



OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION

P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ♦ (805) 528-0392 ♦ DECEMBER 2019 / JANUARY 2020

SWAP'S 2019 Year in Review

By Jan DiLeo, SWAP Board Chair

As you will read in the following paragraphs, SWAP, with your support, has had a full and productive year. The projects and activities described below have kept your Board of Directors and our committee members very busy. Because we are an all-volunteer organization, we especially depend on you, our members, to support us in our efforts. Truly, we could not do it without you. Thank you, and Happy Holidays!

Bench Repairs. Along the Elfin Forest boardwalk there are 22 benches. Many of these benches were installed in the early 2000s and thus are in poor condition. Dave Bowlus and Skip Rotstein initiated an Elfin Forest Bench Repair Project. Gerald Clare, Bill Richmond, and Jay Waddell each took a bench, ultimately making the three benches look like new. Bill Richmond's bench was in such poor condition he actually built a new bench, making it look exactly like the old bench. Then Dave and Skip initiated a "paint a bench program." Lannie Erickson and new volun-



Conservation Committee members Dave Bowlus, foreground, and Skip Rotstein deliver an Elfin Forest bench to be repaired. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Year in Review *continued on page 3*

❖ *Inside This Issue* ❖

- 4 *Red-Breasted Nuthatch*
- 5 *New Zealand Spinach by D. & B. Walters*
- 6 *Weed Warrior News*
- 7 *2019 Big Sit! Team Results*
- 8 *Coming Up in the Elfin Forest*
- 9 *Walks in the Elfin Forest*
- 10 *New & Renewing Members*
- 11 *SWAP Shoppers' Order Form*



Working to remove 350 feet of plastic fencing in September, Weed Warrior Jeff Reifel rolls up a length of fence while Barbara Rosenthal (left) waits to tie up the roll. Photo by R. Johnson

Green Fence Removal Begins

A Recovery Success Story

By Skip Rotstein, Conservation Co-Chair

El Moro Elfin Forest recovery began over twenty years ago with visitors using the new boardwalk and abandoning numerous informal sand trails. The first Elfin Forest Weed Warriors cleared invasive plants, revegetated abandoned trails with native plants and installed over 2000 feet of protective green plastic fencing. By 2011, symbolic fencing consisting of black cable and low stakes was also installed along the boardwalk and recognized sand trails, to protect sensitive areas when the green fences were removed. Today barren areas are filled with native plants and the protective green fences are overgrown, some to the point of being hard to find in the dense brush.

The process of celebrating the Elfin Forest's successful recovery began with the 2018 El Moro Elfin Forest Environmental Assessment. The Assessment Report by Terra Verde Environmental Consultants documented the forest recovery and the blighted condition of, by now, old fencing. It recommended removing green fencing in stages and leaving the symbolic fencing.

The fence removal process continued this spring with County Park officials Ken Klis, Shaun Cooper and Bob Yetter, and SWAP members Dave Bowlus, Pete Sarafian and Skip Rotstein walking the boardwalk and trails to identify fence sections that could safely be removed at this time.

Our volunteer Weed Warriors completed the first stage fence removal during the Saturday Workday in September. 350 feet of fence were removed with minimal plant damage. Familiar "Area Closed for Restoration" and "Sensitive Area, Stay on Trails" signs were left in place to remind visitors we need everyone's help to continue the recovery.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*of the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter of
Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP)*

consists of the following members:

Jan DiLeo, Chair
Skip Rotstein, Vice Chair
Dave Bowlus, Treasurer
Yolanda Waddell, Secretary
Beverly Boyd, Recording Secretary

The SWAP Board of Directors meets monthly
at 2 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of the month
at the Hobby House,
Morro Shores Mobile Home Park,
633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

The next meetings are
Tuesday, December 10
and Tuesday, January 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: 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.

SWAP Treasurer's Report for Fiscal Year 2018-2019

By Dave Bowlus, SWAP Treasurer

SWAP's fiscal year for 2018 to 2019 began July 1, 2018 and ended June 30, 2019. Our expenses exceeded our income by a little over \$14,000 due to the unusual expense of almost \$18,000 to conduct a biological assessment. It was in the year 2003 that we last undertook to have biological experts perform an overall study the Elfin Forest, the natural area that we protect and maintain for the County as an Adopt-a-Park. A biological assessment provides an evaluation of our efforts as custodians of this rare habitat. A summary of the 2018 biological assessment report was published recently in the June/July, 2019 issue of Oakleaves.

Please note that, because SWAP's fiscal year ends on June 30th of each calendar year, the Annual Treasurer's report doesn't reflect financial activity for the rest of the current calendar year. Recently, SWAP was the grateful recipient of \$11,000 from a life insurance policy (see page 10), which increased our balance considerably.

Also, the cost (see Expenses) of replacing donor name panels on the wall of Los Osos Rexall was reported as \$1,940; however, artist Barbara Rosenthal auctioned her original painting for the Elfin Forest mural and donated the \$1,100 earned to SWAP. In addition, Los Osos Rexall donated \$409 toward the name panels, and \$112 in additional donations came in, totaling \$1,612.

Other donations during the 2018-2019 year included \$2,000 from the Masons, \$800 from the Baywood Inn for printing, \$500 from Mary Lou Wilhelm toward the Biological Assessment, and \$900 in memorial donations.

Thanks to members who add generous donations when they renew their memberships, and also to local organizations and businesses for their donations, SWAP is able to weather occasional major expenses such as the cost of the biological assessment, maintenance of about a mile of boardwalk, and other projects in our 90-acre preserve.

INCOME

Annual memberships	\$3,995
Members' donations	\$6,162
Other donations	\$7,990
Merchandise sales	\$1,619
Other Miscellaneous	\$316
Savings interest	\$51
Total income:	\$20,132

EXPENSES

Publications and	
education activities	\$7,000
Biological Assessment	\$17,891
Replacement	
of Donor Panels at Rexall	\$1,940
Conservation	
and maintenance supplies	\$451
Merchandise purchases	\$664
Misc. operating expenses	\$6393
Total Expenses:	\$34,339

Net Excess (Deficit) (\$14,206)

ACCOUNT DATA

As of 7/01/2018	
Checking Account	\$3,965
Savings Account	\$64,083
Petty Cash	\$50
Total	\$68,098
As of 6/30/2019	
Checking Account	\$4,708
Savings Account	\$49,134
Petty Cash	\$50
Total:	\$53,892
Net Excess (Deficit)	(\$14,206)

Year in Review *continued from page 1*

teer Mike Elder began by sanding three benches and painting one bench. During the months of October and November the Elfin Forest Weed Warriors have been sanding and painting benches. SWAP hopes to finish all the benches by the end of 2019.

Green Plastic Fence Removal. In September, SWAP started a project to have volunteers remove green plastic fencing within the Elfin Forest. The fencing removed was primarily located in areas where vegetation was growing through the fence.

Weed Warriors. The first Saturday Elfin Forest work party, known as the Weed Warriors, accomplished many tasks in 2019. This group of volunteers removed invasive plant species, trimmed vegetation extending over the boardwalk and Forest trails, conducted erosion control, made boardwalk repairs, sanded and painted benches, as well as many other tasks.

Volunteer Recognition and 20th Anniversary Elfin Forest Boardwalk Celebration. On August 4th, SWAP thanked their numerous volunteers in a party held at the Red Barn located in Los Osos Community Park. There was food, music, wine, gifts, and conviviality. Filipponi Ranch Cellars donated the wine. Lifetime SWAP memberships were given to Barbara and Rosey Rosenthal and to Yolanda and Jay Waddell.

Elfin Forest Walks. As usual, local teachers and professionals led walks on the 3rd Saturday of each month covering topics such as geology, local birds, mushrooms, and marine life. In addition, SWAP docents led educational walks for school groups and private parties. Contact SWAP if you would like to schedule a walk or come join us on the third Saturday of each month. The Third Saturday walks start at the north end of 15th Street (at the entrance to the Elfin Forest), usually at 9:30 am.

Name Change. SWAP has explored and started paperwork to change its name to Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest. We thought people might understand our role a little better if our name was more clearly connected to the Elfin Forest. We will still be Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP) but with a new name. More to come in 2020.

Annual Celebration: On November 9th SWAP held its annual celebration. Although this event is required by the State and our bylaws, it is also a chance to spend time with SWAP's members, review how we are doing as an organization, share some food and drink, and listen to an interesting speaker. This year Kristen Nelson, lead botanist for Terra Verde Environmental Consulting, spoke about the health of the Elfin Forest.



SWAP docents prepare for a nature walk in the Elfin Forest for Baywood Elementary School first graders. Shown are (L-R) Pat Brown, Vicky Johnsen (in front), Cheryl Dover (Education Co-chair), Barbara Renshaw, Wendi Craig and Leslie Rotstein (Education Co-chair). Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Training Session Held on Vegetation Trimming

By Dean Thompson

On September 30, eight SWAP volunteers met with County Arborist Chuck Woodard to go over proper techniques and proper protocol to be followed when trimming vegetation along the trails in the Elfin Forest. In the walk around the boardwalk loop proper trimming techniques were demonstrated showing how the overall goal is to direct the growth of the plant away from the paths. In many areas Chuck Woodard approved of the work that had been done by the volunteers; but in a few areas it was revealed that some poorly made cuts, probably done by unauthorized trimming, created unsightly or problematic issues.

Key takeaways from the session were:

- Cut back to the next major growth spur that is growing away from the trail or boardwalk.
- Do not cut vegetation in contact with the ground or the underside of the boardwalk to eliminate the danger of impacting any Morro Shoulderband Snails.
- Try to trim plants after blooming and setting seed.
- Avoid trimming Morro Manzanita unless absolutely necessary and cuts are approved by a qualified USFWS endangered species permit holder.

Volunteers that attended will be trimming along the trails and boardwalk, and will also be responsible for training and supervising any other volunteers' trimming efforts. Those who attended the training : Dave Bowlus, Vicky Johnsen, Jeff Reifel, Cindy Roessler, Skip Rotstein, Pete Sarafian, James Solum and Dean Thompson.



County Parks Arborist Chuck Woodard (in white hat with clippers) demonstrates the correct way to prune a Coast live oak in the Elfin Forest. Photo by Vicky Johnsen.



SWAP volunteers who participated in the vegetation trimming training session on September 30, were (L-R) James Solum, Bob Woodard (County Parks Arborist), Cindy Roessler, Dean Thompson, Skip Rotstein, Jeff Reifel and Vicky Johnsen. Not shown was Pete Sarafian. Photo by Dave Bowlus.

Red-breasted Nuthatch:

Newest Entry on Our Elfin Forest Bird List!

Text by Jean Wheeler, Ph.D. Photo by Petra Clayton

For the first time in keeping species lists for the Elfin Forest, the Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) was reported here by Jim Royer and Petra Clayton in October. Best known from its large population widespread in Canada (hence the species name), they are also resident in extreme northern United States and in mountains farther south, including California. Northernmost populations migrate south each winter, but residents elsewhere often don't migrate at all in most years.

This species is, however, well known for "irruptions" in some years. This refers to migration of large numbers far from their usual home or normal winter ranges, turning up even as far south as Baja California and, for eastern birds, the Gulf Coast. Even though these energetic little nuthatches sometimes descend so far south and to lowlands in winter, they strongly prefer coniferous habitat, which our Elfin Forest lacks. This is probably why they haven't previously been reported here since we began keeping records in the 1990's.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is easily distinguished from its close relative the White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*, a year-round resident that is on our Elfin Forest Bird List) by more than just its rusty reddish sides and belly (paler in females). It is a smaller bird, only about 4-5 inches long with a wing-span of 7-8 inches. Blue-gray in color above, darkening to a blue-black cap, these have a definite white stripe from beak to neck above the eye, paralleled by a distinctive wide black streak directly across the eye. The white chin darkens below down the breast and belly to the rusty red the species is named for.

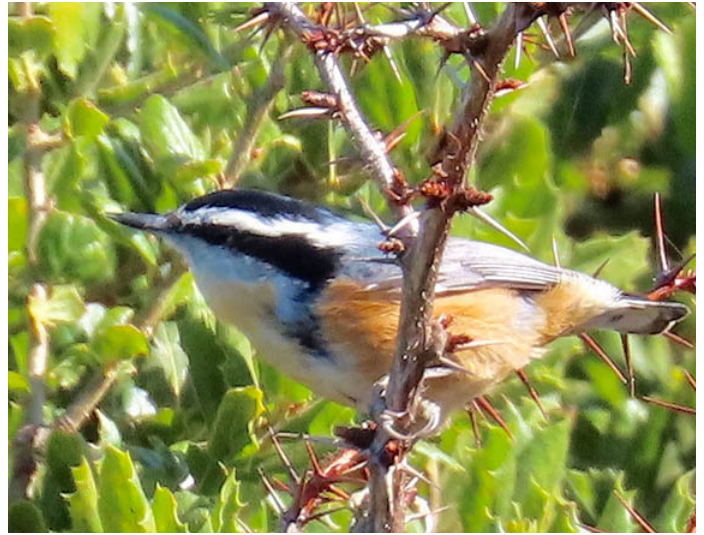
Strangely, a male of this monogamous species courts his lady with his back to her, singing and swaying, with crest feathers raised. Nest holes as much as eight inches deep are pecked in rotten dead conifers or parts of living conifers, or in softer aspens or alders. The female does the majority of the work in about two and a half weeks, while her male helps and feeds her. The male applies sticky resin from conifers to the outside and the female does the same to the inside of the entrance hole to discourage dangerous visitors. Sometimes they apply the resin with a piece of bark, an example of tool use! They avoid getting stuck themselves by diving directly through their nest hole.

The female lays about 5-6 eggs, and incubates them while her male feeds her, in or near the nest. The young hatch in about 12 days, are fed by both parents, and leave the nest in 2-3 weeks.

These nuthatches prefer to seek food and nest sites in habitats with many conifers, especially spruce and fir. Their diet in summer and food for nestlings features insects, spiders, beetles, and caterpillars. Often moving in mixed flocks, including species such as chickadees, other nuthatches, and kinglets, these nuthatches catch insects by moving acrobatically in all directions. They zigzag headfirst up down and across trunks and along branches even clinging on the bottoms of branches.

In fall and winter, they eat mainly conifer seeds, including many cached earlier in the year, jamming large seeds into bark and hammering them open. When winter seed crops fail, notably spruce and fir, irruptions by this species occur earlier than for most other bird species. In such irruptions, Red-breasted Nuthatches may head south as early as July and reach their southern terminus by October.

Populations of Red-breasted Nuthatches have increased throughout most of their range in about the last five decades with the breeding population estimated at around 20 million. The species is protected in the Americas by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists them as a Species of Least Concern.



Don't Miss Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival January 17-20

Be one of more than 500 nature lovers who attend these annual Martin Luther King weekend birding extravaganzas. More than 200 species of birds are typically seen on field trips along our Central Coast north beyond Cambria, south including Oso Flaco Lagoon, inland to the Carrizo Plain, and out on the Pacific Ocean. Choose from about 140 trips, from a couple of hours to all day, scheduled over four days. Stroll in a small area, hike or bike on trails, kayak or ride on a glass-bottomed boat on Morro Bay, or even bird from an ocean vessel normally used for fishing tours. Learn more about birding techniques, rehabilitation of injured birds, and conservation issues and successes in presentations at festival headquarters in Morro Bay. Headquarters also houses exhibitions by vendors and organizations, including our own S.W.A.P. Register now for the festival and tours at morrobayfestival.org. Many tours fill very early.

New Zealand Spinach

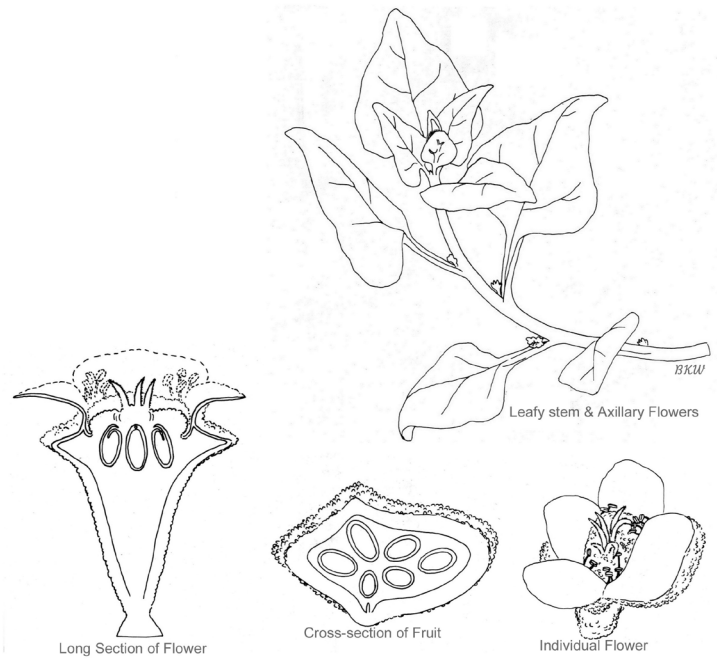
Text by Dirk Walters, Ph.D.; Drawings by Bonnie Walters

Bonnie's drawing for this issue of *Oakleaves* has never been used in any local newsletter. Bonnie drew it for Dr. David Keil and my plant taxonomy text back in the early 1970's. Why has it not been used? Well, a first look at Bonnie's drawing indicates that the species produces inconspicuous flowers. It lacks petals and the flowers are semi-hidden in the axils of its somewhat succulent leaves. The species was recently added to the Elfin Forest Plant List by Kristen Nelson, botanist for Terra Verde Environmental Consulting. Lastly, but even more important is that the species is not native to the Elfin Forest or even California. Its common names are New Zealand or dune spinach, *Tetragonia tetragonioides*. For you old timers like me, back in the 1970's its most common published scientific name was *Tetragonia expansa*.

New Zealand spinach is considered by many to be an invasive weed. I assume we must go along with that, but my experience with it around here is that it's not a particularly successful one. It prefers slightly salty (halophilic) soils. It also seems to require a bit of disturbance. So, look for it at the upper, less salty edge of salt marsh and/or on coastal benches, especially in disturbed sites where few other species can grow. A few individual plants have been found in the Elfin Forest lands along the edge of Los Osos Creek, west of Bay View bridge. The plant is not found near the boardwalk and it takes extra effort to go where it grows. However, it is especially common along the trails south of Spooner's Cove in Montana de Oro State Park. It can also be seen as a weed in Los Osos and Baywood Park.

New Zealand spinach belongs to a family of flowering plants, Aizoaceae, that is primarily native to the Southern Hemisphere. New Zealand spinach is, in fact, native to Southern Africa but has spread to New Zealand and is apparently a serious weed throughout southern Australia. Obviously, it has also been introduced into North America and Eurasia. The genus, *Tetragonia*, has around a dozen species and its generic name is derived from the four (tetra-) wings that are produced on the green fruit. These wings dry up and essentially disappear in the mature fruit. The inconspicuous flowers display a pale, yellow color, but the flowers have no petals, only sepals as it only produces a single whorl or perianth (collective term for sepals and petals). If a perianth has only one whorl, botanists tend to regard them as sepals. These sepals, as well as the stamens are attached to the top of the ovary which makes the ovary inferior. More famous and probably even more weedy members of the Aizoaceae are the ice plants *Carpobrotus* and/or *Mesembryanthemum*.

Wherever New Zealand spinach is found growing, its leaves have been used as a green vegetable. One web source indicated that the Magellan expedition around the world was especially happy to find a patch of it. They would pick the leaves, boil, and then dry them to preserve them for eating. It was particularly good in preventing scurvy! However, note that they boiled the leaves before eating them. The leaves contain enough oxalate chemicals to cause oxalate poisoning. Oxalate chemicals are usually destroyed by boiling.



Photos From The Forest

Dave Bowlus spotted this Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*) branch, beginning to leaf out in anticipation of the rainy season. The plant has been dormant for four or five months, dropping its fruit and leaves early in the summer. Take a close look and notice that a spider has used the plant's thorns as supports for its web.



OAKLEAVES

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: Dave Bowlus, Petra Clayton, Jan DiLeo, Cheryl Dove, Vicky Johnsen, Rich Johnson, Betsy Kinter, Pat Murray, Skip Rotstein, Dean Thompson, Yolanda Waddell, 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: oakleaf@elfin-forest.org.

Weed Warrior Reports

By Vicky Johnsen, Conservation Committee Co-Chair

September 7 – De-fence in the Elfin Forest

On this cool, crisp, sunny September morning, 12 eager volunteers headed up to the boardwalk to begin the event we've all been waiting for: the removal of the plastic fence along the boardwalk (and soon along the trails).

Skip Rotstein and Jeff Reiffel had previously worked a section of fence to formulate a take-down plan. Man-Oh-Man: was the work orchestrated and synchronized down to the very last detail! Jeff created some unique tools, such as the tin can wire-wind-up-spool as well as his iron post uprooting tool.

We were able to remove the fence with minimal plant damage and ended up with large sections of fence material that might be able to be re-purposed. These were rolled up and fastened with short pieces of wires. The rolls of fence were light and easy to transport down to Skip and to Jeff's trucks, but our new volunteer, James, got the task of collecting the heavy, rusty metal posts and rolling them in Jeff's large dolly to his truck.

All told, around 350 feet of plastic fence, with its wires and posts, were cleared away. The fence removal work was done by 10:45 AM. The fence removal crew included Dave Bowlus, Lannie Erickson, Vicky Johnsen, Frances Leitch, Jeff Reifel, Cindy Roessler, Barbara Rosenthal, Skip Rotstein, Pete Sarafian and new volunteer (Welcome!), James Solum.

Craig Johnsen's soft ginger/molasses cookies were enjoyed by all afterwards.

Rich and Prisila Johnson diligently tended to the boardwalk, and Rich took photos of the de-fencing project. Dean Thompson spent the morning trimming vegetation that was growing through fencing along the 11th Street trail.

It was a very, very productive and satisfying morning, indeed!

October 5 – Sanding, Painting, Clipping, Pounding

Eight volunteers gathered under clear, hot skies for their assignments. Rich and Prisila Johnson were told about a loose board and a split stringer. Skip Rotstein, Jeff Reifel and Dave Bowlus gathered up materials for sanding and painting benches. Vicky took James Solum and Clara Gontero down to the Siena's View boardwalk extension with vegetation trimming equipment.

The bench crew completed five benches. Vegetation overhanging the boardwalk and obstructing passage was trimmed from the boardwalk per the guidelines agreed upon during the training session on September 30th (see page 3).

Cold water and Craig Johnsen's home-baked cookies were enjoyed at the end of the morning.

Join 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 drive-ways or mailboxes. To request more information, call (805) 528-0392.



Removing green fencing was the task of the day during the September work party. Weed Warriors working on the project were able to remove the fencing with little or no damage to vegetation.

Photo by Rich Johnson.



During the October work party, Clara Gontero (left) and Vicky Johnsen trimmed a small Coast live oak next to the boardwalk near Siena's View, applying the methods learned earlier that week from the County Parks Arborist.

Photo by Rich Johnson.

Please Report 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: oakleaf@elfin-forest.org or leave a message on SWAP's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.

2019 Big Sit! Team Spots 101 Bird Species

By Jim Royer; photo by Petra Clayton

Editor's Note: Our Big Sit! birding circle, "Phishing in the Wind," led by Jim Royer, came in second with 101 species in this international competition that takes place on the second Sunday of October. The first place circle, with 102 species and named "Lost Tinamous" (a Tinamou is a ground-dwelling tropical bird that looks something like a grouse) was in Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa, Guatemala. Following is an adaptation of Jim Royer's Big Sit! report on the Birdwatchers.com website. Birdwatchers sponsors the Big Sit! each year.

Participants: Carly Boyd-Dovideo, Jerry Breakstone, Lynne Breakstone, Tom Edell, Herb Elliot, Mark Holmgren, Steve McMasters, Jeff Miller, Norm Pillsbury, Jim Royer, Brad Schram, Steve Schubert, Maggie Smith, Mike Stiles, Steve Tillman, Wendy Walwyn

Phishing in the Wind Big Sit! circle was stationed at the Elfin Forest Bush Lupine Point Overlook in Los Osos from 5:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The temperature on the morning of Sunday, October 13, was 52 degrees, clear with an offshore breeze. It reached a high of 72 degrees before the wind became onshore with some fog and cooler temperatures.

The morning started with a beautiful setting full orange moon and shooting stars reflected in the bay below us. The tide was rising and shorebirds, rails, night herons, and ducks called from the bay. We had 32 species by 7 am, and 91 species by noon.

In the afternoon it was a struggle to find more species, with the last two species being a pair of Canada Geese honking overhead and a lone Wilson's Snipe harshly calling as it flew around over us. Eleven raptor species was good for our count. We found nothing out of the ordinary and we unexpectedly missed Cinnamon Teal, Eared Grebe, Short-billed Dowitcher, coot and Lesser Goldfinch. Waterfowl numbers were down for the second year in a row. Land bird migration was typically slow and owls were quiet.

We had fun with our count on the wooden platform high in the coastal scrub, with a beautiful view of the Morro Bay Estuary. We got to sample five different types of muffins (one with homemade plum jam), as well as croissants with different fillings, scones, grapes, chocolate, etc. It was a great way for the veteran birders to exchange "war stories" and to mix with newer birders. We had as many as six spotting scopes at a time on the platform, with a mixture of counters, and members of the non-birding public who happened to stop by with dogs and children.

It's such a beautiful place to just sit or stand that counters often stayed well beyond their scheduled shift. We were enjoying ourselves so much that we almost missed the only Merlin of the day as it shot by over our heads. Fortunately, Herb Elliot was paying attention, and he called it out for all of us to see! We were also able to watch Peregrine Falcons hunting shorebirds in the estuary off and on during the day. At one point there was a pair of Peregrines hunting together.



Petra Clayton attended Jim Royer's Pre-Big Sit! Bird Inventory on October 12, the day before the Big Sit! As the group gathered at the north end of 15th Street to go on the walk, a California Thrasher landed on a Mutt Mitt box at the beginning of the path, as if to say, "Count me first."

Education News

Guided Walk for Morro Bay Montessori Students

By Cheryl Dove, Education Committee Co-Chair

On Friday, October 18, SWAP docents Cheryl Dove and Vicky Johnsen led 17 students through a portion of the Elfin Forest to focus on some of the native plants and how they survive in the forest area.

The students observed the differences between the protected areas that comprise the Elfin Forest and the developed neighborhood nearby. They observed an abundance of acorn-laden live oak trees, as well as other seed-bearing plants such as the black sage. Throughout the walk, students observed many plants that appear to be dead, but are in a dormant stage during this dry season of the year.

We explored some ideas relating to sources of water for these plants and how the leaves of some plants encourage moisture collection. Students noticed a difference in the types of plants growing in the open south-facing areas as compared to those found near Rose's Grove in the lower part of the Forest. They asked pertinent questions and were very interested in learning about the Elfin Forest.

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Text and Photos by Jean Wheeler

I always try to get relatives and friends from other states to visit here between December and February. Unlike most of our nation, these months normally produce our best display of colorfully blooming shrubs and herbs on land and abundantly active bird life in our forest and on our estuary. Hopefully our first rains will have arrived before or as this issue reaches you and trigger our usual holiday extravaganza of colorful wildflowers and birdlife.

By the end of December, we can expect to see our widespread shrubs called buckbrush in the genus *Ceanothus* or California Lilac (pictured), surrounding the whole boardwalk and the sand access trails with their white to pale lavender blossoms. By the end of the year, Morro manzanitas should already begin opening their lovely white floral bells, blushing with pink highlights along the lower boardwalk. Understory blossoms likely to be widespread are the white to pink or lilac rays of asters surrounding their golden disk flowers and the yellow and gold of early California poppies

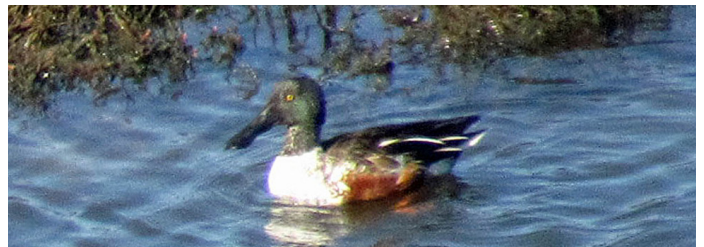
By the end of January, California peonies may be opening their drooping red balls of flowers in the understory, especially near Siena's View and along the 11th Street sand trail. When fuchsia-flowered gooseberries (pictured) begin to open many long red trumpets to the long bills and tongues of Anna's Hummingbirds, those tiny fliers should be very relieved. The red flower tubes of this species are a major food support in their nesting season.

Our area is known as one of the top birding regions in our nation, especially in these winter months. That's why the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, held on Martin Luther King Weekend each year, attracts hundreds of visitors from all over the U.S. and Canada, and even some foreign birders. **The festival is scheduled for January 17-20 in 2020 and early registration is essential for field trips—they fill fast. (see page 4)**

Virtually all species of water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) are present and at peak populations in December and January. Look out onto the estuary from Bush Lupine Point or Siena's View to spot large American White Pelicans and both Canada and Brant Geese. Dabbling Ducks likely to be present in large numbers include Northern Pintails, American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers (pictured), and all three Teal: Blue-winged, Cinnamon, and Green-winged. Diving ducks typically



Ceanothus (above)
Northern Shoveler (below)



numerous include Greater and Lesser Scaup, Buffleheads, and Ruddy Ducks. Wading birds commonly seen are Great and Snowy Egrets, American Avocets and several species of Sandpipers.

All the raptors listed in our pocket guide and most of the passerines are also present in midwinter. Look for Osprey flying low over the estuary or even perched on sticks protruding from the water. Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, Peregrine Falcons and Turkey Vultures often fly low over the estuary or along the cliffs containing Bush Lupine Point and Siena's View lookouts.

The shrubs around the boardwalk can be alive with flitting Finches, Sparrows, Gnatcatchers, Wrens, Phoebe's, Chickadees, Bushtits, Nuthatches, and many other little brown and little grey birds. Among the larger common birds of the brush easily seen from the boardwalk are Thrashers, Towhees, Scrub Jays, Quail, Blackbirds, and Doves.

Take a break from shopping and gift wrapping or relax after the happy holiday turmoil. Walk in the Elfin Forest that we protect through our generous donations and active volunteer efforts. Applaud the tenacity and beauty of our drought-surviving plants and animals!



Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberries

Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

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 oakleaf@elfin-forest.org with the subject: Switch me to online.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Saturday Walks

December 21, 9:30 a.m. – Solstice Walk

To celebrate the Winter Solstice and shortest day of the year, join evolutionary biology professor Jenn Yost and cosmic evolution scholar Bob Field. The two will lead a tour of the Elfin Forest, a very special habitat in our area. They will talk about how seasonal changes and the interactions of sunlight and water affect the diversity, abundance and distribution of life. They will discuss the ocean's influence on everything that can be seen in the Elfin Forest, and will point out a variety of plants, and plant adaptations to the local environment.

January 18, 2020, 9:30 a.m. – Sketch Walk and Native Plants

Join Barbara Renshaw and Jeff Reifel for a stroll along the Elfin Forest boardwalk. Take in views of the Morro Bay estuary, oak groves, expanses of coastal sage scrub and chaparral, and the volcanic Morros beyond. In the Rose Bowker oak grove enjoy ancient gnarled Coast live oak trees. Barbara and Jeff will tell you about native plants along the way and choose a few favorite places for sketching. No drawing experience is necessary. Bring a pad of drawing paper, colored pencils or pastels, and some drinking water. Bring a camera too. You'll be pleased to discover the artist hidden inside of you. Rain will cancel this walk.

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 closed-toe 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 or if you use a wheelchair call (805) 528-0392



Bird inventory participants on the Saturday before the Big Sit! (see page 7) search the bay for bird species. Walk leader Jim Royer (center) later tallied 79 species sighted in just over two hours.

Photo by Petra Clayton.



Barbara Renshaw and Jeff Reifel (from right) brought demonstration seeds to the start of their October 3rd Saturday Walk. They continued around the boardwalk, demonstrating diverse and surprising ways seeds travel away from parent plants to settle into fertile soils.

Oktoberfest a Productive Day for SWAP

By Pat Murray and Yolanda Waddell

The Annual Oktoberfest and Car Show is an institution in Los Osos, taking place on the last Sunday of October on Second Street in Baywood Park. Thousands of visitors flock to Los Osos to enjoy the day with live music and entertainment, a beer garden, food, arts and crafts, classic cars, foot races and of course, information booths by nonprofit organizations such as ours.

For years, SWAP volunteers have set up our information booth and this year was no exception. As always, booth coordinator Pat Murray gathered her volunteers to set up and "person" the booth. Pat, Skip Rotstein and Dave Bowlus picked up the tent and parts and pieces of the booth from SWAP storage, and did the setup. Then Pat, Skip, Dave, Carola Bundy, Jan DiLeo, and Vicky Johnsen worked shifts throughout the day, greeting visitors, telling them about SWAP and the Elfin Forest, and selling SWAP's merchandise. Finally, Jan, and Vicky and Craig Johnsen dismantled the booth and returned it to the storage unit.

Pat reported that merchandise totaling \$338 was sold, and \$45 was received in donations, totaling \$383 income for the day. It was a lovely day and enjoyable for all.



Oakleaves archive photo

Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Libbie Agran & Guy Fitzwater*	Jypsy Joe Johnson*
Anne Avril & Dan Haifley*	Gene Kalland*
Bob & Linda Bailey*	Marie Moore & Elaine Mason*
Nola Barnick*	Pat Murray*
Kathryn Bay*	Brian Nofziger*
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Carmen Fojo*	Mary Whelen*
Jim Havlena & Mary Rogers*	Norma Wightman*
James & Heather Johnson	

DONATIONS:

Donation from the estate of Jack Murphy

2019-2020 Brochure Sponsors:

Celia Alfirevic - Celia's Garden Café

Stephen Dinielli – Envoy Mortgage

Jim Marshall - Jim Marshall Insurance

**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.*

Give SWAP Memberships or Make a Tax Deductible Donation

For the person who has everything, a gift membership to SWAP, or a donation in honor of your loved one or friend would be much appreciated by SWAP as well as the person honored by your generous gift.

Your donation can reduce your income tax bite, and will help SWAP with special projects such as our recent Biological Assessment of the Forest. A life membership with a \$1,000 donation earns the Oakleaves newsletter for life and also a SWAP mural T-shirt or sweatshirt in appreciation of the major contribution to our efforts.

Jack Murphy Donates to SWAP Through Life Insurance

By Yolanda Waddell

In October/November *Oakleaves*, we reported with great sadness the passing of Jack Murphy, a very supportive member who donated a bench in the Elfin Forest and walked his dogs there daily. Shortly after the October issue reached our readers, Treasurer Dave Bowlus received a check for \$11,000 from an insurance company. It turned out that Mr. Murphy had included SWAP as a beneficiary of a portion of his life insurance policy. SWAP Board members are not only grateful, but also relieved to be able to replace some of the \$18,000 that it cost us for the 2018 Elfin Forest Biological Assessment.



Non-profits such as SWAP benefit from bequests, planned gifts and legacy donations given to them to keep the organization's financial engine running. Such gifts help to ensure that the Elfin Forest Natural Area, a small wilderness that we all care about deeply, will be preserved even after we are gone. Jack Murphy certainly thought about the future as he became older, and made sure that he could help SWAP in his own way.

Help with Newsletter Indexing

By Yolanda Waddell, Oakleaves Co-Editor

Your Oakleaves editors and our Webmaster urgently need extra help in catching up the Oakleaves Subject Index in our website. Go to www.elfin-forest.org, click on "Forest Library" and then the top orange button for indexes, and finally, "Subject Index." The subject index is used for reference by SWAP members, docents, guest writers, local media writers and interested readers in finding articles and photos about specific subjects related to the Elfin Forest. If you have organizational skills, like to work with words, and can give a few hours a month, please e-mail us at oakleaf@elfin-forest.org or leave a message at 805-528-0392.



Elfin Forest Mural T-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.



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

2. 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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4. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

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 safe, hand wash suggested.

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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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Red-Breasted Nuthatches in the Forest! See page 4.

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Help Wanted: Roving Ambassadors

By Vicky Johnsen, Conservation Co-Chair

All you need is a smile, an Elfin Forest Trail Guide and a cell phone, if you have one. Also, if you have them, a SWAP T-shirt and/or an Elfin Forest cap will give you some authority.

Our County Park Ranger can't walk through the Forest daily; SWAP volunteers visit the Forest as often as they can, but more eyes and ears are needed. I, personally, like to think of myself as a "roving ambassador" for the SWAP organization when I walk around the boardwalk and on some of the sand trails. It can be rewarding just to be available to answer visitors' questions, to tell them about our web site, our nature walks, and our monthly work parties.

There's a need to keep an eye on the "state of the forest," that is, to report problems, to encourage visitors to stay on paths, stay off the elfin oaks, etc. Do you enjoy going for a daily walk? How about taking that walk in the Elfin Forest once or twice a week as a SWAP Roving Ambassador. Interested? Please send an e-mail to vicky@elfin-forest.org.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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City/State/Zip _____

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- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Seniors & Students \$15 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$1000 | |

☐ I want to help, please call me!

Memberships include a subscription to SWAP's bimonthly newsletter, *Oakleaves*.

☐ ***Check here to receive the online version only.***

All donations to SWAP are tax-deductible.

EVERY membership counts!

Make checks payable to: SWAP

Mail to: Small Wilderness Area Preservation,
P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.