



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 ♦ FEBRUARY / MARCH 2017



Docent Pat Brown (at right) helped a group of Los Osos Middle School students to learn how the plants of the Elfin Forest survive drought.

The Elfin Forest Needs Continuous Work by Volunteers

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair

Invasion of the Elfin Forest by foreign weeds is mostly under control, but other problems also need the attention of SWAP Volunteers. For example, the Forest is on a large sand dune and it is subject to erosion by both wind and rain. To control this erosion

Forest Needs Volunteers *continued on page 2*

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Looking Back – The Campaign for a Boardwalk

By Yolanda Waddell; photo by Les Bowker

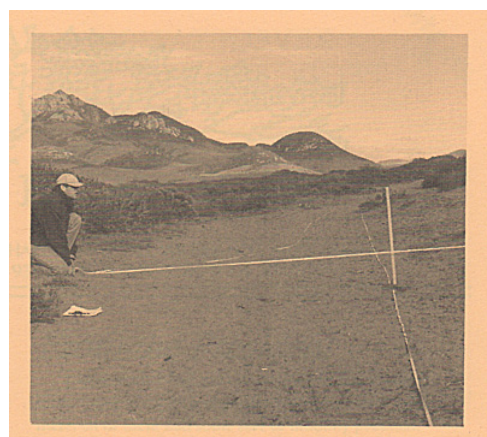
Most visitors to the Elfin Forest are unaware that, in the mid-1990s, there was no boardwalk -- only sand trails. After completing acquisition of the southern 38.7 acres in July, 1994, SWAP turned to the task of writing a Management Plan, required by San Luis Obispo County in return for providing SWAP with the last \$50,000 toward the purchase price. In March, 1995, SWAP President Rose Bowker wrote, "We are working with biologists to identify sensitive resources and to find the best way to provide public access while protecting the natural resources of the Elfin Forest."

By August, 1995, the Management Plan Committee had completed a first draft. Mark Dariz, a neighbor of the Elfin Forest, was an architecture student at Cal Poly focusing on outdoor access for people with limited physical abilities. Mark, a paraplegic, had joined the committee, and offered to design an Elfin Forest boardwalk.

At the end of 1995, the draft plan was reviewed by the County Parks Planner and the State Parks and Recreation ecologist, their comments were incorporated, and copies of the Plan were placed in the South Bay Library for public review.

Many Los Osos residents questioned the need for a boardwalk in the

Elfin Forest. At a community meeting in February, 1996, neighbors worried that increasing access to the Elfin Forest would ruin the very qualities that draw people to it. They also worried about cars parked in front of their houses, litter, noise, and vandalism.



Cal Poly student Jim Mathis takes a soil depth measurement near Bush Lupine Point.

Photo by Les Bowker.

From the April '96 issue of Oakleaves.

Boardwalk *continued on page 4*



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
Vanessa Nelson, Member at Large
Skip Rotstein, Member at Large

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly at
3 p.m. on the 2nd Monday of the month
at the Community Room,
Morro Shores Mobile Home Park,
633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

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

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



CONTACT SWAP

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

A recorded message will give information
about our 3rd Saturday Walks,
Work Saturdays, and other events.

If you have questions, concerns or comments
about any problems in the Elfin Forest,
call or write: Bob Yetter

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 Bob Yetter at 781-1196.

Forest Needs Volunteers *cont. from page 1*

requires frequent relocation of the sand on the entrance trails as well as installing barriers that limit sand movement.

The Boardwalk itself requires continuous monitoring to correct any problems that may be hazardous to visitors. Since the Boardwalk is now more than 15 years old, the wood and screws are going bad. SWAP Volunteers are replacing any corroded screws and, when necessary, any broken boards. If it is not possible for SWAP to replace the broken boards, SLO County Parks is notified and their workers will correct any damage.

At several locations there are plastic fences that have been installed to protect the native vegetation. This fencing has a limited life and needs periodic replacement. SWAP Volunteers perform this activity, and also remove fencing where it is no longer needed.

There are fence posts and welcome panels at all of the entrances to the Forest. When the wood parts of the latter are in contact with the ground they may be subject to attack by termites or degraded by soil organisms and need replacement. When possible, this is done by SWAP Volunteers.

Some native plants in the Elfin Forest, if left unattended, will overgrow the Boardwalk and other trails, blocking easy access by visitors. With the guidance of a qualified botanist or arborist, SWAP Volunteers trim plants that are likely to interfere with use of the Boardwalk and sand trails.

In addition to the above, SWAP Volunteers provide information and serve as guides for special groups and visitors who wish to learn about the Elfin Forest. Our Education Committee docents lead walks for school groups of all ages, pre-school through college. Monthly nature walks on varying topics are given every third Saturday by specialists who generously donate their time (see page 9 for February and March walk descriptions).

SWAP has no paid staff to conduct the activities described above. Join us and become a SWAP Volunteer. Call 805-528-0392 and a member of the SWAP Board of Directors can answer all of your questions.

*Repairing a
boardwalk stringer
in 2015 were (L-R)
Craig Johnsen,
Skip Rotstein,
Ron Rasmussen
and Matt Ellingen.*



Lichen Correction

We were reminded recently that scientists are always researching and updating what they know. In the *Oakleaves* article, "Fascinating Lichen" on page 7 of the December/January issue, we wrote about an interesting orange-colored lichen that was photographed by Pat Brown. It is listed as Slender orange bush lichen, *Teloschistes exilis*, in the *Elfin Forest Pocket Guide* that was published in 2005. After reading about the lichen, long-time SWAP member and photographer Marlin Harms went to the Elfin Forest to take a look at it, as photographing lichens is one of his current interests (see Sightings, page 7). Marlin contacted us, saying that he thought we used an incorrect species name for the lichen.

Marlin had checked for information about *Teloschistes* in the book, *A Field Guide to California Lichens* by Stephen Sharnoff, published in 2014. In his book, Sharnoff states, "Earlier records of *T. Exilis* from California are now thought to be mostly or entirely fertile specimens of *T. Flavicans* (Powdered orange bush lichen)." Sharnoff stated that *T. exilis* rarely occurs in California.

Our thanks to Marlin Harms for bringing us up to date with this lichen. The name change to *Teloschistes flavicans* will appear in the List of Lichens under Flora and Fauna on our website, www.elfin-forest.org, under "Visiting Forest."

Christmas Bird Count in the Elfin Forest

By Yolanda Waddell

Every December since 1900, members of the National Audubon Society become citizen scientists and conduct a census of the nation's birds. Tens of thousands of volunteers brave snow, wind or rain to take part in the count on a day between December 14 and January 5. The data collected allow ornithologists, conservation biologists, wildlife organizations and government agencies to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America.

Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) held its annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 17th. The count area is a circle 15 miles in diameter, centered at the intersection of Turri Road and Los Osos Valley Road. The circle is divided into fifty sectors, one of which is the Elfin Forest.

I received a report on the Elfin Forest from Maggie Smith, MCAS Count Coordinator. She reported that four Counters covered the boardwalk, paths, and the Bush Lupine Point and Siena's View overlooks. The Counters were Joanne Aasen, Dawn Beattie, Herb Elliott and Kerry Runkle. Joanne and Dawn covered the boardwalk and some paths. Herb and Kerry scoped the estuary from the overlooks and the rest of the paths.

The Counters spotted a total of 93 species of land and water birds, as well as birds of the air: Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawk, and Belted Kingfisher. They counted 425 Brant in the bay, way down from the 2,000 or 3,000 that used to be present at this time of year. There was a healthy population of California Quail – 94 counted. Most of the usual Elfin Forest birds were present in healthy numbers, including 16 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, 28 Anna's Hummingbirds, and 16 Yellow-rumped Warblers.

In 2015, on a rainy day CBC, Joanne and Dawn reported 29 Eurasian Collared Doves and 1 Mourning Dove. This year the numbers were a little better: 19 Eurasian Collared Doves and 10 Mourning Doves. However, it is disconcerting to see Collared Doves, an introduced species, outnumbering our native Mourning Doves.

A bird name I had never seen before – Scaly-breasted Munia – caught my eye. 12 of them were counted in the Elfin Forest. That name isn't in any of my not-very-recent bird books. A search online told me that this bird's other name is Nutmeg Mannikin. It is a widespread southeast Asian species, first established in the Los Angeles area, and now apparently spreading over more of California. SWAP member and birder Chris Van Beveren told me that she recently saw a flock of Munias near Pecho Willows in Los Osos. She described them as tiny, the size of goldfinches with brown backs and fine black streaks on their white breasts.

The Elfin Forest was saved to be a wildlife preserve, and to give people a chance to observe and enjoy the creatures of the Forest. Our thanks to Morro Coast Audubon, Maggie Smith and the Counters for including the Forest in this nation-wide census.

The complete Elfin Forest bird count is posted on our website, www.elfin-forest.org, under "Visiting Forest."

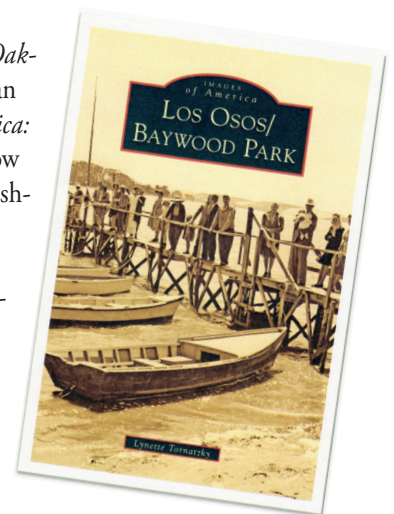


Scaly-breasted Munia. Photo by Marlin Harms.

Los Osos Book Includes Elfin Forest

By Yolanda Waddell; Book cover courtesy of Lynette Tornatsky

A year ago our February/March 2016 issue of *Oak-leaves* included an article about an upcoming book: *Images of America: Los Osos/Baywood Park*. It has now been published by Arcadia Publishing, located in North Carolina. The author, Lynette Tornatsky, intended the book to tell the history of Los Osos and Baywood Park. In her chapter on Parks and Open Space, she planned to include the history of the Elfin Forest and contacted SWAP for help. We provided her with photos to use in the book as well as information about SWAP and the Elfin Forest.



Now available, the book contains a wealth of photos showing the people, buildings and places of Los Osos and Baywood Park from the time of the Chumash to the present. Lynette's concise and informative text describes what one is looking at in the photos, and adds delicious facts that keep one turning the pages to learn more. She devoted four pages and seven photos to the Elfin Forest, plus a photo of the "snailmobile" float that SWAP volunteers built one year for a Los Osos holiday parade.

The book is fun to read through, and will act as a reference when questions about Los Osos or Baywood Park come up. It is a 127-page paperback, costing a reasonable \$21.99, and is available at Volumes of Pleasure Bookstore in Los Osos and other outlets.

Spotted Towhee

Text and Photo by Jean D. Wheeler, Ph.D.

The Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*) wins my votes as both the most beautiful bird and the most co-operative photographic model in the Elfin Forest. I see and hear this species almost every time I visit our reserve, and he seems to call to me with his buzzy trill—looking at me over a shoulder, or posing front and center on his twiggy perch, or turning to show me his handsome profile. Each position is often held plenty long enough to turn on my camera, choose my zoom level, and frame his image to my satisfaction.

Males of this fairly large, chunky sparrow have a black head and breast that I think of as a virtually glowing jet black. Behind the short, thick and pointed beak, the eye stands out bright red against the black head feathers and has a black pupil. The back, wings, and tail are black, sharply contrasted with spots and streaks of brilliant white on the bird's back and sides. These give it the common name now separating it from the Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), a very similar bird except for an almost uniformly black upper body with almost no white spots or streaks.

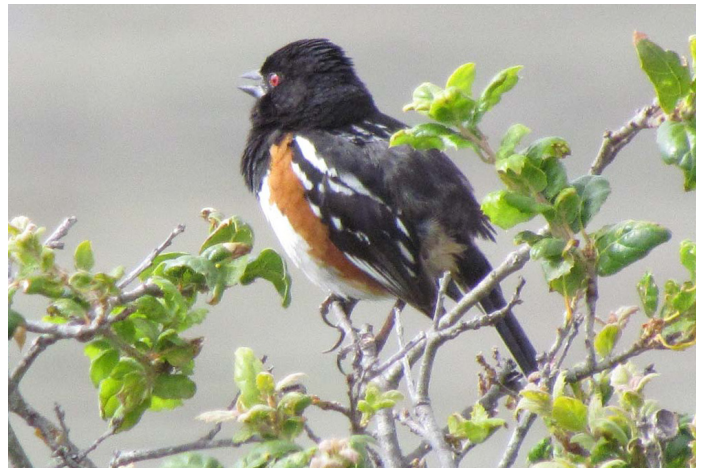
These two towhees were formerly joined as a single species named Rufous-sided Towhee. Rufous is the name given to the warm brown color band below the wings of both species. The bellies are crisply white and the legs pinkish. Females are similar in color but less vibrant. They tend to have more grayish black or dark, slate grey heads and breasts and less vivid black upper bodies with paler brown sides.

Spotted Towhees range from southern Canada to Guatemala and from the Pacific Ocean to the Great Plains. There they meet the Eastern Towhees in a narrow zone where some hybridization occurs. Northern residents and higher mountain birds migrate to lower elevations and/or southward in winter; but those in equable climates like our coastal zone are year-round residents.

Spotted Towhees prefer brushy habitat like chaparral, oak woodlands, and pinyon-juniper woodlands with dense thickets of undergrowth. They hop around in the leaf litter and lower branches of shrubs. They can often be heard rustling fallen leaves as they jump-scratch backward on both feet in the ground litter or glean through lower brush to catch beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, moths, bees, wasps, spiders, and even snails. They also dine on seeds, acorns and berries, plant foods tending to dominate their diets in winter.

A female builds a cup-shaped nest on or near the ground weaving together twigs, grass, roots, and fluffy vegetation or animal hair. It is barely 4-5 inches wide with an inner cup not more than 3-4 inches in diameter. She lays and incubates about 3-5 eggs. The male defends the territory and brings food to his mate. Eggs hatch in a bit less than two weeks.

The young are fed by both parents, and they leave the nest in about a week and a half after hatching. The fledglings remain with the parents for a while. Two broods a year are common, rarely three. One problem for nesting for Spotted Towhees is that they are vulnerable to parasitism by Brown-Headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), also year-round residents of the Elfin Forest. They are also subject to predation by pet or feral cats.



Spotted Towhees are widespread and abundant, and their numbers have remained pretty stable since 1966, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey.

As you wander along the boardwalk, listen for a loud buzzing call, and you should have no trouble spotting this colorful year-round resident of our brushy woodland reserve.

Boardwalk *continued from page 1*

The SWAP Board realized that they would have to work hard to get the Los Osos community on board. They visited the Nature Conservancy's boardwalk access at Oso Flaco Lake with Mark Dariz. The Nature Conservancy had found that after its boardwalk was built through the dunes at Oso Flaco Lake, people stopped taking "short cuts," and vegetation was regrowing in areas once criss-crossed by trails.

An article in the April, 1996, *Oakleaves*, told of a project by Cal Poly senior Jim Mathis to determine the amount of soil lost from the main trails of the Elfin Forest due to the impact of "people feet." In the photo on page 1 Mathis, then a student of ecology professor Les Bowker, a SWAP Board member, is shown measuring the depth of a very wide trail near Bush Lupine Point. That trail is now covered by the boardwalk, and the "short cut" trails in the Elfin Forest have indeed diminished.

Cal Poly architecture Professor Emeritus Paul Wolff, whose focus was universal access, agreed to oversee Mark Dariz' design for a boardwalk. Since Dariz was not yet a state-licensed architect, this assured that there would be no question about boardwalk design. SWAP Board members borrowed a sand wheel chair from Morro Bay Parks and Recreation, and took Mark on a tour of the Elfin Forest.

By August, 1997, the "kinks" had been worked out of the plan, and the San Luis Obispo County Parks Commission voted to accept the *Elfin Forest Natural Resource Management Plan* at its August 21 meeting. Three years in the making, the plan incorporated elements of an existing plan for Morro Bay State Park, reflected comments from the public, and was carefully reviewed and edited by State Parks, County Parks, and the County Parks Commission. It contains a provision for a boardwalk loop with extensions to two overlooks, and an extension to 16th Street for visitors with limited mobility. Parks Facilities Manager (later Parks Director) Pete Jenny said that he preferred to use the word "guideline" instead of the word "plan," because it is intended to be an internal working document and isn't as legally binding as an official planning document.

A future article will tell about the building of the boardwalk.

Common Yarrow

By Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

Common (White) Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is a plant I've wanted to take on for the *Oakleaves* for a long time, but could never bring myself to ask Bonnie to draw. Since we are now using photos to illustrate, I think it's time. One look at the leaves will indicate the reason for my reluctance. Up to four inches long and two inches wide, the leaves are divided two or three times into hundreds, if not *thousands*, of long, thin, needle-like segments which are weakly aromatic.

The species epithet (*millefolium*) translates into 'thousand (mill) leaf (*folia*)'. The leaves spiral up the stem getting smaller higher up the stem. The flowers are small and clustered in heads which are themselves crowded into flat-topped clusters. Most plants in the wild produce whitish flowers but occasionally one finds plants bearing yellowish or pinkish-tinged flowers. These have been selected for deeper colors for use in the garden. There are many sites on the Web that offer these 'colored' varieties for sale.

The species is extremely variable which would be expected by its essentially worldwide range. It is found throughout the northern hemisphere and just about everywhere in the southern hemisphere where humans have settled. A plant with such a wide a distribution as well as a strong correlation with human habitats would certainly be considered an introduced weed. I knew it in the roadsides and pastures of the Midwest, North East and in various weedy and native habitats here in California.

So, where is it native? One can find any answer you want to believe on the Web. In fact, if I'd been asked where it was native before researching this article, I'd have said Eurasia. I found at least one web site that would have agreed with me. However, a majority of botanical sites as well as the Jepson Manual give its native range as "the entire northern hemisphere!"

So accepting it as a California native plant, where does it grow in California? Yarrow is found from sea level to over 10,000 feet in a wide variety of habitats (including weedy ones) throughout that altitudinal range. One of the better places to find it is in our coastal dunes spreading across the base of dune slip faces. As such it serves as an important dune stabilizer. It is very tolerant of extreme environments as long as the plants get sufficient water.

The genus, *Achillea*, was applied to the plant by the Father of Taxonomic Botany, Linnaeus himself in the 1700's. He named it in honor of the Greek hero, Achilles. Why did he name it after a non-botanical war hero who was killed in the Battle of Troy? In the 1700's yarrow was considered a panacea or a cure-all. The story goes that Achilles was charmed and no weapon could harm him. The protection came from his mother dipping him in the river Styx when he was a baby. The river Styx was the transport medium for souls to get to Hades (the land of the dead). However, his mother was afraid he would drown if she let go of him completely; so she held him by his heel which therefore did NOT come in contact



Common Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium*. Courtesy of Wikimedia.

with waters granting protection. So at Troy, Achilles was killed by a poison arrow which nicked his unprotected heel.

Why bring up Achilles heel? Again if one should look up this plant on the Web, one would find lots and lots of sites that discuss its medicinal uses, many with warnings not guaranteeing its effectiveness. According to the story told by my major professor, no modern pharmacopeia (an official list of medicinal plants) contains yarrow. That is after extensive testing, experts have determined that yarrow has NO medicinal value. That *Achillea millefolium* has no medicinal value "is in fact yarrow's Achilles heel."



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Weed Warrior Report

By Yolanda Waddell and Ron Rasmussen

November 5th – Mending Fences and Trails

At the end of the dry season, with very few weeds to pull in the Elfin Forest, there is time to tend to other chores like preparing trails for the rainy season, fixing damaged fences, finding and replacing rusted screws on the boardwalk and trimming plant growth along the boardwalk. Two green mesh fences at Siena's View overlook had been climbed over and needed repair. Also, some symbolic fencing stanchions on the Habitat Trail needed to be moved.

Shown in the adjacent photo doing the fence moving are (L-R) Brenda McMahon, Conservation Chair Skip Rotstein, snail monitor Barrett Holland and Jack McMahon. The rest of the Weed Warriors split into small crews to take care of the fences at Siena's View, to replace screws in the boardwalk, to conduct erosion control on the trails and to do trail trimming. They were: Jennifer Blackburn, Pat Brown, Dave Bowlus, Lannie Erickson, Vicky Johnson, Prisila Johnson, Rich Johnson, Ellen Nelson, Ron Rasmussen and Dean Thompson. Their missions accomplished, cookies were enjoyed by all.



In November, Weed Warriors (L-R) Brenda McMahon, Skip Rotstein, Barrett Holland and Robert McMahon moved some symbolic fencing to make a trail narrower. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



Weed Warriors Pat Brown, Charlie Sitton and Ron Rasmussen happily completed their job of replacing a rotten fence post in December.

December 3rd – Begone, Rotten Posts!

After being in the ground for ten or fifteen years, wood posts can give way to termite activity or dry rot. Two posts that had failed were replaced during the December work party. One, at the end of 13th Street supported a Mutt Mitt dispenser box and a trash can. It toppled over and had been propped back up. Weed Warriors Lannie Erickson, Barrett Holland, Skip Rotstein and Sharon Rooney tackled this job. After removing the Mutt Mitt dispenser and trash can from the old post, they dug a new hole, poured quick cement into it, installed the new post and fastened the dispenser box and trash can to the new post.

A post in the wood fence at the end of 17th Street had rotted through, as can be seen from the photo of Pat Brown, Charlie Sitton holding the old post, and Ron Rasmussen. That job involved unfastening the old post from the fence, putting the new post in place and then fastening the fence rails to it.

Two more Weed Warriors, Prisila and Rich Johnson, did boardwalk duty. They re-fastened a loose board, repaired some loose toe railing in two places and checked for rusted screws. The boardwalk needs constant attention in order to assure the safety of visitors to the Elfin Forest.

SWAP volunteers take their jobs as stewards of the Elfin Forest seriously, and get satisfaction from a Saturday morning of work in the Forest.

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.



During the December Weed Warrior work party, Sharon Rooney (left) and Skip Rotstein muscled a trash can into place on a new Mutt Mitt post. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Vanessa Nelson Joins Board

By Yolanda Waddell, SWAP Secretary

Vanessa Nelson and her husband Don moved to Los Osos in August, 2016. After settling in a bit, Vanessa came to the September SWAP Board meeting and offered to do volunteer work. She was as good as her word, preparing food, serving and doing cleanup at our Annual Celebration on September 24th. She kept attending and contributing ideas at Board meetings. When Oktoberfest rolled around, Vanessa was a booth worker.

Board members were pleased with Vanessa's energetic style, and also were surprised that she was always willing to sit through a two-hour board meeting each month. Finally, at the December meeting, Vanessa was asked if she would like to be a member of the SWAP Board. We were delighted when she said yes.

For Vanessa and husband Don, owning a home and living in Los Osos is the end of a journey that found them living and working in several California communities. They met and married in Livermore, where Don obtained a degree in HVAC. He is also a third generation electrician. Their next stop was Visalia where Vanessa attended the College of the Sequoias. After that, they lived in an RV on a horse ranch off of Paradise Road near Santa Barbara, while Don worked on the construction of the Goleta Valley Cottage Hospital. In August, 2014, Don was hired at Cal Poly and is working in Cal Poly's Central Plant. They rented in Arroyo Grande until they found a house, and a community that appealed to them, in Los Osos.

Both Vanessa and Don love the outdoors. As a child, Vanessa lived in Sonora and was always outside, in sight of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, learning about nature first hand. Three days after Vanessa and Don moved to Los Osos, she walked to the Elfin Forest. The sight of it seemed magical to her. Now, when her 2-1/2 year-old grandson Kenyon visits, she puts him in a wagon and takes him on a tour of the boardwalk. She's pleased to be doing for her grandson what her family in Sonora did for her – giving him a first hand experience of nature.

Asked why she became interested in SWAP, Vanessa said that it appeals to her because it is an all-volunteer organization and the steward of the Elfin Forest. Besides going on adventures in natural areas like the Elfin Forest, she likes kayaking, bicycling, arts and crafts and being with people. As an active member of SWAP, she will join the Education Committee with the idea of leading pre-school walks. She will also work with Property and Records Committee Chair Pat Murray on ordering, developing and inventorying SWAP merchandise; and will help organize photos and archival material for the Historian Committee. We are delighted to have this energetic person on the SWAP Board.



Elfin Forest Sightings

In the winter, before the Elfin Forest is filled with wildflowers, one's eye is drawn to smaller plant life, such as lichens. Recently we received two striking lichen photos from Oakleaves readers. If you are reading a print copy of Oakleaves, we suggest that you visit www.elfin-forest.org to see the photos in color. Thank you to both photographers for taking the time to share their delightful images with us.

Western pixie-cup (*Cladonia asahinae*) >

Some like to pretend that the Elfin Forest has elves; but who would have thought that it has real pixies? Marlin Harms has been interested in photographing lichens lately, and spotted the Western pixie-cup during one of his visits to the Forest. This lichen grows on the ground or on rocks; in this case, it was on the ground. One has to have a sharp eye and a very good close-up lens to find and take a picture of it. The gray-green lichen sprouts hollow tubes that flare at the end like cups or trumpets. The tubes are 10 – 25 millimeters tall – about 1 or 2 centimeters, or 3/8 to 3/4 inch.



< Multiple lichens

Early in December, Vicky Johnsen took a "lovely Sunday morning walk-about" in the Elfin Forest. She said that the sun had just chased the fog away and there were glistening drops hanging from lichens and other plants. Vicky sent us her photo of a branch with yellow and gray crustose lichens, and Lace lichen (*Ramalina menziesii*), all glowing in early morning sunlight.

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest



Text and Photos by Jean Wheeler (above: Western Grebes)

We've lucked out with good rains so far this year, several well-spaced and gently penetrating before year's end. Heavy rains are starting as I write in early January. Let us hope rains continue through February and March and even later rather than the La Niña drought previously predicted.

A lot of shrubs died during the severe drought years, but most species have many surviving shrubs showing strong signs of recovery. There are new green leaves on many if not most branches. Species expected to bloom in midwinter are doing so and on schedule, even ones that last year bloomed sparsely and 1-2 months later than normal.

Around the boardwalk Buckbrush *Ceanothus* shrubs are covered with white to lavender blossoms and should continue to bloom through February and March. Morro Manzanitas were among the species hardest hit by the prolonged drought. Large ones along the lower boardwalk shut off many branches to die in order to save the minimal water they could obtain for remaining branches. New leaves and even tiny bell-shaped flowers on many surviving branches next to obviously dead branches attest to the effectiveness of this survival mechanism.

Black Sage has been a strong survivor. Its white pompoms of flowers (pictured) will continue blooming through the spring. Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberries are advertising their bright red trumpet-shaped flowers to Anna's Hummingbirds, who will provide pollination service in return for using this nectar source to feed their young.

Also red are drooping globes of California peonies. These dark red globes are less than two inches in diameter. The leaves are unusually large for Elfin Forest plants but grow only a foot or so high as they lurk under the shady protection of taller shrubs. They are best seen on the sand trail leading from 11th Street to the boardwalk near Bush Lupine Point or from the boardwalk close to Siena's View.

February and March provide some of the best birding opportunities in the Elfin Forest year. Our resident birds have been joined by hundreds migrating in to escape cold weather and food shortages at higher latitudes and altitudes. Most will not be flying back to their summer breeding territories in Canada, Alaska, and high mountains of our west until at least March.

I've been concerned that the estuary is not nearly as blanketed with ducks, geese, and other water birds as in former years, and



Black Sage

the Christmas Bird Count (CBC, see article page 3) bears this out. Speculation is that many birds are wintering farther north in reaction to global warming. I was relieved to see that virtually all species are still present, if in reduced numbers. CBC counted only one Clark's Grebe and 3 Western Grebes this year whereas my adjoining photo, taken in 2011 includes eight birds of those two species, and I remember there were many more nearby when I took the photo.

Of the species listed in our Pocket Guide (available on page 11) the CBC list for Dec 17 includes 4 of the 5 Grebe species, 7 of 8 Dabbling Ducks and 7 of 9 Diving Ducks species we list. It lists 175 American Wigeons, 250 Northern Pintails, 350 Green-winged Teal and 225 Lesser Scaup among their totals, so you're very likely to see at least those species from our two lookout points.

There are also many regulars and some migrant birds to see among the shrubs and oaks of our little woodland. A few species among those listed by the CBC include 94 California Quail, 28 Anna's Hummingbirds, 20 California Scrub Jays, 20 Bushtits, 55 White-crowned Sparrows, and 25 Golden-crowned Sparrows. Those last 25 are all migrants visiting their resident "cousins" for the winter. The 16 Yellow-rumped Warblers listed are also migrants.

This winter and spring are excellent times to visit the Elfin Forest to see beautiful flowers in bloom and active birds flitting around or swimming on the estuary!

Morro Bay Golf Course Monarch Butterfly Tours

On February 11 and February 25, you can join a Morro Bay Butterfly Tour at the Morro Bay Golf Course. Celebrate one of nature's wonders, the Monarch Butterfly. You'll witness thousands of them up close in their natural habitat. Meet at the Morro Bay Golf Course Clubhouse. The tour will involve a short hike to the viewing area. For information, contact Josh Heptig at 805-781-1318. Rain cancels.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

February 18, 9:30 a.m. – Fungus Foray

Join fungophile Dennis Sheridan on a delightful exploration of the Elfin Forest floor for fascinating mushrooms such as wood bluetts, black elfin saddles, earthstars, golden caps, boletes, and poisonous amanitas. Dennis will take us on a trek to the lower oak grove next to the bay to find these marvelous fungi. Bring a magnifying lens and, if you have a mystery mushroom in your yard, bring a sample for Dennis to identify. This is not a mushroom collecting walk. All plants in the Elfin Forest are protected by law. Only a very heavy rain will cancel the walk.

March 18, 9:30 a.m. – Sex Life of Plants

All of the sex on the planet Earth is biologically designed to serve one evolutionary purpose: to mix the genes of two separate individuals and then produce a new individual sporting a new mixture of genes. Easy enough for mobile creatures such as humans, but how does a plant do this? Join Barb Renshaw and Jeff Reifel in a tour of the Elfin Forest in search of answers to this question.

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.



Cal Poly soil scientist Chip Appel, Left, talks about the thousands of micro-organisms in each handful of Elfin Forest sand.

Photo by Ron Rasmussen.

Abundance

By Mary Kleeman

Friends gather for a weekly trek through the Elfin Forest, twice around, mixing two by two, then single file along narrow boardwalk passages through this magical miniature wilderness. Conversations drift, changing with weather and seasons.

With time or osmosis
we recognize white chamise,
mock heather, California sagebrush
known as cowboy cologne.
Pygmy oak trees decorated with lace lichen
naturally dominate the landscape,
leaving space for twisted Morro manzanita.
Bright sticky monkey flower,
wooley blue star and pearly everlasting
gently outshine coffee berry,
bracken fern, and deer weed.

Lingering we watch tidewater. Who's visiting here today?
Peeps turn in flight reflecting light, gray to white.
In muddy sandbars flocks of sanderlings sit,
maybe cinnamon teal ducks, or avocets or wrens.
Sudden flight, we listen to wings whirl.
Chortling crrrronk calls for attention.
Black brant geese stop in this estuary on their winter way to Mexico,
mating for life, feeding, resting side by side,
migrating wing tip to wing tip.

Still bay water mirrors cloudy blue skies.
Misty fog lifts as cold wind whips rough gray incoming tide.
Abundant life, familiar as faces and voices of faithful friends.



Author and local historian Lynette Tornatsky (3rd from right) shared fascinating stories about the Elfin Forest's past on a breezy December day.

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

NEW MEMBERS:

Jim Schwarz & Deborah Warren*

RENEWING MEMBERS:

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Florence & Karl Appel	James Koga*
Susan & John Armstrong*	Gaby & Ken Levine*
Pam Bains*	Los Osos Fitness*
David & Rosemary Bentley*	W.G. Mcelhinney*
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DONATIONS:

Richard & Prisila Johnson - gift
Carol Irving Mattox, Donna Irving Kobyluk, & Mark Irving
in memory of their aunt, Marion Irving de Cruz

**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.*

Remembrances

By Yolanda Waddell

There are over four hundred members of SWAP in any given year. When I learned about the two women described in the following paragraphs, who loved the Elfin Forest and supported SWAP and the Forest with membership fees and donations, I wished that I could have been acquainted with them. They were busy women, but they found time to enjoy the Elfin Forest and to inspire others to appreciate it as well. Here are their stories.

Marion Irving de Cruz was much loved by her nieces Carol and Donna, and her nephew, Mark, who made a generous donation to SWAP in her memory. Here is what Carol wrote about her:

"Marion loved her walks along the paths and boardwalk of the forest and eagerly shared the spot with all of her out-of-town guests. From the youngest to the oldest (and even the four legged friends), all got to see why Marion considered Baywood Park/Los Osos a paradise as they walked along the boardwalk, breathed in the air and searched for the "elves" that lived among the trees. May this contribution help bring many more generations a place to roam, discover and rest. As for Marion's family, we will continue to walk the paths and search for "elves," but now with a more thoughtful and tender stride." Marion Irving de Cruz passed away in May, 2016.

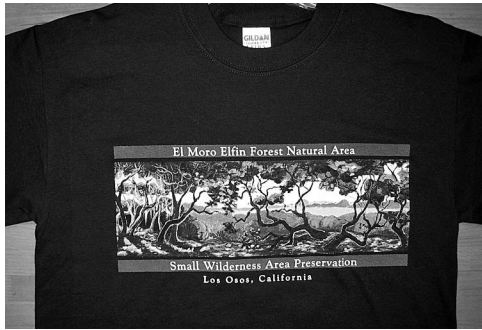
Celia Mingus Zaentz lived a long and colorful life from 1925 to 2015. Born in Fresno during the roaring 20's, Celia was a fearless, free-spirited woman. During the war years she trained to be a Rosie the Riveter and worked as a secretary at the Naval Supply Depot in Oakland. She married her childhood sweetheart, Jon Nielsen in 1948 and moved to New York City where Jon tried to break into the music business. Celia worked for opera singer Robert Merrill to support them. In 1951 she married famed jazz bassist Charles Mingus, and co-founded Debut Records with him in 1952.

Celia later divorced Mingus and took a job with Fantasy Records in Berkeley. She met and married Saul Zaentz, and the two of them eventually purchased Fantasy Records. They struck gold in the 1970s with the band Creedence Clearwater Revival. Later they founded Fantasy Films, which went on to produce major motion pictures, such as One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Amadeus, and The English Patient.

In 2007, Celia moved to Los Osos to be near family and was a busy volunteer with the Natural History Museum in Morro Bay and Circle of Friends. She produced two short films that were screened at the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival, and co-founded the local nonprofit environmental organization Ecolistics, Inc. and the Blue C Community Garden in Los Osos.

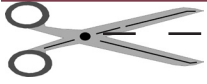
She passed away on July 25, 2016.

SWAP extends our thoughts of sympathy and appreciation to the families of Marion Irving de Cruz and Celia Mingus Zaentz.



Elfin Forest Mural Shirts

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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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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Elfin Forest Needs Volunteers!! ~ see page 1

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