



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 ♦ APRIL/MAY 2016

County Parks Director Marks First Year



Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

On February 2, 2015, Nick Franco became Director of the San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation Department. He took over the helm from Interim Director (and before that, Deputy Director) Curtis Black. In July of 2014, County Administrator Dan Buckshi and the Board of Supervisors made the decision to separate County Parks and the San Luis Obispo County Airport from General Services, making them stand-alone departments and removing a layer of bureaucracy from their operation.

Parks Director *continued on page 2*

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El Niño Helps Flowers Bloom in the Elfin Forest

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair ; photos by Rebecca Rasmussen



The seasonal rains have come to the Elfin Forest with, as of the beginning of March, more than 11 inches in the Los Osos area. The flowering plants have responded beautifully. Compared to the past 2-3 years, *Ceanothus* (*Ceanothus cuneatus*) (pictured above) especially has produced masses of bloom, with separate plants producing either pure white or lilac purple blossoms. The Morro Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos morroensis*) (pictured below) also is producing more bunches of flowers than usual.

Other spring bloomers also have responded to the welcome rains. Some examples are the California Peony (*Paeonia californica*), and Wild Cucumber (*Marah fabaceus*). Other plants have their special season for growth and proliferation, and can be expected to bloom later in the year. More rain is expected in March, possibly extending into April and May.

The rain has also led to germination of the seeds of nonnative invasive plants, especially veldt grass and Saharan mustard. Thus, SWAP Weed Warriors have a busy spring and summer ahead. Join us on the first Saturday of each month to help control this invasion and, in this way, encourage the health and proliferation of native plants.





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, April 13,
and Wednesday, May 11.**

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.

Parks Director *continued from page 1*

Franco heads a department that has 55 full-time employees and an annual budget of \$10.5 million. He and his staff manage 15,000 acres of regional and community parks, golf courses and natural areas such as the 90-acre Elfin Forest.

Before accepting the position at San Luis Obispo County Parks, Franco was the California State Parks San Luis Obispo Coast District Superintendent for eleven years. His office was at Hearst Castle, and he vividly remembers being there during the San Simeon earthquake on December 22, 2003. Fortunately, there was very little damage from the earthquake due to the architectural skill of Julia Morgan.

His 31-year career with State Parks began in 1983 as a park aide at Carpinteria State Beach while going to college. Although his college majors weren't directly related to parks and recreation (music, philosophy and geophysics), Nick found that he enjoyed working outdoors and liked working with parks people. He then obtained a relevant degree from Cal Poly in Political Science. In 1988, he became a park ranger, working at Will Rogers and Topanga State Parks in the Santa Monica Mountains. From there he transferred to Oceano Dunes followed by positions at Big Basin Redwoods and then San Juan Bautista State Historic Park. In 1998, he was promoted to Superintendent at Angel Island State Park, located in San Francisco Bay, working there for five years. He describes an island as "a body of land surrounded by a need for a boat." Then in 2003, he became the Superintendent of the San Luis Obispo Coast District.

As Director at San Luis Obispo County Parks, Franco saw an opportunity to oversee a fresh start for the department, with its own budget and a direct line of communication with the County Administrator and Board of Supervisors. Also, he and his wife had raised their two daughters in Atascadero for the previous eleven years, and wanted to stay in the community.

After a year as Director, Nick Franco is pleased with the state of the County Parks Department. He said, "It's been great – I love it!" He enjoys working in a "different niche" with things like ball fields, playgrounds, pools and dog parks that provide direct benefits to the community, and sees the condition of the county's parks on the upswing. Yet there are problems seen in the Elfin Forest and all county parks that need to be addressed. Unleashed dogs are always very difficult to manage, and there is the problem of taking care of deferred maintenance with limited resources. Also, compact areas like the Elfin Forest with critical habitat can be "loved to death."

One of Franco's primary goals now is to obtain national accreditation through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). There are 151 standards to meet. It will take about five years, but when finished, it will set standards for the future and make it easier to obtain grants and other funding.

County Parks receives 40% of its budget money from the County General Fund. The remaining 60% comes from fees paid at the golf courses, Santa Margarita Lake, Lopez Lake and El Chorro Regional Park, as well as facility use fees in Los Osos Community Park and other community parks. Those fees support areas such as the Elfin Forest, where admission is free.

When asked if there could be a more frequent ranger presence in the Elfin Forest, Franco replied that there is usually just one ranger on duty for our section of the county, who patrols every park from Los Osos Community Park north to Shamel Park in Cambria. He said, "That is where the volunteers come in. County Parks wouldn't survive without volunteers." Parks budget for invasive plant control is small – another area where volunteers such as the Elfin Forest Weed Warriors are invaluable. He is currently working to establish a Partnership Coordinator position, to work with volunteers, concessionaires and non-profit organizations. He extends his thanks to SWAP's members and volunteers, saying, "Our job is to support volunteers. It's a partnership."

The Elfin Forest – a Place for Learning and Enjoyment



Home Schoolers and their parents look at a Turkey Vulture flying overhead. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

By Yolanda Waddell

Following are accounts of three different groups who visited the Elfin Forest in recent months, to learn about its plants, animals and birds.

On January 17, SWAP docent Vicky Johnsen took fifteen attendees at the Morro Bay Bird Festival on a tour of the Forest to learn about plants and lichens. They had to re-set their approach from looking through binoculars at birds to looking through a hand lens at individual flowers and the fibers of lichens. All agreed that it was an eye-opening experience.

On February 14, Barbara Renshaw, a docent for the Central Coast State Parks Association (CCSPA) gave a “Plant of the Month” walk in the Forest. Though the featured plant was Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry, Barbara told the visitors on her walk about other interesting plants along the way. In the top right photo, Barbara points out the broad leaves of California peony, a wild and beautiful cousin of the large multi-petaled peonies seen in Mid-western gardens.

On March 8, ten home school students and their parents drove from Santa Maria to learn about birds from SWAP docents Vicky Johnsen and Chris Van Beveren. Chris and Vicky met the group at Baywood Pier in order to get a close look at gulls and some shore birds. Chris and Vicky had some bird nests for them to look at and feel. They learned about the differences in bird beaks and bird feet, depending on the type of food that birds eat. In the Elfin Forest, the children had an opportunity to see several kinds of birds including a Turkey Vulture, which had just flown overhead when the photo was taken. Chris (at left in T-shirt and cap) brought her spotting scope so the children could see distant birds.



Barbara Renshaw finds an early spring California peony plant. Photo by Vicky Johnsen.



Vicky Johnsen talked about plants to some birders in January. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

SWAP Board Meeting Day Changed to 2nd Wednesday

The SWAP Board of Directors has changed their meeting day from the second Thursday of each month, to the second Wednesday. Meeting time remains the same, from 7 to 9 p.m., and the location is still at Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Avenue in Los Osos. The room has changed from the Fireside Room to the Card Room, still in the main community building. For more information, call 805-528-0392. Meeting dates, times and locations are subject to change.

Common Buckeye Butterfly

Text and Photo by Pat Brown

The Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*) is a strikingly beautiful butterfly in the Nymphalidae family. Nymphalidae butterflies are also known as brush-footed butterflies because the front pair of legs are very short and brushy, which makes them difficult to see, so it seems they have only four legs instead of six. It is called common as there are also Mangrove and Tropical Buckeye butterflies. The resident range for this butterfly is from Mexico up through the southern U.S., although they have been known to migrate as far north as southern Canada over the summer and on the eastern U.S. coast to migrate back south in the fall.

The Buckeye has a wing span of $1 \frac{5}{8}$ to $4 \frac{3}{4}$ inches. The background color is brown with bars of orange and white on the forewing and intricate bands of gold and brown around the edges of the wings. It has large, dark eye spots, called ocelli, on both the fore and hind wings. On the forewings, the ocelli have white dots in the center. The ocelli on the hindwings are part orange. These spots are a form of defensive mimicry. The large “fake” eyes may scare some predators away. In addition, birds know to attack an insect by the head, but in this case the bird will end up with a mouthful of wing. The butterfly can still fly perfectly well with a v-shaped bite taken out of one or more wings.

This butterfly has multiple broods during a year, meaning several complete life cycles from egg to adult in-flight. The squat, dark green eggs are laid singly on the upper side of leaves or on buds of specific types of plants, called host plants. Host plants vary by species of butterfly. For the Buckeye, local host plants include English plantain, snapdragons and monkeyflowers. Iridoid glycoside chemicals found in these plants stimulate females to lay their eggs. When the caterpillar hatches, it will first eat its egg shell for nutrients and then start munching on the host plant, ingesting the iridoid glycosides. When a bird eats a caterpillar with these chemicals it will first notice the bitter taste before it vomits. Some Buckeye caterpillars are lost to predators, but birds soon learn to avoid them.

Caterpillars are dark with longitudinal stripes of pale yellow with many branching spines and the head has two spines that point forward. Buckeye caterpillars will shed their skins four times as they grow before pupating and forming a hard, mottled brown chrysalis. Inside the chrysalis, what was the body of the caterpillar metamorphoses into the adult butterfly. The butterfly breaks out of the hard case of the chrysalis, takes a couple of hours to spread its wings by pumping fluid into them and then takes its first flight.

Adult Buckeyes will glide between wing flaps. They like to bask in the sun on bare ground or low plants in open areas with their wings spread and eye spots clearly visible. Sources of food include flower nectar, mud and rotting fruit. Composite flowers are ideal as their proboscis (think of it as a long mouth part) is not long enough to reach into tubular flowers.

Female Buckeye butterflies are larger than males. A male butterfly will dart out at anything passing by his favorite perch to investigate if it is a potential mate, often returning to same perch. Adults typically live 10 days, so they only have a short time to mate and lay eggs for the next generation. The habitat for many butterflies is shrinking, but this common butterfly is doing well and is not endangered.



Elfin Forest Sightings – Comfy Coyote

On January 26, Mary Jean Brady sent us this photo of a coyote basking in the sun. She said “I’m happy I can share (this photo) I took last week at Elfin Forest. The coyote was just off the boardwalk and very unconcerned about our presence. It was a great time at the forest enhanced by a docent (who was) very friendly and knowledgeable.” The SWAP docent was Vicky Johnsen, who added that the coyote seemed to be enjoying a patch of sunlight next to some shrubs about 30 or 40 feet north of the boardwalk. She said that the coyote was uncharacteristically calm in view of the group of people pointing and taking photos, but did disappear very quickly as soon as two women walking dogs came into view on the boardwalk.



Ookow or Blue Dicks

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

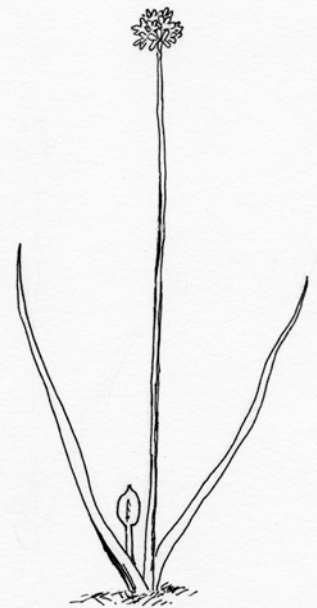
This month's plant is one that I thought I had discussed and Bonnie had drawn before. I was amazed that we had no record of it. I suspect there are two possible reasons for this. First, this plant is essentially impossible to photograph accurately. The flowers are isolated on the top of a foot-long thin stalk (scape) and the usually single leaves/scape arises from the top of an underground corm. All the photos I've seen are of the flower cluster (umbel) only. Bonnie's drawing was able to do something photographers can't do. She shortened the scape; it should be longer relative to the flower cluster. The second reason it has been overlooked is because it's so common that it's taken for granted. It is seen on practically every CNPS field trip in our area. That said, I was somewhat surprised to see it on the most recent Elfin Forest species list because I associate the species with clay soils rather than sandy ones. I also have to admit that I don't remember seeing it from the boardwalk either. I'm hoping that someone who has seen it there will tell me where to find it.

The plant is *Dichelostemma capitatum* which is currently in the asparagus family, Themidaceae. The most commonly used name for it in our area is 'blue dicks'. On a recent field trip I was asked, what is the origin of that name since it sounds a bit risqué? I didn't know. It turns out there is a web site which asks the same question. It had only two responses, both of which admitted they didn't know either, but one answer speculated the blue comes from the color of the flowers and 'dicks' comes from the first syllable of genus name, *Dichelostemma*. 'Dich' is pronounced 'Dick' when said out loud. It's as good as any other explanation of the name.

My questioner then went on to ask if there were any other common names for the plant. Many years ago, Dr. Richard Pimentel, who taught natural history at Cal Poly for many years, said he preferred a name he said came from the native Californians: ookow. I think it's a good alternative name even though most web sites apply this name to a different species of *Dichelostemma* (*D. congestum*) which is found mostly east and north of our area. After all, we can call it what we want since common names are not regulated. If you don't like ookow, the web suggests several alternatives such as school bells, wild hyacinth, and fork-tooth.

The scientific name has been quite variable over the years. Dr. Hoover, in his **Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo**, gave it the name, *Dichelostemma pulchellum* and placed it in the Amaryllis family (Amaryllidaceae). It has also been given the name *Brodiaea pulchella*. The current **Jepson Manual** gives it the name *Dichelostemma capitatum* and places it in the *Brodiaea* family (Themidaceae).

Why the confusion? There is a group of monocots with showy flowers whose perianth (sepal + petals) are brightly colored and similar in size and shape. When sepals and petals are nearly identical and can be recognized primarily by position (sepals are always the outer whorl of flower or perianth) the individual elements of the perianth have been labeled tepals. Since there are over 5,000 species of these tepal monocots, botanists have tried to divide the



large complex of species into smaller, more manageable groups. Unfortunately, they haven't agreed on the criteria. During the last century, the divisions were based on such things as inflorescence (umbels in the Amaryllidaceae and racemes and panicles in the Liliaceae and succulence in the Agavaceae). The genera in these classical (old) families have been totally rearranged into new and very different assemblages including a number of new families.

The characters defining these families are also less obvious than succulence and inflorescence. For example, the two very similar genera *Allium* (onions) and *Muilla* were so similar the author of the younger name, *Muilla*, chose that name to indicate that *Muilla* differed from onion primarily in its lack of odor. By the modern family definition these two genera are now placed in separate families based on chemical and developmental character differences. The most easily observed character that can be used to separate the Themidaceae from the Asparagaceae is that members of the Themidaceae produce corms (underground fleshy stem with scale leaves) while the Alliaceae produce a bulb (minimal underground stem with succulent leaves). Apparently there is still a lot of confusion as to exact family definitions in this group.

Ookow is a major wildlife food. Its corms are dug up and eaten. A few years ago, at Shell Creek a group of feral pigs dug up a patch of ookow. The area looked like it had been plowed. We all thought that it was terrible! But a few years later, the patch had lots of small, widely scattered ookow. How did this happen? It turns out that ookow produces tiny cormlets at the end of short rhizomes (horizontal underground stems). These are so tiny and scattered that the pigs didn't waste effort to find them. As the pigs rooted up the patch, they scattered these tiny cormlets over an expanded area. Also, since there were no large corms at the site, the pigs won't root there for several years giving the cormlets time to grow into mature corms which will produce a new crop of flowering ookow. Even the nasty behavior of plant predators can be turned to good.

Weed Warrior Report

By Yolanda Waddell

January 2nd – Resolute Warriors Greet the New Year

Eleven dedicated volunteers showed up in spite of it's being a holiday weekend, to care for the Elfin Forest. Weed Warrior Coordinator Ron Rasmussen had plenty for them to do. One team consisting of Dave Bowlus, Lannie Erickson, Skip Rotstein and Charlie Sitton took shovels and rakes to prepare paths and the South Bay Boulevard slope for coming rain storms. Trail Trimming Committee leader Dean Thompson and a crew consisting of Mary Ciesinski, Dave McDonald and Dale Stoker trimmed back some over-enthusiastic ceanothus bushes and other plants that were growing over the upper boardwalk. And Ron Rasmussen and Barrett Holland did some boardwalk repair and attached some new identification plaques in a few places. In all, it was a great way to greet the New Year. By the way, Mary Ciesinski is the new Executive Director of ECOSLO. We were very pleased to have her join us.



In January, lead trail trimmer Dean Thompson (foreground), Mary Ciesinski and Dale Stoker carefully cut back ceanothus shrubs that were growing over the boardwalk. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

February 6 – Finishing off More Weeds

On a very nice day in Los Osos, eleven Weed Warriors tackled two important jobs. Trail Trimming leader Dean Thompson and David McDonald worked at trimming shrubbery along the boardwalk. The rest, including snail monitors Barrett Holland and Pete Sarafian, strung out along the South Bay Boulevard slope and pulled a lot of weeds, including ever-present veldt grass and a recent Elfin Forest invader, the very prolific Sahara mustard. Thanks to the following Warriors for their diligent yanking: Steve Cake, Lannie Erickson, Barrett Holland, Vicky Johnsen, Prisila Johnson, Rich Johnson, Ron Rasmussen, first-time Weed Warrior Sharon Rooney, and Pete Sarafian.

Let's all pull together

By Lannie Erickson

Raindrops keep falling on our heads.
What happened to all the weeds we thought were dead?
They're pushin' up the ground!
They spread themselves around. Rain keeps fallin' down.
Don't wait until they pop up in the sun.
Now's the time to get out there and to get the pulling done.
Don't let them get ahead.
We mustn't let them spread while rain falls on our heads.
If there's one thing we know,
The shoots they send to meet us
Won't defeat us.
Our native plants are coming out to greet us.



In March, Rich and Prisila Johnson sought out weeds on the slope above South Bay Boulevard. Photo by Vicky Johnsen.

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.

Happenings In April

MBNEP Poetry Contest – April 1 to 29

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) is sponsoring a poetry contest that has two categories: 1) Haiku focused on the Morro Bay estuary; 2) a poem of any form, 30 lines or fewer, that focuses on wildlife native to the estuary or surrounding watershed. There will be one adult winner and one youth winner for each category. Adults are 18+ and the youth category is ages 12 through 17. Submissions for this year's contest are accepted April 1 through April 29, and winners will be announced on May 13. All winners will receive a prize basket, and will be asked to participate in a celebratory reading at Coalesce Bookstore on May 20 at 7 p.m. All of the contest details are on MBNEP's website at mbnep.org/poetry2016.



Blue Dicks (see page 5). Photo by Jean Wheeler

California Native Plant Week – April 16 to 24

This year CNPS will celebrate the Sixth Annual California Native Plant Week, April 16 - April 24, 2015, taking in two weekends. Statewide, California Native Plant Society chapters will offer special events. Our local chapter, CNPS-SLO, has some field trips planned. Take a look at their website, www.cnps-slo.org for more information about California Native Plant Week. SWAP's butterfly enthusiast, Pat Brown, will lead a "Butterflies and Native Plants" walk on Saturday, April 16. Her walk description is on page 9.

Cambria Wildflower Show – April 23 and 24

Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch will present their annual Cambria Wildflower Show Saturday and Sunday, April 23rd and 24th at the Cambria Vet's Hall. Saturday, the show will be open from noon to 5 p.m. and Sunday hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Imagine the visual feast of more than 500 bouquets of wildflowers all under one roof. The purpose of the show is to enhance the enjoyment of the area's native plants. The wildflowers will be gathered by volunteers along the coast and inland to the top of the Santa Lucia Mountains, from the Monterey County line south to Los Osos. For more information or to volunteer to help, call 927-2856 or e-mail ffrpcambira@sbcglobal.net.

Earth Day – Make the Most of It

By Yolanda Waddell

Each year on April 22nd, Earth Day is celebrated around the world by thousands of environmentally concerned citizens. In San Luis Obispo County, the Earth Day Alliance will present an Earth Day Fair and Music Festival on Sunday, April 24, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at El Chorro Regional Park. The focus will be climate change. Businesses, non-profit groups, students and individuals or families will share their environmental message, cause, or solution. Musicians will perform throughout the day. Go to www.earthday-alliance.com for more information.

In addition to a celebration, there are many other ways to mark Earth Day. Planting trees, native plants or a vegetable garden creates a healthier home or local environment. A visit to the Elfin Forest reminds one that we are all part of our beautiful earth. Look on page 9 for some suggestions from Vicky Johnsen about ways that all of us can care for the Elfin Forest.



Weed Warrior Shana Thompson helped the Elfin Forest by planting native plants. Photo by Yolanda.



Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

As SWAP Chair Ron Rasmussen reported on page 1, the rains received so far this year have brought out a profusion of floral blooming. As I write this on March 10, the white to lilac-colored blossoms of Ceanothus (also called Buckbrush or California Lilac) form low walls along much of the boardwalk itself. Looking from the boardwalk across the Elfin Forest to the ocean or to the chain of volcanic mountains known as the Seven (or Nine) Sisters, large white-flowered patches of these shrubs can be seen. And the Morro Manzanitas are producing lots of their lovely little white bells, blushing pink. Both of these plants are normally through blooming before March ends, but came into bloom so late this year, needing the rains to recover from the 4-year drought, that they may retain lovely flowers well into April.

I've seen a few stalks of yellow Suffrutescent Wallflowers (pictured) in full bloom along several of the sand trails leading to the boardwalk and from the boardwalk itself. More should be in bloom by the time this issue reaches you. Some orange flowers of Sticky Monkey-flower shrubs have also opened. They should be very common by April, and hosting caterpillars of the Variable Checkerspot Butterfly.

Hopefully by May the blue flowers of the Dune bush lupine, for which one of our two lookouts over the estuary is named, will be in bloom also. But our dune lupines are among the shrubs hardest hit by our 4-year drought. Many have died and most others were severely damaged. Hopefully they are recovering enough to host the caterpillars of the Morro Blue butterfly which dine on this plant and hardly any others. Keep a sharp eye out for other flowers coming into bloom as they respond to the first good series of rains in five years.

Western Scrub Jays liven up the Forest with their bright blue feathers and loud calls. Anna's Hummingbirds are zipping around, their throats flashing bright red in the sun as they seek food for themselves and this year's offspring from tube-shaped flowers such as the red Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberries. Bushtits (one is pictured) flit around the shrubs looking for insects to eat, in mixed flocks with other birds such as Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Chestnut-backed Chickadees. Bewick's Wren should be heard singing with



A Bushtit (above left), Suffrutescent Wallflower (above)

rising buzzes and clear descending trills. There may also be flitting finches, sparrows, warblers, black phoebes, and nuthatches.

Larger California Thrashers are easy to recognize by their long, down-curved bills. Spotted Towhees make a loud buzzing call and are brilliantly colored with their black heads, white-spotted black wings, brilliant rufous flanks, and bright white breasts. Quail will be calling "kwer-**CAH**-go" and leading large coveys with many of this year's young across the ground between bushes.

Perhaps most excitingly colorful of all in these two months will be the annual explosion of butterflies flitting about the flowers. See Pat Brown's article and photo of the Common Buckeye on page 4. Other butterflies to watch for include the orange and black Variable Checkerspot and orange and brown Gabb's Checkerspot, the smaller green Coastal Bramble Hairstreak and several other Hairstreaks, the Painted Lady, and the Silvery Blue and Morro Blue.

Take some pleasant strolls around the boardwalk during the springtime wildflower extravaganza and enjoy the flitting vibrant colors of many butterflies and birds! You may also catch glimpses of a squirrel, some lizards, bunnies, or even a coyote. But please keep your dog on a leash to protect our wildlife and your precious pet.

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.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

April 16, 9:30 a.m. – Butterflies & Native Plants

In honor of California Native Plant Week, butterfly enthusiast Pat Brown will lead a walk from the point of view of a hungry butterfly. As you tour the Elfin Forest with her, Pat will introduce you to several native plants and talk about the butterflies that sip their nectar and the caterpillars that eat their leaves. Pat has taken many photos of butterflies in all stages of development from eggs to mature butterflies, and will share them along with fascinating butterfly facts. She'll lead you to hangouts of Variable Checkerspot, Moro Blue, Swallowtail, Hairstreak and other butterflies that make the Elfin Forest their home. She will also share information about butterfly books, web sites and butterfly-related materials. She recommends that you bring a pair of close-focusing (5-10 ft.) binoculars.

May 21, 9:30 a.m. – Wildflower Walk

This is definitely an El Niño Spring, so botanist Dirk Walters will take us on a delightful tour of the enthusiastically blooming plants that are visible from the Elfin Forest boardwalk. There will be bright yellows of Rush-roses, Deerweed, Golden Yarrow and of course California Poppies. White Popcorn flowers, Pearly everlasting and Yarrow plants will be in abundance too, as well as pink Cobwebby Thistles and blue Wild Hyacinths. The Silver Dune Lupines at Bush Lupine Point should be covered with pale blue blossoms, and alive with honeybees and Moro Blue butterflies. Treat yourself to a springtime experience in Nature's own garden.

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.

Become an Elfin Forest Caretaker

By Vicki Johnsen

1) It is not necessary to attend meetings or follow an agenda. We are simply looking for those who have the desire to watch over this special natural area.

2) We appreciate SWAP members and Elfin Forest neighbors who quietly clean up trash on the boardwalk and trails. Join with these people by also looking in on the oak groves and, if needed, gently remind visitors how fragile the trees are and how easily the grove can be damaged.

3) If you see someone riding a bike on the boardwalk or the trails, a friendly reminder that such actions can be a danger to others and to themselves as well as advising these riders about the rules is often the best course of action to educate them and solve the problem.

4) Politely asking dog walkers to leash their pets could be followed by a comment that usually more birds and wildlife are seen as a result of dogs being on leash and under control.

Please join us in the ongoing effort to promote a sense of stewardship over our "small wilderness area preserve."



Black Brant specialist John Roser displays a photo taken in the 1990s, of a sky filled with Brants. The number of Brants wintering in Morro Bay has declined recently. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Dennis Sheridan displays some fascinating fungi to February walk participants. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

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*

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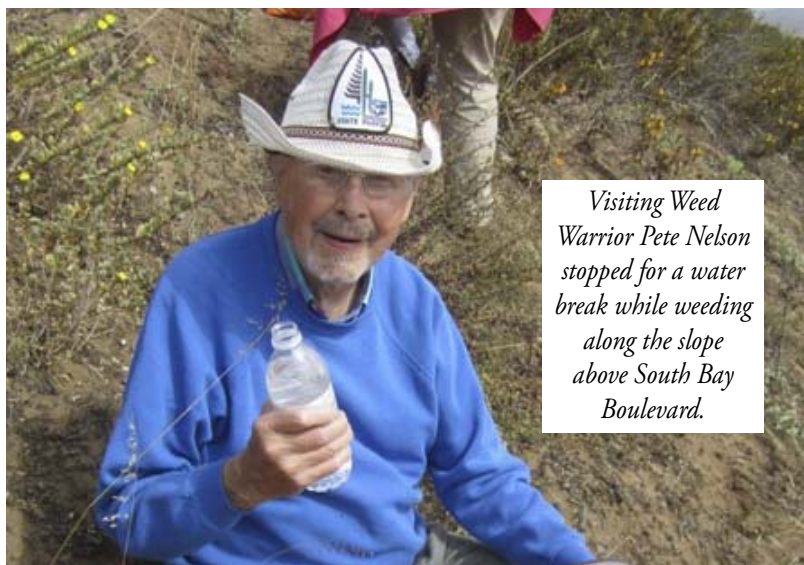
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Scott & Claudia Hein, in memory of Rich Stallcup
Los Osos Middle School PTSA

**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.*

Remembering a Visiting Weed Warrior – Pete Nelson



*Visiting Weed
Warrior Pete Nelson
stopped for a water
break while weeding
along the slope
above South Bay
Boulevard.*

Story & Photo By Yolanda Waddell

Pete Nelson was a librarian with a large dose of wanderlust in him. When I met him, he was working at the Cuesta College Library and living in Morro Bay State Park as a camp host. I took him for a tour of the Elfin Forest and told him about our SWAP Weed Warriors, and he joined us for a few of our first Saturday workdays.

After a few years, Pete moved to the San Diego area to do the same thing – work in a library and take on a camp host job in a local state park. From there he moved to La Quinta, near Palm Springs. Every summer Pete would take a trip up the coast in his RV, visiting the friends he'd made in each of the places he had stayed. One of his stops would be Los Osos, and if it was around the first Saturday of the month, Pete would join the Weed Warriors in the Elfin Forest.

Pete's final campground was Lost Dutchman State Park near Mesa, Arizona. He actually had a house in Mesa, but left his nephew Pat and wife Sue in charge of the house most of the time.

A bad fall at Lost Dutchman ended Pete's camp host days. He spent some years in a senior care home, occasionally staying in touch by e-mail. We recently heard from his nephew that he passed away in June, 2015. We remember Pete as a long-time friend of the Elfin Forest, helping it in the best way a person can, with his time and energy.



OAKLEAVES

is published six times per year beginning in February.

Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;
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Order these gorgeous shirts for yourself or as gifts. They are black with artist Barbara Rosenthal's lovely mural print in color on both the front and back of each shirt. They are available in adult sizes from small to triple extra large as short-sleeved or long-sleeved T-shirts or as thick, warm sweatshirts.



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

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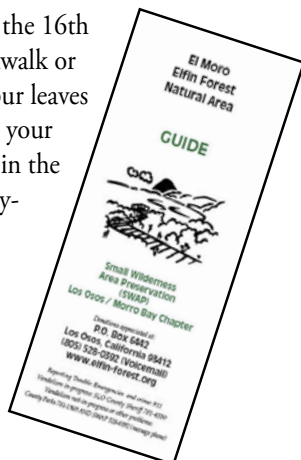
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Introduce a Friend to The Elfin Forest

Wildflowers are in bloom with winter rains, birds and butterflies can be seen, and animal tracks in the sand testify to passing nocturnal residents. How about introducing a friend to the spring beauty of our small wilderness preserve?

Pick up a trail guide where the 16th Street Entrance meets the boardwalk or where the Bush Lupine Point spur leaves the boardwalk loop. Encourage your friend to enjoy the information in the trail guide and on the beautifully-illustrated Interpretive Signs.

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



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