



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 ♦ DECEMBER 2011 / JANUARY 2012

Restoration: Who Cares?

By Ron Rasmussen

SWAP Chair and Conservation Committee Chair

From Webster's Dictionary: restoration, n. a putting or bringing back into a former, normal, unimpaired state or condition.

SWAP and its many volunteers, in collaboration with San Luis Obispo County Parks, the California Conservation Corps and the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, have restored much of the Elfin Forest to what it was before it was misused by visitors and invaded by noxious weeds. The people involved clearly understood what restoration means and were willing to work literally for years to accomplish their goals.

The accomplishment of these goals was not always straightforward. In spite of the obvious benefit to the community there was resistance to any change in the status quo. It was argued that no weeding or trail maintenance should be done, and certainly no boardwalk should be built. These objections continue to this day. Nevertheless, good sense has prevailed and the Elfin Forest has been restored nearly to the state before the non-native plant invasion and adverse human impact.

A similar drama is now being played out around the Morro Coast Audubon Society's (MCAS) aim to restore the recently acquired eight-acre parcel adjacent to the Sweet Springs Nature Preserve. Briefly, the MCAS proposes to remove the invasive veldt

Restoration continued on page 3

An Information-Filled Annual Meeting



John Chesnut, active member of the local California Native Plant Society, described the native plant cultivation project at Los Osos Middle School.

Photo by Jean Wheeler.

By Yolanda Waddell

Our SWAP chapter's annual community meeting was held on Saturday, October 15, in a new venue for us – the Sage Eco-Garden and Nursery in Los Osos. On a lovely autumn day, SWAP members sat in the nursery's demonstration garden and learned about California native plants and local conservation projects.

Nursery Manager Sam Bettien described the characteristics of our climate and soils, encouraging us to "get rid of that thirsty lawn

Annual Meeting continued on page 3

❖ Inside This Issue ❖

- 2 *Annual Treasurer's Report*
- 3 *Help Wanted!*
- 4 *Fox Sparrow*
- 5 *Watson's Salt Bush by Dirk & Bonnie Walters*
- 6 *SWAP News*
- 7 *Weed Warrior News*
- 8 *Coming Up in the Elfin Forest*
- 9 *Walks in the Elfin Forest*
- 10 *New & Renewing Members*
- 11 *SWAP Shoppers' Order Form*

Make the Switch to Online Oakleaves

We have been able to reduce our printing order for Oakleaves by 50 copies thanks to readers who have switched from paper copies to online only. Check out www.elfin-forest.org and click on the button that will take you to the current online issue of Oakleaves, with the pictures shown in full color. If you are comfortable with reading text on your computer screen, we ask you to seriously consider giving up your paper newsletter for the online version.

Just send an email to oakleaves@elfin-forest.org with the words "Online version only," in the subject line. Add your name and address in the message space, and feel good because you've just cut our cost and saved a piece of a tree. Thank you!



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
Jan DiLeo, Treasurer
Yolanda Waddell, Secretary
Pat Akey, Member at Large
Debbie Levi, Member at Large
Pat Murray, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly
at the Community Room, Morro Shores
Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

The next meetings are
**Thursday, December 8,
and Thursday, January 12.**

All Board meetings are open to the public.
To confirm the date, time and location
(which are subject to change),
call (805) 528-0392.



CONTACT SWAP

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

A recorded message will give information
about our 3rd Saturday Walks,

Work Saturdays, and other events. If you have
questions, concerns or comments about any
problems in the Elfin Forest, call or write:

Mark Wagner

SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger
1087 Santa Rosa Street, SLO, CA 93408
(805) 781-1196

Owners of dogs off-leash can be cited. If you
witness dogs off-leash, vandalism or obvious
crimes, call the County Sheriff at 781-4550
or Mark Wagner at 781-1196.

Annual Treasurer's Report

SWAP's fiscal year for 2010 to 2011 began on July 1, 2010, and ended on June 30, 2011. Our income exceeded our expenses by \$6,246 by the end of the fiscal year, and our net worth increased from \$62,914 to \$69,161. SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen commented that our solid financial status, even in difficult economic times, is due to the generosity of our members and the success of our annual Elfin Forest calendar fundraiser. Thanks to all for your generous support of SWAP and the Elfin Forest. The following report was prepared by SWAP Treasurer Jan DiLeo.

SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION ANNUAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR JULY 1, 2010 TO JUNE 30, 2011

INCOME

Operations	\$4,950.00
Special Projects	\$4,160.00
Donations	\$1,819.20
Trail Guide Sponsor	\$550.00
Merchandise (shirts, etc.)	\$1,063.80
Calendar Sales & Sponsorships	\$8,759.00
Subtotal	\$21,302.00
CD Interest (estimate)	\$528.00
TOTAL	\$21,830.00

EXPENSES

Oakleaves	\$7,015.34
Organizational Dues/Membership	\$664.00
SWAP's Phone	\$489.13
Booth & Parade Fees	\$95.00
Filing Fee - Federal Taxes	\$25.00
Office Supplies, Stamps, P.O. Box, etc.	\$287.87
Calendar Costs & Sales Tax	\$4,219.82
Merchandise Costs & Sales Tax	\$118.00
Annual Meeting Expenses	\$79.49
Education Expenses	\$254.14
Conservation Expenses	\$259.51
Insurance Coverage	\$877.00
Storage Facility (Rent)	\$1,199.00
TOTAL	\$15,583.30

NET EXCESS (DEFICIT) \$6,246.70

ACCOUNT DATA

AS OF 07/01/10	
Bank Account	\$17,692.02
CDs (including int. estimate)	\$45,172.43
Petty Cash	\$50.00
TOTAL	\$62,914.45
AS OF 06/30/2011	
Bank Account	\$23,410.72
CDs (including int. estimate)	\$45,700.43
Petty Cash	\$50.00
TOTAL	\$69,161.15
NET INCREASE (DEFICIT)	\$6,246.70

We'd Like Mail!

We encourage our readers to submit photos, letters to the editor, or interesting and timely information by e-mailing to oakleaves@elfin-forest.org. We look forward to hearing from you. *The Editors.*

Annual Meeting *continued from page 1*

and plant natives.” Assistant Manager Matt Bjerk talked about types of native plants that will attract birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife. He provided an outline of their talk and a chart of plants that support wildlife in Los Osos. Our thanks to both Sam and Matt for helping us in many ways, including setting up and taking down chairs. Special thanks to Manager Sam for arranging to donate 10% of the nursery’s weekend sales to our SWAP chapter. Our thanks also to Sage owner Todd Davidson.

SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen introduced two other speakers: Stephanie Little, President of Morro Coast Audubon Society and John Chesnut, Rare Plant Coordinator for the San Luis Obispo Chapter of California Native Plant Society (CNPS). Stephanie described Morro Coast Audubon’s plans for restoring their recently acquired 8-acre parcel next to the Sweet Springs preserve. See Ron Rasmussen’s discussion of MCAS’ project in his article, “Restoration: Who Cares?” on page 1.

John Chesnut’s topic was “Growing Native Plants at Los Osos Middle School.” Every year he works with 120 seventh graders in the Life Science classes to propagate native plants. The California Native Habitat Garden Project includes learning the science of native plants and then raising plants in the school’s greenhouses. Seedlings are then donated to local restoration projects. John said that several students from this class have gone on to major in botany in college.

Ron Rasmussen talked about SWAP’s long-time partnership with the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP). He reminded listeners that the 90-acre Elfin Forest is just one part of the 48,000-acre Morro Bay Watershed. The MBNEP’s goals and activities include restoring areas that are overgrown by invasive plants or badly eroded throughout the watershed, especially along waterways. MBNEP grants have aided SWAP in many revegetation and erosion control projects.

Refreshments after the meeting were provided by SWAP Board members. Patricia (Pat) Akey and Yolanda Waddell were unanimously re-elected to the SWAP Board of Directors.

(top right) Morro Coast Audubon President Stephanie Little explained how the Audubon Chapter plans to restore the 8-acre addition to Sweet Springs.

(middle right) Matt Bjerk, Sage Nursery Assistant Manager, described how to grow healthy native plants, such as the Black sage that he was holding.

(at right) Sage Nursery Manager Sam Bettien told listeners about the many benefits of using native plants in their gardens.

Photos by Bob Meyer.



Restoration *continued from page 1*

grass and, over a period of 10 or more years, to remove the non-native eucalyptus trees. In parallel, the parcel would be replanted and seeded with native plants indigenous to the area, including coast live oak trees. The resulting restoration can be expected to enhance biodiversity and complement the biota in the adjacent part of the preserve.

Objections to the MCAS plan are largely esthetic. In some cases, the objectors’ arguments almost show a religious fervor. While the grove of eucalyptus is a “nice place to visit”, the down side is that these trees also actually inhibit biodiversity because of their toxic leaves and sap. One argument against removing the trees was that owls and other raptors would not have a place to roost. We have observed owls and other raptors roosting elsewhere in the coast live oak species which would replace the eucalyptus trees here. Also, the eucalyptus trees in the adjacent part of Sweet Springs are not to be removed and will still offer roosting sites. In summary, the only way to restore this parcel is to proceed as was done in the Elfin Forest. Namely, remove the non-natives and replace with natives. It is hoped that MCAS will succeed in their efforts.

Help Wanted – *Urgently*

Publicity Person: someone who has a computer, knows how to send a group e-mail, and can forward information about SWAP work parties, walks and special events to the media.

Web Site Maintenance Person: someone who is acquainted with, though not necessarily expert in, HTML. We will train. This person will work with the other member of the Web Site Maintenance Committee and the Web Master in keeping the information on SWAP’s Elfin Forest web site up-to-date.

To apply for either position, please call the SWAP message phone, 528-0392.

Fox Sparrow

Text By Jean Wheeler, Ph.D. Photo By Marlin Harms

Our pocket guide (sold on page 11) lists nine species of sparrows for the Elfin Forest, four as year-round residents and five visiting only seasonally. The Fox Sparrow, (*Passerella iliaca*) is seldom seen here and only in winter. It is one of the largest and stockiest of sparrows, with a length of about seven inches and wingspan to slightly over ten inches. Fox Sparrows are gray, brown, or reddish brown on the back and head with reddish brown wings and tails. The breast is heavily streaked with inverted v-shaped spots varying from light brown to almost blackish brown. The lower mandible is usually yellow.

There are four visually distinct geographical populations of this species, which early DNA studies tend to confirm, and separate species may be recognized with further study. The bird in Marlin's photo appears to belong to the Sooty (Pacific) group, having a uniformly brown back and sooty brown head.

The Red (or Taiga) Fox Sparrow breeds in northern Alaska and Canada and winters in southeastern United States. Its bright reddish patches and streaks the color of red foxes gave the name to the species. The Slate-colored Fox Sparrow of the interior west has a plain gray back with redder tail and wings and a thin beak. The Thick-billed Fox Sparrow of the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountains is colored like the Slate-colored subspecies, but has a much more massive bill than the other three groups.

The Sooty Fox Sparrow breeds on the coast from the Olympic Peninsula of Washington to the Aleutian Islands and winters along the Oregon and California coasts. The Sibley Guide to Birds notes that populations of Sooty Fox Sparrows breeding farthest north and west are palest in color, which matches Marlin's picture, so his bird may have traveled here from a nest in the Aleutian Islands!

Male Fox Sparrows sing to defend territory and attract a mate. Females build bulky nests on the ground or low in shrubs or trees, made of grasses and sticks and lined with hair, moss, and feathers. They incubate about two to five eggs for a scant two weeks. Both parents feed seeds, insects and berries if available, to the young. Fledglings leave the nest in less than two weeks, and the parents usually raise a second brood.

In winter migration, Sooty Fox Sparrows seek chaparral or brushy streamside habitat. They are usually solitary rather than social in behavior and very shy. Ground foragers, they scratch in leaf litter, jumping backwards pulling debris with both feet to expose insects as well as seeds. The loud noise they make foraging is one clue to spotting them, although some of our other species of sparrows jump and scratch similarly. Their song is a long series of irregular notes, which are thinner, more buzzy and staccato for the Sooty subspecies than for the other three Fox Sparrows.

Congratulations, Marlin, for not only spotting this shy and fairly uncommon winter visitor to our Elfin Forest, but also for getting such a wonderful photo of it!



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 sightings to your Oakleaves editors at: oakleaves@elfin-forest.org for inclusion in future issues under "Elfin Forest Sightings." You can also leave a message on SWAP's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.

SWAP First Saturday Work Parties

We invite you to join us on any first Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon at the north end of 15th Street in Los Osos to enjoy satisfying physical activity in fresh air amid lovely surroundings. Please dress for wind, fog, or sun. Layers work well. Long pants and long shirt sleeves are good. Sturdy shoes are a must. Take care not to park in front of driveways or mailboxes. To request more information, call (805)528-0392.

Artists: Start Painting For the Next Calendar

The Calendar Committee is beginning work on the 2013 calendar, featuring works by local artists. We want to get the word out early so that artists will have plenty of time to go to the Elfin Forest, select one or more subjects, and begin painting. Whatever the medium, the end products that the Calendar Committee wants are full-color digital images on a CD. The main subject, as always, is the Elfin Forest. For more detailed information, call our SWAP message phone, 528-0392.

Watson's Salt Bush

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

The plant featured in this issue of *Oakleaves* would not generally be considered worthy to be presented to a general audience because its flowers are tiny, its appearance mundane. It grows along the uppermost edge of coastal salt marshes and the edges of sand dunes. In other words, in order to find this plant one will have to leave the boardwalk and find a way down into the salt marsh. Searchers probably don't have to worry about getting wet feet, however, because it grows where it gets inundated by only the highest of tides. *Atriplex watsonii*, or the Watson's salt bush or Watson's orach is a native plant in a family that past students in Cal Poly's Field Botany class nick-named the "Uglyaceae."

The recognized common names are just translations of the scientific name. *Watsonii* is named in honor of Sereno Watson (1826-1892) who worked as a curator in the Gray Herbarium. I'm not sure whether he was the first to collect the plant or the first to do a taxonomic treatment of it. He was a student of plants of the Western United States who participated in the Clarence King Expedition which studied the natural history, especially geology, of California in the middle of the 19th Century. He published the *Botany of the King Expedition* in 1871.

Orach is derived from the Middle English common name for the plants included in this genus. Salt bush is the more contemporary common name applied to all members of the genus. (This is in spite of the fact that not all of them grow in salty soils or are bushes.) Most members of the genus do favor or even require salty or alkaline soils. The habit of this particular salt bush is a prostrate to mounded herb/shrub. It has very thin stems that spread out laterally becoming mounded only in the center. At its tallest it is less than 10 inches tall. However, it can grow to several feet in width.

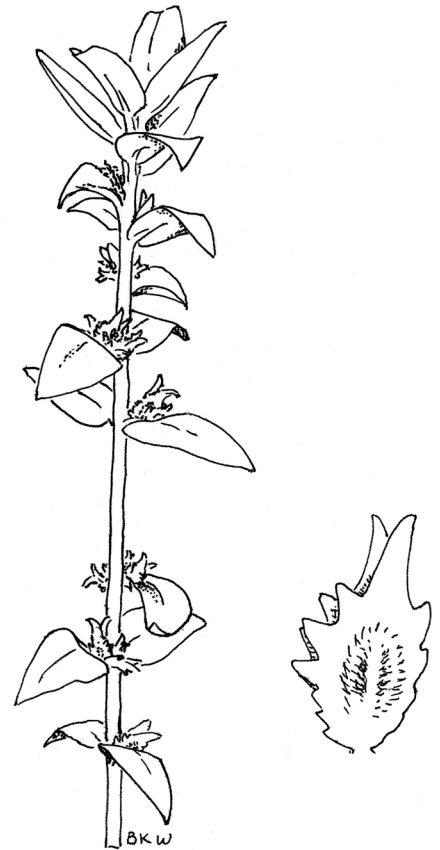
The drawn plant is in fruit. Why show it in fruit? Well, the most obvious reason is that it is fall or winter and this is when most plants are in fruit. But, more importantly, it would be even less exciting when it is in bloom as the flowers are very tiny. Male (staminate) flowers are borne on separate plants from the female (pistillate) plants (dioecious). The male flowers are located in the axils of leaves and are clustered in short, dense spikes. The plant shown is pistillate. We know this because there are clusters of small, paired bracts in the angle between stem and leaf base (axils). Bonnie has drawn one of these 'bract sandwiches'. One would expect to find a dry, single-seeded fruit between the two bracts, but most of the bract pairs are empty.

Like many plants that occur in difficult environments such as salt marshes, resources are expended on surviving rather than on reproduction. A second evolutionary consideration is that the probability of establishing a successful new individual plant in difficult environments is itself extremely low. So, why waste energy producing seeds when they will have an extremely low probability of finding an available site in which to germinate and grow?

Some may have noticed that I have not identified the family to which salt bushes belong. This is because taxonomy texts and the upcoming *Jepson Manual* are going to place them in different families. Classically, before DNA sequence data, salt bushes were placed in the goosefoot family (Chenopodiaceae). When DNA sequence data became available, it was noted that genera of the mostly temperate zone

Chenopods and the mostly tropical family, Amaranthaceae, came out together. This led some taxonomists to combine the two families into one.

Since the Amaranthaceae is the older name, it had 'priority' over the name, Chenopodiaceae. Therefore, if the two families are combined, then the Rules of Botanical Nomenclature require that Amaranthaceae be used. The classical Amaranthaceae contains only three genera (one of them the very common and weedy pigweeds, *Amaranthus*). In contrast, the classical Chenopodiaceae is huge in California. It consists of at least 17 genera and many species. Although most common in deserts, it is found in many other habitats as well. In other words, the classical Chenopodiaceae contains many species that dominate many habitats in California, whereas the classical Amaranthaceae are minor components.



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: Pat Akey, Jan DiLeo, Betsy Kinter, Dave Keeling,
Debie Levi, Bob Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Jim Royer, Pete Sarafian, Jay Waddell,
Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters and Jean Wheeler.

Printed at Hay Printing, Morro Bay on recycled paper.
Labeled and mailed at Achievement House.
Deadline for copy to Oakleaves is the first Wednesday before the month of issue.
If possible, all copy should be submitted by e-mail to:
oakleaves@elfin-forest.org.

Education Corner

*By Pat Akey, Education Committee Chair
Photo by Yolanda Waddell*

In the Elfin Forest our docents use open spaces along the Boardwalk to teach students from kindergarten through college. Docents use hands-on approaches and teaching processes such as question and answer, presentation of information, focus on concepts, and exploration of causes and effects.

Recently through the expert coaching of one of our teacher consultants, Judy Neuhauser from Monarch School, the docents focused on learning to interpret the Forest through sound, sight, taste, feel, and smell. They will lead students to experience the fullness of the Elfin Forest through all of the senses. Rather than just pointing out sights, docents will be asking students what they see, hear, taste, feel and smell.

As you can see, our docents spend much of their time preparing as well as presenting their knowledge to foster the most satisfying learning experiences in the Elfin Forest.

The Education Committee needs more docents and committee members. If you are interested or have questions, please call our message phone 528-0392.



Ron Rasmussen (left), first put this group of Cal Poly freshman volunteers to work doing erosion control, and took them on a tour of the Elfin Forest. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Elfin Forest Sightings

During September and October, Elfin Forest visitors were thrilled to hear and see the elusive coyote, and to be treated with the sight of an Osprey and a Peregrine Falcon soaring overhead.

In September, Pete Sarafian reported that, "the coyote family singers were active, crooning to the wail of fire sirens." Pete said, "They were a little out of tune, but may recover in time for the local Canine Choir Competition."

On October 8, during the Pre-Big Sit! bird walk led by Jim Royer, a beautiful Osprey soared directly overhead at Bush Lupine Point. Jean Wheeler quickly pointed her camera and took the adjacent photo. Later in the walk, a Peregrine Falcon did a slow, soaring dance in front of the Siena's View overlook, amazing those who are used to seeing Peregrines streak past at break-neck speed.

On October 9, a group of birders at Bush Lupine Point were diligently searching the sky and estuary for more species to add to their list. Suddenly there was a short howl and a bark, and someone noticed a coyote crossing the field that is east of Bush Lupine Point. Fortunately Dave Keeling had brought his camera with a high-powered lens, and captured the adjoining close-up that shows a healthy-looking (and well-camouflaged) coyote, pausing for a moment to observe the group of birders.



(above left) This Osprey did a flyover, giving bird walk participants a rare closeup view. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

(at left) A coyote pauses to observe birders on the boardwalk. Photo by Dave Keeling.



*Ron Rasmussen, left, with the help of Prisila Johnson, removed screws from a broken erosion control box to save the good boards for re-use.
Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



Dave Bowlus, standing, worked with three new Weed Warriors on digging and setting posts for new erosion control boxes.

Warriors Fight “Downhill” Battle

Erosion control was the focus of Weed Warrior efforts on Saturday, October 1st. Conservation Chair Ron Rasmussen led the crew down the boardwalk, across the Habitat Trail to the dead pine tree and then down to the steep trail that is held up with erosion control “boxes.” Time, dry rot and foot traffic had caused two of the “boxes” – really two posts with crossboards attached – to collapse. The Weed Warriors removed the broken boards, replaced them with new ones and dug the posts back into the steep path.

After that project was complete, the intrepid warriors moved to the sand paths leading to the boardwalk from 14th, 13th and 12th Streets. They dug sand from behind the water bars and then dug channels to drain any accumulated rain water away from the path. Our wonderful Weed Warriors who fought the battle to keep sand from going downhill were Dave Bowlus, Dave Cox, Prisila Johnson, Rich Johnson, Melanie Lakin, Ron Rasmussen, Kurt Rightmyer, and Yolanda Waddell.



Steve and Sarah Gibson, visiting from New Jersey, declared the Elfin Forest to be an amazing preserve.

Let’s all pull together

By Jay Waddell

Dear Diligent Weed Warriors:
Gravity’s a devil,
It’s not on the level;
It causes the sand to run down.
It leaves its brand
Of erosion on the land;
Weed Warriors, please gather around.
We’ll be clever like foxes
With erosion control boxes,
And shovel away sand by the pound
Ron’s cookies will be there
And at noon he’ll declare
That SWAP’s joy does truly abound.

Visitors From New Jersey

Story & Photo By Yolanda Waddell

The September 3rd Weed Warrior work party had us removing green fence near the boardwalk. Interested visitors stopped to learn why we were cutting up the fence, and one couple, both wearing binoculars, told me how pleased they were to discover such a lovely and well-cared-for preserve.

Steve and Sarah Gibson told me that they were visiting from northern New Jersey. They are avid birders, and have traveled many places to find new birds, but had never been to California. On their way north to San Francisco they stopped at the Baywood Inn, saw our SWAP brochure, and came to see the Forest. They live in an area of New Jersey where there are many preserves and state parks. I told them about the Weed Warriors; they hope to do the same kind of work in a preserve near them. It’s always a pleasure to welcome visitors from far away, and to see the Forest through their eyes.



Ceanothus in bloom by Jean Wheeler.

Celebrate the Holidays: Preserve Nature By Giving SWAP's 2012 Calendar

By Debbie Levi, Calendar Committee Chair

Bring in the New Year with an Elfin Forest 2012 calendar or give it as a holiday gift to a like-minded friend or family member. SWAP continues to raise funds to keep the Elfin Forest a welcome, well-maintained, and accessible natural home for all residents.

In the past few years SWAP extended the Boardwalk into Rose's Grove and installed benches so that everyone can appreciate the beauty, sounds, and smells in nature. We recently purchased a display board which posts current information. It is close to the 16th street junction of the boardwalk. We also continue to offer monthly walks and develop education programs for school children so that they can grow up to understand and enjoy the beauty and wonders of the Forest. We continue our conservation efforts to maintain a healthy environment. SWAP invites you to support these goals and much more by purchasing the 2012 Elfin Forest calendar which includes photographic work donated by expert photographers. The calendar also contains informative and educational text. The cost is a mere \$15.00 donation to SWAP. Order it using the form on page 11 or buy it for the same price, \$15.00, from one of the following 14 vendors:

- Ace Hardware, 1080 Los Osos Valley Road, Los Osos, 528-5255
- ASAP Repographics, 495 Morro Bay Blvd., Morro Bay, 772-3540
- Coalesce Bookstore, 845 Main Street, Morro Bay, 772-2880
- Los Osos Chamber of Commerce, 781 Los Osos Valley Rd., LO, 528-4884
- Los Osos Fitness, Los Osos Valley Road, Los Osos, 528-1190
- Los Osos Flower Market, Los Osos Valley Road, Los Osos, 528-4990
- Los Osos Rexall & Gifts, Los Osos Valley Road, Los Osos, 528-1017
- Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, Embarcadero, Morro Bay, 772-4467
- Otter Bay Gifts, 875 Embarcadero, Morro Bay, 772-1568
- Perry's Parcel Service, 783 Quintana, Morro Bay, 772-2000
- The Photo Shop, 1027 Marsh St. San Luis Obispo, 543-4025
- SAGE Ecological Nursery, 1188 Los Osos Valley Road, Los Osos, 528-1800
- San Luis Obispo Botanical Gardens, 3450 Dairy Creek Road, SLO, 541-1400
- Volumes of Pleasure Bookstore, 1016 Los Osos Valley Road, LO, 528-5565

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Story and Photos By Jean Wheeler

December and January are exciting months in the Elfin Forest! Bird life peaks in diversity and populations, shrubs have greened up from early rains and almost nightly heavy fogs, and the winter wildflower season is spectacular.

The waters of the estuary seem covered with fleets of ducks, geese, and other water birds. Dabbling Ducks include Mallards, Northern Pintails, Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, Teal (Blue-winged, Cinnamon, and Green-winged), and Scaup (Lesser and Greater). There are diving ducks such as Ring-Necked, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, and Ruddy Ducks. All five species of grebes (Horned, Eared, Pied-billed, Western, and Clark's Grebes) will remain until March or April. Some Brant pass through en route farther south, but usually two or three thousand of these geese spend the winter feeding on eel grass in the bay, and Canada Geese are also here for the winter. Shorebirds like Sandpipers, Dowitchers, Marbled Godwits, and American Avocets (pictured below) reach peak populations in winter.

The Elfin Forest also plays host to brush or woodland birds migrating through or wintering. Fox, Lincoln's, and Golden-crowned Sparrows join our year-round White-crowned Sparrows and Ruby-crowned Kinglets settle in for the winter. American Robins and Hermit Thrushes replace our summer Swainson's Thrushes after those depart southward. Yellow-rumped Warblers peak in winter and Say's Phoebe joins its year-round relative, the Black Phoebe. Passing through in small flocks are Cedar Waxwings, Western Tanagers, and Pine Siskins. And, of course, our year-round birds are still active, such as small groups of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers flitting through shrubs with Bushtits.

By December and January, buck brush ceanothus shrubs line much of the boardwalk with long walls of light lavender to white flowers, as pictured above left. But you have to look closely to find wild peonies, growing barely a foot high under bushes in dune scrub or maritime chaparral. These are small native herbaceous plants with dangling globes of red flowers about two inches in diameter, not the large showy peonies of garden fame. Another early winter-flowering beauty is the fuchsia-flowered gooseberry. The bright red color of trumpet-shaped flowers lining branches with small green leaves and lots of sharp thorns makes this good-sized shrub easy to spot. Their nectar is the absolute favorite of Anna's Hummingbirds with throats of the male birds as red as the



flowers providing them with sugar. Beautiful small pink flowers will be opening on the Morro manzanitas along the lower boardwalk. Be sure to enjoy these months of colorful extravagance in the Elfin Forest!

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

December 17, 9:30 a.m. – What's Underfoot? Soils!

Have you ever heard the term "Baywood Fine Sand?" It's the name of the predominant soil in Los Osos, as well as in the Elfin Forest. It's what you walk on when the pavement ends because all of Los Osos was once a series of sand dunes. Soil scientist Jim Brownell will describe local soils and talk about how important soils are in determining what plants will grow in them. We'll learn how sandy soil both benefits and stresses plants that grow in Los Osos and the Elfin Forest. This is an excellent walk for gardeners.

January 21, 9:30 a.m. – Black Brant Geese

Naturalist John Roser has been monitoring Morro Bay's Black Brant population for 15 winters. During his walk, he will share the knowledge he has gained about this migratory goose. Morro Bay is one of the few remaining coastal estuaries where the Brant can find their primary food, eelgrass. John will talk about their impressive migration, their biology, and what has been learned from banding the Brants. This is a rare chance to learn first-hand about these remarkable sea-going geese.

February 18, 9:30 a.m. – Fungus Foray

For our 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 Ysabel 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.



Walk leader Al Normandin turned a folding cot into a table to display visual aids and insect identification materials during his September insect walk. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Jim Royer (center, holding binoculars) led an exciting pre-Big Sit bird inventory walk on October 8, identifying 70 species in less than two hours. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Archaeologist Terry Joslin, right, delighted walk participants with in-depth information and interesting stories about the ancient Chumash and Salinan Indians. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

16th Annual Winter Bird Festival, January 13-16

The 2012 Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, sponsored by Morro Coast Audubon Society, will be held over Martin Luther King weekend, as usual, from January 13 to 16. More than 400 birders are expected to attend and see, photograph, and learn about birds. The Festival gives birders the chance to join local and national birding experts on a variety of field trips and workshops. Field trip group sizes are limited to maximize spotting and identification opportunities. To register and for more information about the Festival, visit the Festival website at www.morrobay-birdfestival.org. The registration deadline is December 31, 2011. Early signups are encouraged as the most popular events fill up quickly.

Thank You to Our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW MEMBERS:

Clifford Beere*
Kay Bolin
Sarah J. Gibson
Jim McCoy*
James Radford

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Richard & Brenda Allmann*	Leora Markwort
C. Dawn & Joseph Aulenbrock*	Jean & Marlene Mathias
Randy Ball	Robert McDougle*
David & Rosemary Bentley	Beth & Sheldon Miller*
Charles E. Blair	Al Normandin
Ray Bracken*	Ronald Rasmussen*
Eleanor Brown	Tom & Susan Richards
Wendy Brown*	Tim & Melissa Rochte
Carol & Barrie Coate*	Lawson Schaller & Anne Norment
David & Evelyn Dabritz*	Mildred Schwab*
Bernard & Fran Deitchman*	John Severson
Elsie & Jerry Deitz*	Dr. Jan W. Simek*
Jan DiLeo	Robert & Mia Simmons
Alice Dobias	T. Alden & M. Sinel*
Fran Edwards*	Peg Smith
Linda Faust*	Kathleen Spencer
Arthur Fong*	John & Leslie Steinbeck
Thomas Fowler*	SWCA Environmental Consultants*
John & Joy Gault*	Elaine Townsend*
Susan & Pascal Grimaud*	Bill & Norma Vaughan*
Marlin & Connie Harms	Rick & Laura Vopatek
Jim & Karen Havlena*	Yolanda & Jay Waddell*
Dr. Steve Jio & Family	Jean D. Wheeler*
Gaby & Ken Levine*	Rosemary Wolter*

DONATIONS:

Jay Carroll (Big Sit)
Nancy Severson
Maggie Smith (Big Sit)
Yolanda Waddell (Big Sit)

**Thanks to those listed above who donated more than the \$25 (regular) or \$15 (senior or student) membership dues. The additional donations will be used for special projects in the Elfin Forest.*



The job of afternoon birders at the Big Sit! is to search intently for species they haven't spotted earlier. This shift of spotters included (L-R) Jim Royer, Dave Keeling, Petra Clayton, Maggie Smith and Doug Stinson. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Big Sit Birders Spot 108 Species

By Jim Royer, Big Sit Coordinator

Sunday's Big Sit was another nice day spent in the Elfin Forest, overlooking Morro Bay and finding birds as we stuffed our faces with all the great food people brought, and caught up on the latest bird and other news. As usual for our annual "sit", the additions to our day's list came fast and furious in the morning (96 species by noon) and slowed to a snail's pace in the afternoon. Nevertheless, our afternoon counters met the challenge of adding new birds to the list despite the fact that there were very few still to be counted. Twenty-two people took time out of their busy schedules to come out to the wooden platform above the bay and look for birds. I hope that all had as good a time as I did - trying to figure out which direction to look in for different birds, as the tide changed, the sun came and went behind the patches of fog, and birds flew and called from every direction. Scopes and binoculars pointed at the bay to our west, the ever-changing tidal mudflats below us, the ranch land between us and Hollister Peak to the east, the coastal scrub/low oaks around us and the neighborhood behind us to the south.

Persistence paid off as some unexpected birds were tallied. Mike Stiles was not only the most persistent of the counters (starting at 5:30 a.m. and finishing in the dark looking for owls after everyone else had left), he also had the most unexpected bird of the day - a Yellow-headed Blackbird (new for the Elfin Forest) that flew by our birding perch. Other unusual species which contributed to our daily total of 108 species included Golden Eagle (one of ten raptor species), Red Knot, Bonaparte's Gull, and a couple of flycatchers which we had to tally as *Empidonax* sp. since we had too quick of a look to ID either one (one was quite drab and the other was more colorful). Other highlights included several Peregrine Falcons that strafed shorebirds in the mudflats below us and others which flew right by us at eye level, one with a very full crop. Noticeably absent were Osprey (which had been quite conspicuous the day before) and House Sparrow (no big loss!).

Thanks to all the great counters, to everyone who contributed food and drink, including champagne at approximately sunset (the fog had blown in at the end of the day and we could not see any sunset). Those of us who remained at the end of the day toasted all of you who counted during the day, "Well Sat"!

Editor's Note: Of 206 Big Sit! count circles in 44 states and 7 other countries besides the United States, our Big Sit! circle came in second with 108 species sighted. Cape May Point, New Jersey, came in first with 117 species. To learn more about this year's Big Sit! results, click on the Big Sit! link at www.birdwatchersdigest.com.



Holiday Presents From SWAP Give To Nature As Well!

Buy holiday presents for friends and family from SWAP. The money you spend doubles as a gift to conserve the Elfin Forest. The 2012 calendar features images taken by talented local photographers of scenes, plants, and animals plus fascinating natural history information in sidebars on each page. Shown is the photo "Welcome to Rose's Grove" by Scott Glancy chosen for July. Sweatshirts, T-shirts, and Mural prints also make great gifts, while note cards, post cards, and pocket guides are wonderful stocking stuffers.



SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

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

All Prices Include Sales Tax

1. MURAL SHIRTS

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

Circle Sizes:

___ Short Slv. T-Shirt (S, M, L, XL) @\$19.00 = \$____
 ___ Short Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @\$22.00 = \$____
 ___ Long Slv. T-Shirt (S, M, L, XL) @\$23.00 = \$____
 ___ Long Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @\$25.00 = \$____
 ___ Sweatshirt (S, M, L, XL) @\$25.00 = \$____
 ___ Sweatshirt (XXL, XXXL) @\$27.00 = \$____

2. PHOTOS OF THE ELFIN FOREST

Original print note cards

___ @ \$3.00 or ___ set of 5 @ \$14.00 = \$____

Printed postcards

___ @ \$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 arthropods 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

___ @ \$25.00 = \$____

5. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

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

___ @ \$21.65 (including tax) = \$____

6. Stunning 2012 ELFIN FOREST CALENDAR

Local photographers featured in this 9"x12" calendar.

___ @ \$15 = \$____

Shipping costs within zip 934 __:

Bird Book, \$2.77 (book rate) per book = ____

Pocket Guides & Note Cards \$1.50 = ____

Mural Prints on Foamcore \$5.00= ____

Shirts each: \$4.00 = ____

Calendars: \$2.75 for 1, \$3.75 for 2 = ____

For more calendars or shipping costs outside 934 __, call (805) 528-0392

TOTAL OF ORDER

\$____

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Email _____

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.

Do Your Holiday Shopping with SWAP - page 11

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



Address Service Requested
 Per Name or Current Resident

Non-Profit Org.
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93402
 Permit No. 112

Holiday Shopping and Tax Deductible Donations

S.W.A.P.'s beautiful 2012 calendar or mural design shirts make excellent gifts for the holidays. The shirts come in most sizes as short-sleeved or long-sleeved T-shirts or warm, comfy sweatshirts. Mural prints 5 1/2 inches by 17 inches signed by the artist Barbara Rosenthal and the Alphabet Bird Book with clever verses and superb photos also make ideal gifts. Good stocking stuffers are the pocket guides to plants and animals of the Elfin Forest and lovely notecards and postcards from Bob Meyer's talented photography. For the person who has everything, a gift membership to SWAP or a tax deductible donation in the name of your relative or friend would also be much appreciated. Use the order form on page 11 to either call in or mail your order, and your gifts will promptly be mailed to you.

A year-end donation to SWAP can not only reduce your income tax bite, but help with special projects in the Elfin Forest such as soil erosion control and revegetation with native species. Donating \$1000 would make you a life member. You would receive the Oakleaves newsletter for life and would also receive a S.W.A.P. mural T-shirt in appreciation of your major contribution to our efforts.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Defender \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steward \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Champion \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Protector \$75 | <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seniors & Students \$15 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$1000 | |

☐ I want to help, please call me!

Memberships include a subscription to SWAP's bimonthly newsletter, *Oakleaves*.

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

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.