



O A K L E A V E S

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

Workshop Begins the SWAP Board Year

Inspired by the new year and the Collaboration Forum on Non-profits at Cuesta College, Yolanda Waddell and Janice Verity conducted a workshop before the January board meeting for new and old SWAP board members. The response was excellent.

The workshop began with all members sharing their backgrounds and past connections to SWAP and other volunteer activities. There is an impressive source of talent available on the board and members were enthused about the prospect of working with such a diverse group. The board agreed it was valuable to take time to know each other before the business-filled regular meeting.

For each board member, Yolanda and Janice prepared a notebook intended to be the main source for any background a board member needs whether it be the by-laws, the history of SWAP, or the functioning of each committee. Especially appreciated is a section by Rose Bowker on the SWAP calendar year and a complete list of all individual and group contacts a SWAP board member would need.

The workshop ended with a history of SWAP by Yolanda and a report from the Cuesta Forum on Non-profits by Beth Wimer and Robin Knapp. The forum encouraged board members to seek organization goals as a group. As a result, the SWAP Board will have a special planning and vision session on a Saturday morning in the near future.

An outside facilitator will be asked to work with us.

In addition, the board settled on some new procedures such as having a rotating meeting coordinator which will give our group some leadership training besides serving as board members.

The enthusiasm generated by the successful workshop got SWAP off to a great start for 1998.

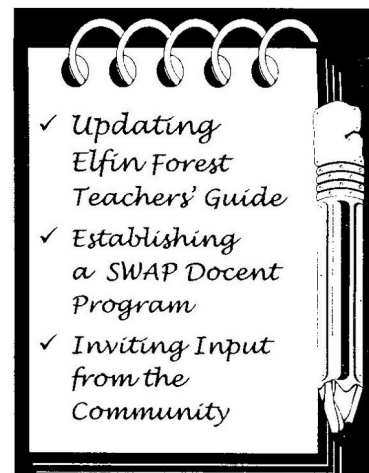
Education Committee Hard at Work

After a brief holiday hiatus, the Education Committee (EC) is back to work on the update of the Elfin Forest Teacher's Guide. Following the recommendations of teachers asked to participate in an information gathering session, new and more comprehensive lesson plans will be added to the guide. To augment resources for the guide, we continue our search for biologists' reports and informational articles on the fauna and flora of the Elfin Forest. Teresa Larson will investigate environmental and educational websites for relevant articles. Future committee plans include a meeting with Pete Jenny, County Parks Facilities Manager, to better understand his vision for interpretive and educational use of the Elfin Forest.

Another EC top priority this year is to establish a SWAP Docent Program. A training program and a resource manual are being developed.

Special thanks go to Sandra Zaida, County Parks Planner, for the long-term loan of a slide projector and Ann Calhoun for her donation of a screen. Their generosity is greatly appreciated. The projector and screen will enable the committee to update the traveling slide program and enhance outreach to schools.

We continue invite input from the community. Do you have articles or studies related to our projects? Teachers – have you used the guide? What activity did you use? What was the outcome? If you are interested in sharing your ideas, the SWAP Docent Program or joining the Education Committee, you may contact either Beth Wimer at 528-2027 or Yolanda Waddell at 528-4540.



- ✓ *Updating Elfin Forest Teachers' Guide*
- ✓ *Establishing a SWAP Docent Program*
- ✓ *Inviting Input from the Community*

Happy Birthday Mary Coffeen!

By Elsie Deitz

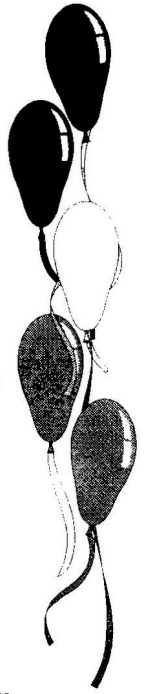
Long before anyone reported seeing even the shadow of an elf, Mary Coffeen was conducting informal walks through the Elfin Forest. Following in the footsteps of Don Klopfer, who cut the first trail through the original state-owned 50 acres, she was engaged in extolling the virtues of the gnarled oaks and informing anyone who wanted to hear, about the plant life underfoot.



Mary describes herself as a naturalist, one who is self-taught through his or her own observations as opposed to the scientist who works mainly with defining and cataloging in a technical sense. Asked about what influenced and began her focus in this direction, she spoke about the summer log cabin her family owned at a lake in Michigan where she could run free and explore where she chose. Approaching the water soundlessly, she was treated to the sight of turtles, even a snake basking in the sunshine on rocks unaware of their audience. She peeked and poked and read, continuing eventually with college courses to shape her life-long pursuit.

Mary and her husband started their life together in Wildermar, California. The house they built with their own hands and a great deal of found material had no electricity, an innovative roof made of water heater covers—in general, a lifestyle enjoyed by the young and adventurous. Rachel Carson's *SILENT SPRING* was one of the books they read aloud to each other. It had a profound effect on them both, creating their special interest in the aims and activities of the Sierra Club. Eventually, Mary became a leader-naturalist with the organization, filling a large need by leading 9-day backpacking trips for beginners. For 15 years she regaled those hikers with stories about the wonders of the area and the plants they met along the way. She feels that the interest she stimulated during that time helped to save Mineral King for posterity.

Some years later, she made her home in Claremont where she was the Supervisor of Youth Education of the Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Gardens. Founded in 1927, it



Happy Birthday continued on page 3

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The regular, second Sunday board meetings for March and April will be held at the NEP Office, at 3rd and El Moro Streets in Baywood Park at 5:00 pm on Sunday, March 8 and Sunday, April 12. Call 528-4540 to see what's on the agenda. See you there!

march 8

april 12

1998 SWAP Board Members

Yolanda Waddell, Walks and Education Coordinator
Bob McDougle, Treasurer
Janice Verity, Volunteer Coordinator
Pat Grimes, Publications Coordinator
Gordon Hensley, Grants Coordinator
Beth Wimer, Education Committee
Robin Knapp, Education Committee
Bethany Griffiths, Membership Co-chair
Sherry Lampert, Membership Co-chair
Teresa Larson, Education Committee
Les Bowker, At Large
Ann Doscher, At Large
Caroline Gmelin, At Large

Happy Birthday continued from page 2

was privately endowed and had over 500,000 specimens of native plants, many collected by botanists or naturalists attached to early exploring parties.

Mary's life since settling in Morro Bay in 1980 has been filled with sharing her love of the Central Coast and her special relationship with our plants. It happened that visitors to the Natural History Museum would ask for a guide to local flora and fauna but none existed for this area. Mary talks about being invited to a luncheon with some NHA friends. By the time dessert was served, she found she had agreed to write the book that became *Central Coast Wildflowers*. In her introduction, she says: "Writing this book has been fun and also hard work and I grew a little in the process. I don't suppose many of us expect to grow much after age 70, so I'm glad I was asked to write it and was permitted to organize it according to my perception of the grand natural world that still remains around us in this time and place. I truly hope readers will join me and other environmentalists in respecting and protecting this dynamic living world that supports all life on our planet."

Since the time some years ago when two friends visited her from Claremont and they climbed to the top of Cerro Alto, Mary has returned to enjoy the diversity of plants and seasonal changes. Just mention the possibility of a day in this park off highway 41 and Mary has hat in hand and her dog Blue ready to take a hike in her favorite haunt. But Mary doesn't spend all of her time in the hills; she's busy with the Native Plant Society, Audubon, leading walks for SWAP, and doing much more than most people twenty years her junior would attempt.

Yolanda Waddell has this to say about Mary: "During the 18 years I have known Mary Coffeen, she has been a model for me and a mentor as well. Her love of native



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- Mary Coffeen,
from the introduction to
Central Coast Wildflowers

plants is contagious, and her talents, thoroughness and stamina are remarkable. It's a delight to hear her stories about each of her plant friends, gleaned from research and her own observation. Following Mary up the Cerro Alto Peak trail is a challenge; she walks briskly ahead, talking all the while, and I come puffing behind, hoping not to be outdone by this super senior. She's earned the respect and love of all whose lives have been touched by her. She has taught me and countless others to look at the marvelous details of the world around us with wonder."

Happy Birthday, Mary, to an elf who is 80 years young!



BOOKS FOR YOU . . . SEEDFOLKS

By Paul Fleischman, Illustrated by Judy Pedersen, Harper Collins 1997

In Pacific Grove author, Paul Fleischman's gem of small book, SEEDFOLKS, gardening plants the seeds of life in a run down, Balkanized Cleveland neighborhood. This miracle tale of a community garden spontaneously cultivated in a trash-collecting vacant lot is told in thirteen unique voices. Each story is a variation on great ongoing filled-a longing for a connection with the living world including the people in their own neighborhood.

The gardeners are inspired to cultivate their plots for a variety of personal reasons: connecting to an unknown father, impressing a girlfriend, or making some quick money. But the residents of Gibb Street harvest a newfound sense of community, and even rebirth, as they "find excuses to let their natural friendliness out," as Amir puts it. SEEDFOLKS reminds us that growing things in harmony with the natural cycles of life is an international language, like making music. Whether they were growing cilantro, ginger or arugula, the gardeners were all subject to "the same weather and pests, the same neighborhood and the same parental emotions toward our plants," which stimulated the growth of communication and connections beyond the safe and the known. The book jacket puts it most eloquently: Fleischman has written a "hymn to the power of plants and of people." Each story is a variation on a great longing filled – a longing for connection with the living world including the people in their own neighborhood.

An Incredible Experience

By Myron Hood



Saturday, November 15, 1997 was an unusual day. Despite the heavy downpour, I went out to Montaña de Oro to observe the extremely high 7.0 tide expected with the juxtaposition of a full moon and the warming El Niño current. The swells from the storm were predicted to be as high as 23 feet. I was planning to enjoy a great show with spectacular effects.

Alone on the bluffs in a magnificent storm, I was absolutely awed by the power of nature exhibited by the breaking waves and the pounding surf. The waves came in bunches of five or more, in quick succession followed by a lapse before the next set would come

rolling in. They were breaking about 30 yards offshore, so the bluffs were spared their full force.

The storm cleared a bit as I wandered along to a place where the shoreline cut in considerably. And as I watched the waves breaking back toward the beach, I saw a young deer run down the hillside and onto a rock outcropping extending into the surf. At low tide, on calm days, the tide-pools at the base attract people onto that rock ridge all the time, but I had no idea what made the deer go out there. An unseen predator, perhaps a coyote or a mountain lion, came to mind.

The deer's timing was very bad. A new set of swells was coming in and the first one caught the deer completely by surprise and swept it off the rock into the surf. Struggling to get its balance, the deer tried to swim to shore when the wave backlashed it head on and pushed it out to sea. As the deer thrashed about, the second wave smashed into the first. Flipped onto its back, I could see only four legs sticking out of the churning water. The deer fought hard to right itself and managed to do so just as the next wave hit.

I ran up the channel toward the struggling deer thinking I must do something, but what could I do in that wild surf? I felt sick watching another big wave carry the deer still farther out to sea. And then I lost sight of it. Hopelessly, I searched the swells going as close as I dared to the edge of the cliff. It was lost.

Suddenly, the deer was scrambling up the cliff and stood on the path not 15 feet from me. Sensing me, it stopped, but looking at its eyes so totally glazed over I don't

THIRD SATURDAY WALKS

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 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.

March 21

Take a discovery walk through the Elfin Forest with two environmental education specialists: Susan Rocha and Teresa Larson. Listen for the voices of the chaparral, smell the fragrance of sage and other coastal dune scrub plants, and learn about the interesting plants, animals and habitats that make the Elfin Forest a special place. For all ages.

April 18

Wildflowers are at their peak in the Elfin Forest during April. Join Mary Coffeen, author of *Central Coast Wildflowers*, for a joyous exploration through the forest's dune scrub, chaparral and groves to find and identify the blooms of its native plants.

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.

think it really saw me at all. Soaking wet and completely out of breath, its first reaction to me was to go back down the cliff to the sea. Realizing this, I immediately started to back slowly away. I was afraid if I turned and ran, I might scare it even more. The deer stood still, then it shook its head as if to clear its eyes and slowly proceeded up the cliff, turned away from me, and trotted across the path to the nearby hill. At the crest, it stopped and turned to gaze at the surging sea from which it had just escaped.

I watched the deer disappear over the hill. Physically relieved, but mentally exhausted from witnessing this ordeal, I wondered, would anyone believe my tale?

Meet Two New SWAP Board Members

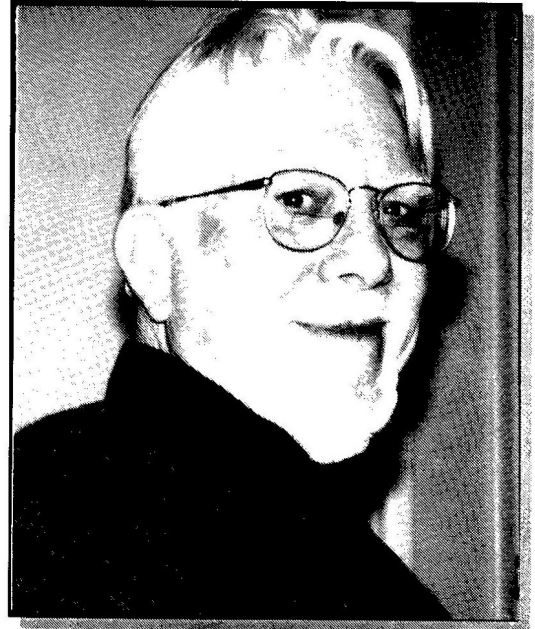
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Teresa earned a degree in outdoor recreation with a minor in biology at San Diego State University. She has done research and field work at natural history museums and agencies such as the Coastal Commission, state and national parks as well as for non-profits. She is currently a substitute naturalist at Rancho El Chorro and also serves on the Parks and Recreation Commission for the City of San Luis Obispo. She loves working outdoors and is very interested in open space issues and the psychological relationship between people and the natural world.

Our new treasurer brings eclectic and extensive experience to the SWAP board. Bob McDougale is a retired aerospace engineer who worked in the industry for 33 years and still found time to indulge many interests. An archaeologist, a sailing enthusiast, a jazz aficionado, and a genealogist, Bob worked on a dig near Barstow for ten years and as a docent at the Cabrillo Marine Museum in San Pedro when he wasn't putting satellites into orbit. He is currently a docent for the Museum of Natural History in Morro Bay and also the treasurer for the Basin Street Regulars Jazz Club.



Many thanks to a spirited and unsinkable group of acorn planters who got the Elfin Forest off to a great New Year of the third day of 1998!



THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

to W. Akle, Anonymous, C.D. Aulenbrock, W.S. & M.H. Autrey, V. Black, C. Boomer, R. Bracken, J. Broshears, V. Cicero, N. Conant, B. DeWitt-Moylan, K. Delzell, P. DeWitt, L. Edgcomb, V. Endres, F. Fairbrother, J. Frawley Trust, K. Garner, M. Goldin, J. Grover, J. Havlena, A. Hill, K. Hurd, A. Kimura, R. & R. Lane, A. Lindeman, M. Macgillivray, B. Machado, L. Martinez, M. Mayfield, Morro Coast Audubon, M. Michel, M. Miller, L. Noel, M. Oshenanko, J. Otto, C. Pardo, PG&E, J. Radabauagh, I. Reti, R. & C. Riggins M. Rodacker, H. Schuchardt, B. Schwenoha, N. Seal, B. Taylor, Y. Waddell, L. Wallender, M. Weiss, E. Wimer, J. Wood, J.A. Youngner, R. Zeitzew.

ESRI's GIS will help SWAP

by Gordon Hensley

A couple of months ago I received an email from our editor, Pat Grimes, who along with our Past President Rose Bowker, was coercing, I mean asking, me to contribute a small article on a continuing attempt to establish a GIS for the Elfin Forest. Many reading this are looking at those initials and asking "a GIS? I thought we were preserving the Elfin Forest!"

The answer, of course, is "that's right". A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a rather fancy type of computer database. If you've already heard of it, you may know it as a very powerful computer mapping system. It is that. But it is also a tool for managing information based on where it is located. For most of us who are not math and computer oriented, the best part of a GIS is that the main product looks like a map instead of columns and tables and statistics.

GIS is becoming one of the foremost tools currently used to make planning decisions. Anticipating that SWAP's role in leading the decisions at the Elfin Forest will be passed on to State and County planners, a project was initiated in 1996 to set up a GIS database for the property. The current trails map in the Elfin Forest Management Plan was produced from this database. SWAP's application of GIS technology involves a process of digitizing an aerial photograph of the Forest. Digitizing makes a computer able to "see" and analyze the photograph.

For many years it was too expensive for an individual, small business, or small organization like SWAP to acquire

the computers and software to operate and maintain a Geographic Information System.

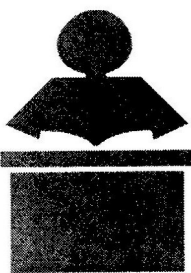
In fact it wasn't until 1995 that Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) made an easy to use, desktop version available. As the saying goes, timing is everything. With recent cost reductions in computers and a generous grant of software from ESRI, my consulting firm has partnered with SWAP to continue using this powerful tool to complete SWAP objectives at the Elfin Forest.

Using the existing database as the starting point, Les Bowker and I plan to be able to compare future aerial photographs to measure the success of SWAP's restoration, revegetation, and maintenance efforts at the Forest. My dream is that as we speed into the next millennium, the Elfin Forest will become a model of restoration, management, and planning for small, environmentally unique preserves. Who knows, over the years we may even be able to snap a picture of an elf or two.



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Museum's Monday Morning Mind Walks Continue



The "Monday Morning Mind Walk" programs continue through February at the Museum of Natural History. All the programs begin at 10:15 a.m. last about two hours. Admission is \$3 for non-members, free for members. The Museum is located in Morro Bay State Park.

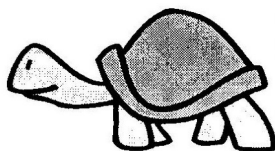
On February 9, a slide show by Sean McKeown will highlight the many spectacular reptiles, amphibians, birds and plants evolving in isolation on The Seychelles, Madagascar and islands of the Indian Ocean.

On February 16, join Margie Harker for an informative talk and slide show about three local species: the California red-legged

frog, two-striped garter snake, and Western pond turtle. Learn what they eat, who eats them, where they live, and more. Harker will discuss ongoing research being done at Piedras Blancas, where she is a biologist with USGS-Biological Resources.

Learn about the world of "Fantastical Spiders" on February 23 when Richard Little presents information on many local species of spiders, including tarantulas, wolf spiders, orb weavers, jumping spiders, and black widows. Little is currently a staff entomologist and agriculture biologist with SLO County, and formerly worked as a biologist for the Department of Food and Agriculture.

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



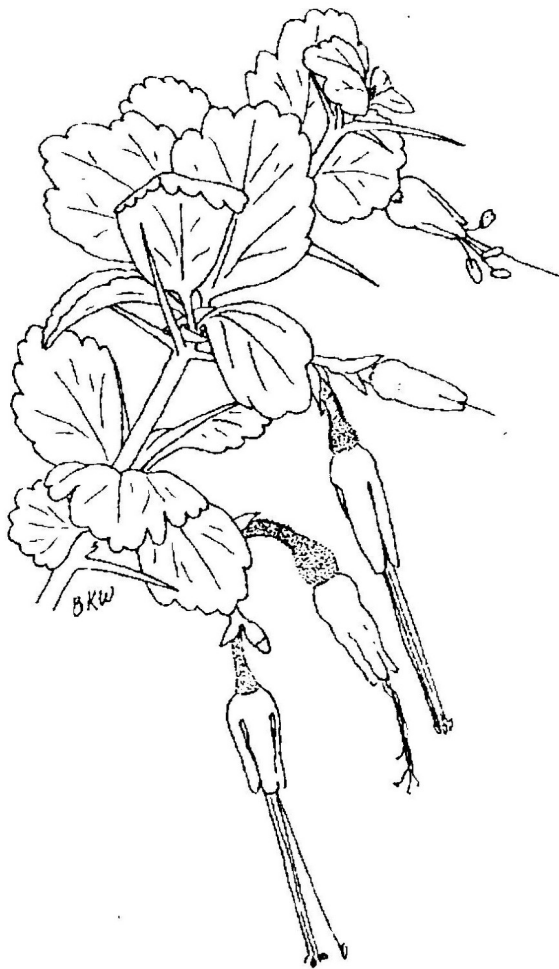
Plants of the Elfin Forest: Fuchsia Flowered Gooseberry

by Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

The plant chosen for discussion in this issue is the fuchsia flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosa*). Bonnie Walters did the drawing, originally, as a newsletter cover for local chapter of the California Native Plant Society. Later the drawing was used as one of the components in a figure in Dr. David J. Keil and my textbook in Vascular Plant Taxonomy published by Kendall/Hunt. The fuchsia flowered gooseberry is a shrub with thickish, dark green leaves that are approximately 1 to 1½ inches wide. The dark red flowers begin to be produced by late November or Early December. So, one should be able to find it blooming right now. Being one of the few native plant species to flower this early in the winter, it provides food to the Anna's hummingbirds. Anna's hummingbird is our earliest nesting hummingbird and it is able to nest this early partially because of the nectar provided by this beautiful gooseberry. Look for the fuchsia-flowered gooseberry on the moister north and east facing slopes in clearings among the oaks and among the shrubs of the coastal chaparral. I would not expect to find it on the level, since this area is too dry and is dominated primarily by dune scrub. This gooseberry is rarely common, but is found as scattered individuals. That is, you will have to search for them. But, the search is worth the effort. By February or March, the flowers will be replaced by sticky, somewhat bristly reddish berries. Unlike the commercial gooseberries, which are primarily species from Eurasia and Eastern North America, this berry is quite dry and rather unpalatable. In spite of the fact that the berries are not edible, the plant is quite beautiful, is easy to grow from cuttings taken from the base of the stems, and is good for attracting hummingbirds. Since it is one of our few native plant species that is commonly sold at commercial nurseries, it can be seen regularly in suburban Southern

California landscapes. In the wild, it loses most of its leaves during the summer months. However, if given a small amount of summer water, it is practically evergreen. The genus *Ribes*, contains plants that are commonly called gooseberries and currants. The name, gooseberry, is given to species of *Ribes* that bear sharp spines on their stems and sometimes also on the berries.

Currants, on the other hand, are *Ribes* that have stems and berries that lack these sharp spines and are therefore smooth. Some of us, who grew up in the eastern United States may remember hearing bad things about gooseberries. You may have heard that "the only good gooseberry is a dead gooseberry". This is because a few species of gooseberry serve as the alternative host of the white pine blister rust which is a major disease of the commercially important eastern white pine tree (*Pinus strobilis*). This thinking has pretty much been abandoned, even in the East. Foresters found that it was impossible to eradicate the gooseberry even after many years of trying. But more important for us, we don't have any white pines, commercial or not, growing in our area. All of the members of the white pine group that grow in California are mountain trees that grow from



Fuchsia Flowered Gooseberry illustration by Bonnie Walters.

medium to high elevations. All of these California pines are of either no commercial value or resistant to the rust. Besides, there are over 30 species of *Ribes* in California and nine species in San Luis Obispo County. Wild gooseberries and currants are much too common and diverse in the West to have any hope of eradication, even if there were economic species involved. There are at least two species of gooseberry recorded for the elfin forest area. Besides the fuchsia-flowered gooseberry there is also what I call the canyon gooseberry (*Ribes menziesii*). I hope to talk about this gooseberry at some other time.

Production and mailing costs for this newsletter have been underwritten by a grant from Pacific Gas and Electric Company.

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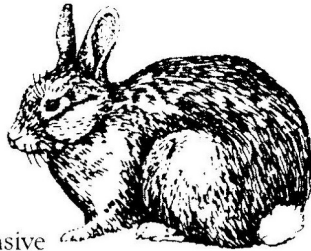


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Elfin Forest Pocket Guide Available



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.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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