt (Sm, Med, Lg, XLg, XXLg, XXXLg) @ \$15.00 = ___
___ Long Slv. T-Shirt (Sm, Med, Lg, XLg, XXLg, XXXLg) @ \$17.00 = ___
___ Sweatshirt (Sm, Med, Lg, XLg, XXLg, XXXLg) @ \$25.00 = ___

3. PHOTOS OF THE ELFIN FOREST

Original photo note cards by Bob Meyer ___ @ \$3.00 = ___
Original photo postcards by Bob Meyer ___ @ \$1.00 = ___

4. MURAL PRINTS

signed 5 1/2" X 17" prints by artist, Barbara Rosenthal
___ Black matted Mural @ \$20.00 = ___

SUBTOTAL (Prices include tax) _____

Shipping cost if outside of Los Osos/Morro Bay \$2.50 = _____

TOTAL OF ORDER _____

(Please print when filling order — and indicate HOW MANY)

Name _____

Phone (with Area code) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Make checks payable and mail to:

SWAP, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6642.

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

New Stationery Items for Sale

We recently added a few new items for sale. Bob Meyer, one of SWAP's very faithful members is a man with many amazing talents. Among these is his enjoyment of taking pictures out in our lovely Elfin Forest. He has made some of his absolutely wonderful colored photos into note card stationery and post cards for SWAP. There are currently about 5 different views. The note cards sell for \$3.00 each and the post cards for \$1.00 each. When we have our booth during the year at different events, do come by and check out these new items.

Docents Needed
 for School Walks!

Los Osos / Morro Bay Chapter
 SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
 A Non-Profit Public Benefit Corporation
 P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442
 (805) 528-0392



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Docents Needed for School Walks



The Education Committee has been hard at work developing plans and making materials to use in teaching lessons for elementary school classes in the Elfin Forest. Lesson planning and material development is nearly complete for first and second grade classes (with lessons for other grade levels to follow). Several alternative learning activities have been developed for each grade level. We need docents willing to work with these materials to help students gain understanding of biological and environmental processes in action in the Elfin Forest. Plans call for one docent and one parent or teacher with each group of ten students. We expect to begin docent training soon.

If you would like to share the excitement of first- and second-graders as they discover key educational concepts among the fascinating plants and animals of the Elfin Forest, please call 528-0392.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

☐ New Member ☐ Renewing Member

☐ Member \$12 ☐ Defender \$100

☐ Steward \$25 ☐ Champion \$250

☐ Protector \$50 ☐ Guardian \$500

☐ Life Member \$1000

☐ I want to help, please call me!

Have you renewed your membership on time?

Check the label on this newsletter
 for your renewal due date.

EVERY membership counts!!

Make checks payable to: SWAP

Mail to: Small Wilderness Area Preservation,
 P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6442