



OAKLEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF FRIENDS OF EL MORO ELFIN FOREST

P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ♦ (805) 528-0392 ♦ APRIL / MAY 2021

FEMEF's Plans for Butterfly Hill Submitted to County Parks

By Dave Bowlus, Ph.D.,
FEMEF Treasurer

Butterfly Hill is a unique feature of the Elfin Forest. To help FEMEF fulfill its mission to protect and preserve the forest, a proposal is moving forward. The FEMEF Board of Directors has approved a plan created by FIRMA Consultants, a landscape design firm in San Luis Obispo, and has forwarded it to Sean Cooper, Senior Planner at the SLO County Department of Parks and Recreation. The FIRMA design is the result of several meetings with FIRMA's Lindsay Corica, the Board, and other interested parties. An in-person on-site meeting was described in *Oakleaves'* December-January issue.

County Parks will evaluate the plan and then send it out to other regulatory agencies, including County Planning and Building, County Public Works, California State Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and, finally, the California Coastal Commission. With luck and maybe some modifications along the way, the plan may be approved, and Parks will obtain a permit. Then FEMEF volunteers and/or the California Conservation Corps will perform the installation.

Butterfly Hill is the name given to the point of highest elevation alongside the 11th Street trail. Here male butterflies duel with



*The panorama view from Butterfly Hill of the estuary and beyond is magnificent.
Photo by Dave Bowlus.*

The FEMEF Mission: Recovery and Beyond

By Skip Rotstein, FEMEF Chair

The best place to start a walk in El Moro Elfin Forest is on the upper boardwalk. Here one can see the dense coastal scrub blend into groves of ancient oaks. The walker feels the cool onshore wind blowing sea mist through the trees and brush and sees moisture drip from the branches, as it has for thousands of years.

I went to the Forest to start my year as Chair of the Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest Board. I wanted to look at the Forest and appreciate what volunteers and the Board of SWAP, now FEMEF, have accomplished in over 20 years of stewardship. I saw how the Forest's scars have healed. I saw people coming to enjoy and learn about the Forest, seldom leaving footprints beyond the Boardwalk and the entrance trails. I looked at the Forest and saw what remains to be done.

During my walk I remembered learning that SWAP began recovery efforts in the Elfin Forest in 1994, when our organization purchased the southern 38.7 acres of the Forest and turned it over to the County. In 2003, County Parks hired the Morro Group (now known as SWCA) to prepare a Recovery Action Plan for the Forest. Fifteen years later, in 2018, SWAP employed Terra Verde Environmental Consulting to conduct a Biological Assessment and to determine which the Recovery Action Plan goals had been achieved. The Survey found

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

of the

Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest (FEMEF)

consists of the following members:

Skip Rotstein, Chair

Steve Hendricks, Vice Chair

Dave Bowlus, Treasurer

Yolanda Waddell, Secretary

Beverly Boyd, Acting Recording Secretary

Albert Calizo

Jeff Reifel

(See more about FEMEF Directors on page 10.)

The FEMEF Board of Directors meets monthly
at 2:30 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of the month

Meeting via ZOOM

until Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

(Date and time are subject to change.)

The next meetings are

Tuesday, April 13
and Tuesday, May 11.

All Board meetings are open to the public.
To attend a Zoom FEMEF Board meeting,
leave a message at 805-528-0392.



CONTACT FEMEF

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

A recorded message will give information
about our coming activities and other events.

If you have questions, concerns or comments
about any problems in the Elfin Forest,
call or write: Lasca Gaylord
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 Lasca Gaylord at 781-1196.

FEMEF Mission *cont. from page 1*

many Recovery goals had been achieved and it recommended new goals for the future.

Our name change to Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest came at an inflection point where we are ready to take the Forest beyond Recovery. Successful recovery activities will continue. Removal of invasive plants will always be important, as will maintenance of the Boardwalk and trails. We will continue work to reduce hillside erosion, both natural and human caused. Two long planned projects have been submitted for permitting and final approval, to County Parks. One project we call Butterfly Hill (see article on page 1) will bring benches, a new fence and an educational display to Butterfly Hill. The other is the removal of obsolete plastic fences. We will complete the projects when they are approved. A new project for 2021 – 2022 is the creation of new interpretive panels and entry signs.

Beyond Recovery, community education and involvement is part of our mission and our future initiative. After Covid, our Saturday walks and workdays will return. We can then actively encourage visitors, teachers and their students to walk the Forest, and scientists to conduct research in and about the Forest. We can begin a series of El Moro Elfin Forest community lectures to share knowledge of the Forest with the community and showcase research about the Forest.

When the wind blows and the mist moistens and the snails take shelter beneath those dripping branches in the years to come, we will have a community that knows about and cares for the Forest.

Extreme Weather and Our Part of the Planet

By Dave Bowlus, Ph.D., FEMEF Treasurer

As I write this in February 2021, we're being told that the Polar Vortex swooped south to deliver snow and frozen pipes to Texas. Here in Los Osos, meanwhile, a persistent area of high pressure, said to be squatting over the western United States, is providing strong, dry winds from the northeast and temperatures of 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

Seven-and-a-half inches of rain fell here in a single storm this past January, almost three-fourths of all the precipitation Los Osos has had in ten months since last May 1st. And how much of that rain soaked into the ancient sand dune that underlies the Elfin Forest and the rest of Baywood Park? I dug a hole in an undisturbed spot to find out.

All those inches of rain wetted only the top one inch of sand.

Plants that succeed in drought-prone but sometimes foggy areas like ours probably absorb some moisture that hits the surface of their leaves. (Coast Redwoods are known to do "foliar water uptake.") Yet it still would appear that much of January's long-wished-for rain just ran downhill into the bay.

Why doesn't our sand soak up rain? Geologists call the small polished grains under our feet, "Baywood Fine Sand." Is it the grain size or the shape that prevents rain from soaking in? Or could it be an accumulation in the sand of waxy debris left behind from generations of drought-tolerant plants that lived and died here over the eons? Or something else? Geologists I've asked couldn't say.

Our Elfin Forest, of course, reminds us that all things are not equal. Although the Coast Live Oaks that tower 30 feet over visitors at Los Osos Oaks State Reserve on Los Osos Valley Road are known to be genetically identical to the elfin oaks we know so well in our forest, the hydrophobic sand, or salty sea breeze, or something else, keeps Elfin Forest trees stunted. ("Stunted" is not so fun-sounding as "elfin.")

Earth Day is April 22, a day to recognize how much our home planet means to us and a day for each of us to resolve to do what we can to keep it a hospitable place for all life forms. There isn't any "Planet B."



Weed Warrior Report

By Jeff Reifel, Conservation Committee Co-Chair

We received 10 inches of rain in January, but we had prepared. Vicky Johnsen, Dean Thompson, Dave Bowlus and Jeff Reifel worked to construct water diversions along the sand trails with overwhelming success.

Joshua Crawford volunteered to make some laser engraved wooden ONE WAY arrow signs to help persuade visitors to circulate in a clockwise direction around the Boardwalk loop, and to better maintain social distancing. The new signs look beautiful. Some of the Boardwalk Trail Guide signs have weathered and are being slowly replaced. We will likely need some new plexiglass covers as well.

Jeff installed another 15 pounds of screws in the Boardwalk, replacing the old screws that had rusted and popped up.

Vicky spent some time removing the invasive Veldt Grass along the South Bay Boulevard slope. The Forest is greening up from the rains, and the weeds can't be far behind. We will carry on individually until it is safe again to work as a group.



Jeff Reifel replaced aging signs along the boardwalk rails with new ones during February. Photo by Jeff Reifel.



New Weed Warrior Maya Holifield was one of the volunteers to gather and pile up dead Cape ivy stems in early March.

Photo by Vicky Johnsen.
(See more about Cape ivy on page 7.)

First Friday work parties will resume when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. We look forward to seeing our Weed Warriors back in full force!

Butterfly Hill Plans *cont. from page 1*

rivals while on the lookout for lady friends. The butterflies do not impact the site when they visit—most often in Spring and early Summer—but humans do. Some human visitors have trampled the surrounding native vegetation while watching butterflies, enjoying the wide-wide view of the Morro Bay Estuary, or witnessing a spectacular sunset. Sometimes, visitors may have wandered the site while searching for the trail to the boardwalk because the trail that turns off to Butterfly Hill is indistinguishable from the continuation of the 11th Street Trail.

Proposed improvements to Butterfly Hill are intended to enhance a visitor's experience and provide more protection for the site itself without changing it in any major way. Two signs will offer information, one giving directions to the boardwalk and the other telling about butterfly behavior. A graceful permanent fence, with a top rail suitable for resting one's elbows when taking in the view, will replace an unsightly green plastic, "temporary," fence that has been in place for many years. The existing "symbolic fence," a knee-high cable between suspending posts, will be relocated to define the human-access area. The addition of a pair of benches, like those found along the boardwalk, will provide places to relax while a visitor waits for the sun's red ball to touch the distant dunes or hopes to see the elusive green flash. Finally, additional native shrubs will be planted to fill gaps among existing vegetation. Both nectaring plants (providing refreshments for busy butterflies) and host plants (providing food for hungry caterpillars) are included in the plans.

So now the regulatory agencies will do what they have to do. And we guardians of the Elfin Forest, but not the butterflies, will have to wait.

Funereal Duskywing Skipper

Text by Jean D. Wheeler, Ph.D. Photo by Pat Brown, who normally leads a very fun and informative butterfly walk for us in April, but not this year given Covid limitations.

These insects get both their rather morbid names, the common Funereal Duskywing label and the scientific *Erynnis fune-ralis*, from their somber dark coloring, characteristic of both the top and bottom of both the forewings and hindwings.

The species is described in butterfly field guides as about 1 ¼ to 1 ¾ inches in wingspan. The forewing is longer and fairly slender, somewhat pointed at the outer ends, brown on top mottled with mostly blacker markings. It does have a few lighter brown patches, one fairly large toward the outer end of the leading edge of each forewing.

In contrast, the hindwing appears rather larger and triangular and is almost uniformly blackish brown except for a startlingly bright but narrow white outer fringe. The undersides of both wings are lighter in shade but still, well—dusky, but the narrow white fringe at the outer edge of the hindwing is still startlingly distinctive.

Butterflies and Moths belong to confusingly many families within Order Lepidoptera. Quite a few of these families are considered “true butterflies,” with our familiar monarchs, checkerspot, swallowtails, painted ladies, etc. Some other families in Lepidoptera are moths, which are not considered butterflies. In between are a group called “true skipper butterflies,” which look like something between a “true butterfly” and a “moth.” They are given their own Family Hesperiidae between the several “true butterfly” families and the “moths.” Funereal Duskywings belong to that family, the “true skippers.”

The Duskywing species (there are several in the genus) are often mistaken for moths, having larger and hairy-looking bodies and heads, and large eyes. Unlike most “true butterflies” they have antennae curved or club-shaped at the tip, which I can clearly see in Pat’s photo. They’re called “skippers” because their flight pattern is rapid, darting, and appearing to skip erratically for short distances. They don’t glide, aren’t good at flying long distances, and few species migrate.

Funereal Duskywings occur from Southern California east to Texas, into the Great Plains and Mississippi Valley and south to Argentina and Chile. The eggs, less than a millimeter in size, are deposited on legumes, especially alfalfa, vetch, and lotus. The adults skip around widely seeking plants on which to lay their eggs and are common over wide areas in three generations from March to December. Their caterpillars, green with yellow side lines, rely heavily on alfalfa in most of their range.

In Southern California, they generally use deerweed (lotus scoparius), which is common in our Elfin Forest. One source noted the adults are known to visit Black Sage (*Salvia mellifera*) for nectar. Pat’s photo confirms that, as her Funeral Duskywing had indeed landed and spread its wings on leaves of Black Sage. Spreading the wings out wide in resting is habitual in Duskywing Skippers, which makes them a bit easier for us to spot them. You might want to watch out for them on Black Sage or Deerweed plants as you walk clockwise around the boardwalk this spring!



Photos from the Forest



The Morro Blue Butterfly lays its eggs on Silver Dune Lupine that grows at Bush Lupine Point and also at Butterfly Hill in the Elfin Forest. Photo by Dave Bowlus.



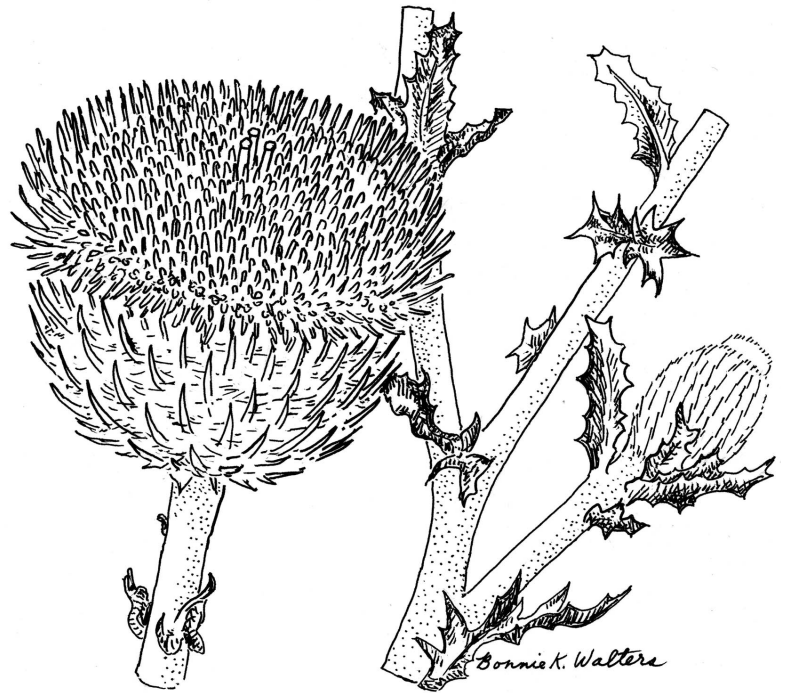
While doing trail-trimming work, Conservation Co-Chair Vicky Johnsen came across this cluster of interesting lichens and moss growing close to the ground at the base of a shrub. The lichens are Cladonia asabinae, Pixie-cup lichen and Flavoparmelia caperata, Common Greenshield lichen. Also, needle-like green leaves are beginning to sprout from the base of the shrub. We don’t have an identification for the moss.

Western or Cobweb Thistle

By Dirk Walters, Ph. D. Drawing by Bonnie Walters.
(Ed. Note: Revised by Dr. Walters from the June/July, 2009 issue)

The plant profiled in this issue is our common native thistle, *Cirsium occidentale*, commonly known as western or cobweb thistle. The genus name, *Cirsium*, is a Latinized version of the Greek word, *kirsion*, which also refers to a kind of thistle. "Occidentale" is Latin for western so the common name western thistle is simply a translation of its scientific name. Cobweb thistle is more interesting. It refers to the multitude of long, white, interwoven trichomes (hairs) with which the plant and especially the spiny bracts surrounding the head of flowers are coated. It makes the head appear to be held together by the work of many spiders. The name thistle is derived from Middle English, "*thistle*," which itself comes from the Old English, "*distel*," and is a direct cognitive from the German, "*distel*". All these name variations can be used to refer to any spiny herb. There is also an implication that the referred to plant is worthless, i.e. weedy. However, this species is NOT a weed. Not only is it native, but it does not show any of the characteristics of weeds. It isn't prone to invade human modified habitats and it usually occurs in reasonable numbers even in its natural habitat of coastal dunes, grass and shrub lands as well as oak woodlands.

The genus *Cirsium* is one of the more difficult genera in which to identify species. Every recent flora mentions how difficult the genus is due to the fact that the species are poorly defined, extremely variable, and/or engage in inter-specific hybridization. Dr. David Keil continues to work on the California thistles and will hopefully straighten them out. Cobweb or western thistle is one such taxonomic mess. It is extremely variable. The problem is that this variation tends to be continuous and overlapping which makes designation of variants somewhat arbitrary. The form used as a model for Bonnie's drawing is the coastal dune form. Its distinguishing characteristic is the tendency for the bracts surrounding the flower head to have their tips bent so far backward that they point downward (recurved). This is the variety *occidentale* whose type locality is Santa Barbara. A type locality is the place where the collection was made upon which a scientific name of the plant is based. The more widespread interior varieties have



(See a photo of this plant on page 8.)

their bracts spreading but not recurved. North of San Simeon, on the coastal benches, the species dwarfs to less than a foot tall with a large skirt of leaves laying on the ground (Rosette).

We give the name thistles to many different kinds of often totally unrelated spiny plants. What they all have in common is their spines which say "don't touch me!" These spines are deterrent for large herbivores but not for smaller ones such as insects, which simply crawl between the spines. Believe it or not, true thistles such as the genus *Cirsium* have a history of being eaten by people. Of course, first the spines are removed by peeling the stems. Other references note the edible roots in some species. All indicate that thick stemmed and/or rooted species were the most commonly used. Charlotte Bringle Clarke in her book, **Edible and Useful Plants of California**, states that "In general, I try all thistles that are large enough to gather." Thistles do have a famous cousin -- the artichoke, *Cynara cardunculus*. In this case, we eat the expanded receptacle to which all the flowers and bracts are attached.



OAKLEAVES

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Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;

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Contributors to this issue: Dave Bowlus, Steve Hendricks, Vicky Johnsen, Betsy Kinter, Jeff Reifel, Barb Renshaw, Skip Rotstein, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters, Jean Wheeler.

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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.

Monarch Population Plunges; How to Help

By Yolanda Waddell ; photos by Jean Wheeler

Note: Sources for this article were KCBX news report, "Central Coast congress members call for monarch butterfly protection," 2/22/21; The Tribune, "Help research migratory western monarch butterflies," 2/23/21; Los Angeles Times, "You can guide monarchs back to their throne," 2/27/21.

Oakleaves is joining other media in sounding the alarm about the catastrophic decline in Monarch Butterfly numbers since the mid-1990s. Both Eastern and Western Monarchs have declined, but Western Monarch numbers have dropped about 99%. The 2020 Western Monarch Thanksgiving count totaled 1,914 butterflies total. Stephanie Little, an environmental scientist for the State of California who monitors the butterflies at the Pismo State Beach Butterfly Grove, counted 180 butterflies there compared to 6,700 in 2019.

Causes of the precipitous decline include habitat destruction, wildfires, insecticides, herbicides, the changing climate and yes – a bad milkweed. Milkweed is the sole food plant for Western Monarchs. But tropical milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*, an attractive plant with feathery green leaves and deep orange flowers, continues to grow and bloom instead of dying back in temperate climates like the Central Coast and Southern California. That allows protozoa parasites to multiply on the plants and to be eaten by Monarch caterpillars. When caterpillars consume too many of the parasites, scientists believe it sickens and weakens adult monarchs, messing up their migration patterns, mating success, flight ability and lifespan.

If you, your family or your neighbors are growing milkweed to feed Monarch caterpillars, make sure it isn't the tropical milkweed. On sale right now are native milkweeds that are safe and equally delicious for Monarch caterpillars. Narrow-leaf milkweed, *Asclepias fascicularis*, a native milkweed, is available at Los Osos Valley Nursery.

What else can one person do to help the Monarchs? At this time, it is up to many "one persons" because the US Fish and Wildlife Service is unable, due to insufficient staffing, to place the Monarch Butterfly on the Endangered Species List. First: don't use pesticides or herbicides in the garden. Second: plant butterfly nectar flowers that feed monarchs as well. These include black sage, bluedicks, sunflowers, manzanita, and native buckwheats. The Elfin Forest is visited by occasional monarchs because all except sunflowers grow there. However, there are no native milkweed plants in the Elfin Forest to support their caterpillars. Third: help to track the monarchs. When Monarchs leave their overwintering groves, scientists don't know where they go. Scientists at Washington State University have developed an online mapping method for citizen scientists. They encourage anyone who sees a Monarch Butterfly elsewhere than in a butterfly grove to take a photo (perfection isn't the goal) and send it with when and where it was taken to monarchmilkweedmapper.org. This is a way to make a contribution to conserving and restoring monarchs in the West.



You can scarcely see any tree leaves in this photo of Monarch butterflies, taken in January 2002 at the Pismo Beach Butterfly Grove, because the leaves are covered with crowded butterflies.



In this January, 2019 photo, also taken at the Pismo Beach Butterfly Grove, only 9 butterflies show up in the color version on our website (they are almost invisible among the leaves in the black/white printed version of this newsletter).

There was concern about the far fewer butterflies even in 2019.

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 FEMEF's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.

Cape Ivy Lurks Behind the Scenes

Text & photos by Pete Sarafian, Certified Pesticide Applicator and Morro Shoulderband Snail Recovery Permit Holder

Many of those who visit or work in the Elfin Forest are unaware of the sinister curtains of vines covering most of the northern periphery by Morro Bay. Above the salt marsh in trees and brush is found a nasty, invasive weed called Cape ivy (*Delairea odorata*). This ivy, one of many invasive plants from South Africa, is commonly called the “kudzu of the west.” It is capable of covering and smothering forests and killing our prized pygmy oak trees (*Quercus agrifolia*) and federally threatened Morro manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos morroensis*). The vines even are found smothering shrubs in open chaparral. They can be seen flowering with bright yellow clusters of blossoms in the winter. All one has to do to find them is look in the trees along Morro Bay State Park Road and South Bay Boulevard along Chorro Creek. In the thick tangle of undergrowth are the curtains of vines. Each winter and spring the vines accumulate length, increased diameter and more leaves. New vines use the dead or partially dead vines from previous years as step ladders to achieve height faster. They coil counter clockwise up along the older vines. That results in curtains of old and new vines climbing up into tree or shrub canopies. Only frost or weed abatement efforts stem the tide of the invasion.

Cape ivy is similar in appearance to native Wild cucumber or Manroot (*Marah fabaceus*). Cape ivy has shiny, smooth surface leaves. Manroot has more rough surfaced leaves. Manroot also has climbing tendrils that grasp onto other plants for climbing. Cape ivy has very bright yellow flowers in tight clusters in the winter while Manroot has cream-colored flowers in the spring that are more singular. Cape ivy stems and vines are smooth, green and purple while Manroot vines are always green and not as smooth and round. For decades SWAP and FEMEF have implored visitors not to pull up the Manroot showing signs and visual comparisons at entrances, but the misdeeds continue each year.

Unfortunately, most Cape ivy in the Elfin Forest is in areas of limited accessibility. In some cases, there are steep bluffs, masses of poison oak and thick trees and brush that block access. That means the vines will remain no matter what efforts are made to eradicate them. The best that can be obtained is a measure of control. A bio-control insect has been used elsewhere in SLO County, but so far has not been used around Morro Bay. The only pesticide allowed to be used in the Elfin Forest by or under the supervision of a Recovery Permit holder to control the infestation is pure glyphosate, the main active ingredient in Roundup. The best time to spray is after blooming in late summer and fall before the vines die and while the plants are sending food down to the roots. That is when the chemical can migrate down to kill the roots the best.

It also is a good practice to pull down the vines from trees before spraying to minimize collateral damage. Digging the vines up is a good practice but is much more labor intensive than chemi-



A curtain of Cape ivy vine covers branches of a Coast live oak tree.



After the Cape ivy vine is sprayed, it dies back, leaving a curtain of stems. These will be pulled down and gathered up by FEMEF volunteers. (See Weed Warrior Report, page 3)

cal use. Removing all of the root is difficult. It tends to break before all of it can be recovered. A big problem with mechanical weed removal is that leaves, stems and vines are easily broken off and can re-root in the soil. Like the weeds in our gardens, we will be living with the invasive Cape ivy forever.

Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest Mission:

Preserve and maintain El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area; inform and educate about the natural history of the Elfin Forest and the Morro Bay Estuary; promote and support scientific research in the Forest.

Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

April and May are two of the best months to look for “flying flowers” in the Elfin Forest. A species commonly seen during these months in most years is the Variable Checkerspot Butterfly (pictured). Their bristly black caterpillars with orange dots may sometimes be spotted grazing on the sticky leaves of their host plant, the sticky monkey-flower. Gabb’s Checkerspot shows much more orange and cream rectangles with less of the brown-black background than the Variable Checkerspot.

Other butterflies to look for are the smaller green Coastal Bramble Hairstreak and Silvery Blues, the large yellow and black Anise Swallowtail, and the black and cream Pale Swallowtail. Page 4 has Pat Brown’s photo of a Funereal Duskywing illustrating my natural history article about that species. Small Morro Blue Butterflies (pictured on page 4) seek the silver dune lupines near Bush Lupine Point, as they are host plants for its larvae. Both that lupine and its dependent butterfly have been severely reduced in area along our coast in recent decades because of housing development. The stands of this lupine supported along the border of the estuary in our Elfin Forest are therefore important in assisting their survival.

Possibly the most widespread and obvious flowers around our boardwalk in April and May are the sticky monkey-flower shrubs with lots of bright orange blossoms. Their name is slightly misleading, however. It is the leaves that are sticky, not the flowers! Other yellow and/or orange flowers include California poppies, deerweed, fiddleneck, golden yarrow, and suffrutescent wallflowers. Pink tones are provided by the blossoms of cobwebby thistles (pictured, and this species is the subject of Dirk Walters’ botany article on page 5) and California hedge nettles. Red fuchsia-flowered gooseberries are nearing the end of their long blooming season but cardinal catchflies in the undergrowth (red flowers appearing to have been cut by pinking shears) should continue to bloom all summer.

Purple nightshade plants add that color, while Pomona milk vetch has creamy flowers on low plants. White to lavender flowers may still be seen on buck brush, also called California lilac, or clustered like white pompoms on black sage. Other white-flowered native plants are California croton, chamise, and wedgeleaf horke-lia. California blackberry and poison oak each have white flowers with green leaves in threes, but the blackberry plants have thorny stems while poison oak stems are smooth.

While admiring butterflies and flowers from the boardwalk and sand trails, your eyes will no doubt also be attracted by the flight of avian residents. Especially likely to be seen and heard are the bright blue California Scrub Jays, plump California Quail with their amusing head plumes, orange and black Spotted Towhees, chattering flocks of tiny fuzzy gray Bushtits and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and similarly talkative little brown birds including several species of sparrows and wrens. Avian migrants passing through on their way north from winter homes farther south may include Warbling Vireos, Hooded Orioles, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Yellow, Townsend’s, and Wilson’s Warblers.



*(Above) Variable Checkerspot Butterfly.
(Below) Cobwebby Thistle.*



Among other residents increasingly active as summer approaches are Western Fence Lizards, Brush Rabbits, Ground Squirrels, and Coyotes.

April and May are months of renewal in the plant and animal world all over our country. Since 1970 we have celebrated April 22 as Earth Day, a time to respect and commit to protecting our global environments everywhere. EARTHDAY.ORG has expressed honor that the Biden Administration has decided to convene a global climate summit on Earth Day 2021. As we enjoy the beauty and lively activities of nature that our organization works to preserve in the Elfin Forest, let us also dedicate ourselves to continue contributing here and worldwide toward progress to Restore Our Earth.



A pair of Milkweed Assassin Bug nymphs, shown here on the leaves of a Coffeeberry plant, eat other insects that feed on the Coffeeberry.

After molting six times, Milkweed Assassin Bug nymphs become a more muted-looking adult who will find a mate, lay eggs and then die.



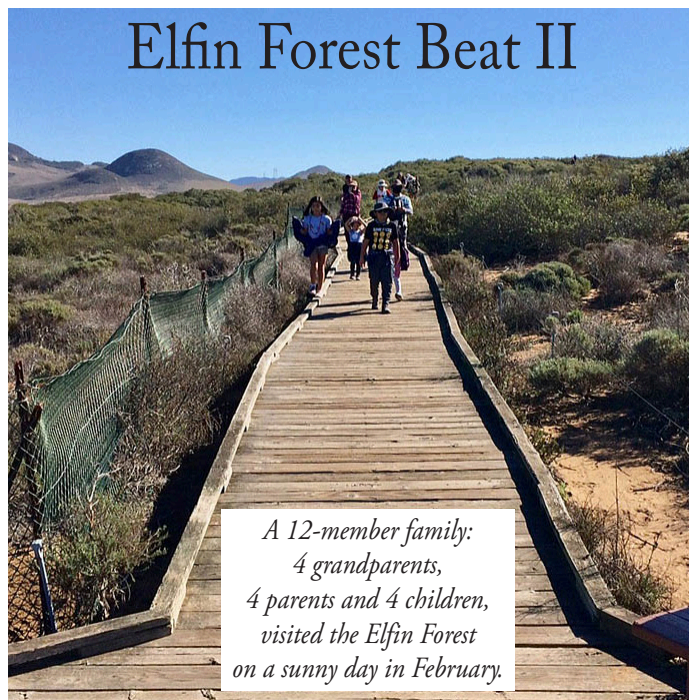
New Bulletin Board Feature: Plant and Bug of the Month

By Yolanda Waddell; photos by Jeff Rafeil

Regular Elfin Forest visitors enjoy checking the Bulletin Board, located near the 16th Street extension, for interesting bits of information. In pre-Covid times, we would post dates and topics of our 3rd Saturday nature walks, dates for Weed Warrior work parties, etc. Bulletin board caretaker Jean Wheeler also posted color photos of birds and plants that could be seen in the Elfin Forest during the month.

In January, volunteers Barb Renshaw and Jeff Reifel introduced a monthly poster featuring "Plant of the Month" with drawings by Barb, and "Bug of the Month" showing photos and drawings by Jeff.

Accompanying this article are Jeff's photos of Milkweed Assassin Bug nymphs and an adult. These insects devour other insects that feed on the Coffeeberry (*Frangula californica*) shrubs that grow in the Forest. The long-legged nymphs molt six times as they grow into adults and start the cycle again. Barb's elegant drawing of Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*) was the Plant of the Month for January.



A 12-member family: 4 grandparents, 4 parents and 4 children, visited the Elfin Forest on a sunny day in February.

Text & photo By Barb Renshaw

Thursday January 7: I spied quite a few people walking in the forest. I stopped an energetic, happy looking family group of five, two adults, and three children of elementary school ages. I introduced myself, and before I could ask a single question, the adults explained that they were the grandparents and that they loved the views from the Elfin Forest. I asked the kids if they had any questions, and they said, "yes, what kinds of animals live here?" I asked them to guess, and they did. During our conversation, I learned that they were from Lancaster and this was the last week of their winter break.

Thursday January 21: Your reporter talked with a couple who live on a ranch near Lompoc. They both had cameras. He was taking a close up of *Ceanothus* flowers. They work on the ranch but had the day off so that she could get her corona virus vaccination in Santa Maria.

Sunday February 7: I saw a large group approaching the main boardwalk intersection. Donning my mask, I waited. They looked happy and friendly so I said hello and asked about their group. A couple I guessed to be about 35 said, "We're a family. We like to camp at El Chorro together. We love to come here. Maybe some of us will move to the Central Coast. Now we live in Delano, but we think it would be really nice to live here." The family group consisted of four grandparents, four parents, and four young children.

From Siena's View I watched a couple of kayaks struggle back into the main channel after running aground in a small rivulet. A young couple came down the trail, and I pointed out the boaters. As we watched them work their way back to the main channel, the couple told me this was their first visit to the Elfin Forest. They discovered it from the website morrobay.org. On Saturday they hiked on Black Hill, but on Sunday they needed to drive home to Orange County so chose the Elfin Forest because it was rated as easy with great views of the bay.



WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Keep an eye on our website home page, www.elfin-forest.org or check outgoing messages each month at 805-528-0392 for any update about walks.

Elfin Forest Watchers Wanted

By Vicky Johnsen, Conservation Committee Co-Chair

ATTENTION ALL FEMEF MEMBERS: Your presence is requested in our Elfin Forest!

All you'll need is a smile, an Elfin Forest Trail Guide and a cell phone, if you have one. 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. The County Parks Ranger can't walk through the Forest daily. Our Board members and Conservation Committee members visit the Forest as often as they can, but more eyes and ears are needed.

I like to think of myself as a "Forest Caretaker" for Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest (FEMEF) when I walk around the boardwalk and on some of the sand trails. It can be rewarding to make sure there is no trash lying around, and to greet visitors and answer their questions.

Generally, most visitors to the Elfin Forest know to enjoy the Forest's plants, birds and animals from the boardwalk. However, some need reminding to walk only on the boardwalk and trails, not to ride a bike on boardwalk or trails, not to climb the fragile oak trees, and to keep dogs on leash.

If you want to help us keep a presence in the Elfin Forest, call us at 805-528-0392 and we'll get you started. FEMEF will give you an orientation and will provide you with a T-shirt and cap.

Thank You to Our Generous Members

*Compiled by Betsy Kinter,
FEMEF Database Coordinator*

NEW MEMBERS:

Christopher Bianco
Patrice Promack

RENEWING MEMBERS:

Christine and David Braun*	Penny Koines*
John Brunner & Michele Neilson*	Jennifer & Larry Levine*
Katy Budge*	Hector Montenegro
Mary & Allan Conkling*	Karen O'Grady*
Ms. Ileen Doering*	Carolyn Schanberger
Bonnie Heikes*	Katherine Tennant
Jane Johnson*	Alice Welchert*

DONATIONS:

Karen O'Grady Remembering Maj. John O'Grattan

**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 FEMEF 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.*

FEMEF Board Officers Elected

By Yolanda Waddell

With three added members as of January 1, the now-six-member FEMEF Board of Directors includes Dave Bowlus, Albert Calizo, Steve Hendricks, Jeff Reifel, Skip Rotstein and Yolanda Waddell. Beverly Boyd is a non-voting board member, serving as Acting Recording Secretary. The Board elected officers at the beginning of this year and they are: Skip Rotstein, Chair; Steve Hendricks, Vice Chair; Dave Bowlus, Treasurer; Yolanda Waddell, Secretary

Dave Bowlus and Yolanda Waddell have served in their positions for more than two years. Because Skip Rotstein and Steve Hendricks are new to their positions, we are providing biographical information showing what they bring to their positions on the Board:

Skip Rotstein, FEMEF Chair

I am a retired secondary school Biology teacher. After retirement I worked a year starting The Desert Institute at Joshua Tree National Park, a program with outdoor learning activities for the public and public lectures to showcase research in the Park. My wife Leslie and I moved to Los Osos eight years ago. I became a Weed Warrior and learned that this Forest is a preserve for endangered species and, like Joshua Tree National Park, is threatened by invasive species. I became a member of the Conservation Committee and learned how SWAP saved the Forest from development and assumed responsibility for its recovery. I served as Conservation Chair and with other Board members commissioned the 2018 - 2019 Biological Assessment of the El Moro Elfin Forest, to provide benchmarks and recommendations for Forest recovery and beyond.

Steve Hendricks, Vice-Chair

My qualification to be Vice Chair of FEMEF is the experience I've had with the Central Coast Biological Society. I have been part of the CCBS board off and on for years, but was asked to be Co-Chair three years ago. In that position I have been responsible for setting up and running board meetings, recruiting speakers, and introducing speakers at our quarterly meetings. I also spent some time as the part-time union faculty representative at Cuesta College, where I worked on the executive board of the union. As part of that position, I was also on the college's Council of Representatives. Both positions required me to work closely with other faculty on a variety of issues.



Coffee Mugs with Mural are Great for Yourself or as Gifts!

Our 15-ounce beverage mug has Barbara Rosenthal's gorgeous Elfin-Forest mural wrapped all around the cup. Microwave safe, it's great for coffee, hot chocolate, or just about any other beverage you chose. Hand washing is suggested.



FEMEF 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 = \$___
 ___ 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

___ @ \$35.00 = \$___

4. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

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

___ @ \$20.00 = \$___

5. MURAL MUG

15- ounce beverage mug with wrap-around mural design. Microwave safe, hand wash suggested.

___ @ \$15 = \$___

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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SHIPPING COSTS: Within and near Los Osos, free delivery may be possible. Shipping costs otherwise depend on zip code and package weight.

Please call 805-528-0392 to arrange for delivery or shipping.

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Call-in orders may also be made: (805) 528-0392.




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Help Save the Monarch Butterflies! ~ page 6

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Help Boost FEMEF Membership



When we apply for grants to finance our work in the Elfin Forest, agencies want to know how many members we have. The more members we have, the greater is our ability to obtain grants for continuing restoration of the Elfin Forest. Check the currency of your own membership, and then urge friends to join FEMEF. Share this newsletter with them. Take them on a walk in our Elfin Forest to see how much there is to enjoy.

You can use the membership form at the right for your renewal or for new memberships for your friends. Checking the box for only the online version reduces our printing and mailing costs, and you can see newsletter photos in full color! Our basic membership fee covers our operating costs and brings members this bimonthly newsletter, the Oakleaves. Donations above that level provide funds to help us with projects to control weeds, prevent erosion, and restore habitat.

Thanks for your help!

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Member \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Defender \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steward \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Champion \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Protector \$75 | <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seniors/Students \$15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$1000 |

Donation only \$ _____

☐ I want to help, please call me!

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

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

All donations to FEMEF are tax-deductible.

EVERY membership counts!

Make checks payable to: FEMEF

Mail to: Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest,
P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.