



# OAKLEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF FRIENDS OF EL MORO ELFIN FOREST  
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ♦ (805) 528-0392 ♦ AUTUMN 2023

## Nature Conservancy Speaker at FEMEF’s October 2023 Annual Celebration

*By Patrice Promack; photo courtesy of The Nature Conservancy*

We are excited to have Michael Bell, a broadly experienced ecologist and nature preserve manager, as our speaker for the 2023 Annual Celebration. Michael has been working for The Nature Conservancy for nearly 18 years and currently holds the position of Protection Strategy Director. He is also



Point Conception Institute Business Development Director at The Jack and Laura Dangermond Preserve, a role he assumed following his extensive involvement in the site’s acquisition when The Nature Conservancy purchased the nearly 25,000-acre Bixby Ranch along the coast at Point Conception in December 2017. With his nearly six years as the Dangermond Preserve’s Director, he will have much to share about the challenges and successes of the ongoing management of this very important natural resource.

## FEMEF 2023 Annual Celebration—in Person!

Saturday, October 21, noon to 2:00 p.m.  
Morro Shores Mobile Home Park Community Room  
633 Ramona Avenue, Los Osos  
(across from Sweet Springs Preserve)

*By Yolanda Waddell*

Please join us for the FEMEF annual celebration on Saturday, October 21, from noon to 2 pm at the Morro Shores Mobile Home Park Community Room in Los Osos. How good to be meeting in person this year! A light lunch will be served at noon, followed by a presentation by Michael Bell, Protection Strategy Director at The Nature Conservancy and Point Conception Institute Business Development Director at the Dangermond Preserve near Lompoc (See profile of Michael at left). A business meeting of the FEMEF Board will be held immediately after his presentation.

An annual meeting with attendance by members is required by the State and our Bylaws. Its purpose is to recapitulate the year’s activities, to discuss plans for the future, and to elect candidates for the FEMEF Board of Directors. Our webmaster will post an announcement of the Annual Celebration on our website, [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org), two weeks before the event. Two to three weeks before the meeting, the Board of Directors will email a notice to members about the Annual Celebration for whom we have email addresses and will mail the notice to the rest.

Following Michael Bell’s talk, there will be brief reports by two Board officers and a committee chair. FEMEF Chair Steve Hendricks will report activities and accomplishments during 2023. Treasurer Dave Bowlus will review the Annual Treasurer’s Report that appears on page 2 of this issue and will take questions. Conservation Co-Chair Jeff Reifel will report how weeding, erosion control, trail trimming, boardwalk repair, and other Elfin Forest maintenance activities have been accomplished.

Election of candidates for the FEMEF Board of Directors will conclude the meeting. Ballots will be given to attendees as they arrive and will be counted during the meeting.

The FEMEF Board of Directors encourages you, our members, to join our first in-person Annual Celebration since 2019. We want to tell you, the supporters of FEMEF and the Elfin Forest, what we have done on your behalf.

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*of the*

*Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest (FEMEF):*

Steve Hendricks, Chair

Robert Dees, Vice Chair

Dave Bowlus, Treasurer

Beverly Boyd, Acting Recording Secretary

Allison Fash, Student Board Member

Roger Carmody, Secretary

Rebecca Rasmussen

Skip Rotstein

The FEMEF Board of Directors meets monthly. Meeting days and times can vary and will be posted on the home page at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org).

FEMEF Board meetings are virtual and are open to the public. To attend a 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.



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Elfin-Forest-Preserve/139602329410370>



[https://www.instagram.com/el\\_moro\\_elfin\\_forest/](https://www.instagram.com/el_moro_elfin_forest/)



*During one of their frequent visits to the Elfin Forest, (L-R) Larry Grimes, Pat Grimes, and daughter Morgan rested on one of the Forest's many benches for a view of the bay and Morro Rock. Larry and Pat were among the group of concerned citizens who founded the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter of SWAP in 1985. Larry was the chapter's first Treasurer and then became the Elfin Forest Lands Manager. Pat was SWAP Secretary, later changing to editor of Oakleaves. Both were active in SWAP throughout the 1990s. Photo by Shannon Egan.*

## Annual Treasurer's Report for fiscal year July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

*By Dave Bowlus, Ph.D., FEMEF Treasurer*

Thank you, generous members, donors, and others who have kept the treasury of our all-volunteer organization growing. Contributions from members amounted to just over \$12,000, more than half of that amount given in excess of the basic \$25 membership. Other donations amounted to nearly \$6,000. Donations included funds from the Baywood Inn and from San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation—each paid half of the cost to print our new full-color Trail Guide (now available in dispensers on the boardwalk). County Parks continues to provide lumber and other supplies in support of our volunteers' continuing work to repair and restore the well-worn boardwalk. Purchases of FEMEF merchandise brought in just over \$4,000.

Specific expenses this year included publishing and mailing our quarterly newsletter *Oakleaves* (\$4,717), insurance (\$3,127), and storage-unit rent (\$2,398). Other costs (\$5,915) were for utilities (telephone, website), office and maintenance supplies, merchandise for sale, and other operating expenses.

Income totaled \$22,111. Expenses were \$16,157. The treasury grew by about \$6,000 to a total of \$68,983. This nest egg will support future projects to refurbish and replace informational signs, add supplementary signs, replace aging benches, make other improvements, and fund projects to serve our mission "to preserve and maintain the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area; to inform and educate about the natural history of the Elfin Forest and the Morro Bay Estuary; and to promote and support scientific research in the Forest."

# Welcome to FEMEF's New Chair of Property and Records, Patrice Promack

by Bob Dees

The FEMEF Board of Directors is pleased to have Patrice Promack as the new Chair of its Property and Records collection. Her role in this position includes not only overseeing FEMEF property and records but also supervising the logistics for our Annual Celebration each fall and managing the ordering, mailing, and even personally delivering T-shirts, mugs, and other FEMEF items to buyers. Her mostly behind-the-scenes job is an essential part of FEMEF's success as an organization. We are indeed fortunate that she has volunteered to serve in this very key position.

Patrice was born and raised in southern California. Although she lived in several towns there, she thinks of Hermosa Beach as her hometown. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Pepperdine University (majoring in biology), after which she worked for two years as a pharmaceutical representative. She later applied and was accepted to both the UCLA School of Dentistry and the US Army Health Professions Scholarship Program. Because the Army paid for its dental school training, she practiced dentistry in the Army, first in Germany, then in Texas.

Patrice resigned her Army commission in 1987 when she left dentistry to shift into holistic therapies. After attending the New Mexico School of Natural Therapeutics in Albuquerque, she began a second, 31-year career as a Natural Therapeutics Specialist focusing on therapeutic massage and bodywork. In 1993, Patrice took a self-assigned, 16-month "sabbatical," travelling throughout the US and western Canada by herself in her VW Vanagon. It was during this odyssey that she met her future husband Chris Bianco and married him about a year later. After Chris re-joined the US Army, their duty stations together included Korea, Germany, Georgia, and Virginia. Upon Chris's retirement from the Army, they felt the open spaces of Montana calling, and for seven years made it their home.

As much as Patrice and Chris loved living in Montana, the urge to return to California eventually grew quite strong. After moving to California and settling in Orcutt, they often drove to the Morro Bay area for the day. One day they discovered Los Osos, where they moved during the Covid-19 pandemic (July 2020) and now feel fortunate to call home. Patrice soon discovered the Elfin Forest and saw what a special gem it is. In 2021 she met Pat Murray, then FEMEF's Chair of Property and Records. Seeing that Pat might be able to use some help with her responsibilities, Patrice began volunteering. Pat has since retired after overseeing FEMEF's Property and Records for some 20 years. [See the article on her retirement in the Summer 2022 issue of *Oakleaves* under the Forest Library heading at <https://www.elfin-forest.org>]

Now that she has taken over Pat's role herself, Patrice says ongoing mentoring from Pat has been extremely helpful. Patrice



has lately been working with other volunteers to review and organize the hundreds of historical FEMEF records and documents for eventual archiving at Cal Poly's Kennedy Library. She is also busy ordering new T-shirts, mugs, and other FEMEF goods and preparing for FEMEF's Annual Celebration in October. Patrice has already shown herself to be a hard-working, enthusiastic addition to the FEMEF family, and we heartily welcome her as the new Chair of Property and Records.



## OAKLEAVES

is a quarterly FEMEF publication.

Editors are Yolanda Waddell, Jean Wheeler, and Bob Dees  
Layout by Katy Budge

Contributors to this issue: Contributors to this issue: Dave Bowlus, Petra Clayton, Carol Comeau, Bob Dees, Suzette Girouard, Vicky Johnsen, Betsy Kinter, John Nowack, Patrice Promack, Skip Rotstein, The Nature Conservancy, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk Walters, Jean Wheeler.

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](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org).

# Bobcat

By Jean Wheeler, Ph. D.

Our “Pocket Guide” to plants and animals known to occur in the Elfin Forest lists the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*). As far as I’m aware, this species was listed because it is known to commonly occur along our coast, and possibly paw tracks in our soil had been identified as those of a bobcat. I’ve not heard of photographs or sightings in or near the Elfin Forest before January this year, when we were delighted to include this photo of a bobcat in our Spring issue of *Oakleaves* (page 6). The accompanying story was by Skip Rotstein, a member of our Board of Directors. This image is a single frame captured from Skip’s video by our Webmaster, Jeff Reifel. Skip has mounted video cameras along a game trail crossing his yard beside the estuary and coming from the southwest corner of our reserve barely a block away.

The distinguishing features of the species can be seen as the animal walks through the video, which can be viewed at the bottom of the page at <https://www.elfin-forest.org/library/default.htm>. The bobcat gets its name from its characteristic short tail, only about 4-8 inches long on bobcats ranging 18 to 50 inches long from nose to the base of the tail. In contrast, my male housecat is 20 inches long, plus an 11-inch tail. Small female bobcats weigh from nine to 34 lbs. and males up to 50 lbs. They are usually grayish brown in color, darkest in forests, lightest in southwestern deserts. Bobcats have dark spots all over, plus dark bars on their bobbed tails and forelegs, the latter shown in the photo here. The face is broad, and the ears have short dark tufts.

Bobcats extend across nearly all of the United States, from southern Canada to Oaxaca, Mexico. They are believed to have evolved from the Eurasian lynx (*L. lynx*), which crossed to North America on the Bering Land Bridge during the Pleistocene (2.5 million to 11,700 mya). These roaming cats evolved into bobcats, migrating to southern North America. They were separated from a later Eurasian lynx invasion by ice sheets. The later immigrants remained in the north, evolving into the Canada lynx (*L. canadensis*) with large, padded paws able to support their weight on deep snow, which the bobcat cannot negotiate. Hybridization between the two species may occasionally occur.

Active mostly in twilight, about three hours before and after sunrise and sunset, bobcats prey mainly on rabbits, hares, squirrels, mice, birds, and insects. Opportunists, they occasionally prey on larger species such as foxes, raccoons, large birds like geese or swans, and even deer. They can be threats to domestic cats, small dogs, poultry, pigs, sheep, and goats. They can survive a long time between kills but eat heavily when prey is available.

The lifetime for bobcats is about seven to ten years. Females may breed in their first or second year. Males are fertile from fall through winter to early summer. They may travel and mate with females several times and usually try to do so with several females in a year. Females will often mate again with other males. A female alone raises two to four, or sometimes up to six kittens, usually born in April or May in a small cave or hollow log. She may have



a second litter as late as September. Young start exploring at about four weeks, are weaned after around two months, and hunt and usually disperse in their first winter.

Bobcats have few predators but can be killed by cougars, wolves, a pack of coyotes, or even alligators in the American Southeast. Kittens may be killed by eagles, great horned owls, or even other male bobcats. Other causes of death are starvation, diseases, accidents, hunters, and automobiles. In California, liver autopsies of bobcats that died of infection by mites revealed the bobcats showed chronic rodenticide exposure, which would have weakened their immune systems.

The bobcat population is reasonably stable and healthy in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Most hunting in these countries is regulated, and bobcat populations are not of major concern. Yet these animals are sensitive to habitat fragmentation by urbanization, which can reduce available range, isolating them and reducing gene flow. Preserving enough contiguous open space for bobcats is needed for population viability. Linked by game trails with Montaña de Oro State Park and open areas around nearby volcanic morros, our Elfin Forest plays an important role in the bobcat’s survival in our region and elsewhere.

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## Accident at 16th Street

In July, an Elfin Forest visitor was parking in one of the spaces at the end of 16th Street when she suddenly sneezed. Her car kept going and plowed up and over the retainer wall, tearing down some symbolic fencing. Her car had to be towed and Highway Patrol came and took a report. Conservation Co-Chair Jeff Reifel quickly replaced the bent symbolic fence stake and broken wire.

It wasn’t the first end-of-street accident at an Elfin Forest entrance. Previously at 16th Street, a man stepped on the gas pedal instead of his brake and went up and over the retainer wall, destroying the retainer wall boards. The most notable accident happened at the end of 11th Street on December 31, 2011, when a pizza delivery man fell asleep at the wheel and his car drove 60 feet into the Elfin Forest, destroying wooden fencing and running over numerous shrubs, trees, and plants.

# California Goldenrod

by Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

The photo by Dr. David Chipping that accompanies this article is of California goldenrod (*Solidago velutina* subspecies *californica*, or *Solidago californica*). Dr. Hoover, in *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County*, states that the California goldenrod “is occasional in dry or moist, usually sandy, soils in the western part of the state, extending inland at least to the Salinas Valley.” Dr. David Keil in his updated edition repeats almost verbatim what Dr. Hoover had written except that, where Dr. Hoover mentions a single report of the species in the Temblors, Dr. Keil states that its range “extends inland to Cholame Valley, La Panza Range and Temblor Range.” Like just about every goldenrod, this species also prefers open grasslands or edges of woods and shrub lands. I haven’t found any goldenrods ever to be overly abundant in our county.

The currently recognized species (*S. velutina*) can be found throughout western North America from Mexico into southern Canada. As might be expected of a species ranging this widely, it has been subdivided into several sub-specific units. Only two of the subspecies are likely to be encountered in California (*S. v. ssp. californica* and *S. v. ssp. sparsiflora*). Subspecies *sparsifolia* need not concern us here as it is found primarily in Eastern California and adjacent states. Subspecies *californica* is found throughout most of California (except the southeastern deserts), but it is especially common in the California Floristic Province, which includes essentially all of California west of the Cascade, Sierra Nevada, and Peninsular Range axis. In the Morro Bay area, I’ve seen it in the grasslands around Shark Inlet. I haven’t seen it in the Elfin Forest, but I’d expect to find it in the Celestial Meadow or anywhere the shrubs and trees are widely scattered. It seems to prefer moister soils, so I would not expect it in higher, drier elevations.

Why two possible scientific names? In Dr. Hoover’s work, this plant is recognized as *S. californica*. In the most recent *Jepson Manual* and Dr. David Keil’s new edition of the *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County, California*, this goldenrod has been reduced to a subspecies of *S. velutina*. How can this happen? Is it just the whim of the experts? It would take a bit of research to learn enough to make an educated guess. According to sources found on the internet, relatively recent numerical taxonomic work on several similar but separately described species of goldenrod indicated that they were more closely related than previously thought. That they were separately described as species should be expected.

Until recent advances in communication, taxonomists tended primarily to identify the plants they found in their immediate area. They would have had little opportunity to travel and visit reference collections far from home. They would encounter forms of plants that were readily distinguishable from other plants in their area. So why not describe them as a new species? Now, of course, taxonomists have many tools to help find characteristics unknowable to earlier workers, including mass transit and communication to know what others have done or are doing, and computers to help analyze all these data. So why not expect lots of changes?

In my limited search of literature and the internet, I found three common names. These are velvety goldenrod in the *Jepson Manual* and California goldenrod or three-nerve goldenrod everywhere else. The name goldenrod I think refers to the observation that most of these species produce clusters on unbranched stems (“rods”) topped with clusters of bright golden flowers. Most of the plants answering to the California goldenrod variety have leaves covered with short hairs, making them appear sort of velvety. The name three-nerved goldenrod refers to the fact that only a few of the larger plants produce leaves with three major veins running from base to tip. I suggest this is not a good common name to use because it is misleading in that only a few of the largest plants produce three-veined leaves.

California goldenrod is the best name for this subspecies as it is essentially restricted to our state.

California goldenrod is highly recommended for the native plant garden. It prefers moist soils but is relatively tolerant of drier sand to light clay soils. It will do best in sunny locations. Attractive to several different classes of pollinators, it is great for those who would like to encourage beautiful, beneficial insects to visit their garden. Also, one internet site showed pictures of yarn dyed a beautiful yellow color by extracts from California goldenrod.

One last thing about goldenrods in general: Where I grew up, in the Midwest, there were many species of goldenrods, and they were exceptionally widespread and numerous. Many species could even be said to be “weedy.” Like a lot of members of the sunflower family, they tended to bloom in the late summer into fall. This is also when other members of the sunflower family bloomed, including rag weed (*Ambrosia trifida*). Rag weeds are unusual composites in that they produce tiny, wind-pollinated flowers. Rag weeds were nearly as common as goldenrods, but because of their tiny flowers many people didn’t even recognize they were blooming, and they produced huge amounts of wind-borne pollen. This made rag weed pollen a major component in allergy forecasts. Unfortunately, announcers often said that rag weed and goldenrod pollen counts were high. I had a botany professor who told his class that goldenrods were included in the forecasts only because they are conspicuous and common. Goldenrods are insect-pollinated and therefore produce little pollen to be released into the air. In fact, their pollen would be sticky so it could stick to the pollinators.



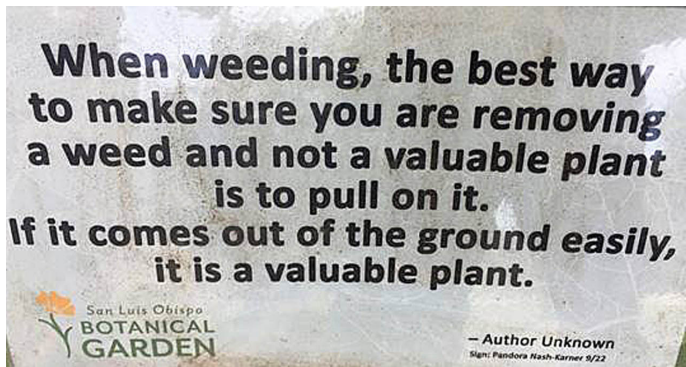


*July Weed Warriors Party.  
L to R:  
Roger Carmody,  
James Solum,  
Pat Brown,  
Vicki Marchenko,  
Sharon Rooney,  
Patrice Promack,  
Jeff Reifel,  
Carol Tuttle-Pilling,  
Natalie Zaragoza,  
Heidi Estus  
with Vicky Johnsen  
kneeling in front. Photo  
taken by Vicky Johnsen,  
with Vicky's photo inserted  
by Pat Brown.*



*(Above) This narrow-leaved ice plant is one of the nasty exotic weeds imported from South Africa. Photo taken by Vicki Marchenko.*

*(Below) Surely most, probably all, of our Elfin Forest Weed Warriors would agree with this sign.*



## Weed Warrior Report

### September 2: Bench-Painting Opportunity Added and More Volunteers Needed.

*By Dave Bowlus*

We call our first-Saturday of the month volunteers “Weed Warriors,” but on September 2 we offer a choice of other work: our customary pulling of weeds and trail trimming or bench painting. The benches around our boardwalk are showing the effects of years of exposure to sun, rain, and salty sea breezes, and they need repainting.

Weed pullers and trail trimmers are, as usual, encouraged to work with gloves and pruning tools. Painters, please bring a 2- to 4-inch paint brush if you have one. We will supply some gardening gloves and clippers and paint brushes on loan. Painters will also be provided with sandpaper, plastic gloves, and buckets of our “official” Elfin Forest brown bench paint (water cleanup).

Everyone will be rewarded with cookies and drinking water at quitting time.

### 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 in layers of clothing with long pants, long shirt sleeves, work gloves, and sturdy shoes with closed toes. Take care not to park in front of driveways or mailboxes. To request more information, call (805) 528-0392.

# Gardening with California Natives: Black Sage

By John Nowak & Suzette Girouard; photo by Jean Wheeler

Black sage (*Salvia mellifera*) is an attractive plant that is often present but seldom dominant, comfortably sharing its place among other coastal chaparral plants. Its branches are covered with abundant pale blue or lavender flowers calling out “See me!” to all. The origins of the black sage’s common name are unknown, possibly coming from the dark green color of its leaves, especially during drought years. It would be hard not to notice its green leaves while walking the trails of the Elfin Forest. *Salvia mellifera* is frequently found growing with its other perennial friends such as *Baccharis pilularis* (coyote brush); *Acmispon glaber* (deerweed or California broom), formerly *Lotus scoparius*; and *Lupinus chamissonis* (silver dune lupine). Sometimes referred to as a pioneer species, black sage can quickly re-establish disturbed areas, making it an ideal plant for revegetation projects.

Black sage is an excellent source of food and shelter for a host of birds, mammals, and insects, especially bees and butterflies. In fact, its species name *mellifera* means “honey-bearing” in Latin. As black sage seeds mature and fall to the ground, California quail (*Callipepla californica*) and other ground birds gorge upon them. Big-eared woodrats (*Neotoma macrotis*) use the seeds’ soft wood to make their shelters, which dot the landscape of the Elfin Forest. Brush rabbits (*Sylvilagus bachmani*) and black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) enjoy black sage’s fresh new foliage when its strong-smelling oil content is lower.

You may have heard of black sage honey, known for its dark color and bold flavor. Black sage has a late blooming cycle that is beneficial for bees and other insects, as well as hummingbirds when other nectar sources are scarce. It’s very likely that 2023 will be a good year for black sage due to the heavy rains from an expected El Niño effect.

California native peoples had many uses for black sage. Local Chumash used it mainly for medicinal purposes, often making an aqueous solution by submerging the plant’s leaves into salt water. This mixture was then placed in the sun for a couple of days to steep like sun tea. Users would soak their feet in this solution to remove pain. There are also accounts of early Spanish settlers using the leaves and seeds during cooking to flavor a bland meal, somewhat akin to European uses of another sage, *Salvia officinalis*, for cooking.

Gardening with black sage can be very successful if it is planted in the proper location in your garden. It prefers a sunny to semi-sunny area and well-drained soils. Drip irrigation, however, will lead to an early decline of the plant and root rot. Once black sage is established, monthly summer watering will keep a lush appearance and prolong flowering. After black sage has flowered, remove the seed heads to encourage more compact growth. A periodic, heavy pruning in autumn will stimulate regeneration of growth, similar to re-growth after a fire. Seeds collected in July are easy to germinate by simply sowing them in sandy soil and



watering them. Once new plants sprout sufficiently, transplant them into a selected spot.

*Salvia mellifera* is an important component of the dune chaparral community. Its ability to restore and revegetate disturbed areas, along with providing food and shelter to animals and insects, earns its welcome into your garden.

## Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest Mission:

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

# Coming Up in Autumn

Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

Where I grew up in northern Illinois, we looked for opening flower buds in spring, lots of fully open flowers in many colors in summer, with fruits and nuts replacing the flowers through autumn. Our Elfin Forest wildflowers provide beautiful displays of plants in all three stages throughout autumn.

In early autumn, buds are swelling, and flowers are opening on asters (pictured) and mock heather. Flowers are also continuing to open and bloom on our California poppies, as they continue to bloom here nearly all year around. Bright patches of these fully open white, lavender, yellow, and orange flowers continue to look like full summer here. The red of cardinal catchfly flowers may also still be seen in the understory near Rose's Grove. Look for acorns on the diminutive oaks that give our wilderness park its name and fruits on coffeeberry plants. Coffeeberries offer change through green, white, yellow, red, and fully ripe shiny black berries, often berries in three colors on the same plant. Seed balls on black sage bushes look like black pompoms decorating our boardwalk for Halloween.

Often just beginning to open by late November are white to lavender blossoms on buckbrush, also known as California lilac, one of our most widespread shrubs all around the boardwalk. Tiny white bells of morro manzanita, often blushing light pink, may also begin to open along the lower boardwalk in very late November if we have early rains. These presage our oncoming winter blooming extravaganza, equivalent to the spring times I remember from my childhood "back East."

Bringing still more color to our small wilderness in autumn are many migratory birds passing through or arriving to winter here. Bush Lupine Point and Siena's View provide excellent vistas in autumn and winter months of many species floating on the estuary. Some wintering ducks may arrive as early as August. By October dabbling ducks, dipping their heads to seek food with tails pointing up in the air, may include mallards, northern pintails, gadwalls, American wigeons, northern shovelers, blue-winged teal, cinnamon teal, and green-winged teal (pictured).

Diving ducks plunge completely below the surface, disappearing in search of their food. Among those to look for as they pop back up to the surface are scaup (lesser and greater), ring-necked, canvasback, bufflehead, common goldeneye, red-breasted merganser, and ruddy ducks. Horned, eared, pied-billed, western, and Clark's grebes also arrive from September to November, remaining until March or April. Shorebirds such as sandpipers, dowitchers, and the American avocet reach peak populations by the end of autumn.

Black brant geese have been famous for wintering on Morro Bay, several thousand at a time when I first moved here in 2000, but they have been down to only a few hundred in recent years. Severe decline here in eel grass, their primary food source in our bay, and warmer winters in the subarctic bays of southern Alaska (allowing greater numbers to winter there instead of spending energy flying south) may account for the decline here.



*Green-winged teal.*



*California asters.*

Within our Elfin Forest, fox, Lincoln's, and golden-crowned sparrows join our year-round resident white-crowned sparrows from October to March or April, settling in shrubs. Ruby-crowned kinglets also come in for the winter. Our summer Swainson's thrushes leave early to winter in Central and South America but are replaced by incoming American robins and hermit thrushes. Yellow-rumped warblers also arrive in autumn. Resident black phoebes are joined by their relatives, Say's phoebes, for a winter visit. Birds passing through in small flocks on their way to the tropics may include cedar waxwings, western tanagers, and pine siskins. Commonly seen year-around avian residents include California scrub jays, California and spotted towhees, California quail, Anna's hummingbirds, bushtits, and blue-gray gnatcatchers.

We may not have tall trees covered in big red, orange, and yellow leaves in our autumn. But we do have lots of colorful flowers and very active and beautiful birds, and even brush rabbits, squirrels, lizards, and very occasionally even a coyote or deer may be seen from or on our boardwalk!



# WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

## Docent-Led Third Saturday Walks

(Reservations required; masks are optional.)

*September 16, 9:30 a.m.—*

### *Tuning in to Nature Writers*

Do you enjoy being read to? Here's an opportunity to stroll around our boardwalk and hear the thoughts and words of famous natural history writers. Historian Robert Pavlik will share selections from the works of Robinson Jeffers, Wallace Stegner, Rachel Carson, Gary Snyder, and other writers and poets of the twentieth-century. As you follow Bob along the boardwalk, stopping here and there for a reading, he will provide you with a delightful menu of descriptions and impressions to enjoy in the Elfin Forest environment. He'll also bring a handout of his readings for those who want to explore more of the writers he has shared.

*October 21, 9:30 a.m.—*

### *Seeds: Space and Time Travelers*

Enjoy an easy walk led by Barbara Renshaw and Jeff Reifel around the Elfin Forest to investigate the amazing properties of seeds and the methods plants use to send them traveling to find a home in the environment. Barbara and Jeff will bring a variety of seeds—most of them local but also some very large and unusual, such as a coconut, from other parts of the world. Many seeds on plants in the Elfin Forest will be discovered, including mature acorns on live oak trees. Barbara and Jeff will also dissect berries to show the fruit, the seed coat, and the embryo inside the seed.

*November 18, 9:30 a.m.—*

### *Stories of the Nine Sisters, the Salt Marsh, and the Bay*

Ever wonder about the stories behind the Nine Sisters (sometimes called the Seven Sisters) landmarks? Fayla Chapman, a talented naturalist and biology teacher, will provide the geological and historical background about this line of prominent peaks. They extend inland from Morro Bay to the last one just beyond the city of San Luis Obispo. About half of these promontories can be seen from our boardwalk. At our two overlooks of the estuary, Fayla will draw on her background as a biologist for stories about residents of the salt marsh bordering our Elfin Forest and the bay beyond the marsh, as well as the ecological importance of these two areas.

*Reservations are required for all walks in the Elfin Forest. To reserve a spot on a walk, email us at [walks@elfin-forest.org](mailto:walks@elfin-forest.org). Indicate the number in your party in the subject line of your email. Walks 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.*



*Dirk Walters (left) provided fascinating information on many plant species around the boardwalk, here a beautiful black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), during the Third Saturday Walk in May.*



*Artists chose spots that attracted them for sketching during the June walk led by Barbara Renshaw and Jeff Reifel. Gnarly branches of an oak drew Zsofi Barthmaier's attention at the edge of Rose's Grove.*

# Thank You to Our Generous Members

*Compiled by  
Betsy Kinter, FEMEF Database Coordinator*

## NEW MEMBERS:

Terri Mansker  
Walter Mark & Sarah Degasis Mark\*

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

Libbie Agran & Guy Fitzwater*	Nancy Ottum
Randy Ball*	George & Carol Pilling*
Linda Barra*	Patrice Promack & Christopher Bianco
Pat Brown*	Darlene M. Reynolds*
Stephen Cake*	Bill Richmond*
Lisa Coffman	Rita Robinson
Siegrid Fenn	Tim & Melissa Rochte*
Dr. Steve Jio and family*	Oscar Sarafian*
Craig & Vicky Johnsen*	Pebble & Terry Smith*
Monique Kuo*	Diane & Frank Snow*
Frances Leitch*	Nancy Stephens*
Susan McTaggart	Ungar family*
Beverley & Bill Moylan*	Edward & Marilyn Vilas*
Louise Noel*	

## 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 quarterly 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.*

## Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

If you receive a print copy of Oakleaves, we encourage you to visit our online version at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org). You will see photos in full color, and the text is easier to read on your computer. If you decide to be an online reader, you will receive an email when each new issue is posted on our website. Your decision would save paper, ink, and FEMEF dollars for other uses. Just email us at [oakleaf@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org) with the subject "Switch me to online."



*Dozer, a very special long-billed curlew. Photo by Petra Clayton.*

## Dozer Has Returned —4th Annual Visit!

*By Petra Clayton, Carol Comeau, and Jean Wheeler*

The amazing long-billed curlew named Dozer has, for his fourth summer, been tracked to Morro Bay. Our first story about him, written by Jean about the species and featuring this very special bird, was suggested by Petra. It appeared on page 5 of our October/November *Oakleaves* issue of 2020. Dozer's return in 2021 prompted another photo story on page 1 of the August/September issue that year.

Dozer was banded and fitted with a satellite transmitter in May of 2020 on his breeding grounds in west-central Idaho and is tracked by Intermountain Bird Observatory. This year's tracking reports show him in Idaho on June 23 and near Lost Hills in our Central Valley on June 29. Then Carol and another local birder, Penny Principe, found him at one of his favorite locations on Morro Strand State Beach on June 30.

We are very happy to have our celebrity curlew back on the Central Coast! Morro Strand State Beach Ebird Checklist has photos and a video.

## Crowdsource Photos Can be Taken in the Elfin Forest

*By Skip Rotstein*

Conservation Co-Chair Jeff Reifel placed a viewing post with a phone camera bracket at the Fairbanks Monument in late May. Curated photos can be seen on the Elfin Forest website, <https://www.elfin-forest.org>. Look for Time Frame at the bottom of the Visiting page. Visitors have been sending the photos at a steady rate. Date and time will be added to the Frame. Additional view posts are planned.



## 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 choose. Hand-washing is suggested.



# FEMEF Shoppers' Order Form

See photos of all items at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org)

All Prices Include Sales Tax

### 1. MURAL SHIRTS

Large mural design by artist Barbara Rosenthal on both front and back. Black shirt with the words "El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area" above mural and "Small Wilderness Area Preservation" and "Los Osos, California" below mural.

Check the desired size(s):

\_\_\_ 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, 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 26 clever verses and superb photos on facing pages, this book is sure to please young and old.

\_\_\_ @ \$20.00 = \$\_\_\_

### 5. MURAL MUG

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

\_\_\_ @ \$15 = \$\_\_\_

### 6. ELFIN FOREST CAPS

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

\_\_\_ @ \$15 = \$\_\_\_ Color(s)\_\_\_

### SUBTOTAL OF ORDER

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(Please print when filling order, and indicate how many of each.)

**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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FEMEF, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412-6442.

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



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Meet a new key FEMEF volunteer! ~ page 3

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*Coffeeferry. Photo by Vicki Johnsen.*

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FEMEF has permission to email me.

Memberships include an online subscription to FEMEF's quarterly newsletter *Oakleaves*.

- Check here to receive the online version by email.
- Check here to receive the print version by U.S. mail.
- Check here if you do not wish to receive *Oakleaves*.

All donations to FEMEF are tax-deductible.

EVERY membership counts!

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