



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 2017

Erosion in the Elfin Forest

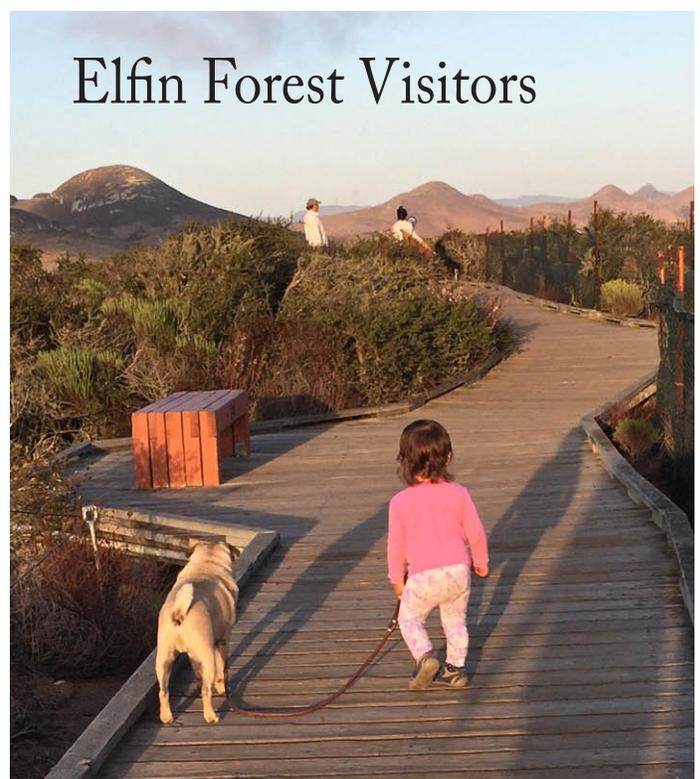
By Ron Rasussen, SWAP Chair; phot by Yolanda Waddell

The Elfin Forest grows on sand dunes that were formed several thousand years ago during the last Ice Age. The sand is subject to movement by wind and rain, and animals who live in the Forest, as well as by visitors to the Forest. As you see when you enter the Forest, except for 16th street, the sand on the trails leading from the street ends to the Boardwalk tends to be moved downhill by



Erosion *continued on page 2*

Meeting about ways to solve a serious erosion problem in the Elfin Forest were (L-R) Shaun Cooper, County Parks Senior Planner; Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair; Barrett Hollland of SWCA Environmental Consultants; Jan Dileo, SWAP Treasurer; Skip Rotstein, Conservation Chair; Bob Yetter, County Parks Supervising Ranger; and Pat Brown, Trail Guide Chairperson.



Elfin Forest Visitors

In February, Vanessa Nelson sent us this photo of 2-year-old Colby taking her pug dog Eddy for an early evening stroll on the boardwalk. Thanks to her parents, she will grow up seeing birds, bunnies, lizards, plants and insects up close.

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Welcome to Two New SWAP Volunteers

Text and photos by Yolanda Waddell

Early this year we were contacted by two people who wanted to help with the education aspect of SWAP's mission. Here is an introduction to them:

Bill McQuilkin – Elfin Forest Ambassador

In her December article, "Elfin Forest Watchers Wanted," Board member Vicky Johnsen asked for someone to help keep a

New Volunteers *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
- 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, April 10, and Monday, May 8.**

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
1144 Monterey 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.

Erosion *cont. from page 1*

both foot traffic and rain. SWAP volunteers routinely move most of this sand back up sloping trails. As long as visitors remain on the trails SWAP can deal with this sand movement.

Erosion also occurs elsewhere in the Forest. The Boardwalk was constructed following pre-existing trails. This way erosion is minimized while still allowing visitors access to a large section of the Forest. With the Boardwalk in place one can see that the sand tends to move downhill. This may result in sand accumulating under the Boardwalk and, in some places, allow plants to grow close to or even under the Boardwalk.

There are a few locations where erosion occurs along sand trails as the result of wind and rain, as well as by some loss of vegetation. An example is at the junction of the trails from street ends 11th, 12th and 13th with the main Boardwalk. Here the sand trail slopes downward to the Boardwalk and is bordered on the east side by part of a sand dune with sparse growth of vegetation. The result may be accumulation of sand that could eventually reach the level of the main Boardwalk. Manual relocation of this sand is presently SWAP's way of controlling the sand. SWAP is now planning to put in some native plants along the east side of the trail to help reduce movement of sand onto the trail.

A topographic map of the Elfin Forest shows that the western, northern and eastern sides of the underlying dunes have steep slopes. The result is loss of sand at these sites at a rate depending on (1) the degree of slope and (2) density of the vegetation. The northern side is less steep and has more dense vegetation and thus loss of sand is slower. The rate of loss is greatest on the western and eastern sides. The slope on the western side is naturally steep and also receives rain runoff from storms. The eastern slope is the result of construction of South Bay Boulevard and has considerable bare sand and a steep slope. To control erosion on the slopes, SWAP has made most of these locations "Off Limits". In this way the native vegetation is allowed to grow and hold the sand mostly in place.

With time, that is a thousand years or so, the Elfin Forest could eventually be washed into the bay. However, the Elfin Forest can be saved by continued maintenance by San Luis Obispo County Parks and SWAP Volunteers.

Trail Guide Box Vandalized



The following report came from Pat Brown, Trail Guide Chairperson, in February:

When I stocked guides on Friday, February 23, the plastic front to the trail guide box (at the end of the 16th Street spur onto the board walk) had been smashed. There were also pieces of broken glass deposited inside the box (pictured). I removed the box and took it home to repair. I replaced the plastic and now have spare plastic fronts for both boxes as they are not the same size. While I had it off of the post I gave it a coat of wood deck protection. Today I reinstalled it in the Elfin Forest.

It has been 7 years since one of the plastic fronts has been smashed, when the other box at the western side of the forest received the same type of damage.

New Volunteers *continued from page 1*

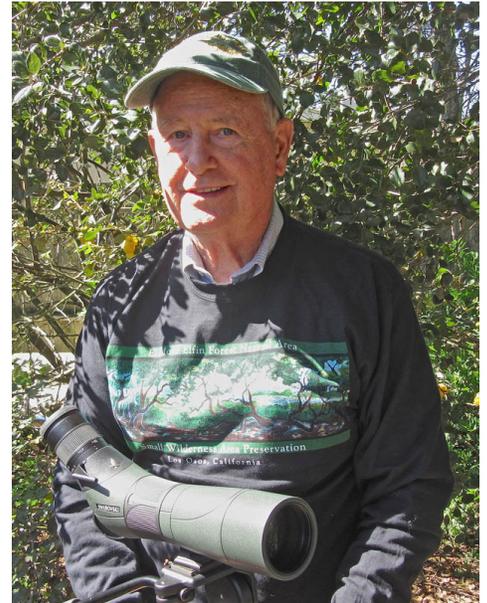
presence in the Elfin Forest. Shortly after that issue reached our readers, we received a phone call from Bill McQuilkin. He was very interested in Vicky's idea of a "roving ambassador" in the Forest. Vicky gave him an orientation walk, and Bill agreed to become SWAP's first Elfin Forest Ambassador. Next he attended a SWAP Board meeting and told us about himself.

Bill grew up in upstate New York in Rochester near the Finger Lakes. After college at the University of Rochester, he joined the Air Force and was stationed in South Dakota for three years. Next he attended University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business to earn his MBA, and then went to work for Eastman Kodak, in marketing and product development. After Kodak, he worked for a hospital and health products company in Indiana, and later at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

All of the time that Bill was working, he was involved with the nonprofit world. In New York, he worked to keep Canandaigua Lake clean, and also was active in the Sierra Club. In 1992, Bill and his wife, Sue, moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where he became very involved in Audubon. He joined the Florida Audubon Board, and eventually was on the National Audubon Board, where he visited many Audubon properties around the country. He also saw a real need for land preservation in the Jacksonville area, and founded the North Florida Land Trust in 1999. To date, the Land Trust has preserved 18,000 acres of land.

Two years ago, Bill and Sue moved from Florida to Nipomo, to be on the same coast as their two adult children. Their daughter and her husband, and granddaughter live in San Luis Obispo; their son lives in Portland, Oregon. Now Bill is a member of the San Luis Obispo County Civil Grand Jury. After his Grand Jury meetings, he walks the Elfin Forest.

Visitors to the Forest during those afternoons might encounter Bill, wearing a SWAP T-shirt and cap and carrying his spotting scope. He says that people he meets like having someone associated with SWAP out and about and learning where they are from or what they have seen and heard during their walks. We are extremely fortunate to have Bill, with his knowledge, experience and passion for nature, as SWAP's Ambassador in the Elfin Forest.



Cheryl Dove – School Walk Docent

The SWAP Education Committee has known and appreciated Cheryl Dove for many years. She taught first grade at Baywood Elementary School, and each Spring would coordinate an insect walk in the Elfin Forest for the school's fifty-or-so first graders. The students walked three long blocks from Baywood School to the 11th Street Elfin Forest entrance, were divided into four smaller groups, and would excitedly discover the different insects in the Forest.

Cheryl recently retired from full-time teaching after 38 years in the classroom, but she is still teaching reading recovery for children who are unable to read. Her passion is to help children overcome neural problems in their brains that block their learning. She realizes that reading well is key to succeeding in school, and is sad that the San Luis Obispo Coastal School District is ending the program this year because of budget cuts.

Cheryl was born in Greenville, South Carolina. Her father was in the army, so her family moved with him to North Carolina, Virginia, Alabama, Colorado and Hawaii. When she was between ten and twelve, they lived in Morocco.

On graduating from high school, Cheryl received a scholarship to Pepperdine University, where she majored in art. After one year, she transferred to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where Gary Dove, her fiancée, was studying. She changed her major to social sciences with an art minor and after graduating, obtained a teaching credential

at Cal State Hayward. She and Gary were married in Hayward, and then bought a house in Los Osos. Cheryl enjoyed her long career, variously teaching middle school, high school, third grade, second grade, and finally first grade at Baywood Elementary.

Cheryl remembers SWAP's campaign to save the Elfin Forest, and has visited the Forest often over the years, going to sit quietly and make sketches that she later turns into watercolor paintings. She said, "It is truly a gift for a community to have such a place for enjoyment and learning." Recently, Cheryl contacted SWAP and asked to become a docent. She will continue teaching children through nature walks instead of in the classroom. We are very grateful that Cheryl, with her deep knowledge of children and how they learn, has chosen to join our Education Committee.



Closeup of a feral pig from website stock.

Wild Pigs in the Elfin Forest

By Jean Wheeler, Ph.D.

Pigs (*Sus scrofa*) that have escaped from domestication and descendents of such escapees living undomesticated are called wild or feral (from Latin meaning wild) pigs. They are in a Eurasian taxonomic family (Suidae), unlike the javelina, which evolved in the Americas and are classified in Family Tayassuidae. *Sus scrofa* were domesticated eight or more thousands of years ago in Europe and Asia. They were brought by early explorers and colonists beginning in the early 1500's to what is now southeastern United States. Many escaped and developed feral populations.

By the 1800s feral pigs had become common enough in southern states to be hunted regularly. Estimated numbers reached two million around 1990 in 20 or more states and shot up to six million in about 39 states in the last few years. They've also been reported as a growing problem in south-central prairie states of Canada. Wild pigs are considered a very seriously growing problem in at least 11 southern states, including California and Hawaii.

Wild pigs cause enormous damage to human property and wilderness areas, so recent sightings of them in the lower Elfin Forest are of serious concern. Pigs are opportunistic omnivores. About 90% of their diet is from vegetation and 10% from animal matter. They use their snouts and tusks to root in the ground for most of their food, consuming acorns, nuts, seeds and roots, interfering with leaf decomposition, and destroying seedlings. They kill and eat small animals such as lizards, toads, and snakes, and eat eggs, such as those of ground-nesting birds. Animals even as large as deer are driven away, and this interferes with feeding by these vulnerable or less assertive species.

Rapid reproduction of pigs and minimal predator control has led to burgeoning feral pig populations. Females are sexually mature at 6-8 months with a first litter at around one year of age. They birth about six pigs per litter and can have several litters a year in ideal conditions, but normally average three litters in two years. Groups called "sounders" are dominated by several generations of related females. Male offspring disperse to other sounders at about a year and a half old.

Only large predators such as wolves, cougars and bears can conquer mature feral pigs. Wild pigs weigh typically 200-300 pounds, have powerful jaws and, in males, strong tusks nearly six inches long. Adults aggressively charge at ten mph or more to protect vulnerable smaller members of their sounder. Unfortunately, large predators have been hunted out of much of our nation. Even



Elfin Forest visitor Nicole Dale took this photo of a wild pig rooting in the marsh below Siena's View overlook.

with recent protection, large predator recovery is slow as they reproduce slowly and usually require larger ranges than are available near areas as urbanized as Los Osos.

Efforts to control feral pigs have been mainly by hunting (practiced for generations in southeastern states, usually with dog packs) and trapping. Wild pigs can be hunted as game mammals in several states, including California. But California requires a depredation permit to conduct a control program or to take depredating animals. Control by poison has been tried but it causes a cruel death suffered over about a week. It is also nearly impossible to prevent poisoning of non-target species such as raccoons. In very recent years, a federal initiative has allocated millions of dollars for control of feral pigs in 39 states. The biggest problem is that unless an entire sounder is destroyed its population will quickly recover. Pig population responds not to how many pigs are killed, but to how many are missed!

Wild pigs have long been established in wetlands around Turri Road and South Bay Blvd. They have been seen recently more than once in the Klopfer Grove at the lower north end of the Elfin Forest near Los Osos Creek. The pigs have only been seen in the lower grove, well away from the boardwalk. Evidence of their rooting has also been seen near the estuary around 8th and 10th streets.

Several emails to SWAP officers have expressed fear of danger to people. State Parks Ecologist Vince Cicero replied to an email that our area does not currently have funding for feral hog control and also that he is not aware of any negative human-wild hog interactions in California.

Like most wild animals, wild pigs will usually try to avoid humans. However, feral pigs can be very dangerous and have injured, even killed people, most often when they are cornered by hunting dogs and they charge people standing nearby. Hikers could be in danger if they surprise pigs, especially if the hiker walks between a sow and her piglets.

The boardwalk and entrance paths from Streets 11-17 off Santa Ysabel Avenue are safe for use. But if you go to visit the lower grove near Los Osos Creek north from the boardwalk or west from South Bay Boulevard, you assume responsibility for your safety. Stay alert and leave if you see one or more wild pigs.

Coast Live Oak

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

(Ed. Note: Revised by Dr. Walters from October, 1998 issue)

Since we last covered our common coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) back in 1998, oaks have been in the news a lot. Essentially all of it has been bad for oaks. First, there was the clearing of valley (*Q. lobata*) and blue (*Q. douglasii*) oaks in the Paso Robles area, and then the spread of Sudden Oak Death (SOD) into our county. For our return look at Elfin Forest oaks, we are using the same charming pencil sketch Bonnie did for *Oakleaves* last time.

Early Spanish settlers in Southern California called this species, Encino after a similar oak native to Spain. A taxonomic tidbit from Howard McMinn and Evelyn Maino's *An Illustrated Manual of Pacific Coast Trees* is that Albert Kellogg actually named the plant *Quercus aQUIifolia* because he thought its leaves resembled those of holly. However, the type setter for the original publication of the name and description misspelled the species epithet as *Q. aGRrifolia*. Since a scientific name can't be changed due to error, the name we know is *Q. agrifolia*.

Memorable for its very picturesque qualities, the coast live oak is not that tall (rarely over 50 feet; the record is 75 feet) but tends to be very wide, (up to 120 feet in diameter). It branches from the base creating a number of horizontal trunks, which then bend up toward their tips. Each branch trunk can produce huge girths. In habitats such as our coastal dunes, the species tends to take on a shrubbier form. Leaves and branches are mostly out away from the center, so that if one can get inside the canopy, one finds a large empty, room-like center.

Leaves are evergreen and minutely hairy all over when young. As leaves get older, they gradually lose hairs over their approximately 2-year life span. A character often cited as the one to use when identifying this species of oak is "hairy armpits." The "armpits" are the angles between the midrib and the primary lateral veins of the leaf. In this spot, the fragile hairs are protected, and thus tend to remain longer than hairs on the top of the veins and on flat areas of the leaf. Thus leaves of intermediate age tend to have a small tuft of hairs in these vein angles or "arm pits." Don't look at the youngest leaves; they're sort of hairy all over, and don't look at very old leaves, they are essentially devoid of hairs (glabrous) everywhere.

Coast live oak leaves are also extremely variable in size and shape between trees and even from different parts of the same tree. Leaves from a shady north side or within the canopy tend to be much larger than leaves on the exposed, hot southerly outside of the tree. I once had a group of students collect randomly 25 leaves from the north side of a single coast live oak while a second group collected leaves from the south side of this same tree. We measured the length of all the leaves and calculated their averages. A simple statistical test determined that the chance that these two sets of leaves were representative of the same population or group was much less than 1 in 100. If we did not know the circumstances of their collection, we might reasonably conclude that the two samples came from different trees or even different species of trees.

Coast live oaks belong to the black oak group which means they mature acorns every two years and have the ends of their leaf veins protruding beyond the leaf margin to form harsh bristles. Black oaks tend to produce more tannins in their acorns than do other groups of oaks. Tannins taste very bitter and tend to create digestive blockage in some animals that eat them, especially insects. Native Californians put pulverized acorn meal into their spectacularly tight baskets and then placed the baskets in a stream to leach out the soluble tannins. I doubt if we could find a stream clean enough to do this today, or would want to use tap water to leach them. Besides, many of our native mammals, such as deer and ground squirrels, depend on acorns as a major food source.

At least one acorn out of thousands produced by a single tree has to germinate and avoid being eaten long enough to produce the next generation of acorns. Like many California oaks, the coast live oak is having a harder and harder time doing just that.



From Our Readers

More on the Scaly-breasted Munia

Members Mimi and Gene Kalland were interested to read that Scaly-breasted Munia were seen in the Elfin Forest during the Christmas Bird Count. The Kallands live not far from the Elfin Forest, and had Munia visiting their bird feeders regularly during the winter. Mimi was charmed by their habit of sharing a bird feeder perch, two at a time, and taking turns in pecking at the seeds in the feeder. Gene Kalland's photo shows two of these very small birds, about 4-1/2 inches long, sharing a perch on a feeder in their back yard.



Weed Warrior Report

By Yolanda Waddell and Ron Rasmussen

January 7th – Digging in the Rain

Rain was predicted for Saturday, January 7th. Work party leader Ron Rasmussen told Weed Warriors in our reminder e-mail, “It’s a go if it’s only sprinkling, but real rain will cancel the work day.” It did rain that morning. However, at 9:00 a.m., the ground was quite wet but there was no rain falling. Intrepid Weed Warrior Vicky Johnsen showed up in head-to-toe rain gear, shovel in hand. Lannie Erickson arrived on her bicycle, bringing her shovel. Lannie is our work party poet. Her poem for January advised readers to “get some fresh air in our sweet Elfin Forest.” Vicky and Lannie went to the intersection of the 13th Street trail and the boardwalk, where rain, as well as foot traffic, had caused the sand to pile up. Ron waited for other Weed Warriors, but no one else came. Vicky, shown in the photo, dug sand away from the boardwalk, and Vicky and Lannie dug channels behind water bars farther up the trail to divert water away from the trail. Thanks to both for their erosion control work, and to Ron, who always comes, regardless of the weather.



*In January, SWAP Board member and Weed Warrior Vicky Johnsen came out on a rainy day to put sand back where it belonged.
Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

February 4th – Weeding, Trimming, Pounding

On the first Saturday in February, ten willing Weed Warriors came to work on the projects that Ron Rasmussen had planned for them. Barrett Holland, our snail monitor, led new Weed Warriors Catherine Hayes and Don Nelson to the lower (Don Klopfer) grove next to the estuary to pull weeds. Jay Bonestell joined them a little later. Prisila and Rich Johnson monitored the boardwalk, replacing broken screws where necessary. Dean Thompson trimmed back some over-eager shrubs that were growing over the boardwalk. And Ron and Skip Rotstein installed a new top railing at Sienna’s View (see photo). Someone had carved names into the original railing. Though it was foggy and overcast, the crew spent a productive and enjoyable morning, munching contentedly on Ron’s home-baked cookies when noon rolled around. Thanks to all of our Weed Warriors for tending to the needs of the Elfin Forest.



*In February, Conservation Chair Skip Rotstein joined Ron Rasmussen in replacing a badly vandalized rail at Sienna’s View overlook.
Photo by Yolanda Waddell.*

Weed Warriors, Forward March!

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.

Elfin Forest Sightings

SWAP's annual Fungus Foray, led this year by naturalist Al Normandin, yielded many fascinating finds due to generous rainfall in the weeks prior. Fungus enthusiasts were led down the slope above the estuary into the magical Don Klopfer Grove, where twisted oak trunks arch overhead. Walk participant Jaime Aranda found much to photograph with his smart phone. One image is a dramatic shot of Turkey Tail shelf fungi and round black Carbon Ball mushrooms.



Young Male Coyote Found Hurt in Elfin Forest

By Yolanda Waddell

The small young male coyote, apparently hit by a car, was found at 8:30 a.m. on November 8th, last year, by Ron Myers, a long-time Elfin Forest volunteer. Lying on the trail parallel to South Bay Boulevard, he struggled to stand up when he saw Ron, stumbled about 20 or 30 feet westward into the brush, and then collapsed.

Ron phoned Woods Humane Society, the Sheriff's office, and County Animal Services without finding any help for the coyote. Next, his veterinarian suggested he contact Pacific Wildlife Care (PCW). He left a message on their answering machine; then went back to check on the coyote. Still alive, the coyote had crawled into a small sheltered area under a ceanothus bush near the end of 17th Street. A PWC couple with knowledge of caring for coyotes arrived in the afternoon bringing a dog crate with them. Ron said, "Our first thought was to minimize further trauma and injury for it. The PCW crew made a wonderful, loving and careful effort in its capture. Their efforts were commendable." The coyote was taken to the PWC Rehabilitation Center in Morro Bay.

In an e-mail to SWAP, Meg Crockett, past president of the PCW Board said: "He was anesthetized for his exam... [the veterinarian] was thus not able to test then for nerve damage. A few days later she was able to determine there was nerve damage such that partial or total paralysis was likely. He was then euthanized, as there was no chance he could survive in the wild."

We appreciate the hours of attention that Ron Myers gave to the injured coyote, and are grateful for the volunteers of Pacific Wildlife Care, who give their time and skills to assist injured wild animals and birds. Ron, of course, was sad that the coyote had to be "put down." It is unfortunate that a high-speed road, South Bay Boulevard, divides what in past decades would have been part of a wildlife corridor. In January, Lannie Erickson reported seeing a large coyote lying dead on the east side of South Bay Boulevard. It had been removed by the time she returned to Los Osos.

If you see an injured animal in the Elfin Forest, call Pacific Wildlife Care's Hotline: 805-543-9453 (WILD). Anyone in the county can call 365 days a year to get help for a distressed animal. Hotline volunteers check for messages at least once an hour, between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm.



Elfin Forest Visitors

In February, Pat Brown and Don Quintana led a walk in the Elfin Forest for about fifteen members of the North American Nature Photographers Association (NANPA) Meetup group. Shown are some of the participants with their impressive cameras and lenses. Photo by Pat Brown.



Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

Too many dead shrubs and dead gray branches on surviving shrubs are grim reminders of our prolonged drought. However, with more rainfall this rainy season than in the last several drought years combined, our shrubs and herbs are doing their best to recover from those stressful years and open their floral bouquets in celebration. These species cover our Elfin Forest because they have evolved by surviving the many previous multi-year droughts characteristic of our dry-summer Mediterranean climate over thousands of years.

Buckbrush ceanothus (California lilac) shrubs are the most widespread in bloom now and should continue through most of April with their white to pale lavender blossoms covering most of their branches. As I write in early March, a few black sage shrubs are opening white flowers in their pompom arrangement along their branches and lots more will surely follow. They should continue into summer with their pompoms turning rust colored by late summer and still present but as dead black decorations by Halloween.

Yellow spikes of suffrutescent wallflowers are blooming in several areas around the boardwalk and entrance trails. Some orange flowers are already open on a few sticky monkey-flower shrubs. We can expect them to be widespread around the boardwalk during most of April and May, and well into summer. Yellow and orange native poppies are common almost any time of year.

Silver dune lupines were especially drought damaged, and quite a few died, but a reasonable number have survived and are green from the rains. They should open their beautiful long spikes of blue flowers near the estuary during the two months of this issue, if not as bountifully as in the last rainy years before the drought.

Deep purple/blue flowers are already beginning to cover **purple nightshade** (pictured), which should be blooming well into summer. Less common but also to be expected in April or May are the pink flowers of the California rose and native cobwebby thistle.

Perhaps the most excitingly colorful attraction in these two months will be the annual explosion of butterflies flitting about the flowers. Butterflies to watch for include the orange and black Variable Checkerspot, whose bristly black caterpillars dine on leaves of sticky monkey-flower plants. Gabb's Checkerspot is orange and brown and is attracted to California poppies. The smaller green

Coastal Bramble Hairstreak (pictured) uses dune buckwheat among its host plants. The Morro Blue Butterfly is of special concern as the major host for its caterpillars is silver dune (bush) lupine, a plant whose habitat is fast being replaced by urbanization. Other butterflies to watch for include the Common Buckeye, Anise Swallowtail, Pale Swallowtail, Painted Lady, and Silvery Blue.



This is, of course, also a very busy time of the year for our avian residents, who are mating, building nests, incubating eggs, and feeding hungry hatchlings. 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 flit around the shrubs looking for insects to eat, in mixed flocks with other birds such as Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Chestnut-backed Chickadees. 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 white breasts. Quail will be calling "kwer-ca-go" and zipping across the ground between bushes in large coveys with many of this year's young.

The resilience of our native California vegetation and wildlife is wonderful to behold in this first year of good rains after the devastatingly long drought.

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.



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WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

Editor's Note: In April, we have an additional Saturday walk, on April 29, sponsored by the MBNEP. See article about MBNEP's State of the Bay report and events on page 10.

April 15, 9:30 a.m. –

Digital Photography and Native Plants

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. He'll also talk about some of the Elfin Forest's plant life. All levels of experience and skill are welcome. Pack water and wear layers in case it is windy.

April 29, 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 knowledgeable walk leader from the Morro Bay National Estuary Program will explain the importance of this body of water as we walk around the Elfin Forest boardwalk. Carolyn Doehring, the Estuary Program's Restoration Projects Manager, will talk about the 48,000-acre watershed that feeds the estuary, threats to estuary health, the state of 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.

May 20, 9:30 a.m. – Wildflower Walk

Dirk Walters will take us on a delightful tour of every blooming plant that is visible from the boardwalk in the Elfin Forest. There will be bright yellows of Rush-roses, Deerweed, Golden Yarrow and of course California Poppies. White Popcorn flowers, Pearly everlasting and Yarrow plants are 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.



A recent rain showed footprints on the Elfin Forest's sandy paths, just in time for Evan Albright (kneeling) to give a good animal tracks walk. Photo by Vicky Johnsen.



Al Normandin (center) talks about the Amanita virosa or Destroying Angel mushroom during February's Fungus Foray. Photo by Ron Rasmussen.

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.

Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW MEMBERS:

Don & Vanessa Nelson*

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Pat Akey *	James & Heather Johnson*
Rosemary Baxter*	Jennifer & Larry Levine
Michel Chirman*	Wendy McKeown
Scott Danielson	Beverley & Bill Moylan*
Leland & Valerie Endres*	Jim & Barbara Murray*
L.R. Erickson*	Tim & Melissa Rochte*
Frank & Gail Freiler*	Nancy Ruhl*
Arylane Hill*	Theo & Edith Waddell*
Gail Johnson – Johnson Gallery & Framing Studio*	Michael Walgren Carol Weisl*
	Dave & Julie Wolter

**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.*

Celebrate Earth Day all of April

By Yolanda Waddell

There is no need to limit our celebration of the earth to Earth Day weekend. On the Central Coast there will be almost daily opportunities to help SWAP pull weeds, go for a hike, attend a talk, see an amazing display of wildflowers in the Carrizo Plain, view 400 species wildflowers at the Cambria Wildflower Show, write a poem, or go to the Earth Day Fair at El Chorro Regional Park. Here are some specifics.

April 1 – SWAP First Saturday Work Party: Weeds are flourishing in the Elfin Forest along with wildflowers. Help the Weed Warriors vanquish those green foes. Meet at the north end of 15th Street at 9 a.m. and work till noon. Be rewarded with Ron's home-baked cookies.

April 1 – Native Plant Society Annual Field Trip at Carrizo Plain: Meet at the Santa Margarita park-and-ride (freeway exit, State Route 58 at Hwy 101) at 8:00 a.m. Caravan from there with a brief stop at Shell Creek. Wear sturdy shoes, bring sunscreen, a hat and layered clothing. Make sure you have plenty of gas and water as well as food. This promises to be a big year for wildflowers. For more information, go to www.cnpslo.org and click on the calendar.

April 1 to 30 – State of the Bay Events sponsored by Morro Bay National Estuary Program – see above, right.

Also, you can spend the month creating a poem to enter in the MBNEP Annual Poetry Contest: A National Treasure in Words. Submissions are due by April 30. Winners will give a celebratory reading of poems at Coalesce Bookstore on May 19. For complete information on these events, visit www.mbnep.org.

Morro Bay National Estuary Program Announces State of the Bay Report and Events

By Rachel Pass, MBNEP Education and Outreach Coordinator

Is the water in Morro Bay clean enough for swimming? How are local steelhead and eelgrass faring? How might climate change affect our bay? Every three years, the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) analyzes monitoring and research data gathered over the years to answer questions like this in a *State of the Bay* report. The 2017 report is now available.

To celebrate the bay and share the information in the *State of the Bay* report, the Estuary Program will host a series of events throughout April and May that invite people to explore the bay through science. These events include a variety of science presentations, walk-and-talks, hands-on activities, hikes, and even a trash pickup and paddle event on Earth Day. It will include three separate science talks. These will take place on April 1 at The Libertine in Morro Bay; April 18 as part of the Science After Dark series at Luis Wine Bar in San Luis Obispo; and at the Morro Bay Natural History Museum on the evening of April 27.

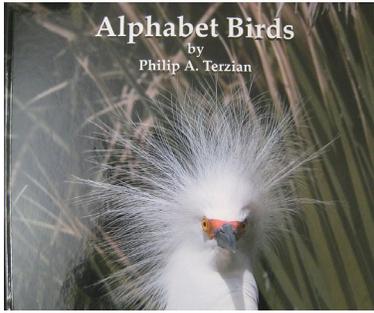
Visit the Estuary Program's website (www.mbnep.org) to read the *State of the Bay* 2017 report and see the complete spring event lineup. Event participants can enter a free raffle for the chance to win prizes. You can also pick up a copy of the report at the Estuary Program's office, at 601 Embarcadero in Morro Bay.

Ed. Note: An estuary walk led by MBNEP Restoration Projects Manager Carolyn Doehring will be given in the Elfin Forest on Saturday, April 29. See page 9 for the walk description.

April 15 to 23 – California Native Plant Week: This statewide observance of the importance of California's native plants will produce many events, including Donald Quintana's Digital Photography and Native Plants walk in the Elfin Forest on April 15. See walk descriptions on page 9 for more information about Don's walk. For other events sponsored by the San Luis Obispo chapter of CNPS (California Native Plant Society), visit their website at www.cnpslo.org.

April 22 - San Luis Obispo County Earth Day Fair and Music Festival: the Earth Day Alliance will present the fair at El Chorro Regional Park on Saturday, April 22nd, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. 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.earthdayalliance.com for more information.

April 29 to 30 - 12th Annual Cambria Wildflower Show: This year's show will be held on Saturday, April 29, from noon until 5:00 pm and Sunday, April 30, from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm at the Cambria Veterans Memorial Building, 1000 Main Street. You are invited to come and see a display of fresh wildflowers collected from the Monterey County line to the Morro Bay Estuary and from the coastal bluffs to the ridge of the Santa Lucia Mountains. An entry donation of \$3 is requested; students are free. For more information, call 927-2856 or e-mail ffircambria@sbcglobal.net.



Alphabet Birds: Wonderful Gift Book for Kids

SWAP is selling this wonderful book by Philip A. Terzian with gorgeous pictures of birds, one for each letter of the alphabet. The facing page features a clever little poem for each bird in large-sized text and child-appropriate wording.



SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

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

All Prices Include Sales Tax

1. MURAL SHIRTS

Mural design by artist Barbara Rosenthal on both front and back. Words on shirt: "El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area" above mural and "Small Wilderness Area Preservation" and "Los Osos, California" below mural.

Circle Sizes:

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

2. POCKET GUIDE

Useful 56-page guide to plants and animals of the Elfin Forest. Lists for mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, arthropods including moths and butterflies, gastropods, vascular plants, lichens, and mushrooms. Some with charts for seasonality, color and more.

___ @ \$3.00 = \$___

3. ELFIN FOREST MURAL PRINTS

Signed prints by artist Barbara Rosenthal, image size 4 1/2 x 16 1/2 in; mounted on foamcore

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With clever verses and superb photos, this book is sure to please young and old.

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5. MURAL MUG

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

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6. ELFIN FOREST CAPS

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

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Oinks in the Forest? ~ see page 4

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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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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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