



OAKLEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF THE LOS OSOS / MORRO BAY CHAPTER OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 528-0392 ❖ JUNE/JULY 2016

Coyotes Are “At Home” In The Elfin Forest



By Ron Rasmussen,
SWAP Chair
Photo by
Rebecca Richardson

A little back-ground may help in understanding why coyotes are present in the Elfin Forest and why they are important for its health. Coyotes have been reported nearly everywhere in the country, from wild, undeveloped lands to city streets. They are attracted by available food sources

that range from trash cans to small animals. Normal residents of our area, coyotes are especially attracted to the Elfin Forest because

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Our County Parks Supervising Ranger

Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

On page 2 of each issue of *Oakleaves* is the statement, “If you have any questions, concerns or comments about any problems in the Elfin Forest, call or write Mark Wagner, SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger.” Recently I had the pleasure of meeting and conversing with Mark, who supervises the County Parks Pecho District that includes the Elfin Forest.

County Parks Supervising Rangers are the “go to” rangers for the public and volunteer organizations like SWAP. Everything from damage and decay to vandalism is reported to Mark, who will make sure that the problem is taken care of. Mark says that supervising rangers do everything that a uniformed ranger does. Park rangers are well informed about their parks. They do inspections of the



park, greet visitors and enforce park rules, do all kinds of maintenance and repair, and give emergency care to visitors as well as performing other tasks. Every park ranger has First Aid/CPR/AED training. Some Park Rangers have Emer-

gency Medical Technician certification. Supervising Rangers make decisions about projects, purchase materials and equipment, manage their budgets, supervise their employees and have countless other responsibilities.

During his grade school years Mark would answer, “Park Ranger,” when asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. In high school Mark became active in music, playing guitar in rock bands, and drifted away from the park ranger career goal; at Cuesta College, he took radio and TV production courses with the idea of working in that field. But while at Cuesta College, he obtained a

Wagner *continued on page 3*



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, June 8,
and Wednesday, July 14.**

**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.

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of the food sources that are present. These include small animals and various kinds of native vegetation. In the Elfin Forest their “dens” are on the north slope of the Forest where fresh water is available and their families are not usually disturbed by visitors.

Coyotes are important for the health of the Elfin Forest because they keep the numbers of small animals under control. Studies of the effect of coyote presence on the population of small animals that can be harmful to the environment show that the removal of coyotes results in proliferation of these “pests.” Thus, the continuous presence of coyotes in the Elfin Forest is especially important for its continued health.

There have been calls for the removal of the coyote population from the Elfin Forest. This would likely be futile. Their removal would almost certainly be followed by re-population from the surrounding region, where coyotes are also present. Their removal would also be followed, in the short term, by proliferation of fast-breeding “pest” animals such as rabbits and rodents that would adversely impact the health of the vegetation in the Elfin Forest. A new group of coyotes would no doubt move into the Elfin Forest, but this would probably take at least a year.

Visitors to the Elfin Forest have, from time to time, reported interactions with the coyote population. There have been no reports of significant harm to the visitors or to the coyotes. However, an important factor in these reported interactions has usually been that the visitors have a dog with them. A second factor has been the time of the year when these adverse interactions occur. Coyotes mate in the winter months. Spring is the time for new pups to be born and the parents can become more protective. If the visitors do not have a dog (or dogs) with them, coyotes tend not to confront them. Thus, visitors should be aware of the time of the year for potential confrontation with coyotes if they have a dog with them, especially at dawn or dusk.

There have been requests from some visitors with dogs for SWAP or County Parks to do something about possible harm from interactions with coyotes. The Elfin Forest does allow dogs on leash to visit. However, the Forest is not an “official” Dog Park. With respect to interactions with coyotes, dogs are the responsibility of the owners, and not SWAP or County Parks. Therefore, because of their importance in maintaining the health of the Elfin Forest, the coyote population must be protected.

When visiting the Elfin Forest without a dog it is important to observe some simple rules:

- Do not attempt to approach a coyote on or off of the boardwalk.
- Do not run from a coyote.
- Make loud noises.
- Move slowly away from the coyote.
- Keep yourself between the coyote and any small children.
- Do not attempt to feed or otherwise attract the coyote.

To obtain more detailed information about coyotes and other wildlife you may visit: www.bornfreeusa.org or www.coexistingwithwildlife.org.

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.

Wagner *continued from page 1*

job as a County Parks seasonal worker, and realized that he really likes working with his hands and outdoors. After Cuesta College, he went on to Cal Poly, majoring in Natural Resources Management. His first job out of college was as a County Parks greens keeper in 1986. In 1987, Mark became a Park Ranger. He worked in all four of the County Park districts, and in 1993 became a Supervising Ranger.

In the Pecho District there are eight full-time rangers and four to eight ranger aides working in El Chorro Regional Park and the north coastal parks from Los Osos to Cambria. Ranger Brian Wilder visits the Elfin Forest every day, checking the entrances daily and walking around the Forest every week or two weeks. The County Parks budget is fairly tight. Mark said, "If I had a magic wand, I'd like to see our \$15 million deferred maintenance issues eliminated." A small example of deferred maintenance in the Elfin Forest might be the interpretive sign at Bush Lupine Point that has deep scratches in it. It will cost \$600 or more to replace the sign, so that project is on hold.

Mark has a special place in his heart for the Elfin Forest, having lived in Los Osos for some years. He said, "Not many places like the Elfin Forest are left." In 1994 when it became county property, he installed the first "Elfin Forest Natural Area" sign on the slope next to South Bay Boulevard.

When asked what are the positive and also the negative aspects of his job, Mark replied, "I like to say that I get paid in sunrises and sunsets. I like what our uniform represents, and I like seeing people enjoying our parks." On the downside, "When you deal with people, you see the best and the worst. There is daily vandalism. Ninety percent of parks visitors are great, and ten percent cause the most problems and the greatest expense." He believes that it is important to inform and educate people to treat parks and natural areas such as the Elfin Forest with respect. That is where SWAP can help County Parks, our "landlord" -- with nature walks for the public, school walks, our newsletter and Weed Warriors. Mark's advice to our readers is, "Get out and enjoy the facilities. Feel free to make suggestions; we are always open for input. And be safe."

Bill to Support Eelgrass Restoration in the Works



By Yolanda Waddell

Photo courtesy of MBNEP - Eelgrass tidelands in 2010.

In April, Public Radio station KCBX aired a news item about California Senate Bill, SB 1363 that would set up a program to restore eelgrass in the state's estuaries. This would be an important step in focusing on the serious decline of eelgrass in the Morro Bay estuary and other estuaries in the state.

Authored by senator Bill Monning (D-Carmel), the bill would require the Ocean Protection Council (OPC), in coordination with the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC), to develop demonstration projects, generate an inventory of locations where conservation can be applied successfully, and incorporate consideration of carbon dioxide removal during habitat restoration. The bill passed the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality on April 20.

Eelgrass is an underwater flowering plant that is the backbone of the Morro Bay estuary. Recent blogs from the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) have reported, "Morro Bay's eelgrass beds are a critical resource. They provide food and shelter to many plants and animals including juvenile rockfish, steelhead trout, shorebirds and waterfowl, and the southern sea otter. Migratory birds like Black Brant (geese) depend on eelgrass to sustain them on their long journey south in the winter. Because it is a plant just like on land, eelgrass also produces oxygen that fish and other marine creatures need to survive."

Unfortunately, eelgrass beds are diminishing worldwide. In the Morro Bay estuary, there were 344 acres of eelgrass in 2007. This year there are fewer than 15 acres. Causes vary: poor water quality, sedimentation, invasive species, disease, development, desiccation, grazing, drought, and high temperatures. Some of these are human-induced and some are natural changes.

In September, 2015, the MBNEP reported, "For the past three years, we have worked with our partners and many dedicated community members to address this decline. We completed our first pilot transplant effort in 2012, and ran larger-scale transplant operations in 2013 and 2014 with the help of over a hundred volunteers each time (SWAP Conservation Chair Gene Rotstein was one of those volunteers)."

In spite of the transplant efforts, eelgrass in the bay continued to decline. MBNEP has discontinued the transplant program, instead trying a new, less-intensive approach by harvesting seed from flowering eelgrass shoots and encouraging seed dispersal in a few locations in the central part of the estuary. The report stated, "Our goal is to successfully germinate eelgrass from seed in areas once occupied by transplanted eelgrass. If enough eelgrass establishes in an area, we hope to see it expand on its own into a healthy eelgrass bed." The MBNEP is working with academic researchers, professional biologists, agency scientists and policy advisors to obtain guidance and technical support in monitoring the progress of their efforts.

The report concludes, "We will continue to work with our partners collaboratively to understand eelgrass dynamics in Morro Bay, so that we can successfully recover it."

Western Scrub Jay

Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler, Ph. D.

One of the most commonly seen and certainly one of the most intelligent animals living in the Elfin Forest is the Western Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*).

This blue-gray bird almost a foot long (tail included) can nearly always be seen and heard by a human walking on the boardwalk or sand trail. It perches at the tops of the tallest shrubs and loudly sounds the raucous call for which it and related species are named, often swooping across the tops of shrubs to another lookout post to keep track of and scold the invaders. This jay is colored rather brightly blue on the head, wings, and tail with a gray-brown back, grayish belly, and a white throat with blue patches or spots often described as a necklace or collar.

Now identified as the Western Scrub Jay species, this was formerly one of three divisions of a species just called Scrub Jay, distinguished from both Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and Steller's Jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) in having a smoothly feathered head instead of a pronounced feathered crest. The Scrub Jays are now separated into three species: our Western Scrub Jay on the mainland west of the Rocky Mts., the Island Scrub Jay (*A. insularis*) on Santa Cruz Island, and the Florida Scrub Jay (*A. coerulescens*) in that state. The Western Scrub Jay species in turn has 3 subspecies (coastal, interior, and southern Mexican) so well-defined that several sources suggest they may soon be recognized as separate species. The interior subspecies has longer, straight and pointed beaks for feeding on piñon nuts, while the acorn-eating coastal and southern Mexican subspecies have thicker, stronger, and slightly hooked beaks.

Western Scrub Jays live in oak woodlands and chaparral like that of our Elfin Forest near the coast and Sierran foothills and in piñon-juniper woodlands in the interior as well as neighboring residential yards, pastures, and orchards. They generally forage in pairs or small groups, dining on frogs, lizards, eggs and young of other birds, insects, grains, nuts and acorns, and berries.

Like other corvids (members of the crow family), they store surplus food in more than 200 caches per bird. They reveal an almost incredible ability to plan ahead in choosing cache sites, provide for volume and variety for future use, and accurately remember such locations for a long time. They also remember cache sites for other birds and species and steal food from them, acorns from Acorn Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) or pine nuts from Clark's Nutcrackers (*Nucifraga columbiana*). They watch carefully to be sure they are unobserved when filling their own caches.

Females build sturdy nests of twigs, moss, and dried grass in low bushes and trees, 3-30 feet above ground and one to two feet in diameter. They usually lay 3-6 eggs, and are fed by their mate while incubating for about two weeks. The young are fed by both parents and leave the nest in about two and a half weeks.

Western Scrub Jays, with several other corvids are among the most intelligent of animals. Their brain-to-body mass is only exceeded by that of humans and similar to that of chimpanzees and dolphins. They remember not only the locations of food caches, but the type of food in each and the rates of decay. It has even been recently revealed in research from U.C. Davis that Western Jays finding a dead jay will call loudly near the body for as long as a half hour, attracting other jays, and remain near the body for one or two days.

So enjoy being scolded by these intelligent, inquisitive and mischievous lookouts, the number one avian alarm system of our Elfin Forest!



A Winning Haiku Features Elfin Forest Mudflat and Coyote

Every April the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) sponsors a poetry contest for poems and haiku that are focused on the Morro Bay estuary. One of the winning haiku in 2015 was written by Lila Bhuta after she saw a coyote on the mudflats next to the Elfin Forest.

Lila writes that her favorite spot on the estuary is the lower outlook (Siena's View) at the Elfin Forest. One misty morning, a coyote gingerly advancing at low tide toward a flock of birds inspired this haiku. Lila shares poems with a small group of poetry enthusiasts in Los Osos and Morro Bay. Here is her haiku:

Estuary Life

Gaunt coyote sneaks
Birdlings dance on briny mud
Oblivious snack

Winners of the 2016 MBNEP Poetry Contest were announced on May 13. To read the winning poems, go to www.mbnep.org and click on Poetry Contest.

Coastal Bush Lupine

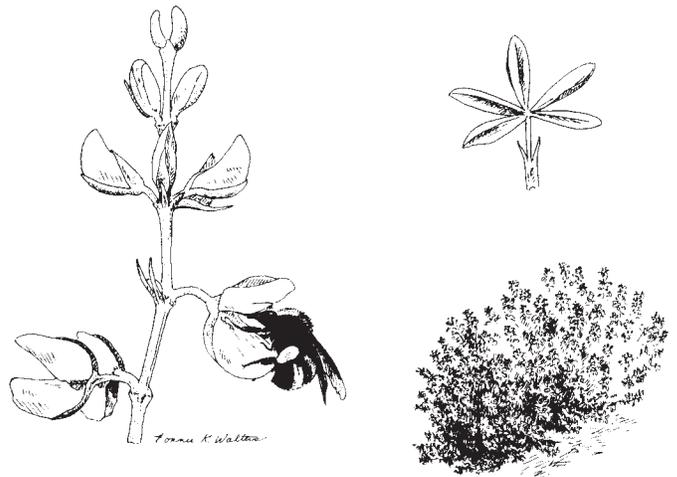
By Dirk Walters, Ph. D.; Drawing by Bonnie Walters

Ed. Note: Revised by Dr. Walters from December 2003 issue

The coastal silver-leafed bush lupine, *Lupinus chamissonis* in many flower books is simply called bush lupine. This is not a good name because we have two 'bush' lupines recorded for the Elfin Forest and a third that could be found there some day. The other recorded one is commonly called tree lupine (*L. arboreus*). Tree lupine is actually a shrub called a tree because it begins to branch several inches above the soil surface. Thus it has a 'trunk.' It also has green rather than silvery leaves. The one that could be found along the inland edge of the Elfin Forest is one I call interior bush lupine (*L. albifrons*). It is very common throughout the interior of our county.

Coastal bush lupine is what gives Bush Lupine Point its name. It is the common silver-leaf bush lupine all along the Central Coast. I have heard reports that these plants at Bush Lupine Point are looking ragged. The literature reports that shrubs can be expected to have a life span of 20-30 years. It's been my experience that such longevity figures are best applied only to hard-stem, truly woody shrubs such as manzanitas and California lilacs. Soft-stem or weak wood shrubs such as shrub Lupines can be expected to have a life span of a few to a half-dozen years. Unless conditions are changing, this should be long enough for replacement seedlings to have appeared. If there are no replacement seedlings, we need to look for some environmental cause. Two come to mind. First, the plant community is getting more mature and early succession plants, such as shrub lupines are being replaced by later succession shrubs such as buckbrush or holly-leaf cherry. If this is not in evidence then the change could be increasing air (and soil) temperatures brought about by global climate change. That such effects are visible here in our area is obvious to those who observe the life-event timing of our local plants and animals. It will take a bit of research to determine a potential cause. Or, HOPEFULLY, this is just a lull between coast bush lupine generations and they will regenerate on their own.

Genus *Lupinus* contains well over 100 species on all continents except Australia and Antarctica. However, most are found in western North America (approximately 70 species in California alone). Lupine and *Lupinus*, are derived from the Latin name for wolf, *Lupus*. The names result from a wrong interpretation of a readily made observation. Lupines and other legumes occur commonly on impoverished soils. If these observations were true, it could logically follow that the lupines were causing the impoverished soil. This ancient conclusion is, of course, totally wrong. As we know today, lupines and all other members of the pea family - Fabaceae or Leguminosae (legumes) - have bacteria in special nodules on their roots that can convert nitrogen from the air into nitrites and nitrates that the lupine can use to make compounds such as proteins and nucleic acids that the plant requires. When a lupine dies, these nitrogenous compounds end up in the soil. Lupines and other legumes did not cause the impoverished soils, but are there because they are able to tolerate them.



Coastal bush lupine is the only shrub in the Forest with leaves bearing 5-7 separate silvery leaflets arising from the end of its leaf stalk (petiole) termed a palmate compound leaf. Tree lupines also have palmate compound leaves, but their leaflets are bright green on top. The interior bush lupine, if it is ever found in the Elfin Forest, will be told by its leaf petioles, mostly longer than its leaflets whereas petioles are shorter in the coastal bush lupine. Near the Elfin Forest, all three species have the same pale blue to white flowers.

Bonnie's drawing of the flower with bumblebee illustrates how the flowers are pollinated. It requires a heavy insect like the bumblebee to do the job. The bee lands on the horizontal four-petal complex (horizontal wings and v-shaped joined keel petals, totally enclosing the stamens). To get at the nectar, the bee pushes down on the petal complex and up on the base of the large single upright petal called the banner or standard. Its long proboscis reaches the hidden nectar within the base of the flower and forces pollen out through a pore formed by the keel petals. The pollen coats the underside of the bee's abdomen. Later the stigma will come out of the same pore to receive pollen from a second flower. The bee scrapes off some pollen into special 'baskets' on its hind legs. But it never gets all of the bright orange pollen, so some is left to pollinate subsequent flowers.



OAK LEAVES

is published six times per year beginning in February.

Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;
layout is by Katy Budge. Editing assistance by Pat Grimes.
Contributors to this issue: Lila Bhuta, Pat Brown, Lannie Erickson, Betsy Kinter,
Ann Kitajima, Christine Nelson, Rachel Pass, Ron Rasmussen,
Yolanda Waddell, Mark Wagner,
Dirk and Bonnie Walters, and Jean Wheeler.

Printed at Hay Printing, Morro Bay on recycled paper.
Labeled and mailed at Achievement House.

Deadline for copy to Oakleaves is the first of the month before issue.
If possible, all copy should be submitted by e-mail to: oakleaves@elfin-forest.org.

Weed Warrior Report

By Yolanda Waddell

March 5th – Work Party Spoiled by Rain

Sadly, six willing Weed Warriors who came to work in the Elfin Forest on March 5th were outdone by a heavy rainstorm; Work Party Captain Ron Rasmussen had to send them home. Thanks to Pat Brown, Prisila and Rich Johnson, Sharon Rooney and Skip Rotstein for thinking positively and showing up. Lannie Erickson and Dave McDonald had phoned ahead and knew not to come. It would have been a very productive weed pulling morning, but the weeds were in luck on that rainy day.

April 2nd – Nice Day, Good Party

On a sunny April first Saturday, 13 Weed Warriors pulled weeds, trimmed bushes and worked on the boardwalk. The major activity was weeding, both along South Bay Boulevard and in the Klopfer Grove (the lower grove next to the estuary). Yolanda Waddell helped Dean Thompson trim the heavily overgrown 11th Street Trail, and Ron Rasmussen fixed a loose board in the boardwalk. The two groups of weed pullers included Lannie Erickson and snail monitor Pete Sarafian, working along South Bay Boulevard. Pat Brown, Jay Bonestell, snail monitor Barrett Holland, Prisila and Rich Johnson, Grant Mueller, Ellen Nelson, Sharon Rooney and Conservation Committee Chair Skip Rotstein made a large dent in the Klopfer Grove weeds. Thanks to all for a very productive workday, and to Ron R. for bringing his delicious cookies to enjoy afterward.

Let's all pull together

By Lannie Erickson

Weed warriors, rise Saturday morning.
We shall make our way to the field.
Our green foes shall there await us,
In the end they must surely yield.
We shall seek them in the meadows,
We will rout them midst the trees.
Not the smallest shall escape us,
Though they bring us to our knees.
At last at noon, the sun above us,
Victorious Weed Warriors will stand,
Laying down our gloves and shovels,
Smiling faces and cookie in hand.

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.



*In April, Trail Trimming leader Dean Thompson cut back some shrubs and plants that were protruding over the 11th Street trail.
Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*



*A crew of Weed Warriors enjoyed pulling invasive plants in the Don Klopfer Grove (lower grove next to the estuary) on April 2nd. Lining up for the photo are (L-R) Skip Rotstein, Sharon Rooney, Pat Brown (front), Ellen Wilson, Prisila Johnson, Rich Johnson and Jay Bonestell.
Photo by Ron Rasmussen.*

Elfin Forest Visitors – 4-H SLO Hikers

Text and Photo by Yolanda Waddell

The Elfin Forest receives many visitors every day. Most come from adjacent Los Osos or Morro Bay. But word travels far about its boardwalk, trails and natural beauty; individuals and groups visit it from farther away in California, and from out of state as well. On April 2nd, there appeared at the end of 11th Street a banner stretched across the trunk of a car, a table covered with informational material and two smiling young women. Their goal: to lead a group of parents and children from the Santa Maria CAPSLO Child Care Resource Connection on a nature walk through the Elfin Forest.

Christine Nelson, the Coordinator of 4-H SLO Hikers, told me that the program is sponsored by the 4-H Youth Development Program of the county and encourages families and individuals to establish a healthy lifestyle by increasing their daily physical activity. It is open to the public as well as 4-H members. The goal is to get out and explore the great outdoors of San Luis Obispo County by walking the county's many excellent trails. Christine works with many agencies, recently collaborating with Morro Coast Audubon Society for a birding walk at Sweet Springs Nature Preserve in Los Osos.

The 4-H SLO Hikers program began in 2012, with a hike for 8 people on the Bob Jones Trail. All ages are welcome; over 20 trails across the county have been hiked since 2012. Christine said, "Our youngest hiker was three and I believe our oldest was 80 years old. To see a multi-generational hiking group learning from one another and connecting with nature is an incredible experience for me and for our hikers." Of the Elfin Forest she remarked: "This is a wonderful trail for all ages! Many of the CAPSLO daycare providers had not been to the Elfin Forest. Our group thoroughly enjoyed the look-out points, the boardwalk pathways, and the coast live oaks."

To learn about future walks by 4-H SLO Hikers, check their Facebook page, look in the New Times calendar section or e-mail cinelson@co.slo.ca.us. We thank Christine for featuring the Elfin Forest on one of her walks, and look forward to seeing her and her hikers in the Elfin Forest again.



Christine Nelson (left) and Yenny Alvarez wait to lead a group of parents and children from the Santa Maria CAPSLO Childcare Resource Connection on a 4-H SLO Hikers walk in the Elfin Forest.

What Does SWAP Do With Its "Stuff"?

Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

How does a small non-profit deal with the necessities of running its day-to-day operations? In the early 1990s, a fledgling SWAP Board of Directors each kept SWAP-related files in their homes and equipment for working in the Elfin Forest in their garages. That worked for awhile, but from time to time there were awkward moments when a board member was out of town and other board members needed the files or equipment that were in that member's house. Renting office space was too expensive, so we rented a storage room. By the early 2000s, the original storage room filled up, and SWAP moved into a more spacious unit.

At SWAP's March board meeting this year, Property and Records Chair Pat Murray complained that our storage unit was crowded with too much "stuff." Board member Vicky Johnsen suggested that we sell all the things that we don't need anymore at a yard sale. A subcommittee consisting of Vicky, Pat and Yolanda met at our storage room and started pulling things out.

It turned out that there weren't enough items to make a good yard sale so the subcommittee decided to give the unneeded items to a non-profit thrift store. The problem of what to do with old files wasn't settled, and the fact remains that some current board members still have materials, files and equipment in their homes. Perhaps that is the fate of a small organization like SWAP.

One thing we certainly need is the help of an **ARCHIVIST**. If any of our members have a knack for organizing files and a willingness to spend some time on our archive project, we would appreciate hearing from you. Please leave a message at 805-528-0392 or e-mail swap@elfin-forest.org.



During a SWAP storage room decluttering session, Board members Vicky Johnsen (left) and Pat Murray discuss whether an electric lamp should be kept or discarded.

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

June and July are especially good months in the Elfin Forest for fanciers of lovely blue and purple flowers. Bush Lupine Point is named for the tall shrubs with large spikes of blue flowers. Woolly star is a low-growing bush with herbaceous shoots and bright blue flowers above a woody root crown. It is best seen along the 15th Street sand trail and where that trail meets the boardwalk. Blue dicks have a cluster of purplish-blue flowers at the top of a slender stem as much as two feet tall. Purple nightshade is also in bloom during these months.

Of course our lovely wilderness garden has other floral colors too. Cobwebby thistle and California hedge nettle have pink blossoms. California poppies native on our coast tend to be more yellow than orange. Deerweed is a medium-sized shrub covered in small yellow pea flowers. Yellow flowers also top the tall reddish stems rising from succulent rosettes of coastal dudleya. Tall shrubs with sticky leaves and conspicuous orange flowers are called sticky monkey-flowers. Deep yellow flowers top the crowded stems of golden-yarrow. Peak rush-rose has 5-petaled flowers of a light yellow atop its stems. Red glows in flowers formerly known as Indian pinks but recently renamed cardinal catchfly and usually found under oak trees or tall shrubs.

Dune buckwheat has white flowers at this time of year. White to pale lavender blossoms occur in pompoms on sturdy stems of black sage. Spikes of white flowers characterize chamise coming into bloom in this season. Close to the ground among elliptical light green leaves are tiny clusters of white flowers on croton. We even have an orchid species producing a few spikes of cream-colored flowers well secluded in undergrowth along Orchid Trail, a sand trail named for this species along the crest of the hill overlooking South Bay Blvd.

Butterflies have been called “flying flowers” and these colorful insects abound in June and July. Bush lupines attract Moro Blue butterflies to lay eggs on their leaves. Moro Blues visit deerweed for nectar while Acmon Blues are attracted to deerweed both for nectar and to host their caterpillars. Dune buckwheat attracts Acmon Blues and Gray Hairstreaks as caterpillar hosts and for nectar. The Variable Checkerspot lays eggs on undersides of sticky monkey-flower leaves. Gabb’s Checkerspot is attracted to California poppies for nectar. The California Oak Moth lays its eggs on our pygmy live oaks.

The Anise Swallowtail Butterfly can be seen often even though Weed Warriors have removed fennel, its host plant, as a non-native weed. Fennel does grow nearby. This and several other butterfly species visit Butterfly Hill along the 11th street sand trail. That high spot functions as a “singles bar” for butterflies seeking mates! Once “serviced” the females hastily leave to lay their eggs elsewhere away from the determined males.

Many birds of the oak woodlands, maritime chaparral, and coastal dune scrub which comprise the Elfin Forest are feeding



Rein orchid (left)



Bewick's Wren (above)

young in these summer months. Listen for a loud buzz to locate the Spotted Towhee calling from the top of a shrub. He’s very distinctive with his black head, rust-colored flanks and rump, and white-spotted wings. His drabber cousin, the brown-grey California Towhee, may be seen darting between shrubs or on the ground between them.

Other birds flitting over or among the shrubs or oak trees include flycatchers such as the Black Phoebe and the Western Kingbird; Bewick’s Wren and the noisy but elusive Wrentit; Chipping, Lark, Savannah, Song, and White-crowned Sparrows; Black-headed Grosbeaks; Orange-crowned, Yellow, and Wilson’s Warblers; Brewer’s Blackbird; House and Purple Finches; and the Lesser and American Goldfinches.

On the estuary, many individual ducks and shorebirds remain all year or even arrive to nest here after vacationing for the winter farther south. Among waders, willets and killdeer continue to be common. Also resident all year are great blue and black-crowned night herons along with many snowy and greater egrets. Most of our raptor species are here all year, and likely to be actively hunting with fledglings to feed in June and July.

Enjoy a colorful and exciting summer outing along the sand trails and boardwalk of our small wilderness area!

Correction:

On page 8 of the April/May issue the bird in the photo was mistakenly identified as a Bush-tit. It was actually a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

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

June 18, 9:30 a.m. – All About the Estuary

What is an estuary? Why is the Morro Bay estuary important to the Elfin Forest, and vice versa? A very knowledgeable walk leader from the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) will explain the importance of this body of water as we walk around the Elfin Forest boardwalk. Lexie Bell, MBNEP Executive Director, will talk about the 48,000-acre watershed that feeds the estuary, threats to estuary health, the state of the eelgrass, and the Estuary Program's conservation work. Plus, participants will learn how they can help to protect this vital natural resource in their everyday lives. Lexie is known to give pop quizzes – with prizes!

July 16, 9:30 a.m. –

Digital Photography and Birding Walk

Join nature and wildlife photographer Donald Quintana on a photographic journey to capture the natural world of the Elfin Forest. Using whatever camera you have at hand, we will explore many photographic opportunities, from birds and butterflies to close ups of plants and flowers, to views of the Forest and bay. Don will discuss the use of light and how to best capture its influence on your subject. All levels of experience and skill are welcome. Have your binoculars ready for bird identification. Pack water and wear layers in case it is windy.

August 20, 9:30 a.m. – See Below!

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.



Birder Jessica Griffith led a "Birds at Nesting Time" 3rd Saturday walk in March. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Geologist Jeff Grover on 3rd Saturday walk.

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.

Elfin Forest Walk Leader Wins Award

Text and photo by Yolanda Waddell

SWAP's 3rd Saturday Walk leaders are a diverse group, with many different disciplines and interests. One very dynamic walk leader is Cuesta College geology instructor Jeff Grover (pictured above describing the effects of advancing tectonic plates). He has little interest in plants, and says so. But when it comes to talking about anything that has to do with the earth's crust and its components, Jeff will enthusiastically talk about plate tectonics, subduction zones, types of rock – he brings along a backpack-full of rocks as examples – earthquake faults and many characteristics of local geology. His fascination with geology spreads to those attending his walks.

Jeff's charismatic geology lectures also inspire his students at Cuesta College. A former student said, "He is the reason I am doing geology for my major. The way he presents the history of the Earth through his class is nothing short of inspiring and his enthusiasm is unmatched by any other instructor." Because of his dedication to geology and positive influence on students, Jeff was recently awarded the 2016 Peter and M'May Difley Award for Faculty Excellence. Congratulations from SWAP to Jeff for this well-deserved and prestigious award. **Jeff will be giving a 3rd Saturday geology walk in the Elfin Forest on August 20, at 9:30 a.m.**

Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter,
SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW:

Kate & Emil Flock*
Debra Hansen*
Patrick O'Donnell*
Bill Richmond*

RENEWING MEMBERS:

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Jim Havlena
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**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.*

On May 14, Yolanda Waddell spotted a plant that is only seen in the Elfin Forest when there has been a good amount of rain during the winter. It is Clustered broomrape, *Orobanche fasciculata* (pictured at right), a parasite plant that grows attached to the roots of other plants, usually California sagebrush or Dune buckwheat. It will bloom into June along the west side of the path directly off of Bush Lupine Point.

The last recorded sighting of Clustered broomrape was in 2005.

Elfin Forest Sightings

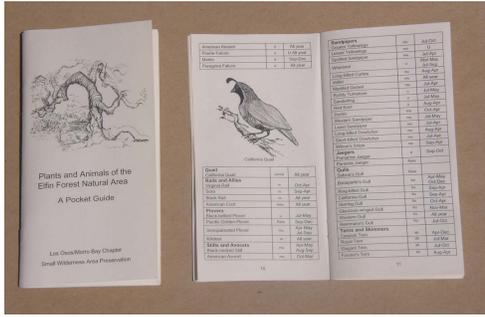


April is one of the best months for seeing butterflies in the Elfin Forest. In April of 2015, Pat Brown photographed four butterflies that she hadn't seen before in the Elfin Forest. Two of them were featured in past issues of *Oakleaves*, and the other two are the Cloudless Sulfur and the Marine Blue. Cloudless Sulfur butterflies (pictured below left) can be identified by the two circular marks on the under hind wing and also on the under front wing. Their host plants include the Cassia family, clovers and other legumes. They nectar on bougainvillea, hibiscus, lantana and wild morning glory.

Marine Blue butterflies (pictured above) have a blue upper side, and pale brown and pale blue bands on the underside of the wing. The caterpillars feed on alfalfa, Plumbago, many legumes, milkvetch (*Astragalus*) and mesquite. They nectar on many species of flowers.

On April 7th of this year, Pat spotted a beautiful diurnal moth (pictured below right) that was vigorously feeding on Black sage at 1:00 in the afternoon. Pat stated that she isn't sure of the exact species, but knows that it is in the genus *Drasteria*. If any of our readers can help with the species name, we'd love to hear from you. Just e-mail oakleaves@elfin-forest.org.





Our *Pocket Guide, Plants and Animals of the Elfin Forest Natural Area* is a goldmine of information!

This paperback is 8 by 4 inches with 56 pages packed with fascinating facts. Includes charts of plants by bloom season, color and habitat; birds by habitat and peak months; and butterflies by size, months in flight, color, and host or nectar plants used. Other lists include mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and other arthropods, lichens, and mushrooms.



SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

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

All Prices Include Sales Tax

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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.

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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.

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Things for Kids to do in the Elfin Forest During Summer

Explore with a camera. Come early when bunnies are **hopping** around and quail are foraging. Send “best” photos to *Oakleaves* at the end of the summer and we’ll publish them.

Pack a lunch and have a **picnic**.
 Look at the flowers and butterflies.

Become a birder. Take binoculars and a bird guide and see how many birds you can identify.



Become a *writer*. Make a journal about your visits to the Forest, and turn that into a story.

Get exercise. **SHAPE UP** by walking or running around the boardwalk.

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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.

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