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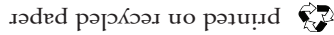


For brochures and registration for the 13th annual festival itself and its popular birding tours and other events, call Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce at 805-772-4467 or 1-800-231-0592, or go to the website online at www.morrobaybirdfestival.org.

SWAP needs volunteer workers for our booth at the festival headquarters in Morro Bay. Vendor booths are open to the public without festival registration. Our booths are set up to be self-explanatory, and we'll provide you with a question and answer sheet for the most commonly asked questions. We'll sell T-shirts and other items. Help us to get the word out about SWAP and the Elfin Forest.

Please call our answering machine, 528-0392, if you can help us, and state whether you'd prefer a morning or afternoon shift.

Please check renewal date on your label.



SWAP Calendars and TShirts Make Great Gifts!

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 www.elfin-forest.org



MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____

Address _____

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Phone _____

☐ New Member ☐ Renewing Member

☐ Member \$25 ☐ Defender \$100

☐ Steward \$50 ☐ Champion \$250

☐ Protector \$75 ☐ Guardian \$500

☐ Seniors & Students \$15

☐ Life Member \$1000

☐ I want to help, please call me!

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.

12/08



OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF THE LOS OSOS / MORRO BAY CHAPTER of SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ♦ (805) 528-0392 ♦ DECEMBER 2008 / JANUARY 2009

“As Time Goes By”... SWAP's Year in Review

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair

2008 nears its end. The Los Osos/Morro Bay chapter of SWAP is well into its twenty-fourth year of caring for the Elfin Forest. The Forest has been restored to a beautiful example of coastal chaparral and oak woodland. This was accomplished through the efforts of devoted volunteers. Without their continued work, the Forest could not have survived and become the unique place that we know today. But, as time goes by, these few dedicated persons also feel the physical changes that come with the passage of years. To preserve the Elfin Forest a new cadre of volunteers must step up and assume this responsibility. Without new blood, the Elfin Forest will likely revert to the state existing before SWAP became its steward. Non-native plants such as iceplant and veldt grass will invade, and the Forest will become another sand dune that will slowly erode into the bay.

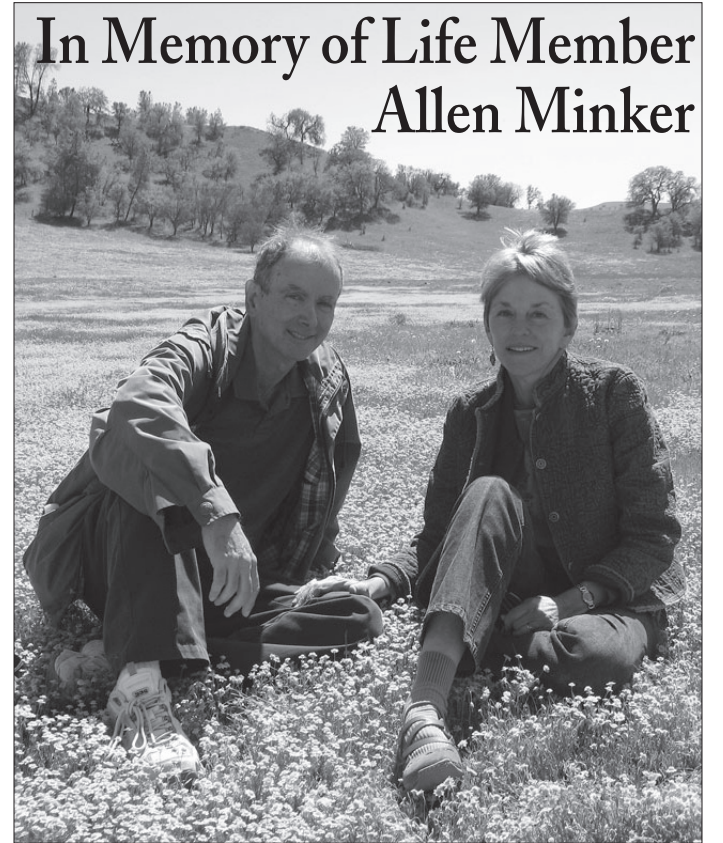
SWAP has a formal agreement with San Luis Obispo County Parks to act as steward for the Elfin Forest. This Adopt-A-Park agreement extends until 2014. If you care about preserving the Elfin Forest, please consider becoming a regular volunteer. SWAP especially needs new members for its Board of Directors. The

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In Memory of Life Member Allen Minker



*Life Members Allen and Susan Minker seen here among wildflowers at Shell Creek Road, also loved the natural beauty of the Elfin Forest.
Photo courtesy of Susan Minker.*

By Yolanda Waddell

Allen Minker, judge, journalist and world adventurer, died of lung cancer at his home in Los Osos on September 25, 2008. He was 63. He and his wife Susan became life members of SWAP shortly after they moved to Los Osos from southeastern Arizona, where Allen was a superior court judge. Allen became a volunteer attorney in the Paso Robles office of California Rural Legal Assistance, an organization that provides legal help to low-income people. He was elected to the Los Osos Community Advisory Council, and chaired the group for two years. Susan, a professor and physician, also became involved in numerous organizations. They both found the Elfin Forest to be a place of respite from their busy lives. So they gave their financial support as a thank you to SWAP for its stewardship. We of SWAP are grateful to Allen and Susan, and send our heartfelt condolences to Susan.



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 / Treasurer
Pete Sarafian, Vice Chair
Yolanda Waddell, Secretary
Pat Akey, Member at Large
Debbie Levi, Member at Large
Bob Meyer, Member at Large
Pat Murray, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly
on the 2nd Monday at 7 p.m. at
the Community Center of
Sea Oaks Mobile Home Park,
1675 Los Osos Valley Road.
The next meetings are
Monday, January 12
and Monday, February 9.
All Board meetings are open to the public.
To confirm the date, time and location
(which are subject to change), call 528-0392.



CONTACT SWAP

If you have questions about SWAP activities
or want to volunteer, please call 528-0392 and
leave a message. A recorded message will give
information about our 3rd Saturday Walks,
Work Saturdays, and other events. If you have
questions, concerns or comments about any
problems in the Elfin Forest, call or write:

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
or Chuck Lowe at 781-4417.

Calling all Elves to March in the Holiday Parade

The Los Osos Chamber of Commerce will hold its annual Holiday Parade on
Saturday, December 13th, at 10 a.m. on Los Osos Valley Road between Fairchild
Avenue and Palisades, a distance of six blocks. Our chapter will participate this
year with several elves leading, followed by all Weed Warriors who wish to join us.
SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen will toss candy from the SWAP wheelbarrow which
will be pushed by Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian. Do you fancy yourself as an
elf? Elves or Weed Warriors can call us at 528-0392 to join the fun. You will be
much applauded by enthusiastic onlookers.

As Time Goes By continued from page 1

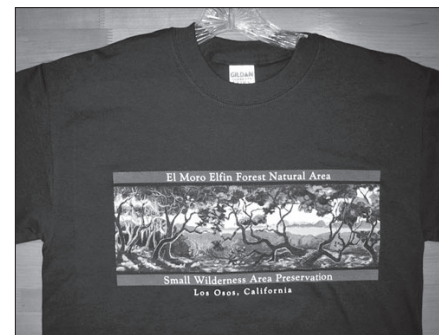
treasurer's position is now open. Also, we need help in fund raising and for educational
programs for the community. We must find new members for our Board to ensure that
we can fulfill our obligations to County Parks and the Community. The time commit-
ment is very flexible, and the reward is knowing that you will be helping preserve an
irreplaceable resource for our community.

I am happy to report that the financial health of our organization is good. Our
major source of support continues to be our loyal membership, with many members
contributing more than the small membership dues. Over 60% of our income is from
this source. Merchandise sales contribute about 20% and the remainder is from grants
and unsolicited donations. Overall, our total assets have increased by about 4% in the
past fiscal year, ending on June 30, 2008. It is very important to remember that SWAP
has no paid staff. All work, including Elfin Forest maintenance, publication of the
OAKLEAVES newsletter (except for layout, printing and mailing costs), record keep-
ing, and correspondence are all done by volunteers. If it were necessary to pay for staff
we would not be able to continue our work at the present level.

The future will present some serious challenges for SWAP. We will need to raise
funds for more than just routine activities in the Forest. For example, the boardwalk is
showing signs of age (it was built in 1999) and it is not certain that County Parks will
have sufficient funds for repairs. Other smaller projects, similar to next year's extension
of the boardwalk into the Rose Bowker Grove, may become desirable. Invasion of the
Forest by non-native plants continues to be troublesome. At the edges and in isolated
spots, Cape Ivy (*Delairea odorata*) has become a real problem. At the southwestern
edge a new invasive grass, panic veldt grass (*Ehrharta erecta*) threatens to spread into the
Forest. With the rainy season, dormant seeds of veldt grass (*E. calycina*) will sprout in
many areas of the Forest and the sprouts must be removed.

On a positive note, SWAP has the opportunity to actually add more land to the
Elfin Forest. We have received an invitation to purchase about two-thirds of an acre of
vacant land at the extreme southwestern tip of the Forest. This property is contiguous
with the Forest and is covered by a dense population of oaks and other native vegetation
identical to the Forest. If we are successful in this purchase, the actual addition to the
Forest would be more than two acres. This is because the uncompleted streets adjoin-
ing the property would be abandoned by San Luis Obispo County and also become
part of the Elfin Forest. We do not have the resources to purchase the land ourselves
and will need to obtain grants and contributions from other sources. SWAP will gladly
receive contributions from our members toward the purchase of this property. Please
call us if you would like more information.

In conclusion, 2008 has been a good year for SWAP and the Elfin Forest. Thanks
to all our loyal members and volunteers as we look ahead to a great 2009.



SWAP Has Great Holiday Gifts!

Mural T-shirts and sweatshirts and mural prints make wonderful gifts for your
loved ones. Our artistic 2009 calendars will recall your thoughtfulness every month
of the new year. And the lovely note cards, postcards, and pocket guides make good
stocking stuffers! A gift donation or life membership in the name of your relative or
friend would also be much appreciated.



SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

All Prices Include Sales Tax

1. MURAL SHIRTS

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

Circle Sizes:

____ Short Slv. T-Shirt (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 = \$ _____

2. PHOTOS OF THE ELFIN FOREST

Original photo note cards by Bob Meyer

____ @ \$3.00 or ____ 5 @ \$14.00 = \$ _____

Original photo postcards by Bob Meyer

____ @ \$1.00 = \$ _____

Indicate No. per View(s):

____ All 5; ____ Don Klopfer Trail; ____ Ocean View;

____ Wild Hyacinth; ____ Horned Lizard; ____ Dudleya

3. POCKET GUIDE

Useful 56-page guide to plants and animals of the Elfin
Forest. Charts for bloom season, form, color, and habitat
for 200 vascular plants plus lists of lichens and mushrooms
known to occur. Habitat and peak months seen are charted
for 187 birds. Also listed: 28 common mammals; 10 reptiles;
4 amphibians; 19 butterflies and moths (charted by size,
months in flight, color, and host plants); 104 other arthro-
pods and 7 gastropods.

____ @ \$2.00 = \$ _____

4. ELFIN FOREST MURAL PRINTS

____ signed prints by artist Barbara Rosenthal,
image size 4 1/2 x 16 1/2 in;

mounted on foamcore

____ @ \$20.00 = \$ _____

or framed size 7 x 20 in

____ @ \$35.00 = \$ _____

5. 2009 ELFIN FOREST CALENDAR

Enjoy the all year round these creative views
of the Elfin Forest by outstanding local artists!

____ @\$15.00 = \$ _____

Shipping cost if outside Los Osos/Morro Bay

Pocket Guides & Note Cards: \$1.50 = ____

Framed Mural Prints: \$12.00 = ____

Calendars & all other items: \$3.00 = ____

TOTAL OF ORDER \$ _____

(Please print when filling order, and indicate how many of each)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone (w/area code) : _____

Make checks payable and mail to:

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

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

Thank You to Our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW MEMBERS:

M. Bertrand and R. Dodge
Justine Cameron
Delia K. Smith
Peter and Chalys Stephens

RENEWING MEMBERS:

David and Rosemary Bentley	Leland and Valerie Endres* Carla Grindle*
George and Cynthia Boatenhamer	Bill and Meg Henry*
William Bouton*	Herbert and Debra Holt*
Wendy Brown*	Roberta Knapp*
Doug and Lee Buckmaster	Patricia Murray
Mark and Robin Cohen	Monica Rowcliffe
E. Craig Cunningham	Gewynn and George Taylor*
Suzanne Dannenbring	Charles Templin
Marion DeCruz*	Keith and Beth Wimer
Kathleen M. Delzell*	June Wright
Leo and Ileen M. Doering	

SPECIAL DONATIONS:

Anonymous donation
Alice and Lisa Bertrand
(gift in honor of Bill & Meg Henry's Wedding)
Mary C. Topp
Ron Weaver (Big Sit donation)

**Thanks to those listed above who donated more than the \$25 membership dues. The additional donations will be used for special projects in the Elfin Forest.*

*As light faded at the end of the Big Sit, birders spotted the last few bird species to bring the total for the day to 108.
Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



Big Sit birders worked in shifts at Bush Lupine Point during the day-long event, checking with spotting scopes and binoculars to identify species not yet seen.

“Big Sit!” Report

By Jim Royer; photos by Yolanda Waddell

After ten years of doing an annual “Big Sit!” bird count (one day of sighting birds from one 16-foot circle) at Bush Lupine Point in the Elfin Forest, there were still many surprises for the counters on this last October 12. Many of the species we had usually spotted from the overlook were absent this year (possibly due to our drought), such as Wilson’s Snipe, Killdeer, Song Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Western Meadowlark. On the other hand, we had four new species for the count - White-faced Ibis, Vaux’s Swift, Steller’s Jay, and Blackpoll Warbler. The Blackpoll, a bird that usually migrates east of the Rockies, was perhaps the least surprising of the four as it has been an unusually good Fall for them here. The day’s flight of migrant land birds was average or better with a fair number of warblers and the largest number of swallows we have ever had at the big sit here, mostly Violet-greens. The single Vaux’s Swift was with one of these swallow flocks.

While the number of resident land birds in the coastal scrub of the Elfin Forest was noticeably down, the Morro Bay estuary was as productive as usual. Clouds of shorebirds (14 species), five species of terns, and ten species of ducks followed the rise, fall, and second rise of the tide. While the shorebirds and terns followed the edge of the water, the ducks were easiest to see when the tide was higher. Ten species of raptors also soared and hunted over the bay.

Despite slow periods, it was an entertaining day of birding with displays by an adult Peregrine Falcon, calling aggressively at a Red-tail, and diving on and screaming at a harrier. We watched this Peregrine and an immature Merlin, a smaller falcon, hunt along the estuary. An Osprey caught a fish in the bay and flew by our perch as if to show off its catch. While things slowed in mid afternoon when the tide was very low, they picked up with a small flurry of sightings just before the light faded at dusk.

Twenty-one counters made it fun: birding, eating, drinking, socializing, and more birding. The few who lasted to the end, toasted with champagne to the beautiful sunset behind the sand spit that separates Morro Bay from the Pacific.

We had as many as eight spotting scopes on our platform at once and 21 good birders. We’d like to think that we didn’t miss too much, but our total of 108 species was well below our all time Big Sit high of 122 species. Our ten year species list for the Big Sit at the Elfin Forest now stands at 174 species.



2008 Annual Meeting All About Lichens and Awards

By Yolanda Waddell, SWAP Secretary; photos by Bob Meyer

Attendees at our chapter’s Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition were treated to a fascinating Power Point program on lichen diversity and conservation by State Park Ecologist Lisa Andreano. Lisa explained the basics about lichens, such as the names of the three types: crustose, foliose and fruticose. She helped us to appreciate the invaluable part that lichens play in supporting ecosystem health. For instance, in dune environments lichens can form a crust on the sand that helps to prevent erosion and acts as a soil stabilizer. This allows dune plants to flourish. Lisa has produced a book, *Common Lichens of Estero Bay*, and has co-authored two other books on flora and butterflies of Estero Bay.

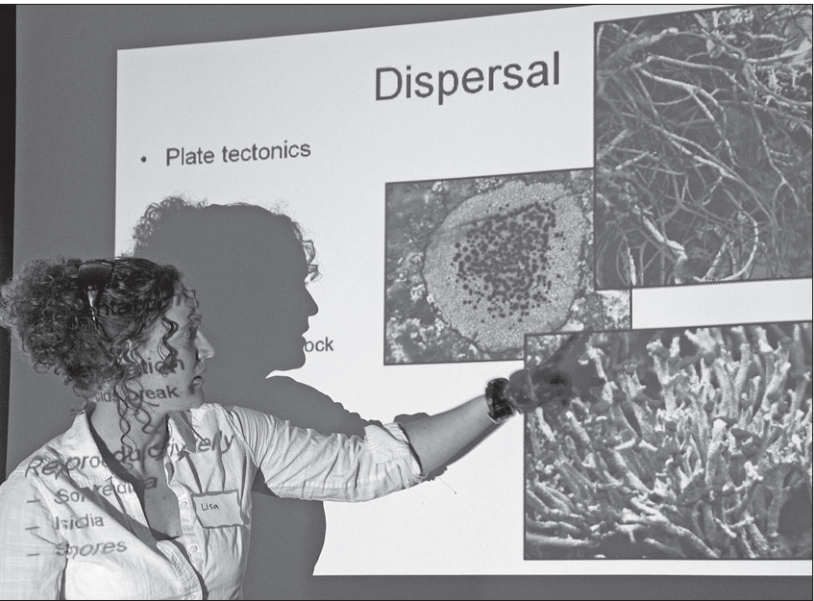
In the business section of the meeting, Treasurer Ron Rasmussen, who is also SWAP Chair, reported that SWAP is doing well for a small non-profit organization. Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian discussed the progress being made with our weeding and revegetation programs. In addition, members present voted unanimously to approve an addition to chapter bylaws regarding reimbursement of volunteer expenses. They also unanimously re-elected Debbie Levi, Pat Murray, Ron Rasmussen and Pete Sarafian to the SWAP Board.

Chair Ron Rasmussen announced that SWAP Database Coordinator Betsy Kinter was chosen to receive the Volunteer of the Year Award for her excellent work. She maintains the chapter’s database as well as taking on the task of sending thank you letters to members and donors, and recently added the task of sending out renewal reminders. Betsy wasn’t able to attend the meeting, but will receive a framed Elfin Forest print.

Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian gave the Weed Warrior Golden Trowel Award to Ron Rasmussen for his constant work in weeding as well as watering new plants. Pete also handed out new work gloves to Weed Warriors who had worked twice or more during the past year. Volunteer Chair Pat Murray gave photo bookmarks of Evan’s Grove (photo by Bob Meyer) to all volunteers who were present at the meeting. Following the meeting, a tasty lunch of Subway sandwiches, veggies, fruit and cookies was enjoyed by all.

Thanks to Darren Nichols of Subway for providing the sandwiches and donating a portion of the luncheon.

*Top: Ron Rasmussen was awarded the Golden Trowel for being the hardest-working Weed Warrior during the past year.
Middle: State Parks Ecologist Lisa Andreano lectured about the importance of Central Coast lichens and the need to conserve them.
Bottom: New SWAP member Mimi Whitney Haffti signs in so that she can participate in electing Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter Board members.
Calendar Chair Debbie Levi is seated at right.*





Above: The courting dance of male Anna's Hummingbirds is a rapid dive from over 100 feet in the air to just above the bush where the female waits and watches. Below: Pygmy oaks draped with lace lichen are a much-loved sight in the Elfin Forest.



Nature's Gifts in the Elfin Forest

By Yolanda Waddell; photos by Jean Wheeler

The Gift of Birds:

Encounters with birds are often brief and dramatic. Rounding a curve on an Elfin Forest path in late winter, I hear a high-pitched whoosh—like a tiny jet plane coming out of a dive. A miniature bird streaks upward into the blue sky until almost out of sight, hovers a moment, then dives straight down. Throat and head flash bright crimson in sunlight as it pulls out of its dive over a ceanothus bush where its lady love is perched, watching. Again the mini-roar. It is the courting display of an Anna's hummingbird, a year-round resident in the Elfin Forest.

Farther along, the sight of a large, beautiful hawk perched on a stump stops me in my tracks. Up go the binoculars. It has white streaks above and below its eyes, giving it an intense expression. My birding friend identifies it as a female northern harrier. It spreads its wings, almost four feet across, and flies low, intently searching the ground for mice, woodrats or other small prey.

The Gift of Animals:

Wild animals do their best to hide from humans. Except for brush rabbits and lizards, the 28 species of mammals and 10 species of reptiles that inhabit the Elfin Forest are seldom seen. Most of the mammals are nocturnal—night hunters. All we see of them is their tracks crossing sandy paths early in the morning. Friends have told me about the thrill of seeing a deer, bobcat, coyote, or gray fox. As I walk the paths of the Elfin Forest, I content myself with the knowledge that I am passing the homes of “nightworkers,” and step quietly.

The Gift of Plants:

Pygmy oaks draped with lace lichen; Morro manzanita displaying its white and pink lamp-shaded flowers; ceanothus covered with a profusion of white or pale blue blossoms, like snow on its branches. All year long, something is in bloom in the Elfin Forest. In January the California peony has garnet-colored flowers drooping from its stems; in June heavenly blue Woolly star petals cover the ground around each low-growing plant. It's a Garden of Eden, still in its natural state, right here on California's Central Coast.

The Gift of Land:

Open spaces—grasslands, chaparral, woods and forests. In Central California we tend to take open space for granted. But people move in. A lot here, an acre there; gradually oak trees and coastal chaparral are bulldozed to make way for human “nests,” streets and shopping centers. It takes an alert and caring community to maintain a balance between human needs and the needs of our other neighbors, the animals and plants that share this earth with us. Preservation of the El Moro Elfin Forest is a gift we have given to its wild inhabitants, to ourselves and our children, and to future generations—a gift of nature for all time.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

December 20, 9:30 a.m. –

Geographer's View of the Solstice

December 21 is Winter Solstice, so named in ancient times because it seemed as if the sun was “standing still.” Geographer Dr. Jean Wheeler will explain this phenomenon and what the relative wanderings of the sun, moon and earth mean to us in terms of our climates, tides, and the vegetation and animal life around us. She'll use charts to explain how seasons are caused by differences in sun angle, and how some plants grow well on the shaded northern slopes of the Elfin Forest, while others require more sunshine and thrive along the ridge tops and gentle southern slopes of the Forest dunes. Join us for this energetic and “enlightening” walk and talk!

January 17, 9:30 a.m. – *Animal Tracks Walk*

Join Evan Albright, an animal track expert, to find out who is “tracking up” the Elfin Forest. Evan will demonstrate how to tell which are the front feet or back feet of a raccoon, and what the difference is between coyote tracks and dog tracks. Visitors will learn to look for other signs that a wild resident of the Elfin Forest has passed that way, such as hairs on a fence or “scoot” marks where the animal squeezed through a fence hole. This walk will open up a complex world of the Elfin Forest's inhabitants, one that we would never suspect while walking along the boardwalk.

February 16, 9:30 a.m. – *Fungus Foray*

For our fifteenth annual Fungus Foray in the Elfin Forest, intrepid leader and fungophile Dennis Sheridan will take us on an exploration of the Elfin Forest floor for wood bluetts, black elfin saddles, earthstars, golden caps, boletes, poisonous amanitas and many other fascinating 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, as all plants in the Elfin Forest are protected by law. Only a very heavy rain will cancel the walk, and if it hasn't rained, Dennis will give us an equally fascinating walk about the lichens that grow abundantly in the Forest.

Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at times stated above. Park at the north end of 15th Street (16th Street for wheelchairs) off Santa Ysobel in Los Osos. Walks begin on the boardwalk at the end of the 15th Street path. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes. Please leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.



During October, physicist Dr. Bob Field gave a mind-expanding walk and talk about evolution in relation to the Elfin Forest.

Photo by Jean Wheeler.



In September, Cuesta College geologist Jeff Grover answered a question about the relationship of the Irish Hills, south of Los Osos, and the Elfin Forest. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

“We want the active and zealous help of every man far-sighted enough to realize the importance from the standpoint of the nation's welfare in the future of preserving the forests.”

- Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), 26th U.S. President

SWAP Calendars: Gifts of Nature

By Debbie Levi

Support SWAP by ringing in the New Year with a SWAP 2009 calendar gift to a friend or family member. You'll be giving them beautiful scenes of the Elfin Forest and supporting SWAP in our work to maintain this lovely preserve for future generations.

You can support our goals by purchasing the 2009 Elfin Forest calendar featuring the artwork of 22 accomplished local artists plus informative and educational text. The \$15 cost is a tax-deductible donation to SWAP. Calendars are available at: Los Osos Chamber of Commerce, Los Osos Rexall Drugs, Volumes of Pleasure Bookshop, Art is For Everyone in Baywood, as well as the SWAP Shoppers Order Form on page 11 of this issue of *Oakleaves*.



California peonies have large green leaves and deep red flowers that face downward when they bloom.



Buckbrush dominates the chaparral during winter with its profuse white to lavender blossoms.

The 13th Annual Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival is being held January 16-19, 2009, and registration is open now through January 5, 2009; download a brochure from the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival web site at www.morrobaybirdfestival.org. Online registration is also available. The weekend vendor show at the Morro Bay Community Center is open to festival attendees and the general public at no charge.

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Article and photos by Jean Wheeler

With our early November rains, our wonderful winter wild-flowers should be coming up splendidly by the time you receive this issue. The Elfin Forest is at its greenest with the winter rains. Against that green, the bright red of the Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberry makes a cheerful holiday statement. Lower to the ground, look for the small red flower globes of wild California Peonies. These plants are only a foot or so high and usually partly shaded by bushes of the dune scrub or maritime chaparral.

Some of our larger shrubs should be coming into bloom also. Buckbrush, among the many species of the *Ceanothus* genus, is one of the dominants in the maritime chaparral, so its white to lavender flowers nearly surround the boardwalk at this season. Two white-flowered “trees,” both shrub-sized in our stressful environment and tucked in more protected areas of the lower boardwalk, are Toyon, widespread in California, and Morro Manzanita. The latter is a very narrow endemic found only along the coast between Montana de Oro and Morro Bay State Parks, with the Elfin Forest preserve nearly centering its limited range. The tiny bell-shaped flowers of the Morro Manzanita are listed in our Pocket Guide (*sold on page 11*) as white, but often have a somewhat pinkish blush.

December and January are peak seasons for “birders” to visit our area. Thousands of wintering birds in many species join the already rich diversity of our year-round resident birds, making the Morro Bay area one of the top birding meccas of the nation. The Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival (*see below left*) celebrates this marvelous spectacle, popular with local birders and visitors from all over the United States and some foreign countries. Virtually all of the water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide are present and at peak populations in these two months, as are all the raptors listed, and a great many of the passerines. Sometimes from Bush Lupine Point or Siena’s View, the water of the estuary seems nearly covered by the thousands of water and wading birds. The shrubs around the boardwalk can be alive with flitting finches, sparrows, warblers, wrens, bushtits, and many other little brown and little grey birds. Watch for the hummingbirds busily gathering nectar as they pollinate the red tubes of those Fuchsia-flowered gooseberries. Among the not-so-little birds of the brush are phoebes, thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, quail, blackbirds, and doves.



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: Betsy Kinter, Debbi Levi, Bob Meyer, Susan Minker, Pat Murray, Alon Pearlman, Ron Rasmussen, Jim Royer, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters, and Jean Wheeler.
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If possible, all copy should be submitted by e-mail to:
ywaddell@kcbx.net AND jeanwheeler@charter.net.

Sixty-fourth in a Series

Bedstraws

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

The three species of plants discussed this time are all members of the genus, *Galium*. Bedstraw is the most universally used common name for this genus. Locally, bedstraws come in three very easily recognized forms based on their stems and leaves, which Bonnie has drawn for the illustration.

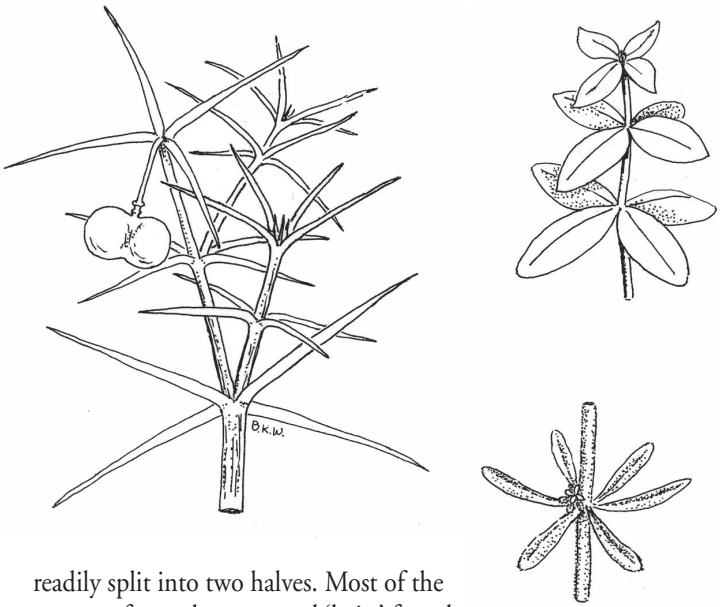
The most distinctive of the three has the whorl of four extremely narrow, needle-like leaves, most longer than the space between adjacent leaf attachments. *G. andrewsii* grows commonly among shrubs and under oaks and is easily distinguished from any of the 11 or so other SLO County bedstraw species. It has not been recorded in the Elfin Forest, but it wouldn’t surprise me if it will be found growing in its drier areas.

The other two species shown have shorter, broader, flat leaves. The species listed as *G. nuttallii* in the Elfin Forest Pocket Guide is the one with the four leaves per whorl. The last species pictured, *G. aparine*, is the only annual and, as shown, usually has six leaves per whorl. It is also the only non-native species commonly found along semi-shady paths, streams and as a garden weed throughout the county. This weedy species has recently been reported at the western end of the Elfin Forest.

In *The Jepson Manual*, the current authority on California plant identification, *G. nuttallii* is restricted to Southern California and should not be growing this far north. Also, the taxonomy of the genus has been revised relatively recently. The plant growing in the Elfin Forest should now be called *Galium porrigens*.

Why ‘should be’ and not ‘is’ called? There are several species of locally common four-leaf per whorl bedstraws and the characteristics used to distinguish these species are easily overlooked, such as whether the very thin stems are woody only at the base or more-or-less extensively woody. Also, the shape and size of leaves as well as the amount and nature of ‘hairs’ on the stem and leaves are quite variable depending on whether they grow in sun or shade. This causes the variation to overlap among the species. Each of the three pictured species is divided further into several varieties, which also makes easy identification difficult.

Several common names applied to this genus also reflect the subtle distinguishing characteristics among species. So far I’ve found goose-grass, cleavers, catch-weed, hay-ruff, mutton-chops, scratch-grass, grip-grass, Robin-in-the-hedge, and sweet-hearts. Goose-grass refers to the plant’s extreme desirability as a forage plant. I suspect cleavers refers to those species, with large fruits that



readily split into two halves. Most of the names refer to the re-curved ‘hairs’ found on stems, leaves, and fruits of many of the species, which serve to attach to animal hair or fuzzy clothing. The plants then steal a ride as an aid in fruit/seed dispersal. *G. nuttallii* bears minute re-curved hairs and smooth, fleshy fruits so it is not dispersed in that way. If you squint at some of the bi-lobed fruits they can be made to resemble a valentine heart. Has anybody heard of a better explanation for the name sweet-hearts?

The most universal common name, bedstraw, obviously comes from the pioneer practice of stuffing dried bedstraw, especially one from Eurasia called sweet bedstraw, into pillows and mattresses. The dried stems and leaves are reported to give off a sweet odor which is supposed to give one sweet dreams.

Elfin Forest Sightings

Deer are not often seen in the Elfin Forest. However, the November Weed Warrior crew found numerous deer tracks along the Habitat Trail. Also, an Elfin Forest neighbor on 15th Street has complained about deer coming out of the Forest and eating his plants and shrubs. The deer apparently pass through the preserve at night, or at dawn or dusk, when they are least likely to encounter human visitors.

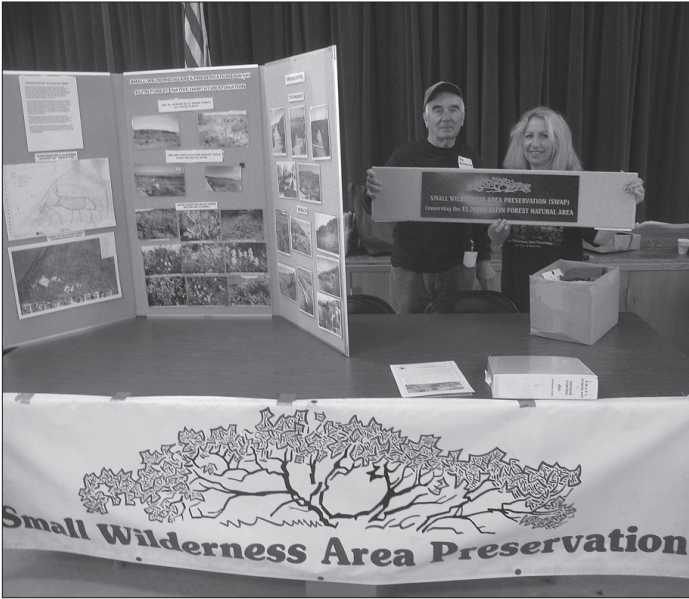
Many gardeners living at the edge of wilderness preserves find it helpful to stock their gardens with deer-resistant plants. Gardening books, such as those published by Sunset Magazine, often provide lists of many trees, shrubs, vines, groundcovers, perennials, bulbs, and annuals that deer will usually leave alone.

Please Report Elfin Forest Sightings

Have you observed any unusual birds in the Elfin Forest? Mammals? Reptiles? Amphibians? Insects? Interesting activities or footprints of wildlife in our Elfin Forest? Unusual plants? Please report any interesting wildlife activity or plants that you see to Jean Wheeler at jeanwheeler@charter.net for inclusion in future Oakleaves issues under “Elfin Forest Sightings.” You can also leave a message on SWAP’s answering machine, 528-0392.

Swap Volunteers Staff Booth at Three Local Events

By Pat Murray and Yolanda Waddell



Our chapter's exhibit on erosion control in the Elfin Forest at the first Los Osos Water Conservation Event, was staffed by (L-R) Ron Rasmussen and Debbie Levi. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



County Parks Volunteer Recognition Party
In September, County Parks staff, coordinated by Stacey King, gave a Volunteer Recognition Barbecue to honor many dedicated volunteers who give their time. SWAP members who attended included Ed and Susan Chandler, Pete Sarafian, Jay Bonestell, Jay Waddell, Ann Bonestell, Ron Rasmussen, and Bob and Sharon Meyer. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Heather Lucio (center) and Pat Murray helped a customer purchase a mural T-shirt at the Los Osos Craft Fair in October. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Our wonderful caring SWAP volunteers have again responded to the call, staffing our booth for 2-hour shifts at three recent events in Los Osos. In September there was a meeting at the Community Center on "Saving Our Water, One Drop at a Time." Pat Akey, Debbie Levi, Ron Rasmussen, and Yolanda Waddell staffed a table for SWAP at that event.

Gray skies did not stop folks from enjoying the Baywood Park Oktoberfest on Sunday, October 26. Experienced SWAP volunteers who set up, staffed, and took down the booth included Pat and David Akey, Rosemary Baxter, Ann Calhoun, Susan Chandler, Debbie Levi, Sharon and Bob Meyer, Pat Murray, and June Wright.

A special thank you goes to first-time worker Cindy Konrad (and her infant daughter Eleanor who was held by Mom in her sling). Very special thanks also go to another first-time worker, Heather Lucio. Heather worked one entire 2 hour shift and then stayed around to help the last shift and assist in dismantling and loading all items on the truck. And special thanks once again to Bob Meyer for the use of his truck.

The Los Osos Annual Holiday Arts, Crafts and Collectibles Fair was held on Saturday, November 1 at the Community Center. Debbie Levi, Heather Lucio, and Pat Murray were all on hand again to set up and staff the SWAP booth for that event.



Elves needed for Holiday Parade!

Do you fancy yourself as an elf? See page 2, then call us at 528-0392 to join the fun.

Weed Warriors

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chairperson

October Work Party Rained Out

The first seasonal rain of the year cancelled the September work party. This is the first time that this has happened in several years. However, the last time a work party was held in the rain, the few volunteers who braved the weather with Pete Sarafian never returned. SWAP hopes that their health did not suffer. It now is the policy of the Conservation Committee to cancel rainy day work parties. What is good for the Elfin Forest (rain) is not necessarily good for volunteer Weed Warriors.

November Work Party Tackles Trails

The Don Klopfer Trail that traverses the oak woodlands down by the Bay has become somewhat of a hazard lately. Low hanging branches have forced visitors practically to crawl on their hands and knees. This is especially difficult for the senior citizens who join us for third Saturday nature walks. Our November Weekend Weed Warrior volunteers re-positioned parts of the trail and strategically trimmed branches to make the trail easier to follow. They also used some of the dead branches on the ground to outline the new confines of the trail and make it easier to follow. When this task was completed, time was left to improve the control of water and erosion on the sand trails to 12th, 13th and 14th Streets. The warriors raked, hoed and shoveled sand out from behind erosion bars and moved the sand uphill. This helps to channel water and erosion in desired directions rather than downhill along the trails and into the streets. Joining in the trail work were Zach Green, Rich and Prisila Johnson, Bob and Sharon Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Dar Reynolds and Pete Sarafian. A sincere thank you to all who helped. The much-needed tasks were accomplished well.

Let's All Pull Together

The recent rains cut a few furrows,
And critters continue their burrows.
We must stop the erosion,
And exotic explosion,
While enjoying our view of the Morros.
*Yours in integrated pest management,
Pete Sarafian*

SWAP First Saturday Work Parties

SWAP First Saturday Work Parties are held at 9 a.m. to noon on the first Saturday of each month. Please dress for wind, fog, or sun. Layers work well. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are best. Sturdy shoes are a must. Meet at the north end of 15th Street at the Elfin Forest entrance. Take care not to park in front of drive-ways or mailboxes. Call 528-0392.



The November Weed Warrior crew members seemed pleased with the results of their hard work along several trails. Left to right are: Zach Green, Rich Johnson, Prisila Johnson, Dar Reynolds, Pete Sarafian, Sharon Meyer and Bob Meyer. Photo by Ron Rasmussen.



New Weed Warrior Zach Green cleared sand from erosion bars to help control erosion during the winter rains. Photo by Alon Pearlman.