



OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION

P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 528-0392 ❖ FEBRUARY / MARCH 2018

US Fish & Wildlife Service Holds Local Endangered Species Meeting

By Pete Sarafian

On November 16, 2017 Julie Vanderwier of the Ventura U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office (VFWO) hosted a meeting in Baywood Park concerning the continued viability of two land snail species on the Central Coast. The endangered Morro Shoulderband Snail (*Helminthoglypta walkeriana*) (MSS) and non-listed Chorro Shoulderband Snail (*H. morroensis*) (CSS) were the subjects of concern. Meeting attendees included two federal biologists from the VFWO, two representatives from the San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Works, State Parks biologists, several private company biological consultants, and Travis Belt and Barrett Holland from SWCA Environmental Consultants. Mr. Holland and Mr. Belt have extensive experience monitoring for MSS in the Elfin Forest and during the Los Osos Wastewater Project.

The Morro Shoulderband Snail exists mainly in the area around Los Osos in soils comprised of Baywood Fine Sands. During the Los Osos Wastewater Project excavations, County and SWCA biological monitors found and moved to safety over 1,000 specimens. In contrast, the Chorro Shoulderband Snail occurs more widespread in areas between North Morro Bay and Cayucos as well as along the Chorro Valley on both sides of Highway 1 including Camp San Luis Obispo. The CSS seems to prefer clay type soils. MSS and CSS are similar in color, size and shape but differ on a number of details. The MSS has a higher conical dome while the CSS is flatter. The MSS also has spiral shell striations that are missing in the CSS. Fish & Wildlife personnel will be deciding if any follow-up actions are needed to protect the two species.

Meet Three New SWAP Board Members

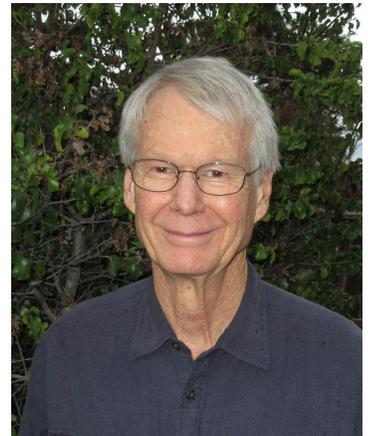
By Yolanda Waddell; Photos by Jay and Yolanda Waddell

SWAP is pleased to announce the addition of three new members to our Board of Directors. They have joined at a time when the Board's numbers were seriously diminishing, and bring new energy and good ideas to our organization. All three have been active on SWAP committees.

Dave Bowlus

Dave has been a Weed Warrior for over a decade and, more recently, joined SWAP's Conservation Committee. When asked how he ended up in Baywood Park/Los Osos, he told the following.

A native Californian, Dave grew up in Pasadena and then went to U.C. Berkeley, earning a B.A. in biochemistry in 1967. Having developed a strong interest in marine invertebrates, he went on to Scripps Institution of Oceanography, planning to obtain a Ph.D. However, in 1969 with the Vietnam War in full swing, his draft classification was changed to 1A. Dave chose to join the Coast Guard after obtaining his Master's Degree at Scripps.



After Officer Candidate School, he became the Operations Officer on a Coast Guard cutter, a buoy tender based in Cordova, Alaska. The ship did search and rescue, marine safety inspections and other enforcement tasks as well as tending buoys and taking supplies to two remote light house stations every two weeks. His next assignment was in the Office of Boating Safety in Portsmouth, Virginia, where he completed almost four years of active duty. He returned to Scripps, doing research on marine invertebrate enzymes and earning his Ph.D. in 1979.

Dave began his teaching career at colleges in the Los Angeles area, ending at East L.A. College in Monterey Park. In 2003, he and his wife Beverly, who taught English, decided to retire. They

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

consists of the following members:

- Leslie Rotstein, Chair
- Skip Rotstein, Vice Chair
- Jan DiLeo, Treasurer
- Bill McQuilkin, Secretary
- Yolanda Waddell, Recording Secretary
- Dave Bowlus, Member at Large
- Pat Murray, Member at Large
- Ron Rasmussen, Director Emeritus

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

The next meetings are
**Monday, February 12,
and Monday, March 12.**

**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 Board of Directors Ballot for 2018

By Jan DiLeo, SWAP Treasurer

Annually SWAP has nominations and elections for its Board of Directors. The process of nominating and electing Board members occurs at SWAP's Annual Celebration, which is typically held in late September. In November, 2017 two Board members (Ron Rasmussen and Vicky Johnsen) resigned from the Board effective January 1 and January 31, 2018 respectively. As a result, in December 2017 the SWAP Board temporarily appointed three new board members (Dave Bowlus, Leslie Rotstein, and Bill McQuilkin) to one-year terms and the re-election of Skip Rotstein and Yolanda Waddell for two-year terms. Since these changes occurred after SWAP's Annual Celebration, SWAP's members were unable to cast votes regarding these changes.

If you are a SWAP member and would like to serve on SWAP's Board or vote for the election of SWAP's Board of Directors please either:

- ✓ Attend the March 12, 2018 SWAP Board meeting held at Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Avenue, Los Osos in the Fireside Room. To cast a vote you must be there by 3:05 pm, or
- ✓ Complete the ballot below and mail the ballot to: SWAP Elections, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 no later than March 1, 2018.

Below is the 2018 SWAP Board of Directors Ballot containing a list of Board members up for re-election as well as new Board members. If you are voting by mail please cut out the ballot below, place a check by those names you support to serve on SWAP's Board, and mail the ballot to: SWAP Elections, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 **no later than March 1, 2018.**

SWAP's 2018 Board of Directors Ballot

You may vote for all persons listed below. Please indicate a name if you are providing a write-in candidate.

YES

- SKIP ROTSTEIN (TWO YEARS)
- YOLANDA WADDELL (TWO YEARS)
- DAVE BOWLUS (ONE YEAR)
- BILL MCQUILKIN (ONE YEAR)
- LESLIE ROTSTEIN (ONE YEAR)
- WRITE-IN CANDIDATE (ONE YEAR)

Vicky Johnsen Retires from SWAP Board

SWAP Board of Directors member Vicky Johnsen began by joining the SWAP Weed Warriors. Following that, she became a booth worker for Oktoberfest, and then trained to be a SWAP docent. She also joined the SWAP Conservation Committee. In 2013, she was given the SWAP Volunteer of the Year award. Since June, 2014, Vicky has served on the Board of Directors, and now is leaving that post. SWAP is grateful for the time and energy she has given to the Board. She will continue as our lead docent, and as an active Weed Warrior and member of the Conservation Committee.

New Board Members *continued from page 1*

knew about Los Osos, having visited Beverly's sister and brother who live in the area. Because Dave loves small boat sailing and wanted to be near the ocean, and because they have family nearby, they decided to settle here.

Currently Dave is a part-time teacher in the Bio Sciences Division at Cuesta College. He is active in the community as a member of the Implementation Committee of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, and serves as Treasurer and Membership Chair of the Central Coast Biological Society. From 2005 to 2013, he and Beverly ran a summer sailing camp for children at the Baywood Pier as volunteers for the San Luis Obispo YMCA. Dave provided the boats and instruction, and Beverly was "shore patrol."

As a member of the SWAP Board, Dave wants to support conservation work in the Elfin Forest, and considers education about the Forest to be essential to its preservation. We are grateful to Dave for bringing a scientist's knowledge and point of view to the Board and for giving his time and energy in support of the Elfin Forest.

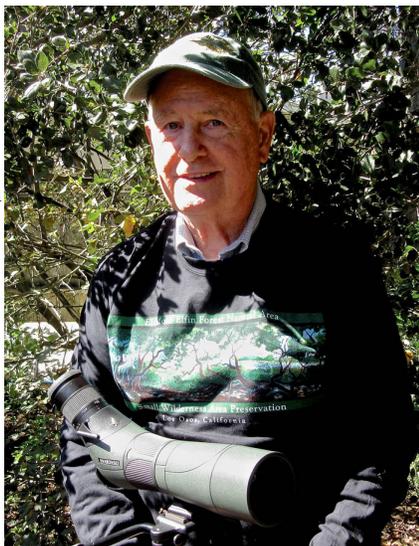
Bill McQuilkin

In January, 2017, Bill McQuilkin became SWAP's first Elfin Forest Ambassador. Even though he lives in Nipomo, he visits the Forest weekly, setting up his spotting scope at one of the two overlooks, and greeting visitors to the Forest.

Although he is the Foreperson of the San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury until June of this year, and is on the Board of the History Center of San Luis Obispo, Bill readily agreed to join the SWAP Board when he learned of our need.

Bill has many years of involvement with conservation organizations. While living in upper New York State, he worked to keep Canandaigua Lake clean and also was active in the Sierra Club. After he and his wife, Sue, retired to Jacksonville, Florida, he became involved in the Audubon Society and joined the Florida Audubon Board, eventually serving on the National Audubon Board. He also saw a need for land preservation in the Jacksonville area, and founded the North Florida Land Trust in 1999. Since its founding, the land trust has preserved 18,000 acres of agricultural land, marsh land and riverside properties.

Bill and Sue decided to move to the San Luis Obispo area in 2014, to be on the same coast as their two adult children. Their daughter, her husband and their granddaughter live in San Luis Obispo, and their son lives in Portland, Oregon. However, Bill and Sue's ties with Florida aren't completely broken. On January 29, they flew to Jacksonville with



their son for a special North Florida Land Trust event – creation of the Land Trust's McQuilkin Society for donors who make large gifts.

Because of his many years of service on boards of directors, Bill sees that the formation of a Planning Committee would give the SWAP Board a means to make its way more effectively in the years to come. A Planning Committee will help to improve all the functions including organization, conservation and outreach. He is interested in SWAP's partnerships not only with County Parks but also with the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, State Parks, the California Conservation Corps, Cuesta College, Cal Poly and other local conservation organizations.

We are extremely fortunate that Bill, with his knowledge, experience and passion for nature, has been involved with SWAP and now is a member of its Board of Directors.

Leslie Rotstein

Leslie and her husband Skip became active in SWAP in 2014, after moving to Los Osos from Morongo Valley, in the California desert. Skip became a member of the SWAP Board, and is now our Conservation Chair. Leslie, having taught all grades from kindergarten through high school, joined our Education Committee. She was especially well qualified, since she had been a docent at the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, designing activities for children that emphasized observation, questioning and recording of information.

When Leslie learned that the number of SWAP Board members was rapidly declining, she volunteered to be on the Board. This will be added to her other activities. She is involved in several garden-related groups including the Los Osos Valley Garden Club, which she reorganized and then became its President. She is active in Celebrate Los Osos, belongs to a women's discussion group, and is a member of Womenade, an organization that helps families in need. As is often the case, an active person like Leslie knows how to wear an additional hat when the need is great.

As a member of the SWAP Board, Leslie sees a need for networking with other community organizations and the local schools, including Los Osos Middle School. She said, "My experience is that networking and supporting other community organizations can enrich all the organizations and better coordinate a calendar of non-conflicting events." She would like to initiate new SWAP events that would bring in younger active members, and said that she will work to "grow the Board."

Leslie also said that, "the most important part of participating on a board, is that you need to work with all board members." With her energy and flow of good ideas, SWAP members can be assured that the organization that cares for the Elfin Forest will provide enrichment for the community as well. We thank her for understanding that the Elfin Forest needs a healthy organization to care for it.



Marbled Godwit

Text and Photo by Jean Wheeler, Ph.D.

One of our most distinctive wading shorebirds is the Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*). Larger than most of our wading birds, they are full-bodied, weighing over half to slightly more than a pound. The females are generally larger than the males. From their short tails to the tips of their long bills they measure 16-20 inches. That bill is the most distinguishing feature of this wading species on our estuary; 3-5 inches long it is nearly straight but curved very slightly upward and is colored just about half pink from the head to half black at the tip. These waders have long grey legs.

The common name “marbled” refers to the varying shades of brown of the feathers. The browns are darker on the backs and sides, paler on the breasts, and a cinnamon shade lines the under wings. In breeding season darker bars cross the chest. At least one banded bird later recovered was over 13 years old.

Marbled Godwits breed in loose colonies on the plains and prairies in north central United States and south central Canada. Males call while flying over the chosen site and the pair may do a nest-scraping display on the grassy ground, usually close to water bodies. Nests are lined with and may be shaded with grass and are hard to spot as the birds are motionless when approached. Nesting birds have even been picked up by humans.

Typically both parents tend four eggs and guard the hatchlings although young leave the nest very soon and find their own food. They fly at about three weeks. The diet of Marbled Godwits focuses on insects and crustaceans, including lots of grasshoppers on the breeding prairies, and some roots, sedges and pondweeds. They probe for prey on mudflats, marshes, and beaches.



Migrating in flocks, most of these birds move to coastal regions from Virginia around the Gulf Coast and from California south. A few may go as far as northern South America, but most winter north of Panama. On coastal shores and ponds they probe for mollusks, marine worms, and other

invertebrates. Our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) shows them at peak in our area from late July to early April, almost completely absent here only for a brief breeding season from April to late July.

Marbled Godwits suffered dramatic population declines from hunting in the 1800's like many of our feathered species. Their total population stabilized overall in the twentieth century, but increased notably in some areas while decreasing greatly in others, especially in Canadian plains where much suitable habitat was converted to farming.

Audubon maps of possible impacts from climate change show likely increase of winter migration range in southern United States by 2080. However, they also show completely total loss of current breeding areas by that date, with substantial increase in possible breeding habitats farther north across Canada and Alaska. I can't help but wonder, though, whether the species can adapt to breeding that much farther north in so few decades.

A group of godwits are collectively referred to as an “omniscience” or a “pantheon” or even a “prayer” of godwits. Let's hope these reflect their ability to cope with such extreme changes in location of viable habitat for them in the years to come.



Craig Johnsen, who built the frames, completes installation of one of the new panels at Bush Lupine Point.

Photo by Vicky Johnsen.

Interpretive Panels at Bush Lupine Point Now Like New

A few years ago, a vandal defaced the two interpretive panels at Bush Lupine Point with deep scratches. In past years, County Parks would have ordered replacement panels from a Canadian company that fabricated the originals. However that company no longer uses the Quark electronic format that was used for printing the panels. After much research, our web master Bob Meyer found a way to transfer the panel files from Quark to PDF.

A U.S. company, Fossil, was then able to fabricate new panels to replace the damaged ones.

SWAP member Craig Johnsen, a boat designer and master craftsman, offered to mount the new panels in frames, and then attach the frames to the Bush Lupine Point railings.

He finished the replacement on October 1st. Craig also replaced a railing that was broken when the panel was pulled away from it. SWAP is grateful both to Bob Meyer and Craig Johnsen for their expertise and generosity in completing this project.

California Blackberry

By Dirk Walters, Ph.D.; Drawings by Bonnie Walters
(Ed. Note: Revised by Dr. Walters from October 2004 issue)

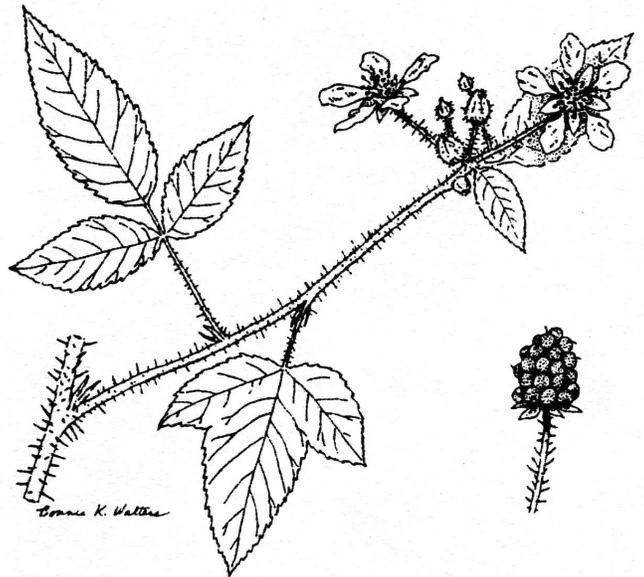
The repeat plant discussed in this issue of *Oakleaves* is listed as a shrub but is more often a tallish ground cover. It is the California Blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*). In the Elfin Forest, it grows among, under and around the pygmy oak groves. More universally it is found growing primarily along streams and as an understory in open woods or shrub lands from sea level to 4000 feet throughout the Pacific States. Being extremely widespread, useful, and easily recognized, it has accrued lots of common names. A limited search of the internet will yield several such as California blackberry, California dewberry, Douglas berry, Pacific blackberry, Pacific dewberry, trailing blackberry, and bush lawyer. Those of us who grew up in the Eastern U.S. may be familiar with the name, 'dewberry,' used to designate a blackberry-bearing plant that is more trailing than upright.

So our local blackberry would probably be known as a dewberry if it was growing east of the Mississippi River. I assume 'Douglas' refers to the early California botanist, who had some role to play in its discovery. Any ideas where 'bush lawyer' comes from? I certainly don't!

This species is easy to recognize because it is one of only three common species in the Elfin Forest with 'ouchies' or sharp projections. Botanically, there are three kinds of 'ouchies'. Prickles are hard, sharp-pointed outgrowths of the epidermis identified by their distribution, more or less uniform over the entire stem. A look at Bonnie's drawing will show that prickles cover California Blackberry's stems. Thorns and spines are found only near where the leaves are attached to the stem (nodes). Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry and California rose are the other two species in the Elfin Forest, with 'ouchies'. Of these plants, the fuchsia-flowered gooseberry is the easiest to distinguish. It is a tall shrub with red flowers. Its leaves consist of a single small palmate-lobed blade with paired spines (stipules) arising from either side of each leaf attachment. California rose produces prickles and largish white to pinkish flowers and compound leaves that generally consist of at least 5 leaflets. In contrast, California blackberry produces largish white flowers and large leaves that vary from simple (consisting of a single blade) to compound but usually with no more than 3 leaflets. Some of you might recall that poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) also has three leaflets per leaf and can be recognized with the help of an old rhyme. "Berries white, poisonous sight; leaflets three, leave it be." Although California blackberry does usually have 3 leaflets, the blades are dull due to their rough hairy surface while poison oak leaflets are smooth and shiny. Although poison oak lacks the obvious 'ouchies', it should be avoided as the oils that are found over the entire plant surface cause the skin to itch in about 85% of us.

As its common name implies, California blackberry can produce edible berries. However, like many other widespread species, it is extremely variable. Several references indicate that this variability includes fruit quality and quantity. Dr. Hoover, in his *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County*, noted that plants growing this far south rarely produce "good" crops. In fact, I have seen only a few berries and these were in the Turri Road marsh area. If you want to find fruit, head north. Individuals growing in Northern California produce abundant crops of berries. The internet also indicates that California blackberry has some use in landscaping and conservation. In landscaping its use would be limited to areas with lots of room as the plant spreads out laterally. When and wherever a stem encounters soil it sends out roots thus establishing a new plant. Its robust growth makes it a great plant to stabilize stream banks or other areas where there is adequate water.

California blackberry is the ancestor of a couple of our garden berries. Several references indicate that it is the ancestor of the Loganberry, Olallieberry, and possibly several other varieties of blackberry. Blackberries are those that are made up of a number of separate small fruit units (drupelets) fused together. They are in the same genus as the raspberry. Blackberries differ from raspberries in how the drupelets are attached (receptacle) within the flower. In blackberries the receptacle stays inside the cluster of drupelets when the berries are picked while it is left attached to the flower base in the raspberry.





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Layout is by Katy Budge.

Editing assistance by Pat Grimes.
Contributors to this issue: Jan DiLeo, Lannie Erickson, Vicky Johnsen,
Betsy Kinter, Pete Sarafian, Mary Lee Schaffarzick, Yolanda Waddell,
Dirk and Bonnie Walters, Jean Wheeler.

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Weed Warriors Sharon Rooney (left) and Vicky Johnsen made more room on the path by trimming back a very robust Ceanothus bush. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



During the December 2nd work party, Dean Thompson (left) and Skip Rotstein moved a peeler log water bar on the 17th Street path to a place where it would be more effective. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

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 driveways or mailboxes. To request more information, call (805) 528-0392.

Weed Warrior Report

By Yolanda Waddell and Ron Rasmussen

November 4th - A Dedicated Few Accomplish Good Work

Saturday, November 4th, was a beautiful day on the Central Coast, too beautiful to resist going hiking or biking in the hills, or spending a day at the beach. But six lovers of the Elfin Forest came to trim its “hair” and “comb” its trails. New Weed Warrior Drew Bentz, Prisila Johnson and Rich Johnson raked and shoveled sand on Forest trails to prevent erosion from foot traffic and future rain. Vicky Johnsen and Sharon Rooney took clippers to the shrubs that were growing over the boardwalk, trimming them back to give space for visitors using the boardwalk. Work Day Coordinator Ron Rasmussen looked for and found numerous broken screws in the boardwalk, and replaced them. Thank you all!

December 2nd – No Rain, No Weeding; Other Stuff

By the beginning of December, we fully expected to see sprouts of the evil weed, Veldt Grass, poking up from the soil. But November saw very little rain, so our diligent Weed Warriors did “other tasks as needed.” Vicky Johnsen and Sharon Rooney did trail trimming along the boardwalk near Siena’s View Overlook, continuing work they had begun the month before. Rich and Prisila Johnson went on rusted screw patrol, finding many to replace, as always. Skip Rotstein and Dean Thompson removed a peeler log water bar from a place on the 17th Street trail where it wasn’t doing any good, and installed it in a spot down-trail where it would be more effective in moving rainwater away from the trail. Ron Rasmussen took up an erosion control rake and prepared some trails for future rain. This Saturday was a good day to accomplish the “other tasks” in hopes that in January the Weed Warriors would be busy weeding.

Let’s All Pull Together

By Lannie Erickson

Weed warriors, rise Saturday morning.
We shall make our way to the field.
Our green foes shall there await us,
In the end they must surely yield.

We shall seek them in the meadows,
We will rout them midst the trees.
Not the smallest shall escape us,
Though they bring us to our knees.

Rat-tata-tat, rat-tata-tat, rat-tata-tat-tata-tata-tat!
Go Weed Warriors!
Forward March!



Not Dusky-footed, but Big-eared Woodrat

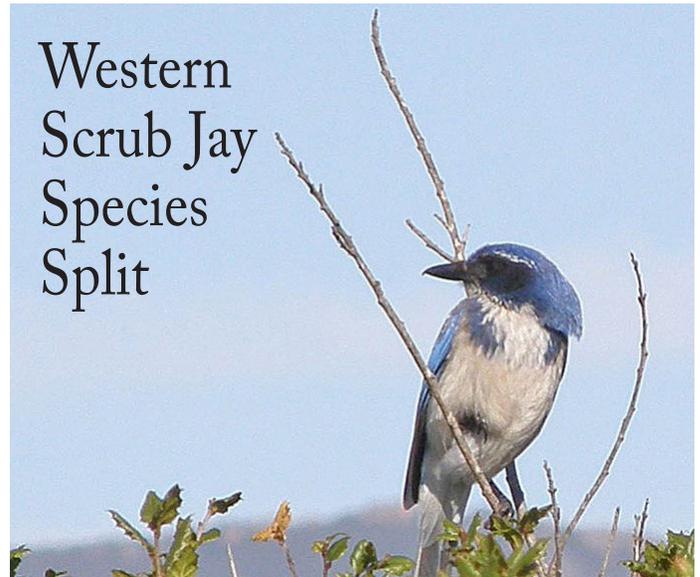
By Yolanda Waddell

We recently learned from Ron Ruppert, Chair of the Cuesta College Bio Sciences Division, that our Elfin Forest woodrat, long called the Dusky-footed Woodrat, has had its name changed. It is now the Big-eared Woodrat. Ron said that the Dusky-footed Woodrat, *Neotoma fuscipes*, is inland and north of us.

Ron gave us an internet link to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. IUCN is the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The IUCN description of *N. macrotis*, Big-eared or Large-eared Woodrat, tells us that this was “formerly a subspecies under *Neotoma fuscipes*. *N. macrotis* was elevated to species status following the discovery of morphological and genetic differences indicating genetic isolation between the two groups (Matocq 2002).” It is found from central and eastern California south into northwestern Baja California.

Like other members of the *Neotoma* genus, Big-eared Woodrats prefer to reside where there is dense vegetative cover, including chaparral, coastal scrub, and woodlands. They build large houses of sticks, bark, leaves and man-made objects discovered while foraging. The dome-shaped stick houses typically contain a single adult or a female with pups, and have been known to be maintained for decades by several generations of the same family.

In her December, 2009 *Oakleaves* article about Woodrats, Jean Wheeler said, “Woodrats are food for foxes, coyotes, large snakes, and especially owls. Their nests provide shelter for insects, spiders, even salamanders and lizards. Research has shown that species diversity is increased with the presence of woodrat houses. As you follow the boardwalk through our Elfin Forest, look under the live oaks and especially where their outer branches descend to mingle with branches of surrounding shrubs. See if you can detect these brushy apartment complexes with their woodrat landlady and diverse tenants.”



Western Scrub Jay Species Split

By Jean Wheeler

There is no more Western Scrub-Jay species. Our Scrub-Jay is now the California Scrub-Jay in its common as well as its scientific name.

Before 1995, there was just one species in our nation known as the Scrub-Jay, with the Latin name of *Aphelocoma coerulescens*. Then the American Ornithologists Union split the Scrub-Jay into three species. Scrub-Jays in the state of Florida retained the original scientific name with the new common name of Florida Scrub-Jay. The ones on Santa Cruz Island off the California Coast became Island Scrub Jays (*A. insularis*), and the remaining scrub-jays in mainland western United States were designated *A. californica* with the common name Western Scrub-Jay.

In 2016, another official split of the Western Scrub-Jay species occurred with essentially the Pacific Coast contingent changing the common name to California Scrub-Jay with the same scientific name, *A. californica*. Scrub-Jays living inland in the drier intermountain west are now a separate species designated Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (*A. woodhouseii*).

The California Scrub-Jay is darker and more vividly colored with brighter blues and a sharper distinction between the vivid white throat and a narrow deep blue collar or breastband. This species also behaves in a bolder more conspicuous manner. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay is duller with dusty blues and only a faintly blue collar or breastband meeting a more grayish white throat. This interior species also acts in a shy and more inconspicuous manner.

Elfin Forest Sighting

While very much appreciating warm and sunny weather on our boardwalk rather than the seriously below freezing cold, snow, and ice storms buffeting his Spokane home, Joey Rektor spotted movement nearby. He exchanged several minutes of observation with this coyote and summoned his mom, Jean Wheeler, to take this photo. A short while later, emergency vehicle sirens prompted howling by an entire pack in the same vicinity, and Joey enjoyed the chorus.



Text and Photos by Jean Wheeler

February and March normally provide wonderful displays of colorful wildflowers opening against a vibrant green background. When writing in November for our December/January issue, both Dirk Walters in his article on Common Buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*) and I in this column for that issue noted the buds on the shrubs of *C. cuneatus* all around our boardwalk. We both expected a spectacular display this winter, and I predicted that by the end of December “the boardwalk should be bordered all around with their white to lilac blossoms.”

Oops! The buds are still there but hardly any have opened in the absence of rain in those two months. As I write now just after light showers the first week in January with heavier rains predicted during the 2nd week, hopefully that prediction will be honored just a month or two overdue, by the time you read this!

At least when my son was visiting over the holiday from snowy Spokane, Washington, I was able to show him a few tiny flower bells on the Morro Manzanitas at the entrance to Rose’s grove. But the usual wall of gorgeous white bells blushing pink along the lower boardwalk also has yet to perform that display. We did have a pretty good rain season last year. But with four years of drought before that and virtually no rain yet this season, our shrubs are apparently saving the moisture they do have for survival. They seem to be awaiting a more reasonable amount of rainfall before switching from survival to reproduction mode.

Some Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberries are sporting brilliant red trumpet blossoms, but not nearly as heavily as in rainier years. The Anna’s Hummingbirds who treasure their nectar to feed their fledglings would, I’m sure, soon appreciate a greater abundance of them. I’ve yet to see even the leaves of California Peonies (pictured) coming up along the 11th street sand path or near Siena’s View. If we do get the rain predicted in January’s second week, the leaves should come springing up and the drooping red flowers appear soon after. My photo of this species was taken on January 18 in 2013, and they bloomed in late February and March last year.

There are a number of migratory ducks on the estuary, including Buffleheads, Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, and Green-



At left, Brant; above California Peony

winged Teal, but the waters are not as crowded with them as usual in midwinter. In particular, we have relatively few geese, especially Brant (pictured). We used to get 3,000 or more of that species visiting for several months in the winter, but our problems with declining eel grass may have discouraged their continued visitation in large numbers for the winter season as that is their major food.

Virtually all species of water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) are at peak populations for the year between November and March, as are all the raptors listed, and a great many of the passerines. Watch the shrubs around the boardwalk for flitting finches, sparrows, warblers, wrens, phoebes, chickadees, bushtits, gnatcatchers, nuthatches, and other little brown and little grey birds. The larger thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, quail, blackbirds, and doves can be seen and/or heard regularly.

Come for a walk on the wild side in our small wilderness area. Watch for plants beginning to bloom as they respond to winter rains. Listen and look for our resident birds as they engage in mating rituals and prepare to raise their 2018 families. Try to catch a glimpse of lizards, rabbits, squirrels, or maybe even a wild coyote.

Please Report Elfin Forest Sightings

Have you observed any unusual birds in the Elfin Forest? Mammals? Reptiles? Amphibians? Insects? Interesting activities or footprints of wildlife in our Elfin Forest? Unusual plants? Taken a good photo? Please report any interesting sightings to your Oakleaves editors at: oakleaves@elfin-forest.org for inclusion in future issues under “Elfin Forest Sightings.” You can also leave a message on SWAP’s answering machine, (805) 528-0392.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

February 17, 9:30 a.m. – Fungus Foray

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

March 17, 9:30 a.m. – Animal Tracks Walk

Join Evan Albright, an animal track expert, in learning who is “tracking up” the Elfin Forest. Visitors will learn how to tell the front feet from the back feet of a raccoon, and how coyote and dog tracks differ. Evan will also demonstrate how to find other signs that a wild resident of the Elfin Forest has passed that way. Attend this walk and develop an awareness of the comings and goings of the Forest’s animal, bird and reptile inhabitants – something we wouldn’t readily see while walking along the boardwalk.

Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at times stated above at the north end (1100 block) of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes, and leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information call (805) 528-0392.



During his very popular walk on a beautiful Saturday in November, Cuesta College geology instructor Jeff Grover (with hand extended) gave a condensed “Geology 101” talk for a rapt audience.

Photo by Mary Lee Schaffarzick.



Two of the artists on a sketching walk in December led by Barbara Renshaw and Jeff Reifel enjoy their drawing from a bench in Rose’s Grove. Photo by Jean Wheeler.

2017 Christmas Bird Count in the Elfin Forest



By Yolanda Waddell

Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) held its annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 16. This annual census is a national event, begun in 1900. Originally its purpose was to counteract an annual bird shoot, and now it provides valuable information about bird populations for scientific study.

The count area is a circle 15 miles in diameter, centered at the intersection of Turri Road and Los Osos Valley Road. This year the circle was divided into 63 count areas, two of which were located in the Elfin Forest.

CBC Count Compiler Tom Edell told me, “Two teams counted in the Elfin Forest this year. One was composed of Joanne Aasen, Dawn Beattie, Sharon Hite and Linda Sewell. They covered the trails and saw 23 species. Rick Saval counted a smaller part of the forest and also scoped the estuary, spotting 44 additional species.” Tom sent a list of the species and total number of each bird sighted.

In his report on the MCAS website, Tom wrote that a total of 200 species were seen during the count, with 116 birders participating. Total number of birds seen was 41,686, which is 6,813 fewer than in the 2016 count. He commented that the Brant count was low for the fifth straight year, totaling 477 birds, or 25% of the average since 1980. Notable sightings were two Bald Eagles, one of which was seen by Rick Saval from the Elfin Forest.

The Elfin Forest Counters saw a total of 67 species. The most numerous land birds were 20 California Quail and 19 California Scrub-Jays. Not many doves were seen: 4 Mourning Doves and 3 Eurasian Collared Doves, compared with 10 Mourning Doves and 19 Collared Doves seen in 2016. Maybe they found better pickings in neighboring back yards? There was no sight of the delightful Scaly-breasted Munia that were seen last year, and were described in our February/March 2017 Oakleaves on page 3. We hope they turn up next year.

We thank Morro Coast Audubon, Tom Edell and the Elfin Forest counters for including the Forest on this nation-wide census. The complete Elfin Forest bird count is posted on our website, www.elfin-forest.org under “Flora and Fauna,” at the end of the List of Birds.

Thank You to Our Generous Members

Compiled by Betsy Kinter, SWAP Database Coordinator

NEW MEMBERS:

Richard Robinson*

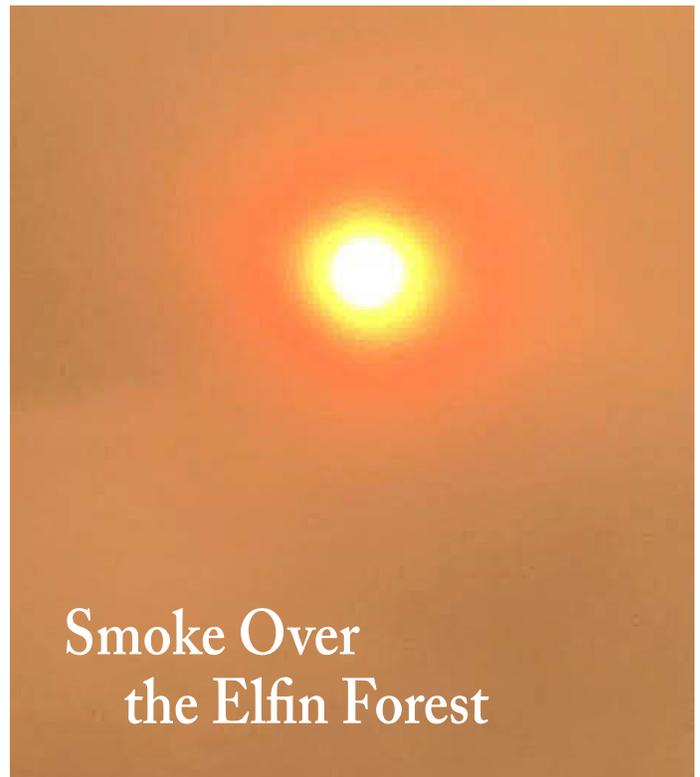
RENEWING MEMBERS:

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DONATIONS:

Marie Moore & Elaine Mason
Kenneth Smith

**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.*



By Yolanda Waddell

The accompanying photo was taken by SWAP Board member Vicky Johnsen on January 1st during a walk in the Elfin Forest. Hanging over the coast of San Luis Obispo County, including the Elfin Forest, was a huge brown cloud of smoke that almost blocked out the sun. The smoke had been blown north from the Thomas Fire that was burning fiercely in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, the largest fire ever in California.

We know how terribly the Thomas Fire affected everyone living in Santa Barbara and northern Ventura County, and send thoughts of comfort to SWAP members who live there.

Vicky and all of us who are involved with SWAP and the Elfin Forest, were well aware that fire could easily devastate the Elfin Forest and the neighborhood that lies next to it. We ask all of our members who visit the Forest regularly to be on the lookout, especially during the summer, for people with cigarettes. There are No Smoking signs at each of the seven entrances, but a few people think they are the exception to the rule. It is OK to ask a smoker in the Forest to extinguish the cigarette, but not to pursue the matter further with that person. If the smoker doesn't cooperate, contact the Sheriff at 805-781-4550. We are all keepers of the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area. Thank you!

Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

Tired of looking at that pile of newsletters and magazines waiting to be read? If you use your computer a lot, we encourage you to take a look at the online *Oakleaves* at www.elfin-forest.org. Being able to see the 20 or so photos in full color makes it a very attractive alternative to the black-and-white printed copy. If you miss an issue for some reason, it is there, waiting for you. Simply click on "Forest Library," then "Oakleaves Index" and finally the year and month of the issue that you want to read. Just e-mail us at oakleaves@elfin-forest.org with the subject: Switch me to online.



Elfin Forest Caps

One size fits all for these caps. They have adjustable straps in the back and are made of 100% cotton. Two handsome colors are available, forest green or maroon. Each cap has emblazoned in gold across its front the image of one of our coast live oaks, elfin-short but with a wide sprawling canopy, and the words "Elfin Forest Natural Area."



SWAP Shoppers' Order Form

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

All Prices Include Sales Tax

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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.

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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.

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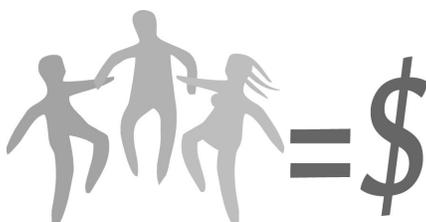
Meet SWAP's Three New Board Members! page 1

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Please look at your mailing label on the flip side of this page for the date when your membership expires. If it's time to renew, use the form in the box to the right of this one to support SWAP for another year. Notice you can check to receive only the online version of *Oakleaves* (with photos in full color!) to switch more dollars from mailing costs to conservation efforts.

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