



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 2016

Elfin Forest Featured in Upcoming Book

Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

Last November, I received a phone call from Lynette Tornatzky. She told me that she is writing a book about Los Osos, and at that time was working on a chapter about parks and open space in Los Osos. She especially wanted to feature the Elfin Forest, asking if I would tell her the history of its creation, and provide her with some photos. We met, and a few conversations, e-mails and photo searches later, Lynette finished her chapter in time for a December deadline.

Lynette, who has a degree in art from UCLA, spent her employment years as an art director for print work and as a buyer for a retail store in the Los Angeles area. When she met her husband, Lou Tornatzky, and they decided to get married, they had a problem agreeing where to live. Lou lived in Silverado Canyon in Orange County and Lynette lived in the San Fernando Valley. Lynette didn't want to live in a canyon in fire-prone Southern California; Lou didn't want to live in a crowded suburb. Relocating seemed to be the answer, and they traveled up and down the west coast in search of a location that would meet their wants and needs. In 2005, they concluded that Los Osos was the place for them.

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Is the Elfin Forest Ready For El Niño?

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair



In preparation for El Niño, Dave Bowlus moves sand on a trail so that rainwater will flow away from the trail and onto land covered by vegetation. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Above normal rains may soon impact the Central Coast. Beginning in January a "river" of storms is predicted to flow from the ocean over California, resulting in well above average rainfall. It is very likely that some areas will suffer flood damage, but the Elfin Forest may mostly avoid this result.

The Elfin Forest may experience some erosion, but less than many areas of the Morro Bay Watershed. Beginning in 1994, when SWAP agreed to care for Elfin Forest, it has been a goal of SWAP volunteers to return the Forest to its original native condition. Since that time, non-native plants have been largely removed, and numerous sections of the Elfin Forest are re-vegetated with native plants. On sand trails, measures have been taken to direct rainwater away from the trail to minimize damage. When there have been heavy rainstorms, erosion has occurred mostly on sand trails and in areas without native plants, but little in re-

El Niño continued on page 2



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
- Vicky Johnsen, Member at Large
- Pat Murray, Member at Large
- Skip Rotstein, 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
***Wednesday, February 10,
and Wednesday, March 9.***

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.

Upcoming Book *continued from page 1*



*Los Osos author
Lynette Tornatsky
has included
the Elfin Forest
in her book,
Los Osos/Baywood Park,
written for
Arcadia Publishing's
"Images of America"
series.*

Lynette said, "Before we bought anything, we were in the Elfin Forest. I made a photo montage with music about the Forest for my friends to see."

Both Lynette and Lou have an interest in community government. In 2006, Lynette ran for a position on the Los Osos Community Services District (CSD) Board, and lost. In recent years, Lou was elected to the CSD Board. Lynette is currently on the Land Use Committee for the Los Osos Community Advisory Council. She also was invited to serve on the board of Celebrate Los Osos, a community beautification organization. In working on a project for Celebrate Los Osos, she met Will (formerly George) Kastner who founded Los Osos Community Organization (LOCO), the forerunner of Celebrate Los Osos. Will encouraged Lynette to write a book about Los Osos. He directed her to Arcadia Publishing, a publisher of local and regional books. Their "Images of America" Series, currently containing 7,853 titles, covers every area of the United States, and includes a book about Morro Bay.

Lynette's proposal for a book about Los Osos was accepted by Arcadia Publishing. Arcadia requires 180-240 vintage images with captions for each book. Lynette began researching at the San Luis Obispo History Center and county libraries. She also found and interviewed people in the community, such as artist and local history writer, Joan Sullivan. When she completes the book mid-April, Lynette will have written six or seven chapters. The printed book should be in bookstores in October. SWAP is pleased that Lynette has given the Elfin Forest some pages in a nationally published book.

El Niño *continued from page 1*

vegetated areas. Therefore, given SWAP's erosion control and revegetation activities, El Niño storms may not cause major damage.

When El Niño storms do occur, SWAP volunteers will be on hand to minimize any erosion damage that may take place, and to take preventive measures to minimize erosion by possible later storms. It is important to keep in mind that all plants need water. When actions are taken to reduce erosion, the water will be directed in ways that will encourage absorption into the sandy soil that makes up the Elfin Forest.

The actions of SWAP volunteers in the preservation of El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area are supported mostly by contributions from SWAP members. Volunteer support for activities, like dealing with the threats from El Niño, is especially important, and is very much appreciated.

Education Committee Hosts Baywood First Graders

In November, the Education Committee was asked to give a walk for 57 first graders from the two first grade classes at Baywood Elementary School. The teachers, Cherie Newell and Maisha Slusher, wanted our docents to talk about how animals adapt to their environment and survive in the Elfin Forest. It wasn't likely that the children would actually see any mammals, reptiles or insects, and only a few birds at 9:30 in the morning on December 17th. Therefore, we chose to use the Forest itself and visual aids to let the children see that there are many wild residents who live and flourish in the Elfin Forest.

Education Committee Chair Pat Akey contacted four docents: Pat Brown, Vicky Johnsen, Pete Sarafian and Chris Van Beveren. They each led a group of 15 students past woodrat nests, piles of brush where birds can hide, trees where birds can roost, and showed them oak galls where the oak gall fly lays its eggs. Thanks to our docents for helping the first graders to have a better understanding of the "critters" that live in the Elfin Forest.



SWAP Docent Vicky Johnsen heads to the next point of interest with her group of Baywood School first graders. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



A Christmas elf visited the Elfin Forest on Christmas day and left seeds, berries and fruit for the wildlife. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



SWAP Docent Chris Van Beveren (left) holds a plant stem covered with fuzzy insect galls for Baywood School first graders. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Elfin Forest Sightings: Christmas Treat

This past Christmas, one of Santa's helpers remembered the Elfin Forest birds, woodrats and other residents with a treat of seeds, cranberries and orange and grapefruit slices. The seeds were cleverly placed in hollowed-out grapefruit rinds that were hung from branches with string baskets. Cranberries were strung and also hung from branches in Rose's Grove and other places along the boardwalk. It was a visual treat for human visitors on Christmas Day as well. Although it's best not to feed wildlife, this was undoubtedly a welcome treat for Elfin Forest residents during a year when the Forest has been unable to produce nearly as much fruit and seeds as usual due to the drought.



OAKLEAVES
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Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;
layout is by Katy Budge. Editing assistance by Pat Grimes.

Contributors to this issue: Betsy Kinter, Dave Lawrence, Roger Longden, Bob Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Lynette Tornatsky, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters and Jean Wheeler.

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Northern Flicker

Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler, Ph. D.

The Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) is a woodpecker with very un-woodpeckerish eating habits! The species occurs in all but the northernmost parts of the U.S. and Canada, with most northern birds migrating south in the winter.

Ours are the Red-shafted subspecies resident in the western states. The other subspecies, Yellow-shafted, dominate in the east. Once considered separate species, there is such a broad zone of interbreeding from the Texas Panhandle to Alaska and intermediate birds frequenting most of the continent that they are now considered a single species.

Red-shafted Northern Flickers are about a foot long (tail included) with a slim and rounded gray head and a slightly down-curved bill. The tail is long and pointed. Their backs and the tops of their wings are brown with black stripes or bars. Breasts and bellies are buffy white with many oval black spots and a large crescent-shaped black patch on the breast just below the throat. In flight a white rump patch flashes as do red shafts on the underwings for western birds distinguishing them from flashing yellow underwing shafts for the eastern subspecies.

Our westerners have a gray face and throat separated by a bright red malar streak. The malar streak for the easterners is black separating their light brown faces and throats. The flight pattern is like that of other woodpeckers, a rolling up-and-down motion, wing flapping alternating with glides.

Now, about those non-woodpeckerish eating habits! Other woodpeckers spend most of their time creeping up the trunks and major limbs of trees, listening for insects moving under the bark and drumming them out with their strong straight bills. They are seldom seen on the ground. Flickers, however, do most of their foraging for insects on the ground. They lap up ants with their long, barbed tongues for a large part of their diet. They scoop up fat ant larvae underground using their slightly curved bill to hammer the soil as other woodpeckers hammer tree barks. They'll also eat flies, butterflies, moths, and snails. They will perch on branches to eat berries and seeds, especially in winter. When scared from the ground, they tend to land horizontally on branches rather than vertically on a tree trunk.

Like other woodpeckers, Northern Flickers are cavity nesters, choosing a site usually 6-20 feet above ground. Both sexes share in drumming out their nest cavity about a foot deep in a tree trunk with an entrance hole about 3 inches in diameter. They may reuse last year's cavity or adopt one previously excavated even by another species, practices uncommon in other woodpeckers. They lay about a half dozen eggs in usually only one brood per year. Incubation is about a dozen days and young leave the nest about 3 weeks after hatching. Both parents share in incubation and feeding of hatchlings.

Because they are ground feeders and nest as low as 6 feet from the ground, they are more likely to be seen by visitors to our Boardwalk than the Downy, Hairy, or Nuttall's Woodpeckers also listed as occurring at any time of year in the Elfin Forest.

Northern Flickers being widespread and common are considered a "species of least concern." However, numbers have decreased about 1.5% per year from 1966 to 2010, a cumulative decline of 46%, and they are considered a "common bird in steep decline" but are not on a watch list. Introduced starlings compete for nesting sites and may drive flickers away.



Annual Cape Ivy / Wild Cucumber Reminder

By Yolanda Waddell; Photos by Bob Meyer

Every year, one or more well-meaning persons will pull up the native Wild Cucumber vine, thinking it is Cape Ivy, an invasive plant. Wild Cucumber grows rapidly during February through April, sometimes covering nearby plants. That apparently alarms some Elfin Forest visitors. In May the vine begins to die back, and by summer it has disappeared.

We ask our readers to learn the differences between the two plants, and inform others when you are in the Elfin Forest. Here are some differences:

- Cape Ivy doesn't have tendrils – Wild Cucumber does have tendrils, as it is a vine.
- Cape Ivy leaves are smooth and rubbery – Wild Cucumber leaves are hairy and rough.
- Cape Ivy has yellow flowers – Wild Cucumber has white flowers.
- Cape Ivy never grows in the open – Wild Cucumber often grows in the open.
- Cape Ivy doesn't die back in summer – Wild Cucumber dies back in summer.

Neither Cape Ivy nor Wild Cucumber should be pulled. Pulling any plant in the Elfin Forest, including weeds, may not be done without a trained snail monitor present. If you see someone in the Elfin Forest pulling up either plant, please give that person the SWAP phone number, 528-0392 for more information about weeding in the Elfin Forest.



*Wild Cucumber (above)
Cape Ivy (below)*



Wild Cucumber

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

Bonnie's drawing features "wild cucumber" or "man-root" or "man-under-ground" (*Marah fabaceus*) which should be blooming and beginning to produce fruits as this issue of Oakleaves is distributed. It germinates and soon begins to flower after the first rains; during the dry season it all but disappears. A good example can be seen to the left after entering the Elfin Forest from 15th Street. It is widespread but not abundant in any single location.

Marah grows and flowers quickly due to its large tuberous root. The species prefers river banks or areas thinned by fire or other disturbance. It grows over adjoining vegetation and can cover up to 20 feet in diameter. The vine "steals" support from the surrounding plants, so *Marah* can put all of its energy into growing many long stems. As can be seen from Bonnie's drawing, *Marah* and all other members of the Cucurbitaceae family are non-woody vines bearing tendrils and broad palmate veined leaves. Their flowers are unisexual (staminate or pistillate) and borne in the axils of leaves. Fruits in the family are extremely variable and unique to the family. Botanists call this kind of berry a pepo. Pepos are often large with fleshy, fibrous, or watery flesh inside enclosed by a clearly defined outer skin or rind.

The name wild cucumber refers to its resemblance to the edible cucumber of the same family, which also contains melons, squash, and pumpkins and gourds. Although several species produce edible fruit today, this has not always been true and is certainly NOT true of *Marah* and most other wild members of the family. In fact, the genus name, *Marah*, is derived from Hebrew and translates as "bitter."

So what's the link between inedible and/or poisonous *Marah* and most other wild cucurbits of today with the edible cucurbits? It is best summed up by a quote from a November 20, 2015 paper by Andrea Elyse Messer entitled "Loss of Mastodons Aided Domestication of Pumpkins, Squash."

"If Pleistocene megafauna -- mastodons, mammoths, giant sloths and others -- had not become extinct, humans might not be eating pumpkin pie and squash for the holidays, according to an international team of anthropologists."

The article indicates that most wild cucurbits are bitter and that smaller organisms and humans tend to avoid the fruit. It then notes that large mammals such as mastodons have fewer bitter taste buds in their mouths so eating cucurbits shouldn't have been a problem. The authors also noted that wherever they examined fossil mastodon dung it contained cucurbit seeds. Since the only way cucurbit seeds could get into dung is by being eaten, they concluded cucurbits were an important food for them. Being huge animals, mastodons migrated over wide distances so mastodons were major dispersers of cucurbit seeds. The researchers also found that the DNA they removed from seeds in the dung was more similar to



wild cucurbits of today than to the edible ones. Therefore it's logical that ancestors of edible cucurbits were bitter.

What killed off the mastodons? A recent book entitled *The Sixth Extinction* gives a possible clue. Large animals live at the edge of existence and the loss of few key animals can lead to ultimate extinction in a relatively short time. Early humans coexisted with the last of the mastodons and probably preferred to kill the biggest and healthiest animals as we still do today. This would have taken the breeding animals of a family. When a parent is killed, often the rest of their family dies as well. Even very modest yearly losses of a few key animals could lead to slow extinction in a few thousand years.

Mastodons and other large mammals died out over ten thousand years ago. So why do we have edible cucurbits about? The article indicates that early peoples didn't use fresh cucurbit fruits for food, but waited until they were dry and hollow and used them for containers and/or fish floats; so the seeds would have been thrown into their trash heaps. People took over from mastodons as major seed dispersers. Most cucurbits, including *Marah*, prefer disturbed, high nitrogen soils found in such heaps; so cucurbits would have been common around early human settlements.

A bitter compound is often poisonous in large amounts but medicinal in small regulated amounts, so it can be assumed that early peoples probably used the fleshy fruits as medicine. It doesn't seem to me a great stretch to assume enough genetic variability in early cucurbits that some would have been less bitter than others. These would be selectively used by early people, and by the time mastodons were gone, various cucurbits would have been planted around their settlements. Once there, they would have been selected to be less and less bitter until we have the edible squash and pumpkins we enjoy today.

One final thought: pumpkins and squash were domesticated in the new world and in all likelihood the pumpkin was one of the few major crops domesticated within the lower 48 states. Personally, I find plants like wild cucurbits of the mastodons' day enjoyed best (and safest) as we find them--growing in nature.

Weed Warrior Report

Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell

November 7th – Weed Warriors in Many Places

There is always something that needs attention in the Elfin Forest. In November, there were quite a few somethings. Skip Rotstein, Dave McDonald and Ron Rasmussen did some boardwalk repair; Dave Bowlus, Prisila and Rich Johnson did erosion control on the sand trails. Pete Sarafian and Charlie Sitton worked on an erosion problem on the slope below Bush Lupine Point. Pat Brown and Vicky Johnsen picked up trash along South Bay Boulevard. Then Pete Sarafian (as snail monitor), Pat Brown, Charlie Sitton and Skip Rotstein pulled veldt grass along South Bay Boulevard. Thanks to all for putting in an energetic and productive morning.

December 5th – Harvesting Veldt Grass, And More

October rains produced a bumper crop of veldt grass under an oak canopy near the northern end of 10th Street at the far western end of the Elfin Forest. Eight of a crew of 12 Weed Warriors managed to clear the oak grove understory of veldt grass by the end of the work morning. The Warriors with so much “pull” were Jay Bonestell, Pat Brown, Jack Fanselow, snail monitor Barrett Holland, Prisila Johnson, Rich Johnson, Frances Leitch and Yolanda Waddell.

Elsewhere in the Forest, two broken “steps” (actually, erosion control boxes) on the trail leading down to the grove next to the estuary, were repaired by Ron Rasmussen, Skip Rotstein and Dave McDonald. Ron Rasmussen installed some plant name plaques on boardwalk rails. Dave Bowlus, our trail keeper extraordinaire, did some energetic sand shoveling and raking along trails leading in from the streets. Well done, Weed Warriors!

Let’s all pull together

By Lannie Erickson

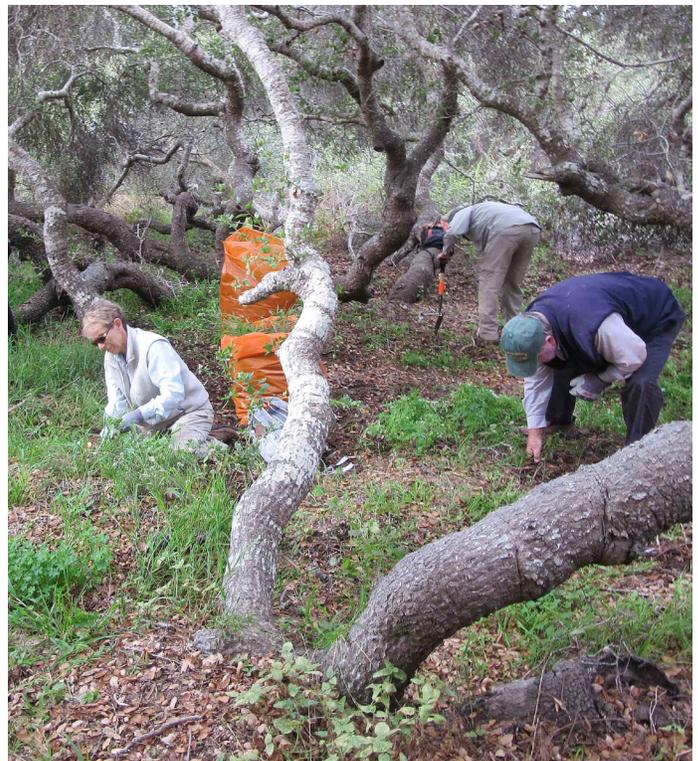
Weeds return regardless of weather.
O’ergrown trails, if trimmed, might look better.
Barriers hold the sand ‘til it slips.
Then someone has to fill in the dips.
Time marches on, we’d better get cracking,
We know the Weed Warriors are not ones for slacking.
The better our work, the more we are blessed,
Maybe with cookies when at last we rest.

Join 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.



Rich and Prisila Johnson shovel away sand that has washed down the 13th Street path onto the street. Photo by Dave Lawrence.



In December, Weed Warriors (L-R) Prisila Johnson, Rich Johnson and Jack Fanselow help to pull up a bumper crop of veldt grass in the 10th Street grove. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Elfin Forest Guide Revised

Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

Visitors to the Elfin Forest seem to be pleased to find our “Elfin Forest Natural Area Guide” in dispenser boxes at the 16th Street and 13th Street path intersections with the boardwalk. The Guide is a folded, 4-sided pamphlet with information about plants and habitats at 19 “stops” along the one-mile boardwalk loop. Each stop is marked on the boardwalk rail with a numbered plaque.

The Guide, originally called the Boardwalk Trail Guide, was developed in 2002 by the Trail Guide Committee chaired by Pat Brown. Pat and committee members Mary Mitchell, Pat Murray and Jean Wheeler planned the points of interest and wrote text to inform visitors about the Forest’s wonderful environment. Bonnie Walters supplied the plant drawings, Pat Brown provided a butterfly photo, Jean Wheeler made the map and our marvelous graphic designer, Katy Budge, did the layout. Pat Brown’s neighbor, Bob Gandy, built the two guide dispenser boxes, and Pat Murray helped with installation.

Fourteen years and several revisions later, the Guide went into its tenth printing of 10,000 Guides in January. Pat Brown has been the Guide Committee Chair for the entire time. Generally she is a one-person committee, stocking guide boxes weekly and keeping a monthly record of how many guides have been used. Occasionally she is assisted by Pete Sarafian and Yolanda Waddell in keeping the guide boxes stocked when she is away.

Last year, with another printing being needed, the committee expanded to include Vicky Johnsen, Ron Rasmussen and Skip Rotstein. They reviewed the Guide stops, making changes where plants had died back and where scientific names had changed. They also selected some plants not included in the Guide to be marked with plaques.

We are grateful to the Baywood Inn and San Luis Obispo County Parks for underwriting the cost of printing the Guide. Thanks to Dave Moran for producing an updated boardwalk and trail map. Ron Rasmussen has produced and installed new plaques along the boardwalk rail.



Ron Rasmussen and Committee Chair Pat Brown check locations of Guide markers prior to revision of the Elfin Forest Guide.

Christmas Bird Count Includes the Elfin Forest

Text & photo by Yolanda Waddell

The National Audubon Society began its Christmas Bird Count on Christmas Day, 1900, when ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an Audubon Society officer, proposed a “Christmas Bird Census.” His idea was in response to a 19th century holiday tradition known as the Christmas “Side Hunt.” Hunters would choose sides and then hunt birds and animals. The side that brought in the most killed birds and animals, won. Counting birds instead of hunting them had an appeal that has grown through the years. Today, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas brave snow, wind or rain to take part in a bird census between December 14 and January 5.

The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America, and to propose conservation action.

The Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) held its annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 19th. The count area is a circle 15 miles in diameter, centered at the intersection of Turri Road and Los Osos Valley Road. This citizen science effort is one of over 1,000 counts in North America that are compiled by the National Audubon Society and used to determine the annual distribution and fluctuation in numbers of North American birds.

On December 19th, we had rain. MCAS Count Compiler Tom Edell reported that rainy weather finally gave way to mostly clear skies in the early afternoon, though mostly cloudy skies were back by late afternoon. In spite of the rain, 112 counters tallied 190 species. In the Elfin Forest, lead counter Joanne Aasen and her assistant, Dawn, reported seeing 15 species in the morning and 8 species in the afternoon. The largest number of one species was 29 Eurasian Collard-Doves, a non-native. Only one Mourning Dove, a California native, was heard; none were seen. However, Joanne and Dawn were pleased to see 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Cooper’s Hawk, 3 Red-tailed Hawks, ten Bushtits and 11 California Quail among the birds they counted. We thank them for giving the time to include the Elfin Forest in the Christmas Bird Count.



Birder Joanne Aasen and assistant Dawn were pleased to see a Ruby Crowned Kinglet during their Christmas Bird Count in the Elfin Forest.

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

With rains virtually every week since Halloween, the Elfin Forest would normally be covered in bloom by early January. However, as I write nearly a week into 2016, there are very few flowers now in bloom. Apparently most of our shrubs need more time to recover from the severe 4-year drought before they can invest energy in blooming.

Yet I think by the time this newsletter reaches mailboxes we will at least have lots of white to pale lavender blossoms all over the ceanothus (California Lilac) bushes bordering most of the boardwalk and sand trails. The leaves on these bushes are now green and very healthy looking, and there are lots of large flower buds on most of the branches looking about to burst open.

I did see some white flower bells on a Manzanita shrub near the high point of the boardwalk, but the main area of large shrubs



Golden-crowned Sparrow, one of eight species of sparrows listed for this time of year in the Elfin Forest.

of that species along the lower boardwalk have no blossoms open at all. I think they do appear to have a number of very tiny buds just beginning to develop, however. So perhaps we will get a fairly decent show of Manzanita blooms just 1 ½ to 2 months later than usual.

There are a few Cardinal catchflies (formerly known as Indian pinks) bright red under the oaks on the lower (northern) boardwalk. They responded quickly to the early rains but will probably not last much longer. And I saw a couple of buds on a California peony in the understory along the 11th Street sand trail. Fuchsia-flowered gooseberries also opened some long red trumpets very soon after the rains began, but are not as numerous at this time as in other years that were not preceded by such a long-lasting severe drought.

Wild cucumber vines (pictured) are growing very vigorously with big bright green leaves in response to the rains. They are easy to see in many places along the sand trails and boardwalk given sparsely leaved branches on their hosts this year. They should be blooming when this issue reaches you and will have large spiny green fruits soon thereafter. See the article by Dirk Walters about probable relationships of this species to now extinct mastodons on page 5! Please do NOT pull these vines—they are not exotic pests like rather similar looking Cape ivy. Wild cucumbers die back quickly, with sunlight soon restored to host branches.

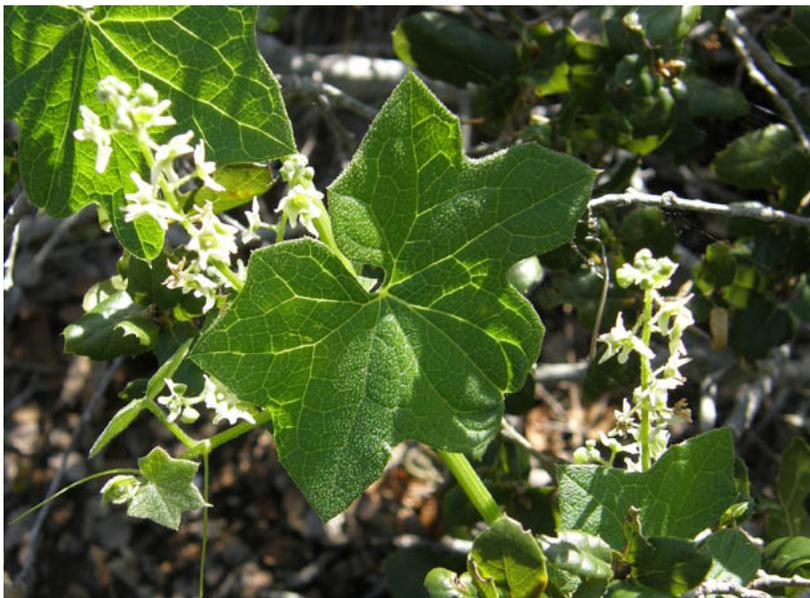
The unusually hot weather throughout the northwest this autumn seems to have reduced numbers of ducks and geese we normally expect to see in mid-winter. There are a number of ducks on the estuary, including Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, and Green-winged Teal, but the waters are not as crowded with them as is usual in January. Perhaps many did not migrate this far south this year.

Virtually all species of water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) are at peak populations for the year at this time, as are all the raptors listed, and a great many of the passerines. Watch the shrubs around the boardwalk for flitting finches, sparrows, warblers, wrens, phoebes, chickadees, titmice, nut-

hatches, and other little brown and little grey birds. The larger thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, quail, blackbirds, and doves can be seen and/or heard regularly.

Come for a walk on the wild side in our increasingly green again small wilderness area. Watch for plants beginning to bloom as they recover from the long drought. Listen and look for our resident birds as they engage in mating rituals and prepare to raise their 2016 families. Try to catch a glimpse of lizards, rabbits, squirrels, or maybe even a wild coyote.

Wild cucumber is a native vine from a large underground tuber. Vines die soon each year, are not lethal to our perennial shrubs, but have been pulled in recent years by mistaken visitors. ONLY trained Weed Warriors with a monitor for the threatened Morro Shoulderband Snail are legally allowed to pull ANY plants in the Elfin Forest.



WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

February 20, 9:30 a.m. – Fungus Foray

Intrepid walk 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.

March 19, 8:30 a.m. – Birds at Nesting Time

Spring is in the air, which means it's nesting season for our Central Coast birds. Join biologist and birder Jessica Griffiths for a walk through the Elfin Forest to see and hear male birds doing their best to impress the ladies with song and fancy flying. In addition to identifying the Forest's birds, Jessica will talk about breeding season plumage, mating behavior, nest building practices, and the ways different birds raise their young. This will be a good walk for all levels of birding ability. Note the 8:30 starting time.

Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at times stated above at the north end (1100 block) of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes, and leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.



Al Normandin began a 3rd Saturday walk about December's plants, lichens and mushrooms by showing a good example of Honey mushrooms. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



In November, Historian Bob Pavlik helped Eflin Forest visitors to tune in to nature writers by reading selections from his favorite authors. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Bicycle Incident

Last Fall, SWAP member Roger Longden reported, "around 6 p.m. in the evening, my wife, daughter-in-law and granddaughter were nearly run over on the boardwalk as they walked to an overlook. I heard the yells. As the approximately 14-year-old culprit on a small black 2-wheel cycle approached me on the lower boardwalk, I stopped him and told him "No Bikes!" "I'm not bothering anyone," he replied, and 15 minutes later rode past again. Bikes will destroy your boardwalk with all the vibration. A peaceful time was turned noisy by him. What can visitors do?"

SWAP Board members had some suggestions. First, tell the boardwalk bicyclist about the Morro Bay Bike Park at Main Street and Radcliff Avenue, near the Highway 1 Main Street exit in Morro Bay. Most cyclists in the Elfin Forest haven't seen the "no bicycles" sign at the entrance. If the cyclist is antagonistic, whip out a smart phone, take a photo and ask for the person's name. Send that information to swap@elfin-forest.org and we'll see if we can contact him or her. Antagonistic offenders can be told that you are going to call the Sheriff (phone number 781-4550) if he/she doesn't get off of the bike and walk it out of the Elfin Forest. If there has been an accident, then definitely call the Sheriff, as well as County Parks Supervising Ranger, 781-1196. Please notify SWAP about any bicycle incident, 528-0392.

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 for inclusion in future issues under "Elfin Forest Sightings." You can also leave a message on SWAP's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.

Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter,
SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW:
Carol Weisl*

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Brenda & Richard Allmann*	Prisila & Rich Johnson*
David & Rosemary Bentley*	William Johnson*
Wendy Brown*	Jerry & Judith Kirkhart*
Katy Budge*	Dr. Frank Kurczewski*
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DONATIONS:

Baywood Inn- donation for trail guide printing
PGE Employee Giving
SLO County- donation for trail guide printing

**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.*

Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

Tired of looking at that pile of newsletters and magazines waiting to be read? If you use your computer a lot, we encourage you to take a look at the online *Oakleaves* at 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. Just e-mail us at oakleaves@elfin-forest.org with the subject: Switch me to online.

*Ornaments
on the "SWAP
Christmas Tree"
feature birds,
Red-legged Frogs
and other wildlife.*



SWAP Christmas Tree Shines Again

Text & photos by Yolanda Waddell

In 1997, our SWAP Chapter received an invitation from the Inn at Morro Bay to participate in a Christmas tree decoration event along with several other non-profit organizations. The idea was appealing, as it would provide an opportunity to have SWAP in the public eye for a while. Board members Flo Appel and Beth Wimer agreed to make ornaments for the SWAP tree. They worked in their homes for many days, crafting ornaments that featured birds, elves, rabbits and even Ceanothus caterpillars and Red-legged frogs.

The resulting tree was spectacular, admired by many visitors at the Inn at Morro Bay. When the event ended, Flo and Beth's lovely ornaments were carefully packed away in a large plastic tub. They remained there for many years; no use was found for them, except for one resurrection in 2002, when they decorated the Christmas tree in our home.

At last December's SWAP Board meeting, Property and Records Chair Pat Murray asked whether we still want to keep the plastic tub with the Christmas ornaments. The tub is taking up space in SWAP's storage unit, which is quite crowded.

Pat encouraged me to take a look at the ornaments and recommend what to do with them. As I unpacked them, I knew that those wonderfully crafted ornaments must see the light of day again. We held a Christmas tree trimming party, and once more the SWAP Christmas Tree delighted all who visited our house. The ornaments are packed away again, and will remain in the SWAP storage room. Next Christmas, if all goes well, they will grace another Christmas tree.



Beth Wimer decorates the "SWAP Christmas Tree" with ornaments that she made in 1997.



Elfin Forest Caps

One size fits all for these caps, added to our shoppers list only four months ago. They have adjustable straps in the back and are made of 100% cotton. Two handsome colors are available, forest green or maroon. Each cap has emblazoned in gold across its front the image of one of our coast live oaks, elfin-short but with a wide sprawling canopy, and the words "Elfin Forest Natural Area."



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) @ \$20.00 = \$ _____
 Short Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @ \$23.00 = \$ _____
 Long Slv. T-Shirt (S, M, L, XL) @ \$25.00 = \$ _____
 Long Slv. T-Shirt (XXL, XXXL) @ \$27.00 = \$ _____
 Sweatshirt (S, M, L, XL) @ \$35.00 = \$ _____
 Sweatshirt (XXL, XXXL) @ \$37.00 = \$ _____

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.

_____ @ \$3.00 = \$ _____

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 = \$ _____

7. ELFIN FOREST CAPS

One size fits all caps with adjustable straps in back, 100% cotton. Two colors, forest green and maroon. Specify color when ordering.

_____ @ \$15 = \$ _____ Color(s) _____

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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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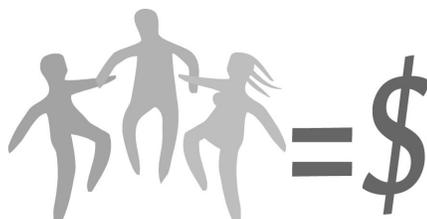
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Every membership helps us to be more convincing to foundations and government agencies when we ask them for funds.

They all want to know "How many members do you have?"

Please look at your mailing label on the flip side of this page for the date when your membership expires. If it's time to renew, use the form in the box to the right of this one to support SWAP for another year. Notice you can check to receive only the online version of Oakleaves (with photos in full color!) to switch more dollars from mailing costs to conservation efforts.

Timely renewal of your membership helps us to save on postage and the time needed to send a renewal reminder by mail. Thank you for supporting SWAP and the Elfin Forest.



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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!

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