



OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF THE LOS OSOS / MORRO BAY CHAPTER OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ DECEMBER 1997 / JANUARY 1998

From the President:

Community Proved Success Is Possible

by Rose Bowker, SWAP President

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever does."

— Margaret Mead

In April of 1985 Les and I went for our first walk in the Elfin Forest. Somehow we had lived in Los Osos for eight years without being at all aware of this treasure. But at the gentle and persistent insistence of Larry Grimes, we joined him, his wife Pat, Yolanda Waddell, and Phil Ashley and spent a morning exploring. And we were captivated.

We weren't so sure of what we were getting into when Yolanda informed us that we were going to save the Elfin Forest — where in the world would this small band of neighbors find the millions of dollars it was expected to take?

We should have had more faith in Yolanda's vision as we DID find the millions of dollars that were needed — with a lot of help from individuals, elected officials and governmental agencies, the local media, other not-for-profit organizations, many local businesses, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Every time that I drive past Los Osos Rexall and see our mural I think of the thousands of people who were willing to support our effort. I think of the terrific local talent that was donated to create newsletters, bumperstickers, t-shirt logos, etc. I think of the creative ways that people found to raise money — from yard sales to art shows and penny drives. And I think of how proud I am to have been able to play an active role in this effort.

After the purchase, SWAP worked with SLO County

From the President continued on page 2

In Appreciation ...



*Rose and Les Bowker,
Jerry and Elsie Deitz,
Larry Grimes*

*An address given at the SWAP annual meeting
by Yolanda Waddell*

There is a green belt of forest surrounding Chicago, Illinois, where I grew up, called the Forest Preserves. My brother and I occasionally would bicycle from our house in Evanston, just north of Chicago, and pedal out to the preserve close to us to spend the day exploring the "wilderness" as we called it.

Those preserves are still intact due to the vision and hard work of long-forgotten individuals during the early years of this century. Though I don't know who they were, I will always be grateful to them for the chance to experience an urban wilderness.

Here in Los Osos, another group of individuals with a vision organized a chapter of Small Wilderness Area Preservation in 1985, in order to preserve the 90-acre Otto Property, which they renamed the El Moro Elfin Forest. They spent thousands of hours over the course of ten years staffing booths, writing

These five people are altruists in the best sense of the word.

They gave their most precious possessions — their time, energy and skills — without hesitation and with persistence till their mutual goal was accomplished — the saving and securing of the Elfin Forest which they love.

They have given us all a gift which children and adults can enjoy 50 or 100 years from now. We can only say THANK YOU, Rose, Les, Jerry, Elsie and Larry. And the Elfin Forest thanks you too.

In Appreciation continued on page 2

In Appreciation continued from page 2

grants, traveling to Sacramento, networking with government agencies and influential people, producing a newsletter, giving walks, gathering scientific information, keeping track of the treasury – the list goes on.

Then after the hoped-for miracle happened and the \$1.6 million dollars which Mrs. Otto was asking was finally raised in June, 1994, the Elfin Forest became a County Natural Reserve with SWAP as its adoptive parent for ten more years. After escrow closed on the Elfin Forest, other kinds of work began. A serious invasion of Veldt grass and other exotic plants was tackled by weeding crews; erosion caused by off-road bikers and foot traffic was slowed with a replanting project; guidelines for management of the Elfin Forest were written at the request of County Parks. The same unsung group of individuals who worked to save the Elfin Forest worked to restore it and prepare for its future.

Today we have an opportunity to say thank you to five of those individuals who are leaving the SWAP Board of Directors to pursue other activities – and maybe to have an opportunity to relax a bit. Rose Bowker, our tireless President for seven years; Les Bowker, our Recording Secretary, Ecology Advisor and liaison with the Morro Bay Task Force and other environmental entities; Jerry Deitz, our very able Treasurer who kept track of dimes, dollars and thousands of dollars as they rolled in and were paid out; Elsie Deitz, our Special Events and Membership Coordinator who organized so many fundraisers she has lost track, and would like to sell everyone here and Elfin Forest T-shirt; and Larry Grimes who is familiar with every square inch of the Elfin Forest because he has either weeded it, watered it, trimmed its trails or planted native plant seeds and seedlings in it.

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Yolanda Waddell recognizes the contributions of retiring board members at the November annual meeting.

time, energy and skills – without hesitation and with persistence till their mutual goal was accomplished – the saving and securing of the Elfin Forest which they love. They have given us all a gift which children and adults can enjoy 50 or 100 years from now. Not only that, they have made sure that the woodrats, brush bunnies, horned toads, California Quail and all of the other Elfin Forest creatures and plants have a home to live out their lives. We can only say THANK YOU, Rose, Les, Jerry, Elsie and Larry. And the Elfin Forest thanks you too.

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The regular, second Sunday, potluck board meetings for January and February will be held at the NEP Office, at 3rd and El Moro Streets in Baywood Park at 5:30 pm on Sunday, January 11 and Sunday, February 8. Call 528-8151 to see what's on the menu/agenda. See you there!

January 11

February 8

From the President continued from page 1

Parks and Morro Bay State Park to produce the Natural Resource Management Guidelines. We applied for funding for improved access via a boardwalk and began restoration work at Bush Lupine Point. We have continued the educational programs that were started during the fund raising efforts.

While the time has come for me to step down from SWAP's board, I will continue to support SWAP's efforts and look forward to many walks in the Elfin Forest. Come join me!

Rose

Fun and Festive Annual Meeting

The "Indoor Picnic" annual meeting at the South Bay Community Building turned out to be a refuge from the heat rather than cold weather, but "fun and festive" spirits characterized the day.

Treasurer Jerry Deitz conducted the official business of the annual report and adoption of revised by-laws to reflect the Adopt-a-Park agreement with the County of San Luis Obispo. Retiring board members were thanked and new board members, Bethany Griffiths, Bob McDougal, Ann Doshier, Sherry Lampert, Caroline Gmellin, Gordon Hensley, Robin Knapp and Teresa Larsen were welcomed. Deitz thanked the hard-working nominating committee for their recruiting efforts and announced upcoming events.

Yolanda Waddell and Janice Verity recognized the retiring board members and Ron Bayhan honored the winner of the slideshow contest. The winner – well-known local photographer, Marlin Harms – presented his concept of "A Day in the Life of the Elfin Forest" showing aspects from a dramatic shot featuring the grand design of the area to an exquisite close-up of the illusive phoelisma.

The picnic of roasted chicken, salads, goodies and friendly conversation topped off the afternoon. Many thanks to the Nominating Committee and the "Moving Forward" Committee, and especially to the amazing Janice Verity who coordinated it all and went to Paris too!

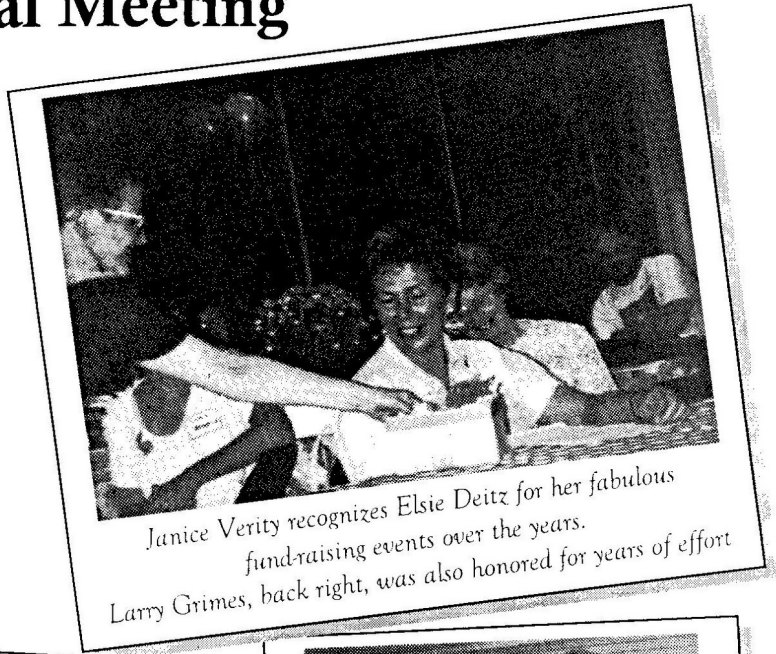


SWAP Committee News

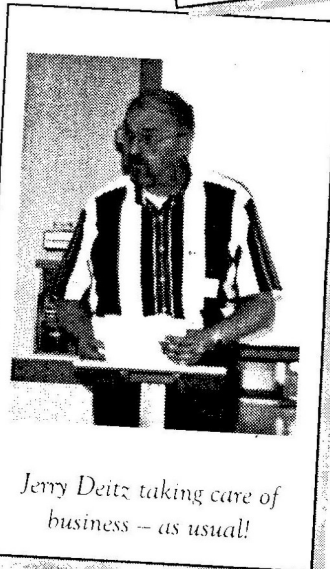
The "Moving Forward" Committee's Next Step, or ... *You're Welcome to Our Workshop on Being a Board Member*

Our committee is now working on the transition period for several new board members who will start their jobs in January. On Sunday, January 11, there will be a special workshop for the board members before the regular meeting. We will go over a typical SWAP year, the functions of the various committees, and the ins and outs of being a board member.

If you have had thoughts of being on the SWAP Board, but have been unsure of what goes on at board meetings, this is your chance to find out "what the deal is"! We welcome SWAP members to attend this workshop. Come and see what you think. Janice Verity (528-8151) and Yolanda Waddell (528-4540) will lead the workshop. Give them a call if you're interested.



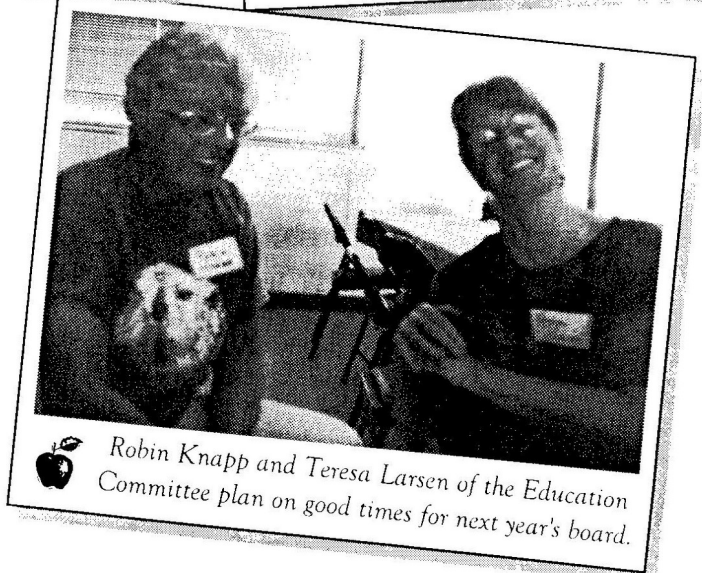
Janice Verity recognizes Elsie Deitz for her fabulous fund-raising events over the years. Larry Grimes, back right, was also honored for years of effort



Jerry Deitz taking care of business – as usual!



New Membership Chair, Bethany Griffiths and Janice Verity put on the delicious spread.

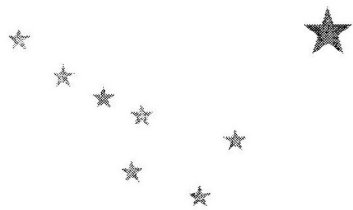


Robin Knapp and Teresa Larsen of the Education Committee plan on good times for next year's board.

Winter Light Show in the Celestial Meadow

by Yolanda Waddell

An excellent place to stargaze during the winter is the Celestial Meadow of the El Moro Elfin Forest. It is surrounded by oak trees and manzanita bushes which block out light from houses and streets. Coastal fog is generally absent, so we have clear dark skies and a tapestry of millions of stars, galaxies and nebulae. A pair of binoculars, or better yet, a telescope, will help to see fainter stars and bring planets into better view.



In the northern sky is one of the most familiar groups of stars – the Big Dipper, which is part of the Great Bear or Ursa Major constellation. It is quite easy to see the dipper, but

not so easy to figure out the bear. In fact, the Chumash Indians thought of it as a fox.. The star in the upper lip of the Big Dipper looks at the North Star, which is at the end of the handle of the Little Dipper (Ursa Minor). The North Star is still used for night navigation world-wide.

Looking south we find the constellation Orion, the Great Hunter, marked by a line of three stars which form the hunter's belt. Below the belt is a slanted row of stars which is Orion's sword, and in the sword is a nebula named M42. This huge cloud of gas and dust is about 26 light years across and 2,000 light years away from the earth. A light year is almost 6 trillion miles.

Orion's right shoulder is the supergiant star, Betelgeuse. The arabic name for Orion is Jauza, the Central One, and Betelgeuse comes from the arabic Ibt-al-Jauza, "armpit of the Central One." Rigel, marking Orion's left knee, is another supergiant star which, although it is 540 light years away and only one-tenth the size of Betelgeuse, seems a little brighter. In actuality, it is ten times brighter, one of the brightest stars known. However, the brightest star in the winter sky is Sirius, the Dog Star which is below and to the left of Orion. It is twenty-seven times as bright as our sun, and is 500,000 times as far away.

If you face west, you will see the Great Square, which looks like a baseball diamond. Go up one large star from the square and you are in the constellation Andromeda. Now move two stars to the right and you are at the spiral galaxy M31. It is a fuzzy blob, best seen with binoculars or telescope. M31 is similar in shape to the Milky Way, our own galaxy which we can see sprinkled across the sky above us like white sand.

THIRD SATURDAY WALKS

December 20

"Gifts of Forest and Bay" will be the theme of marine biologist and county supervisor Bud Laurent, who will help walkers view the Elfin Forest and Morro Bay estuary as a complete wetlands system. A tour of the Elfin Forest will include panoramic views of the bay and shell middens left by ancient Chumash who used the bay as a source of food.

January 17

Our annual Fungus Foray with Dennis Sheridan. If El Niño performs as predicted, Elfin Forest fungi will be in full bloom. Dennis will lead us in an exploration of the Elfin Forest floor for boletes, Black elfin saddles, Earthstars, Golden caps and many other fascinating fungi. Some of the exploration may involve crawling, so don't wear your best levis. Do bring samples of fungi from your yard for help in identifying them.

February 21

Join birder Lisa Trayser at **8:30 a.m.** for a look at winter feathered visitors and residents of the Elfin Forest. Lisa is an active member of Morro Coast Audubon who conducts weekly Birds At Ebb Tide viewing sessions at the Audubon Overlook. She'll help us to spot Brown and Spotted Towhees, California Thrashers, Warblers, Bewick's Wrens, and of course ducks and shorebirds; we are likely to see 30 to 40 species during our walk. Bring your binoculars.

Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at 9:30 a.m. (unless otherwise noted) at the north end of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Only the heaviest of El Niño rains will cancel a walk; if rain is light, put on your poncho and join us! Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes. We ask that you not bring dogs or other pets. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

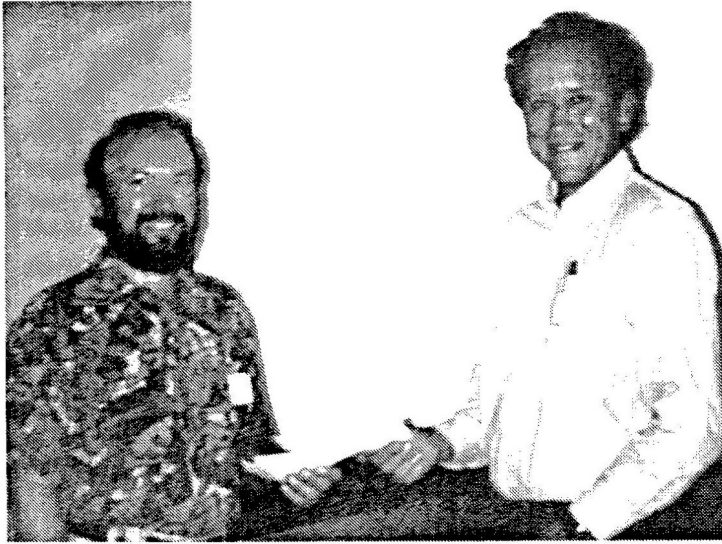
Call 528-4540 evenings for information.

January and February have the best displays of bright stars out of the entire year. It is worth bundling up in warm coat, hat and gloves to take advantage of a sight that is rare in most inhabited areas in the world due to light pollution and smog. We have a great light show right here in our own backyard – don't miss it!

(This article also appeared in January 1991 Sun Bulletin as "View From the Celestial Meadow" – part of the "View From the Elfin Forest series)



Marlin Harms' Photos Explore a Day in the Life of the Elfin Forest



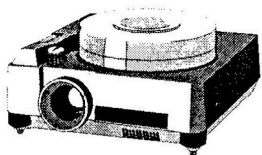
Ron Bayhan presents Marlin Harms with a \$50 gift certificate from Photo Pros in Morro Bay for his winning slides.

Citing Marlin Harms' keen ability to find beauty in familiarity and to help viewers explore things differently through photos than in real time, Ron Bayhan announced the winner of SWAP's first slideshow contest. Harms received a \$50 gift certificate generously donated by Dwayne Jojola at Photo Pros, 440 Quintana Road in Morro Bay. In addition, he will receive photo credit whenever SWAP uses his work in production or presentations.

Keep SWAP in mind when you take photos in the Elfin Forest. The Education Committee is developing a revised Teacher's Guide with media presentations which could feature your work. They are always looking for material. Call Yolanda Waddell at 528-4540.

SWAP WISH LIST:

Wishes do come true! Many thanks to Jerri Chadwick for arranging for SWAP to get a file cabinet for the storage space.



Now the SWAP Education Committee is looking for a magic elf to help with some special "wishes." The committee is tooling up for increased outreach to schools, and would like to have a carousel slide projector and screen available for school talks. Does anyone out there have a slide projector sitting in its case in a closet, unused from one year to the next? Or do you have a screen unused because you transferred your home movies to videotape? If you would care to donate either item to SWAP, please call 528-4540 evenings.

Another Volunteer Effort Supports SWAP

Caroline Gmelin of Los Osos was one of many who volunteered to observe the performance of the Early Warning Siren System in a September test conducted by the County Office of Emergency Services and PG&E. In gratitude, PG&E provided a donation to a charity or non-profit organization chosen by the volunteers. Many thanks to Caroline for selecting SWAP to benefit from her volunteer work.

Bird Fest Volunteers Needed

SWAP is one of the co-sponsors of the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival – January 16-19, 1998 – so we're hoping to get some volunteers from our ranks to help with the event. If you're interested please call Jerry Deitz at 528-7136.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

to F. Appel, R. Avelar, R. Ball, M. Bates,
R. Belknap, E. Berg, Bank of America Foundation,
J. Boyer, R. Braun, W. Buckmaster, K. Budge,
B. Burke, J. Burnham, P. Childers,
Central Coast Natural History Association,
E. Dabritz, K. Davis, E. Doering, R. Easton,
M. Elliot, A. Elijah, M. Engle, L. Farwell, S. Fenn,
P. Foulstone, A. Frey, D. Graves, C. Hallstrom,
M. Harms, V. Hodge, S. Howe, R. Hudson,
W. Jackson, H. James, N. Jeffries, C. Jeffrey, S. Jio,
P. King, A. Knodel, P. Lafollette, M. Mayfield,
J. McCullagh, R. McDougle, S. McLaughlin,
M. Moore, R. Mountain, M. Munson, E. Nelson,
M. Norby, L. Norwood, R. O'Dell, S. Palmer, N. Pier,
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B. Rosenthal, N. Ruhl, R. Sansaricq,
State of California, C. Stephens, J. Stits, C. Taylor,
D. Thompson, D. Thomson, D. Tolley, P. VanCoops,
N. Vaughan, B. Wamsley, C. Ward, R. Ward,
J. Whitmire, D. Wiedenkiller, A. Wieman,
N. Wightman, E. Yukelson-Ungar.

Many thanks to the Membership Committee
whose efforts have worked so well.

We appreciate the renewal of support from those who
check the membership renewal date on the newsletter
address label and from those who respond to the
"reminders." You're all great in our book!



Winter Bird Festival Winging Its Way to Morro Bay

Come celebrate the return of the wintering birds to Morro Bay during the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival slated for the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, January 16-19, 1998.

The festival will offer over 35 expert-guided field trips for all levels of birders. Among the scheduled outings are ocean trips to see pelagic birds and whales; kayak trips on the bay and estuary; van trips to look for the California Condor, Sandhill Cranes, owls, and raptors; and a "Big Day," a strenuous event where birders will try to see at least 100 species of birds.

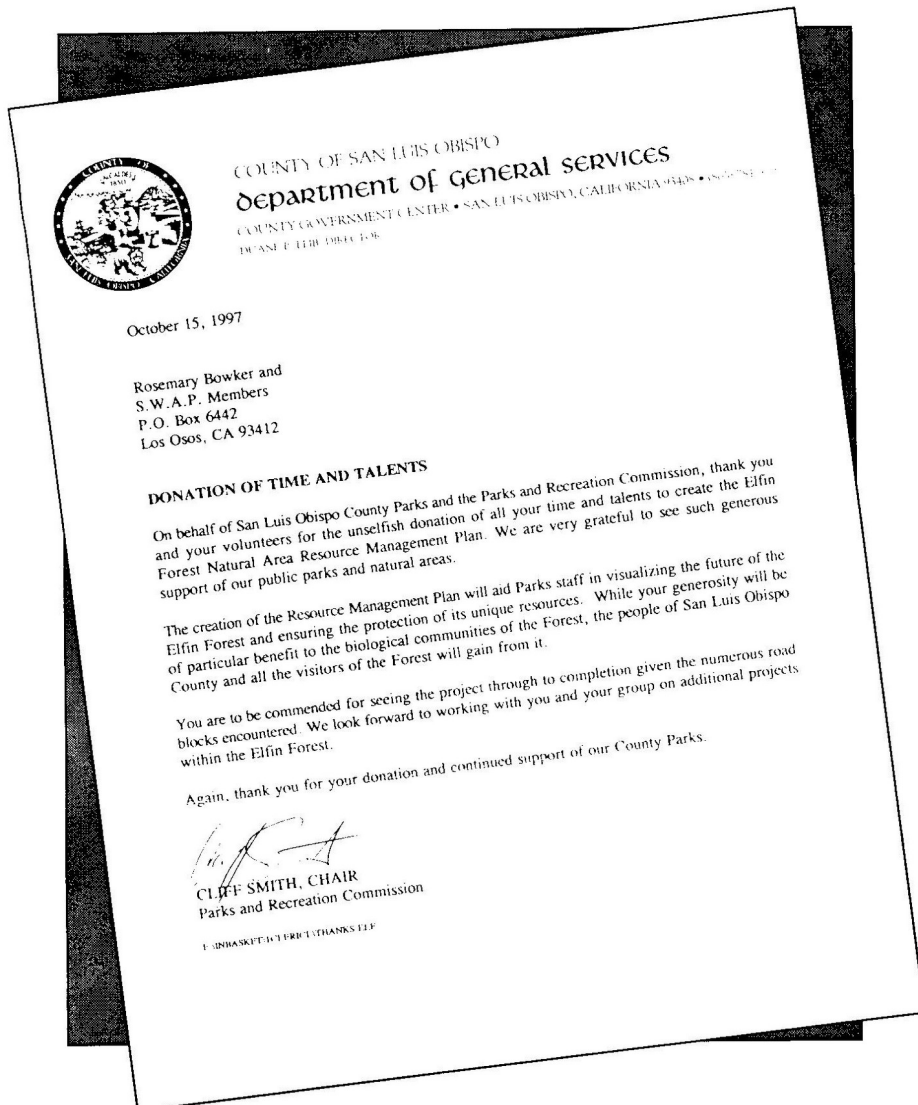
There will also be field trips to Monarch Butterfly wintering sites, a search for mushrooms in the Elfin Forest, and a jaunt focusing on bird photography. Over 20 workshops and presentations will be offered as well, such as "Beginning Birding," "California Warblers," "Gull Identification," "Elephant Seals on the Rebound," "Field Guide Update," "Nestboxes," "Gardening for Birds and Butterflies," and much more.

Local experts slated to be on hand are bird photographer Rich Hansen, Peregrine falcon expert Steve Schubert, and "Mr. Estuary"

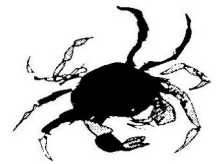
himself — Harold Wieman. The Saturday banquet will feature Luis Baptista, an expert in bird vocalizations who will give some insights into "How Birds Communicate." There will also be an art exhibit of local outdoor artists, and a nationally known bird artist — Keith Hansen — who will lead a workshop and field trip on "Field Sketching."

This year's headquarters will be at The Inn at Morro Bay, where the art exhibit will be set up, as well as numerous vendors. It will also be the site of the Saturday banquet. For more information and/or to sign up, contact the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce for an event brochure — (805) 772-4467, (800) 231-0592, P.O. Box 876, Morro Bay, CA 93443-0876. *The deadline for registration is December 16*, though additional registrations will be taken after that date as space allows.

As was the case in the inaugural event last year, this year's Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival is co-sponsored by SWAP, Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, Central Coast Natural History Association, Morro Coast Audubon Society, Friends of the Estuary, and California State Parks. *(Volunteers are needed — see page 5!!)*

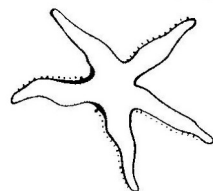


Seashore Wonders Returns to Museum



The Central Coast Natural History Association and PG&E will present their semi-annual Seashore Wonders program for three days beginning the Saturday after Christmas — December 27-29, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Museum of Natural History in Morro Bay State Park.

Sea stars, anemones, crabs, barnacles, sea cucumbers and other creatures that populate our local



seashores will be on display, and specially trained docents will be on hand to explain, answer questions and let visitors touch some of the animals.

In addition, each day at 10:30 a.m., the Morro Bay Puppeteers will present a special show about the creatures that live in our tidepools.

For more info call the Museum of Natural History at 772-2694.

First in a Series

Plants of the Elfin Forest: Purple or Blue Nightshade

by Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

Blue nightshade (*Solanum xanthii*) is one of the plants that seem to disappear until it produces its bluish flowers with yellow centers. Flowers are produced primarily in the spring, but a few usually can be found any month of the year.

A coastal area like the Pygmy Forest is made up of a number of plant groupings called plant communities. The area where one finds the blue nightshade is the Coastal Dune Scrub which consists of a number of low mounded shrubs of which mock heather is the most common. Mock heather (*Ericameria ericoides*) is the yellow flowered shrub with tiny leaves that is just finishing its bloom and is now covered with white plumed fruits.

Blue nightshades are hard to find when not in bloom because they rarely grow alone away from other shrubs. They are one of several species of plants that must grow in the shade of one of the dominant shrubs. A dominant plant that shelters another species under or within it is called a nurse plant. The environment under the dominant shrub is moister due to the shade by the nurse plant. The nurse plant also protects the leaves of the blue nightshade from the drying winds. Winds within the canopy of the nurse plant are much lower than in the area between the shrubs and this

significantly lowers the amount of evaporation from the plant's leaves.

What is the meaning of the common name? There is no problem with the purple or blue as this refers to the color of the petals or corolla. The name, nightshade, however is much more interesting. It dates back at least to Medieval Europe or even to Roman times and refers to pulling down the blackness of sleep or death around one. This is quite appropriate as the Eurasian relatives of the blue nightshade, bitter-sweet nightshade (*S. dulcamara*), black nightshade (*S. nigra*), and its close European relatives such as henbane (*Hyocyamus*), mandrake (*Mandagora*) and belladonna (*Atropa*) are all slightly to moderately poisonous.

The green parts of all nightshades contain a cornucopia of poisonous alkaloid compound, some such as atropine (from belladonna), are still used medicinally. There are, however, a number of members of the nightshades from other parts of the world that produce edible parts.

There are the edible fruits of egg plant

(*S. melongea*) from Africa and the pepino (*S. muricatum*) from Latin America. The most important of the edible nightshades is the white, Idaho, or Irish potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) which is native to the South American Andes.



Purple or Blue Nightshade flowering.

Kayakers, Boaters Can Adversely Impact Bay Waterfowl

Kayakers and other small boaters also need to realize that they impact waterfowl activities on the bay as much as, and in some cases more than, hunters. In their zeal to enjoy the bird populations, recreational boaters often get too close to the waterfowl, flushing them and disturbing their resting and eating activities. In many cases these birds have flown thousands of miles to reach the sanctuary and rich food resources of Morro Bay, and their populations depend on being able to recharge here in the bay.

Please give the birds adequate space – read their “body language” and back away from them if they seem to start acting agitating or nervous.



By the same token, be aware if the birds don't move or act nervous as you approach – you may be paddling straight into a flock of hunters' decoys. Please keep in mind that this may not only create an unpleasant and/or hazardous situation, but that California is one of the states that has an anti-hunter harassment law.



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Diablo Canyon Power Plant
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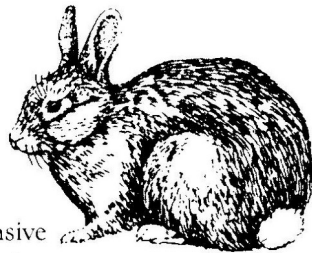
- Member \$12 Defender \$100
- Steward \$25 Champion \$250
- Protector \$50 Life Member \$1000
- I want to help, please call me!

Have you renewed your membership on time?
Check out the label on this newsletter for the date you last sent in your membership.

EVERY membership counts!!

Make checks payable to SWAP,
Mail to Small Wilderness Area Preservation,
P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6442

Elfin Forest Pocket Guide Available



SWAP is proud to have published the comprehensive "Pocket Guide to the Plants and Animals of the Elfin Forest Natural Area."

Edited by Yolanda Waddell, with illustrations by Becky McFarland, the extensive, 25-page guide covers 24 mammals, 13 amphibians and reptiles, 110 birds, 121 arthropods, 150 flowering plants and 35 fungi known to occur in the Elfin Forest. The species lists were compiled by Aryan Roest, Ph.D., Ron Ruppert, Jim Royer, V.L. Holland, Ph.D. and Dennis Sheridan. Funds for printing were provided by a grant from the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors' Environmental Projects Fund.

Copies of this guide will be available for \$1 on Third Saturday Walks, and is also available at Volumes of Pleasure Bookstore in Los Osos.