



# 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 ♦ FEBRUARY / MARCH 2014

## Drought and the Elfin Forest

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair

By now we all know that 2013 was the driest year on record in Los Osos with less than half an inch of rain since July. The fact that this year has been very dry is not, in itself, unusual. Over time rainfall can vary widely from year to year. This variation tends to select plants that can tolerate and survive periods of little rain.

The Elfin Forest plant community contains several examples of plants that have accommodated to the year-to-year variation in rainfall. The California peony (*Paeonia californica*) normally sprouts from an underground tuber about the first of December, and blossoms through February. However, this year it has not appeared and likely will not sprout and bloom at all. This does not mean that the plant is dead but only that it has adapted to the periodic drought conditions of our region. Black sage (*Salvia mellifera*) usually is actively "leafing out" in December and January, but this year it is showing few leaflets. Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*) also should be showing color in December, but this year only a very few blossoms can be found.

In these drought conditions, the Elfin Forest appears very dry over all. Most of the plants, including the oaks and manzanitas, have been affected by the lack of rain. If this trend continues, many plants may not bloom normally this year, but will remain dormant. Perhaps a benefit of the drought is that many invasive weed seeds won't sprout either.

In future years the rain will return and the Elfin Forest will respond with new growth and will bloom as we have seen in the past. Until that time please continue to visit the Elfin Forest and enjoy the greenery and views of the bay and the Morros.

## Try A Different Elfin Forest Entrance – 11th Street



Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell

Many visitors to the Elfin Forest enter it from the end of 16th Street because of the boardwalk extension that leads from the street-end to the main loop of the boardwalk. Others enter from the end of 15th Street because SWAP nature walks begin there. But there are five more entrances to the Forest; each one is quite different from the others.

A very "woody" entrance to the Elfin Forest can be found at the end of 11th Street. There is plenty of room for parking. Visi-

**Different Entrance** *continued on page 2*

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### Volunteer Event Date Changed Again to Feb. 9

The Volunteer Appreciation Event Committee consists of six women: Pat Akey, Jan DiLeo, Vicky Johnsen, Pat Murray, Yolanda Waddell and Danna Weidner. Unfortunately, none of us follow football, and were unaware that February 2nd is Super Bowl Sunday. On January 9, we were told that our reservation of the Community Room at Morro Shores Mobile Home Park was canceled because Park residents were going to watch the Super Bowl game there. The new date for the SWAP Volunteer Appreciation Event is Sunday, February 9, from 2 to 4 p.m. The location will still be the Community Room at Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Avenue in Los Osos. We look forward to seeing our SWAP volunteers and thanking them for their service.



## 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  
Erick Amaya, Member at Large  
Pat Murray, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly at 7 p.m. at the Community Room, Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

The next meetings are  
***Thursday, February 13,  
and Thursday, March 13.***

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.

## Different Entrance *continued from page 1*

tors pass through an angled fence that County Parks built to prevent vehicles from traveling up the path, as happened in the past.

Once on the path, you take a sharp right and head up a gradual slope. Soon you are on a narrow path with gnarled branches stretching across at ground level. Be watchful and step carefully. On either side are oak groves with protective green fencing in front of them. If you walk slowly, you will be treated to the sounds and sights of birds hunting for insects and seeds in and under shrubs and oak trees.

When you arrive at an open area with a path leading to the left, you are at Butterfly Hill. In April and May, butterflies congregate here to find mates. Our docent who gives butterfly walks calls it a "butterfly singles bar." Take the path at the left to the green fence at its end, and you have a very nice view of the bay, ocean and Morro Rock.

Retrace your steps to the main path and continue on a downward slope. Notice shells and shell fragments in the sand on either side. They are part of an ancient kitchen midden, or waste dump, left by the Chumash in the 18th century and before. Soon the trees give way to shrubs, and you are treated to a view of an expanse of coastal dune scrub with volcanic peaks beyond.

Your path eventually merges with another that leads off to the left, toward the boardwalk. Follow that path, and you will be at the Bush Lupine Point overlook. After enjoying the sight of birds swimming and in flight, you can continue along the boardwalk. When you reach the Fairbanks monument, pick up an Elfin Forest Guide from the box nearby, and enjoy a leisurely walk around the boardwalk loop. The total walk will take about 1-1/2 to 2 hours. Enjoy your visit!



*The 11th Street path winds among twisted oaks and thriving shrubs.*

## Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

If you are more comfortable reading a paper copy of Oakleaves, we understand. However if you use your computer a lot, we encourage you to take a look at the online version at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org). Being able to see the 20 or so photos in full color makes it a very attractive alternative to the black-and-white printed copy. If you miss an issue for some reason, it is there, waiting for you. Simply click on "Forest Library", then "Oakleaves Index" and finally the year and month of the issue that you want to read. Try it – you may like it.



# Wilderness Gardens, One of SWAP's Early Successes

By Yolanda Waddell

In 1970, SWAP founder Emily Polk astonished California conservationists by persuading a property owner, a wealthy industrialist and then State Parks officials to save an 85-acre oak woodland in Los Osos. In the 1970s and 1980s, concerned citizens all over California took up the challenge to save very special pieces of land from development. Using Emily's methods to save the Los Osos Oaks State Preserve as a model, citizen groups formed SWAP chapters and set to work. That was the case with the La Jolla Chapter of SWAP, which was formed to save the Wilderness Gardens in San Diego County.

During my visits with Emily Polk over the years, she told me several times about saving Wilderness Gardens in the northeastern part of San Diego County near the Pala Indian reservation. It is 737 acres of oak forest, lakes, a bouldered stream, meadows and chaparral-covered slopes. Last September, my husband and I had the good fortune to be taken to Wilderness Gardens by his cousin, whom we were visiting. It is indeed a beautiful preserve with lots of history.

The La Jolla Chapter of SWAP spent three years working to develop public awareness of the need to save Wilderness Gardens, and to raise funds for options to prevent its sale for a trailer park. The turning point was a field day in 1972; officials were so impressed that 4,000 people would turn out that they added the project to their master plan, and county supervisors voted to buy it with matching county and federal funds. In 1973, it became the Wilderness Gardens Preserve, the first nature preserve for San Diego County Parks and Recreation.

Wilderness Gardens vegetation supports many bird species including migratory birds, resident waterfowl and birds of prey. Coyotes, raccoons, bobcats, snakes and deer inhabit the preserve. There is also evidence of countless generations of human habitation. There are grinding rocks left by the Luiseño Indians, the remains of a gristmill, and remnants of the days when it was a ranch. If you have the opportunity to be in San Diego County, it's worth the drive to visit Wilderness Gardens. It is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday through Monday, closed Tuesday through Thursday. It is also closed in August due to high temperatures, as it is in an inland valley. For more information, visit the San Diego Parks website at [www.sdparks.org](http://www.sdparks.org).



*The Wilderness Gardens front gate provides a hint of what can be seen when walking the preserve trails. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

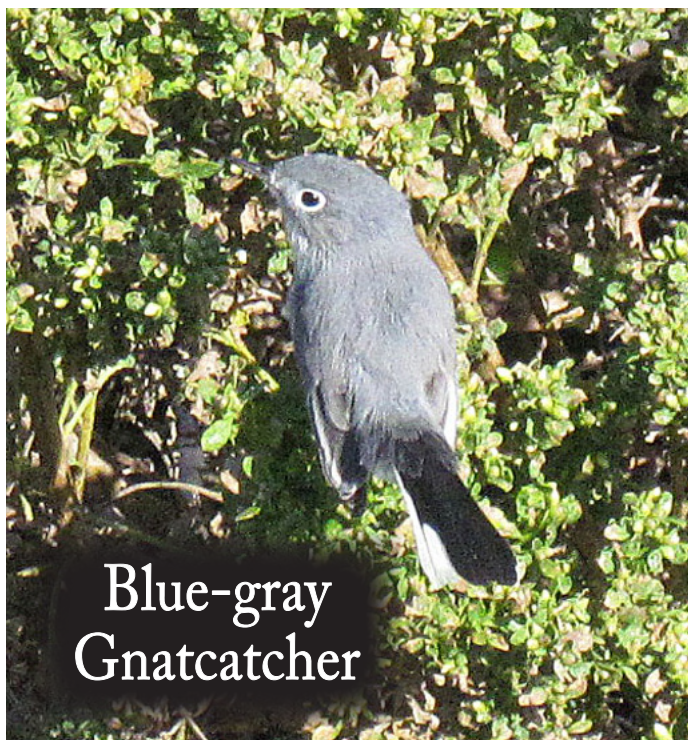


*A boulder-strewn stream runs through the 737-acre preserve. Photo courtesy of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department.*

## Ron Rasmussen to Give a MindWalk on February 17

At the beginning of each calendar year, the Central Coast State Parks Association (CCSPA) sponsors a series of Monday morning lectures called "MindWalks." This year's weekly talks began on January 6 and will conclude on March 24. On Monday, February 17, SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen will give an illustrated talk about the Elfin Forest. He will tell how local citizens acquired the 90-acre natural area and restored it, and how SWAP volunteers maintain the Elfin Forest.

All lectures begin at 10 a.m. and are held at the Morro Bay Veterans' Hall, 209 Surf St., Morro Bay. There is a \$3.00 charge except for CCSPA members; children under 17 are free. For more information about the MindWalks schedule of lectures, see the CCSPA website at [www.ccnha.org](http://www.ccnha.org), or call the Morro Bay Museum at 805-772-2694.



Text and Photos By Jean Wheeler, Ph. D.

Vicky Johnsen's new series of 2nd Wednesday Walks (see page 9) in December answered the question "How to be a Near-sighted Birdwatcher." One of the birds we watched was the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Realizing we have not featured this well-named species before, I decided it would be a good topic for this issue.

*Poliophtila caerulea* is indeed blue-gray in color and does dine on small insects such as gnats. This tiny bird is only about 4 ½ inches long with a 6-inch wingspan. Its tail is nearly half its length, and it has a fairly long, thin bill, pale on the females and somewhat darker on breeding males. The head and back of the bird are definitely bluish-gray in color, lightening to pale gray or nearly white on the belly, often with a slightly brownish tinge on the wings.

The tail is black above with white feathers along the edge and white below. There is a distinct white eye ring around the bright black eye in both sexes, including juveniles. More than one source describes them as looking like miniature Mockingbirds.

Breeding males have a black streak over the eye absent in the fall-early winter non-breeding season. Our western population usually has less white on the tail edges, with the marginal feath-

ers black near the body and white only near the tips. The voice is described as a thin musical warble in eastern populations, but lower and harsher in our western birds, more like that of wrens. Their song can contain notes mimicked from other bird songs of the area.

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers are in almost constant motion. They flit and jump from branch to branch in our shrubs, flicking their tails up and down. This probably helps to flush out the tiny insects and spiders which are their main prey, although they also eat insect eggs. They mainly glean insects from branch tips, but may also catch them in flight. The long thin bill enables them to probe into narrow cracks in stems to extract hiding insects. They may hunt alone or in mated pairs, but I've also often seen them moving through our chaparral in mixed flocks with other insect eaters, such as Bushtits.

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers make elegantly constructed nests similar to but larger than those of hummingbirds and similarly attached to a horizontal branch. They consist of bits of plants, including the lichens so copiously supplied in our Elfin Forest, woven together with spider webs or caterpillar silk. If they have a second brood, materials torn out of their prior nest are often recycled in building a second one. Nests are difficult to find unless the parents are present, noisily feeding their offspring. Both parents incubate the eggs, which number about 4 or 5 and are blue in color with brown spots. The eggs hatch in approximately two weeks and the young fledge in about another two weeks.

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher can occur in most of the United States but is rare in the northern Great Plains and Intermontane. It is very rare in southern Canada, but has shown signs of increasing its range northward in recent years. It is the only truly migratory species of Gnatcatcher. The ones we see in winter may be year-round residents, or our breeders may migrate south and be replaced by winter migrants from farther north.

The only other gnatcatcher species normally resident in the U.S. are the California Gnatcatcher (*P. californica*) and the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*P. melanura*). The former occurs from the Los Angeles area south into Mexico and the latter from the southern tip of Nevada and the adjacent edge of California southeast to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and into Mexico.

As you walk around the boardwalk, you may see these tiny blue-gray birds flitting busily among the branches, often hanging briefly upside down, as they glean the branches of the shrubs for insect and spider cuisine.

## From Our Readers

Pat Grimes sent us this story:

One Sunday morning Larry Grimes (who tends the 16th Street Mutt Mitt station) was heading up to the Elfin Forest Boardwalk when he encountered a young family on the sandy trail. The little girl was "walking" her tiny stuffed toy dog on a leash. Her parents were patiently waiting uphill. Larry said to the little girl who was dragging the dog up the trail, "Oh, you're taking your dog for a walk today." And she responded, "And I've got my bag too!" holding up a green plastic Mutt Mitt.

## 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? Taken a good photo?

Please report any interesting sightings to your Oakleaves editors at: [oakleaves@elfin-forest.org](mailto: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.



# A Manzanita Mystery

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

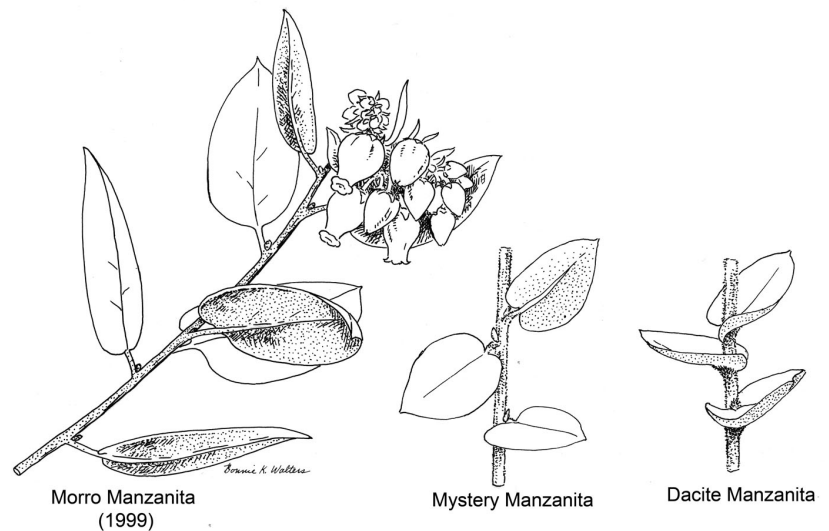
The presence of the three manzanita plants shown in Bonnie's drawings is, in my mind, sufficient cause for preserving the Elfin Forest. One is the endemic and rare Morro Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos morroensis*), included here for comparison. One of the other two drawings is of a single manzanita plant (maybe a clone) currently in flower near the mouth of Los Osos Creek; the last is of a species commonly called Dacite Manzanita (*A. tomentosa* ssp. *daciticola*) not recorded on Elfin Forest lands but in nearby hills above the mouth of Los Osos Creek.

Two other manzanita species could also complicate identification of our mystery manzanita. First and most problematic is Los Osos Manzanita (*A. osoensis*) with a range recorded on higher ridges and plateaus west of Hollister Peak on sandstone or dacite outcrops. Last is Arroyo de la Cruz Manzanita (*A. cruzensis*) which would be our sole choice if we used Robert F. Hoover's 1970 edition of *The Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County, California* for identification. Dacite Manzanita and Los Osos Manzanita were not recognized by Dr. Hoover as valid names. So which name should we apply to our mystery manzanita?

Many careful observers concluded that the new manzanita is NOT Morro Manzanita -- the only one listed in the current *Elfin Forest Pocket Guide*. So if it is not Morro manzanita, what manzanita is it? This question is not easy to answer and leads us to the third drawing. It represents Dacite Manzanita, one of two species found growing on dacite, a granite-like rock which is dominant in the Morro Peaks. Outcrops of dacite weather into thin, infertile soils. Dacite Manzanita is found only within the Los Osos Creek drainage. If our mystery is not Morro Manzanita, it is a much closer, but not perfect match to the Dacite Manzanita in the drawing.

Identification of manzanitas is not easy. First, there are over 60 species with many subspecies and varieties recognized in California. Second, the genus has an easily recognized number of characteristics familiar to most people. Differentiating species is a challenge because defining characteristics are minutely different or technical in nature. However, species can be divided into groups based on the length of their petioles (leaf stalks) and the shape of the leaf blade base. One group, including Morro Manzanita, has an easily seen but short (< 4 mm.) petiole and a smooth, rounded to chordate (resembling the top of a valentine heart) blade base. The other group has petioles either absent or so short (< 2 mm.) that they would not easily be noticed and chordate leaf bases. Neither of the latter group traits is present in Bonnie's Morro Manzanita drawing, but they are found in the other two drawings. There are other technical attributes of course, but most of these are not visible without a microscope or hand lens.

One more easily seen characteristic is whether or not a manzanita has a large swelling at the junction where the root turns



into the base of the stem. In those without the swelling, including Morro Manzanita, branching usually begins after the main stem (trunk) is a few inches to a foot or more above the ground. These are called tree manzanitas due to that single trunk. Those that branch from the swelling below ground are commonly called shrub manzanitas, tending to produce a bunch of stems in a tight cluster. Again, this trait should eliminate Morro Manzanita from consideration because it is a 'tree' manzanita usually branching at or above ground.

So if our mystery plant is not Morro Manzanita, which of the other manzanitas is it? Arroyo de la Cruz Manzanita, as currently defined, should range from Cambia northward. Los Osos manzanita is reported as a relatively tall shrub (3 to 12 feet) restricted to dacite or sandstone outcrops. Dacite Manzanita occurs just up slope from our mystery manzanita but is also supposedly restricted to dacite outcrops. Our mystery plant grows on a relatively narrow terrace well above the salt marsh and just below the foundation fill used to raise South Bay Boulevard above Morro Bay estuary. It is growing in coarse sandy soil probably derived from the fill and is growing with species characteristic of coastal scrub with a large complement of weeds -- a classic, disturbed, man-made habitat. Such habitats are known to allow unusual individuals such as hybrids and others out of typical range or habitat to become established. In other words, range and habitat can't be used to limit the possible identification.

So what is its correct identification? I'm still quite unsure. Even Cal Poly Herbarium is not much help here. I think I could find all three possible species among specimens within each single species folder in the Cal Poly Herbarium. I do have to admit that differences among the three short petiolate, chordate leaf-based species depends on the often subtle nature of the kind of hairs (pubescence or trichomes) found on twig and leaf. As stated earlier, these traits require at least a hand lens to observe. I think it is safest to leave it as a mystery manzanita. Maybe a Cal Poly Senior Project or graduate student will take on this project and find the

**Manzanita Mystery** continued on page 6

## Education Corner

*By Yolanda Waddell, Acting Education Chair*

I regret to report the resignation of our Education Chair, Pat Akey, who has led the Education Committee since 2009. During her chairmanship, Pat and her committee developed a docent manual, and requested and got funds from the SWAP Board to pay for the cost of school buses for schools that can't afford them. She and the Education Committee developed new walk curricula for upper grades and college level walks, and designed new walks for lower elementary grade.

In 2010, Pat developed and gave a presentation about our educational services to elementary school teachers. In 2011, she invited Monarch School teacher Judy Neuhauser to coach members of the Education Committee on ways to improve school walks for elementary students.

In the Fall of 2012, Pat and the Education Committee began docent training for Vicky Johnsen, Frances Meehan and Chris Van Beveren, with the goal of providing more general walks for all ages throughout the year. Recently, Vicky Johnsen began giving 2nd Wednesday nature walks (see Walks In The Elfin Forest, page 9).

Fortunately for us, Pat will remain on the Education Committee. The SWAP Board is grateful for her hard work over the years. During that time, hundreds of students have benefited from nature walks in the Elfin Forest. I will step in as Acting Education Chair, and will actively be looking for a qualified person to head the committee.

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## Manzanita Mystery *cont. from page 5*

correct answer for us. It appears that all the species from the Los Osos Creek drainage are closely related, at least based on appearance. With additional modern taxonomic techniques it may even be determined that Dr. Hoover was correct back in 1970 that all (except Morro manzanita) are the same species.

Update: After writing the preceding paragraph, I went back out and observed the three pictured manzanitas again. This time I walked through the Elfin Forest to reacquaint myself with the variability found among Morro Manzanita individuals. The plants along the boardwalk are similar to Bonnie's drawing. But if you observe the manzanitas along the trail off the north-east boardwalk curve that goes toward South Bay Boulevard you will find that the Morro Manzanitas get shorter and shrubbier and their leaves have shorter petioles and more deeply lobed leaf bases. It's a mini-cline. In other words they begin to resemble more and more our mystery manzanita. So, I'm forced to conclude, at least tentatively, that our mystery manzanita is simply an extreme form of Morro manzanita and probably the most northern individual of the species despite being clearly different from the Morro Manzanita we all had pictured in our minds. I still think there is a good student project here.



*Former Education Chair Pat Akey (left) and SWAP docent trainees Frances Meehan, Chris Van Beveren and Vicky Johnsen relax after a training session in the Elfin Forest. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

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## SWAP Mug with Elfin Forest Mural Now Available!

Thanks to the resourcefulness and diligent efforts of Board Member and Property Chair, Pat Murray, SWAP is now able to sell these beautiful beverage mugs. They feature the well-known Elfin Forest mural which artist Barbara Rosenthal designed and painted on the wall of Rexall Pharmacy Store on Los Osos Valley Road at 9th Street.



With the artist's permission, the design of the mural has long adorned the T-shirts and sweatshirts sold in the SWAP Booth at local events and on the Shoppers' Page of Oakleaves (page 11). On noting the popularity of beverage mugs featuring photos or art designs, Pat decided to investigate the possibility of obtaining mugs with the Elfin Forest mural design. She contacted Dan Lindberg of Arroyo Grande, who manufactures mugs. Learning such a project should be feasible, she then contacted Barbara Rosenthal.

SWAP thanks Barbara very much for giving her permission and then doing considerable work in contact with Mr. Lindberg not only to provide him with the original design to work with but also to make changes in such artistic details as the color balance of the master for him after the baking of the first trial mug.

The 15-ounce mugs are microwave and dishwasher safe, and are sold for \$10 each (tax included) on page 11 of this and subsequent issues of Oakleaves, or can be ordered by calling 805-528-0392



# Weed Warrior Report

*Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell*

## November – Erosion Controlled

During the November 2nd work day, the Weed Warriors focused on erosion control in anticipation of some much-hoped-for rain. They dug sand from behind the water bars on all seven of the Forest's entrance paths, and added shallow trenches to move rain-water to the side of each path. A few of the day's volunteers watered our new plants at 11th and 16th Streets; those plants are doing well. Some veldt grass was also pulled. Thanks for a good day's work to Weed Warriors Ed and Matt Ellingen, Lannie Erickson, Bob Meyer, Ron Rasmussen (Conservation Chair), Charlie Sitton and Yolanda Waddell.

## December – Rained Out

Due to a heavy shower early Saturday morning, December 7, the work planned for the day had to be canceled by Conservation Chair Ron Rasmussen. Rain brings out the endangered Shoulder-band Dune Snails, and there was no snail monitor available that day. Our thanks and apologies to Jack Fanselow and Prisila and Rich Johnsen for coming out to work in spite of the inclement weather.

## Let's all pull together

*By Yolanda Waddell*

The Elfin Forest has many needs  
Like watering plants and pulling weeds.  
It depends on us for those good deeds.

Once each month for hours three  
we Warriors work with energy and glee,  
and leave the Forest looking a lot more spiffy.

See you on Saturday, rain or shine.  
At noon we'll feast on cookies  
that are definitely divine.

## 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. Heavy rain cancels.



*In November, anticipating hoped-for rain, a weed warrior crew prepared the 13th Street trail near the boardwalk. Shown are (L-R) Bob Meyer, Charlie Sitton, Ed Ellingen, Matt Ellingen and Ron Rasmussen. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

## Seen From the Elfin Forest



*On a balmy January day, these paddleboard travelers and their dog passed by the Siena's View overlook in the Elfin Forest. Photo by Jean Wheeler.*



**OAKLEAVES**

is published six times per year beginning in February.

Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;  
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Contributors to this issue: Vicky Johnsen, Betsy Kinter, Bob Meyer, Pat Murray,  
Ron Rasmussen, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters and Jean Wheeler.

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# Coming Up in the Elfin Forest



*A song sparrow, a year-round resident of the Elfin Forest.*

*Text and Photos By Jean Wheeler*

February and March normally provide wonderful displays of colorful wildflowers opening against a vibrant green background. My column for the last issue was written in early November, when I said “We’re very light on rain so far, but even a couple of more light rains should bring some of our larger shrubs into bloom.” As our Chair Ron Rasmussen reports in his first page article for this issue, we’ve had only those few very light rains and no more.

The result is that our diverse shrubs adapted to drought years like this are protecting themselves by withholding the profuse blooming we expect to enjoy in winter. As I write in early January, there is much less vibrant green than usual and far more beige and brown leaves dropping off the branches. We’re concerned that some of the shrubs may die for lack of water, but most will probably survive, many generations of their ancestors having adapted to droughts lasting more than one year.

Ceanothus shrubs (aka Buck Brush or California Lilac) do have a few blossoms open, shown in the photo I took this January 8. But they would normally be lining the boardwalk with almost a wall of bright white to light lavender blossoms at this time of year. I couldn’t even find flower buds on the Morro Manzanita shrubs, which seemed nearly smothered with pink and white bells a year ago. The California Peonies are not even sending leaves up from their tubers, saving their precious stored water for next year.

There are a few Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberries with some red tubular flower buds on them, but you’ll really have to look for them, as will the hummingbirds that normally have an abundant supply of their nectar. If you have hummingbird feeders, your cli-



*Ceanothus shrubs, shown in foreground, have just a few blossoms instead of a wall of flowers this Spring.*

ents will really appreciate you this year! Birds that are mainly seed and fruit eaters, like the pictured Song Sparrow (resident all year), are also likely to be increasingly hungry this year as the flowers missing now mean these foods will be in even shorter supply later.

February and March do provide some of the best birding opportunities in the Elfin Forest year. Our winter water birds are still here at least through February. This includes all ducks and geese, all wading birds, and all grebes listed in our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11). American Avocets and most sandpipers are also here through March.

Winter visitors to our chaparral and pygmy oak groves are nearing the end of their visit and will soon head north or up into high mountains. These include Ruby-crowned Kinglets, American Robins, and several species of Sparrows. Migrants will be passing through from wintering sites in Middle and South America. Among them you might be lucky enough to spot Rufous or Allen’s Hummingbirds.

Some of our summer birds, including House Wrens and all of our species of Swallows, will be returning from their holidays in the tropics to get to work again building nests for this year’s families. Of course our year-round birds are here, such as Anna’s Hummingbirds, California Quail, both species of Towhees, the California Thrasher, and Western Scrub Jays. The Wrentit is more often heard than seen.

As you stroll around the boardwalk, see what flowers you can find open despite the drought, enjoy listening to and watching the birds, and resolve to keep your bird feeders copiously filled for them in this drought-stricken time of food shortage.



# WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

## Second Wednesday Walks

new!

*February 12, 10:00 a.m. –*

### *Valentines in the Elfin Forest*

Just two days before Valentine's Day, SWAP docent Vicky Johnsen will describe the special relationship between a native plant, the fuchsia-flowering gooseberry, and hummingbirds. She'll also reveal the sex-life of our flowering plants. This walk will be off-color only if the drought has prevented February flowers from blooming.

*March 12, 10:00 a.m. –*

### *What Will the Rains Bring?*

Assuming that we have gotten SOME rain by early March, Vicky Johnsen's 2nd Wednesday nature walk in the Elfin Forest will focus on searching out the Springtime flowers. Join her on this treasure hunt for the golden, white, lavender, red and blue plant jewels of the Elfin Forest.

## Third Saturday Walks

*February 15, 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 fascinating mushrooms such as wood bluetts, black elfin saddles, earthstars, golden caps, boletes, and poisonous amanitas. Bring a magnifying lens and, if you have a mystery mushroom in your yard, bring a sample for Dennis to identify. This is not a mushroom collecting walk. All plants in the Elfin Forest are protected by law. Only a very heavy rain will cancel the walk. If it hasn't rained, Dennis will give us an equally enjoyable walk about the lichens that grow abundantly in the Forest.

*March 14, 9:30 a.m. – Animal Tracks Walk*

Join Evan Albright, an animal track expert, in learning who is "tracking up" the Elfin Forest. Visitors will learn how to tell the front feet from the back feet of a raccoon, and how coyote and dog tracks differ. Evan will also demonstrate how to find other signs that a wild resident of the Elfin Forest has passed that way. Attend this walk and develop an awareness of the comings and goings of the Forest's animal, bird and reptile inhabitants – something we wouldn't readily see while walking along the boardwalk.

*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, and leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. Only heavy rain will cancel a walk. For more information call (805) 528-0392.*



*Cal Poly biology instructor Robb Tibstra (center, in black jacket) brought examples of reptiles and amphibians for his November 3rd Saturday walk. Photo by Ron Rasmussen.*



*Retired geography professor Jean Wheeler used an earth balloon to illustrate our position in relation to the sun during her solstice walk on December 21st. Photo by Bob Meyer.*



*SWAP docent Vicky Johnsen featured Elfin Forest habitats and Hobbitts during her January 2nd Wednesday walk. Photo by Jean Wheeler.*

# Thank You to Our Generous Members

*Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator*

## NEW:

Dianne Bougher\*  
Jean & Jack Fanselow\*  
Sam & Shirley Mednick\*  
Jim & Wendi Proffitt\*  
George Tirman

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

David & Rosemary Bentley	Frank R. Martinez
Andrea Bersie*	Donald & Elizabeth Maruska
Steve & Sue Burns*	Bob & Sharon Meyer*
Alice L. Cushing*	Howard & Marlo Miller*
Diane Dalenberg*	Al Normandin
Marion Irving DeCruz	Randall & Shirley Palmer
Kathleen M. Delzell*	Richard S. Parker*
Marlin & Connie Harms*	Tim & Melissa Rochte*
Clement H. Jeffrey	Nancy E. Ruhl*
Dr. Steve Jio & family	Lawson Schaller &
William Johnson	Anne Norment
James R. Landreth*	John Severson
Laura Kass*	Dr. Jan W. Simek*
Heidi Kausch*	Peter & Chalys Stephens
Chris & Kyra Kitts*	David & Helianthe Stevig*
James Koga	Alyce Thorp &
Donna Krueger	Robert Mayberry*
Mary Leizear	Lisa Wallender*
Gaby & Ken Levine*	Michael Ward
Leora Markwort	

## DONATIONS:

Yolanda Waddell – Big Sit Pledge

## Correction:

***We apologize for incorrectly spelling the names of  
Phillip and Joyce Kerce  
in our December/January "New and Renewing" column.***

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

*If you recently sent a donation to SWAP and don't see your name in this issue's New and Renewing list, be assured that your gift will be acknowledged in the next bimonthly issue.*

*Gifts are processed by two different volunteers before reaching our editors, and newsletter copy deadline is one month before the date of the issue.*

# Elfin Forest Visitors

*By Yolanda Waddell*

During a walk along the Elfin Forest boardwalk in January, I happened on two people who have a long history with SWAP. Bruce and Margaret (Peggy) Black are the son and daughter of Virginia Black, who was an early SWAP Board member. Immediately after joining the Board in 1989,



Virginia became a valuable organizer and resource person for SWAP. A counselor and personnel director by profession, she coordinated the writing of a state grant application, and organized the search for SWAP's volunteer Development Director, Barbara Machado.

Virginia loved all things related to nature, especially the Elfin Forest. She was an avid hiker, and her hiking group, The North Coast Explorers, donated a bench in her memory after she tragically died in an auto accident in 2001. The bench is located where the 16th Street extension meets the boardwalk loop.

Bruce and Peggy Black also donated a bench in Virginia's name; that one is located at the Siena's View overlook. They knew that it would please their mom who worked so hard to save the Elfin Forest. Bruce lives in San Francisco and Peggy lives in Washington State, but they often come to Los Osos where their father still lives, and they pay a visit to the Elfin Forest as well. Madeline Martin wrote a longer article about Virginia Black for the April/May, 2001 issue of *Oakleaves*. It can be found on SWAP's web site, [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org) under "Forest Library" and then Subject Index.

## In Memoriam

## Janine Kirkpatrick, Artist

As an artist, Janine Kirkpatrick touched many lives. She founded a summer program for children in Atascadero, called ArtPark, taught art classes at many schools in the area, and taught adult ceramics classes through Cuesta College. She also loved the out-of-doors, joining Barbara Renshaw's well-known sketch walks in the Elfin Forest and other natural areas.

When the SWAP Calendar Committee decided to produce a calendar featuring local artists in 2008, Janine was invited to provide an art piece for the 2009 Elfin Forest calendar. She came up with a lovely pastel of a blue butterfly that was included on the May page of that calendar. Two years later, a pastel and watercolor were included in the 2011 Elfin Forest calendar. SWAP has been fortunate to have superb artists such as Janine to portray the beauty of the Elfin Forest. Janine passed away in October, 2013, at age 80 after battling lung cancer and leukemia. We are grateful to have known this wonderful lady and her art.





## SWAP Now Selling a New Mural Mug!

Our new beverage mug is now available for \$10! It is a 15-ounce mug with a large comfortable handle and is microwave and dishwasher safe. Wrapped around and baked into the surface is our wonderful mural design by Barbara Rosenthal—the same one long enjoyed on our T-shirts and sweatshirts, also sold below!



# SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

See Photos of All Items at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org)

All Prices Include Sales Tax

### 1. MURAL SHIRTS

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. ELFIN FOREST NOTE CARDS

Original print note cards

\_\_\_ @ \$3.00 or \_\_\_ set of 5 @ \$14.00 = \$\_\_\_

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. Lists for mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, arthropods including moths and butterflies, gastropods, vascular plants, lichens, and mushrooms. Some with charts for seasonality, color and more.

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

### 6. MURAL MUG

15- ounce beverage mug with wrap-around mural design, microwave and dishwasher safe.

\_\_\_ @ \$10 = \$\_\_\_

### 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 = \_\_\_

Mural Mug - call for shipping cost.

For shipping costs outside 934 \_\_,  
call (805) 528-0392

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

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## Introduce a Friend to the Elfin Forest

How about introducing a friend to the late winter/early spring beauty of our small wilderness preserve? Even with the drought, there are some flowers in bloom and more will open if we get the rain we're hoping for. Listen to and watch for both year-round resident and winter visiting birds. Spring migrants should begin passing through on their way from Central and South America back to their northern homes.



Pick up a 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 guide and on the beautifully-illustrated Interpretive Signs.

Report your friend's reactions and especially wonderful or unusual sightings to the editors for "Elfin Forest Visitors" or "Elfin Forest Sightings" in a future issue of *Oakleaves*.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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| <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.

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