

## O A K L E A V E S



## Elves and "Snailmobile" Featured in Parade

By Yolanda Waddell

When the SWAP Board received an invitation from the Los Osos Chamber of Commerce to participate in the Los Osos Holiday Parade on Saturday, December 10, we brainstormed several ideas to fit in with the parade theme, "Hollywood Holidays." We finally came up with our own "movie" title, "The Snail That Saved the Elfin Forest," and then had to figure out how to produce a giant snail for our float.

Bob McDougle agreed to let us use his red truck, and Bob Meyer drew a concept sketch of what he thought the "snail" would look like on the truck. Ron Rasmussen decided that a silver-colored tarpaulin could be folded and stuffed to suggest the slimy body of the snail, and he produced the snail body or "foot" in his garage. Pat and David Akey provided a dome tent to be used as the shell. Bob Meyer suggested that the

eye-stalks could be made out of gray flexible foam pipe insulation with Styrofoam balls for the eyes, and Ron figured out how to attach the "eye-stalks" to the tarpaulin body.

At about that time, a couple in Morro Bay, the Rudolphs, announced that they were selling all of their outdoor Christmas decorations including some elf costumes, so we bought seven elf costumes from them, complete with elf ears and shoes. Pat Sarafian, SWAP Volunteer Coordinator, did some phoning to recruit some "elves."

On Friday, December 9, several SWAP members gathered at

the house of Treasurer Pat Akey to assemble the "Snailmobile." Pat Akey, Bob Meyer, Jean Wheeler, and Jay and Yolanda Waddell took the snail body that Ron Rasmussen had produced, added the tent shell, and decorated the truck. Pat Akey made a sign with the title of our float, to be carried by two of the elves.

The day of the parade, seven SWAP elves, three weed warriors and truck driver Ron Rasmussen all met at the parade starting point. Dressed in bright green and red elf costumes were Pat Akey, Rosemary

Baxter, Ann Calhoun, Terri Gates, Sharon Meyer, Charlie Sitton and Jean Wheeler. In addition, three Weed Warriors: Pat Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell and Rosemary Wolter joined them. Two elves carried the banner, two elves carried small buckets of candy to toss to onlookers, and the rest carried shovels, including "drum major" Charlie Sitton. Although our strange-looking float didn't win a prize, we were cheered along the entire parade route, and hopefully attracted some new Weed Warriors. Thanks to all who participated!

Above: Jean Wheeler, using some folk dance steps, was a delightful dancing elf during the parade. She also handed out candy to children watching the parade.

Photo by Stan Thompson.

Top at right: Pat Akey used her sign-making skills gained from years of teaching elementary school, to produce our float banner for the Los Osos Holiday parade.

Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

At right: Snailmobile and Elves waited to be given the word to join the line of floats in the Los Osos Holiday Parade. Visible participants were (l-r) Sharon Meyer, Charlie Sitton (the "Drum major"), Rosemary Baxter, Pat Akey, Jean Wheeler, Ann Calhoun, and Snailmobile driver Ron Rasmussen. Behind Ron was Terri Gates. Photo by Bob Meyer.





## Lichens Flourish in the Elfin Forest

By Yolanda Waddell

While walking through the Elfin Forest, we always notice the plants and trees crowding toward the board-walk, but unless our attention is drawn to lichens, we tend to be unaware of the them, even though they are everywhere in the Forest, growing on trees, bushes, leaves, and even on the sandy soil.

Lichens are not vascular plants; that is, they don't have a system of vessels to aid in the transport of nutrients or water. They are the unique product of a symbiotic relationship between two entirely different organisms -- algae and fungi. The microscopic alga provides food through photosynthesis, using nutrients and water found in rain and the foggy Los Osos air, and the sunlight's energy. The fungus provides structure, some protection to the alga, and it holds moisture. On a foggy day, you can feel the moisture in the Lace Lichen that hangs from the branches of Coast live oak trees.

There are three general groups of lichens, based on their appearance. Foliose lichens look somewhat like leaves. They have lobes, an upper and lower surface, and are more-or-less circular in shape. Fruticose lichens can look like very small shrubs, or hang from their "substrate" (the base on which they live). An example of a fruticose lichen is the Lace Lichen (*Ramalina menziesii*). Crustose lichens are firmly attached to their substrate, and often

look like part of the tree or other support that they are growing on.

To call attention to the interesting variety of lichens in the Forest, some of SWAP's Third Saturday walks during the 1990s featured Cal Poly botanist Shirley Sparling, whose walk topic was Lichens, Mosses and Galls. More recently, Dennis Sheridan has highlighted some of the lichens during his annual February "Fungus Foray." Dennis, an ento-



Lichenologist Charis Bratt has identified and collected lichens throughout California.

She has an international following, and guides lichenologists from other countries to areas of interest on the Central Coast, including the Elfin Forest.

Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

mologist, is fascinated with fungi and lichens. He provided the list of fungi that is published in SWAP's new Pocket Guide to the Plants and Animals of the Elfin Forest; but for lichens, he referred the Pocket Guide Committee to lichenologist Charis Bratt, curator of the Santa Barbara Botanical Garden's Bratt-Tucker Lichen Herbarium.

So it was that during the summer of 2004, Cha-



The Splitting yarn lichen, Sulcaria isidiifera. Photo by Bob Meyer.

ris Bratt drove to Los Osos from her home in Goleta to walk through the Elfin Forest with members of the Pocket Guide Committee and identify the Forest's lichens. She showed us the *Usnea* or "rubber band" lichens, so-called because their strands stretch when you pull them. The genus *Usnea* contains usnic acid, a recognized antibiotic. Another interesting lichen is the *Cladonia*, which lives on the ground. One species, *Cladonia firma*, Charis nicknamed "Popcorn lichen" because it looks like small clumps of popcorn resting on the sand. Another species, *Cladonia asahinae*, is called Pixie-cup lichen because it looks like a very small flared cup. Charis showed us a very special lichen, and one that is important to SWAP and the Elfin Forest - the Splitting yarn lichen, *Sulcaria isidiifera*. This lichen (see photo) is a Federal Species of Concern, and its presence in the Elfin Forest helped in the effort to preserve the Forest.

Charis left with quite a long list of lichens, and promised to e-mail it to the Committee after she had done some chemical testing and research on a few species that she was unsure of. Soon a list arrived by e-mail, with the explanation that she had driven back to the Elfin Forest some time after her tour with the Committee, and found even more species of lichens. Her final list, which contains 56 species and their substrates, is published in the Pocket Guide along with common names that Committee Chair Bob Meyer researched. Charis laughed when she learned that we were concerned about common names, saying that she has enough trouble with the scientific names. However, Bob Meyer got the last laugh by giving a common name to *Hypogymnia gracilis*, a lichen that Charis is credited with identifying for the first time. He named it "Charis' hypogymnia."

## SWAP Completes Restoration Project

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

A significant milestone has been reached in the Elfin Forest. The worst disturbed area with veldt grass and iceplant infestation near the center of the park is now restored to native conditions. In the early and mid-1980¹s, neighborhood children tore up the dunes to the southeast of Bush Lupine Point. They engaged in motorbike races in the dune scrub. Areas were left totally denuded without a living thing to cover the fragile terrain. Erosion followed, and then invasive weeds took over. By the year 2000, veldt grass was so thick that it totally obscured part of the sand trail leading from 13th Street.

Starting in 2000, SWAP and the Weed Warriors began manually removing the weeds. Since that time, scores of volunteers have spent many hundreds of hours scouring the area for weeds. In late 2000 and early 2001, Americorps volunteers helped gather and sow native seeds in the area. In spring of 2001, there was an explosion of new native plant seedlings. The following year, SWAP installed green plastic mesh fencing around a half-acre area. A contractor began planting about 150 seedlings that Americorps and the California Conservation Corps grew for us. Over the next few years, SWAP has continued to weed and water the new plants. County Parks and the CCC added some more plants in 2004.

Now, finally, in January 2006 SWAP volunteers have removed the green mesh fencing from two sides of the triangle. If all goes well, and if the public does not intrude in the area and cause excessive damage, fencing on the last side of the triangle can come down. Back in the years around 2000 / 2001, SWAP was totally involved with weeding just in this area. Now that the weeds are successfully under control, SWAP can concentrate on other restorations.



Counter-clockwise from left:

Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair and faithful Weed Warrior, dug holes for anchor rods for the new symbolic fencing that has replaced the old green mesh fence.

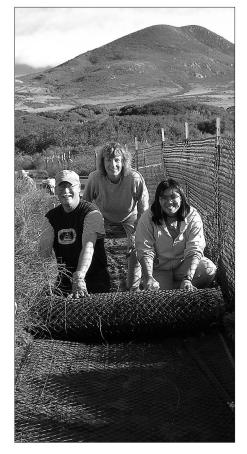
Rosemary Baxter, Janet Hillson and Sharon Meyer worked on installing anchor rods in holes dug by Ron Rasmussen (rear).

At the end of their fence building job, the tired crew took a moment to rest. The Fence Warriors (L-R) are Ron Rasmussen, Janet Hillson, Sharon Meyer, Rosemary Baxter, Pete Sarafian (Conservation Chair and project leader), and Bob Meyer.

Bob Meyer stopped for just a moment to pose while carrying in a batch of steel anchor rods for the new low fencing.

Happily removing and rolling up the green mesh fence that guarded the conservation plot near Bush Lupine Point were (L-R) Charlie Sitton, Gail Martin and Tiffany Masuda. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

All other photos by Yolanda Waddell.









## Weekend Volunteers Do Big Projects

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

In November 2005. SWAP's Wonderful Weekend Weed Warriors were at it again in the Elfin Forest. This time they stemmed the tide of erosion. There were many straw wattles at the top of the highway embankment along South Bay Boulevard that were weather-beaten. The warriors replaced or reinforced them with new wattles that should last for another year or two. They also trimmed the Orchid Trail so hikers would not be prone to stepping on the new erosion controls. The workers included Rosemary Baxter, Ben Burgoa, Steve Cake, Bob and Sharon Meyer, Pat and Pete Sarafian, and Jean Wheeler. They did a great job!

In December, the Weed Warriors installed symbolic fencing along the east and west sides of the old fenced triangular area that lies just southeast of the Bush Lupine Point overlook. The plan was to install new, low visual impact fencing, and then to remove the old plastic mesh fencing that had been installed in 2002. The work involved turning screw-type anchor rods into the sand, and then threading insulated cable through the eye at the top of each rod. It was hard work, but the warriors completed the task. The December crew consisted of Rosemary Baxter, Janet Hillson, Bob and Sharon Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Pete Sarafian and Yolanda Waddell. Nice work, folks!

In January 2006, the Weed Warriors completed the fencing work started in December. The old plastic mesh fencing was removed, hopefully for good. The area southeast of Bush Lupine Point overlook now has an open view and looks more natural. The side of the triangular area that is adjacent to the boardwalk was left with mesh fencing for the time being to discourage cross foot traffic. SWAP will evaluate how well the public treats the restored area before removing the last of the fencing. Assisting in fence removal were Jay Bonestell, Jan Harper, Gail Martin, Tiffany Masuda, Ron Rasmussen, Pete Sarafian, Charlie Sitton, Stuart Thompson, and Jean Wheeler. Thanks for all the hard work. The Elfin Forest really looks better now.

### Let's All Pull Together!

Weeds are turning the ground a brilliant green, Enough to make a warrior keen, To stop their growth right in its tracks, Let's show them that we're not just hacks.



Bring yourself and a friend if you choose, Here's your chance, there's naught to lose. Come on out and get a start On this year's crop, let's make it flop.

-- Pete Sarafian

#### 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 Pat Akey, Treasurer Yolanda Waddell, Secretary Bob Meyer, Member at Large Pat Sarafian, Member at Large

#### The Elfin Forest: Nature's Bonsai

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair

A visitor to SWAP's booth at the recent Baywood Park Oktoberfest noted that the oaks in the Elfin Forest resemble the trees produced using bonsai methods. "Bonsai" literally means to plant something in a bowl or basin. It does not necessarily mean a small container as often seen

in examples of the art. At the Huntington Arboretum in Los Angeles are bonsai trees up to three feet high with trunks several inches in diameter and with ages measured in at least decades. Perhaps trees like the dwarfed oaks in our Forest, with their stunted growth and twisted and gnarled trunks, served as models for bonsai artists through the ages.

The Elfin Forest is growing in a "basin" of a sort. It is bounded on two sides by the estuary and on the remainder by South Bay Boulevard and residential development, and thus cannot expand its area. The soil is mostly sand, poor in nutrients and dry except during the rainy season. Some moisture is available to those plants

"Bonsai" literally means to plant something in a bowl or basin. It does not necessarily mean a small container as often seen in examples of the art.

with deep root systems that can tap into the underground flow that moves toward the estuary from the surrounding hills. Water is also available from the frequent fogs from the ocean. Overall, however, the restrictions of poor nutrients and limited moisture result in growing conditions very much like those used in bonsai cultures.

The Elfin Forest further resembles a bonsai culture in that it requires care to maintain its character. Unwanted plants (veldt grass, etc.) must be removed and desirable plants encouraged or replaced. The oak groves need to be protected from overuse and vandalism. However the oaks and other plants are allowed to grow as they will, and are not trained into a particular form as in small bonsai cultures. The "bonsai artists" for the Elfin Forest are the loyal SWAP volunteers, the Boy Scouts, the California Conservation Corps, and County Parks personnel who do weeding, trash removal, boardwalk repair, and other necessary activities. You can join this dedicated group. If you would like to help preserve "Nature's Bonsai" just show up at 9 a.m. on the first Saturday of each month. Meet at the end of 15th street and avoid driveways and mailboxes when parking. You will be welcome.

## 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. Call 528-0392.

#### 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, February 13, and Monday, March 13

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

#### February 18, 9:30 - Fungus Foray

If there is plenty of rain in February, entomologist and fungophile Dennis Sheridan will be able to lead us to many beautiful, and some ugly, species of fungi sprouting from the Elfin Forest floor. He'll help us to find Earthstars, Wood blewits, Yellow staining agaricus, the poisonous Amanitas, Shaggy parasol mushrooms, and dozens of others. Bring a magnifying lens and, if you have a mystery mushroom in your yard, bring a sample for Dennis to identify. Note: this is not a mushroom collecting walk, as all plant material in the Elfin Forest is protected by law. If there hasn't been enough rain to bring out the mushrooms, Dennis will give us an equally fascinating walk about the lichens that grow abundantly in the Elfin Forest.

#### March 18, 9:30 - Photography Walk

Get a different view of the Elfin Forest through the lens of your camera on a walk designed for camera bugs of all ages and levels of experience. Marlin Harms, whose photos have been featured by several land conservancies and recently in two books, will provide pointers on composition and lighting as well as how to solve problems of high contrast lighting and dense foliage. Wildflowers will provide an opportunity for close-up photography. He'll address the needs of both 35mm and digital camera users. Marlin is a birder and naturalist in addition to being an excellent photographer, so you're bound to learn about the Elfin Forest itself. Noncamera users are welcome as well.

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 leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.

#### 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.

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.



Pete Sarafian finished his "Off the Beaten Path" walk in November with an overall view from the Highest Point in the Elfin Forest. Walk participants saw woodrat nests in the big lower grove and experienced all five of the Elfin Forest habitats during Pete's walk. Photo by Jean Wheeler.



Artist Barbara Renshaw (second from right) guided Sketch Walk participants to interesting plants and views to draw during her December walk.

Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

"The long fight to save wild beauty represents democracy at its best.

It requires citizens to practice the hardest of virtues — self-restraint."

Edwin Way Teale

## Chamise

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

The plant profiled for this issue of *Oakleaves* is a very common shrub in Southern and Central California. It is chamise or chamiso, *Adenostoma fasciculata*. This shrub is characteristic of interior shrub lands where it can grow in nearly pure stands, usually on steep south and west slopes. However, it is found in a wide variety of communities and situations.

In the Elfin Forest, Chamise is common only at the highest elevations and in the driest soils. These are bordering the southeast corner of the boardwalk. The species itself can grow over 10 feet tall, but in the Elfin Forest it only grows to 3-4 feet. This is probably due to pruning by salt laden on-shore winds that commonly blow across the Elfin Forest from Morro Bay.

Chamise is often the dominant shrub in the plant community known as chaparral. In fact, growth characteristics of chamise are essentially identical to those of chaparral. Individual chamise plants form branches that grow in an interlocking knot. The branches are hard and difficult to break. Thus, they create an impenetrable mass. When it grows in the interior chaparral, chamise branches will interlock with neighbors such that the whole community becomes impenetrable. In the Elfin

#### Visitor Comments

At right, Elsie Bethard, a resident of Los Osos since the mid-seventies, is shown enjoying a visit to the Elfin Forest with the help of Ramona Benson (pushing Elsie's wheelchair). She said that it is one of her favorite places in Los Osos, and of course she wouldn't be able to visit the Elfin Forest if it weren't for the boardwalk.

Last October, Fran Brunsell and George Sehn of Glendora, California, sent a donation to SWAP



with this comment: "On a recent trip to Los Osos and the Central Coast, we took a walk at Elfin Forest. We enjoyed our visit. Enclosed is our donation to help keep this preserve for visitors and residents."

And more recently, while working on removing the green mesh fence from the conservation plot at Bush Lupine Point, Jean Wheeler heard an Elfin Forest visitor comment, "What a change - that area was bare sand just a few years ago!"

Forest, however, individual chamise plants rarely intrude into surrounding shrubs.

Chamise, like chaparral itself, is extremely flammable due to its production of volatile oils. One would not want to use it as a foundation planting in fire prone areas. Also like chaparral, it has at least two adaptations to recover after fires. First, it is a prolific producer of seeds that can remain dormant in the soil for a long time. Chamise seed dormancy is broken by heat from fire or from the combustion products produced by the fire. Secondly, Chamise also has an underground enlargement of the junction between root crown and stem base (burl). Since soil contains a large amount of air space, it serves as an insulator that prevents temperatures from reaching critical heights as little as an inch below the fire base. Because of the oils, stems and leaves burn so rapidly that the fire doesn't remain in one spot long enough for heat to build up.

Chamise has a couple of characteristics that

discourage its use in landscaping. These include its high flammability and its extreme commonness. However, I think it is a quite handsome plant. Its evergreen leaves are small but occur in clusters so numerous that vegetative plants appear to be dark green from a distance. In spring and early summer countless small whitish flowers literally coat the plant changing it from green to white. These flowers have very small petals and 5 groups of 2-3 stamens attached to a relatively massive bowl-shaped flower base (hypanthium). The single small pistil arises from the bottom of the bowl. Although the petals and stamens fall off after flowering, the hypanthiums remain to turn a rusty brown. Since there are so many of them, the plant changes color from white to reddish.



Thus depending on the season, chamise may appear to be dark green,

white or red from a distance, giving a variety of colors to the garden.

#### OAKLEAVES

is published six times per year beginning in February. Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler; layout is by Katy Budge. Editing assistance by Pat Grimes

Contributors to this issue: Wendy Brown, Bob Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters, Jean Wheeler

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## Thank You to Our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Wendy Brown, SWAP Database Coordinator

**NEW MEMBER:** Vickie Maples\*

#### **RENEWING MEMBERS:**

Susan Armstrong Lois Barber\* Iav Bonestell\* William Bouton\* Katy Budge\* Andrew Chermak\* David & Linda Chipping\* Andrew Christie Vic, George, & Doris Croy\* Alice Cushing\* Stephani & Stuart Denker\* Pauline Dewitt Ileen Doering\* Tim & Kathy Dugan\* Leland & Valerie Endres\* Linda Faust\*

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\*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 =		
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Sweatshirt (med., Lg, Xlg., XXLg, XXXLg)	@ \$25.00 =		
2. MURAL SHIRTS (New Design) - circle sizes			
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Useful 56-page guide to plants & animals of the Elfin Forest	@ \$2.00 =		
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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 Item!

SWAP has recently published a 56-page Pocket Guide update titled, "Plants and Animals of the Elfin Forest Natural Area." It contains lists of the Forest's mammals; reptiles and amphibians; birds; common arthropods including a separate list of butterflies and moths; gastropods; a descriptive list of vascular plants, mushrooms; and a 56-species list of lichens. There is also a Habitat Map of the Elfin Forest.

The Pocket Guide sells for \$2.00.

#### Please check renewal date on your label.

Spring is here! Take a friend to the Elfin Forest.

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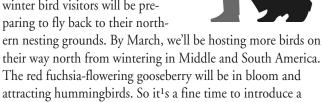
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# Introduce a Friend to The Elfin Forest

This is a great time of the year for birds and wildflowers in the Elfin Forest. In February, our winter bird visitors will be preparing to fly back to their north-

friend to our beautiful preserve.



Pick up a trail guide where the 16th Street Entrance meets the boardwalk or where the Bush Lupine Point spur leaves the boardwalk loop. Encourage your friend to enjoy the information in the trail guide and in the beautifully-illustrated Interpretive Signs. Watch for lizards, butterflies, unusual birds and look for animal tracks in the sand.

Report especially wonderful or unusual sightings to one of the editors for "Elfin Forest Sightings" in a future issue of *Oakleaves*.

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-				
	☐ New Member	☐ Renewing Member		
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MEMBERSHIP FORM

Memberships include a subscription to SWAP's bimonthly newsletter, *Oakleaves*. All donations to SWAP are tax-deductible. EVERY membership counts! Make checks payable to: SWAP. Mail to: Small Wilderness Area Preservation, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.

☐ I want to help, please call me!

02/06