



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 ♦ (805) 546-1199 ♦ APRIL / MAY 1998

The Elfin Forest Is #1

That's right. According to an article by Jim Royer in the Morro Coast Audubon Society's newsletter, Pacific Flyway, the Elfin Forest is the best local spot for sitting and viewing the largest variety of bird species. For the first time a birding group participating in a "Big Sit" spotted over 100 species of birds at the Bush Lupine Point overlook in the Elfin Forest. While not all the reports are in yet, preliminary statistics suggest that the Elfin Forest has the title of the best place to sit and view birds in the United States!



Royer, who has conducted many Third Saturday Walks for SWAP, writes that close to 100 groups across the country counted species while restricted to a 17-foot circle in the October 17, 1997 "Big Sit." Until the nine birders from Morro Coast Audubon sighted 101 species over that day, no group had previously broken the 100 species barrier. (93 species had been sighted near Sweet Springs in 1996.) Royer attributes the extensive views of bay and hillsides for providing superb viewing for waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and herons although the land birding was somewhat weak.

The Elfin Forest has always been # 1 with our chapter of SWAP, but it's good to hear some statistics from the people who know to support our views. It's even more important to recognize that preserving this habitat improves the quality of life for so many species of birds.

*"One means of sanity
is to retain a hold on the
natural world, to remain,
insofar as we can,
good animals."
—Wallace Stegner*

Elfin Forest Boardwalk Project Update

Members of SWAP met with SLO County Parks representatives recently to clarify progress on the status of the boardwalk project since the timeline suggested in the grant applications will need to be extended. County Parks Director, Pete Jenny will report to the board on the request for a time extension as well as the current status of the Los Osos Community Organization (LOCO) project for an overlook/visitor center at South Bay Boulevard and Turri Road (state property). This project was at one time linked with SLO County's Elfin Forest Interpretive Trail Project for mobility impaired groups.

This linkage of two projects on separate timelines for funding from both the state Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation (EEM) Grant and the Federal Transportation Enhancement Act (TEA) Grant, along with staff turnover in the County Parks Office, has created a need for reclarification of the scope of the Elfin Forest project and the exact amount of SWAP's financial commitment for 20% of the matching funds.

As part of our Adopt-a-Park agreement with County Parks, SWAP has already raised over \$17,000 toward our matching funds for the EEM grant. To date, SWAP has received funds from Wild Horse Winery, Pacific Gas & Electric Company, The Chevron Companies, and community project funds from the SLO County Board of Supervisors. County Parks has also received a grant from the California Trails and Greenways Association to support this project.

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SWAP Takes Part in First Local History Day

The La Cañada de Los Osos Historical Group sponsored a marvelously successful event at the Community Center in February. It was called "History Day – Los Osos Long Ago" and included exhibits featuring the history of Los Osos and Baywood areas. People of all ages came and looked and stayed and remembered.

Some of the booths presented family history from the Spooners and the Etos; others showed the history of key buildings which have played a central part in the community such as the library and the Baywood Women's Club. SWAP's exhibit focused on the Elfin Forest while the NHA docents' exhibit told the story of Emily Polk, the founder of SWAP. Her original project, the Los Osos Oaks Reserve, and our Elfin Forest project provide natural community gateways. These two projects preserve the natural history of the region and the history of their preservation is a tribute to the ongoing vision and commitment of the residents of this area.

Our thanks to Yolanda Waddell and Pat Grimes for telling the history of SWAP for the many interested people, and congratulations to the historical group for bringing us all together.



Pat Grimes with the SWAP display at History Day in Los Osos.

Like many California places named for the experiences of early Spanish explorers, La Cañada de Los Osos, or Valley of the Bears, got its moniker from the number of grizzly bears sighted by Gaspar de Portola's 1769 expedition.



Where To Call, Where To Write

If you have questions about SWAP activities or want to volunteer, you can now call our new phone message service at 546-1199. A recorded message will have information about the Third Saturday Walks and other current events. And, as everyone says these days, "We'll get back to you as soon as we can."

If you have questions, concerns or comments about anything that's happening in the Elfin Forest, call or write:

Pete Jenny, SLO County Parks Facilities Manager
 County Government Center
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93408
 (805) 781-5930

Please Note:
 The April SWAP Board Meeting
 will be on April 19th at the NEP Office
 instead of on April 12th.



SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The regular, second Sunday board meetings for May and June will be held at the NEP Office, at 3rd and El Moro Streets in Baywood Park at 5:00 pm on Sunday, May 10 and Sunday, June 14. Call 528-4540 to see what's on the agenda. See you there!

may 10

june 14

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



SWAP Goes to the Faire Again

Once again SWAP has provided a booth for the Rancho El Chorro Outdoor School Environmental Faire, held this year on March 28. Over the years, the "Faire" has attracted up to 1,600 visitors and SWAP has been one of 20 or more displays open to grownups and children alike.

Yolanda Waddell put together some "mystery socks" for children. The excitement of guessing what an object from the Elfin Forest is by feeling it without being able to see it makes the SWAP booth a very popular activity at the "Faire."

Norma and Bill Vaughan and Beth Wimer from our Education Committee were the volunteer sock masters staffing the booth this year. Many thanks to them and to Yolanda for bringing the magic of the Elfin Forest and the mystery of nature to the public on behalf of SWAP.

Calling All Scrubbers!

May 1st and 2nd, SWAP will be having fun at the SLO Botanical Garden Festival by staffing a "Ceanothus Scrub" booth. We need volunteers for this unique activity, so please call Janice Verity at 528-8151 if you're intrigued.



HELP WANTED: Volunteer position

Occasional but important work for a clever and competent individual. No pay; high satisfaction.

- SWAP needs a person to be responsible for the props for our outreach efforts.

The tent, display boards, banner, etc. are all stored in the storage unit, but we need someone to do booth set-up and take-down for perhaps four events a year such as the Environmental Fair or the Octoberfest.

If you're a handy person and could help us with this infrequent job, please call Yolanda Waddell at 528-4540.



BOOKS FOR YOU . . .

Wildlife Watcher's Guide to San Luis Obispo County

by Anthony Krause, illustrations by Jose Tapia, EZ Nature Books

Intended for nature lovers, not rigorous scientific types, this local guide gives general advice on central coast wildlife watching and offers sections on birds, marine mammals, land mammals, insects, reptiles and amphibians, even algae, fungi and other slippery things. Each piece on an individual species includes suggestions on when and where to find local creatures and how to get there.

Krause fuses science and stories in the friendly style of a good storyteller while whiskers quiver in Jose Tapia's detailed illustrations. This is a fine introduction to wildlife watching which could be very useful to always have along to answer questions about vultures or turkeys observed on a commute, or butterflies or squirrels at the park; it could also be the inspiration for an adventurous trek in search of awesome fungi or frolicking otters.

Our Volunteers 'Go with the Flo' and Raise Funds for SWAP

Flo Ross, former volunteer coordinator for SWAP was honored as Volunteer of the Year by the Morro Bay Harbor Festival recently for her outstanding job coordinating the 1500 volunteers who work at the annual festival.

Ross, whose energy and good humor are dearly missed since she has gone on to the big time, has been at the helm of the Harbor Festival volunteer ship for three years.

At the Just Desserts reception in March, SWAP's outstanding volunteers earned \$445 for their many hours of ticket-taking during the two-day event last October.

(THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!)

51 percent of the annual festival profits are disbursed to nonprofit groups who do most of the volunteer work. The SWAP board is grateful to our hard-working and generous volunteers and very happy to join in the praise of Flo Ross, a fine and fantastic organizer and an incredible volunteer herself.



Flo Ross
Volunteer Extraordinaire!

Coastal Dunes: A Backyard Treasure In Trouble

by Members of
the Morro Estuary Greenbelt Alliance (MEGA)

The Coastal Dune Habitats are globally rare. Those with pristine habitat are rarer still, and it is here on the Central Coast that we find this habitat type existing as it once did.

On these dunes the subtle, exquisite mosaic of rare and indigenous vegetation provides habitat to rare and unique animals as well as offering people quiet and lovely vistas. This beautiful resource is being pushed to the margins of survival - 85% of the existing Coastal Dune Habitat is already gone.

The myriad species of animals and plants found in the Los Osos Coastal Dunes have unique genetic traits which evolved partly because of the area's remoteness. These species include the most endangered mammal in the United States, the Morro Bay kangaroo rat, along with Morro shoulder-banded snail, Morro manzanita, Indian Knob mountain balm, Morro blue butterfly, and popcorn lichen. In all, there are at least 19 plants, 14 resident species of wildlife, and seven migrant birds which are considered species of concern. These unique species and their particular habitat are what the Morro Estuary Greenbelt Alliance, or MEGA, wishes to preserve and protect.

MEGA looks for support from state bonds, mitigation, federal grants, and private donations and foundations. To date, MEGA has received endorsements and support from a wide range of concerned officials, agencies, and groups. Among those supporters was the late Congressman Walter Capps, who, in one of his last letters, contacted Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to request attention to the loss of habitat and asked for his agency to "play a role in the protection of the unique area." Capps said, "... acquisition of those parcels before they are developed may well be the best, if not the only, way to preserve what remains of the rare Los Osos Dune Ecosystem and one of the most richly diverse and sensitive combinations of plant and animal species in all of California."

In addition, the area of concern is entirely within the watershed of the Morro Bay Estuary. Maintaining portions of this watershed in an undeveloped, vegetated state can help prevent sedimentation and filter contamination from increased urban runoff. This may be one of the most important sources negatively impacting the water quality of the Bay, and therefore the nursery habitat of countless fish and wildlife resources.

THIRD SATURDAY WALKS

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.

May 16

Get a different view of the Elfin Forest through the lens of your camera on a walk especially for camera bugs of all ages and levels of experience. A local photographer will provide pointers on composition and lighting, as well as on how to solve problems of high contrast lighting and dense foliage. Wildflowers will provide an opportunity for close-up photography.

June 20

Tour the Elfin Forest's "plant neighborhoods" with biologist Steve Mueller. Learn how plants both compete with other species, yet are dependent on them as well. Get a different view of the Elfin Forest along the seldom-used Habitat Trail, as well as a chance to enjoy many wildflowers which are still in bloom.

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.

MEGA believes that the preservation of the remaining undeveloped Coastal Dune habitat in Los Osos and Baywood Park would not only ensure species survival, but would also provide a lasting visual treasure surrounding the community. This would significantly contribute to the quality of life in the area while ensuring preservation of our natural treasures for future generations.

MEGA is seeking volunteer help in our Community. If you would like more information or to volunteer, call 528-5708. In addition, on April 9, at 7:30 p.m., the Sierra Club is hosting a slide presentation on the beauty of Coastal Dunes and MEGA's action to preserve them.

Meet Two More SWAP Board Members

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Gordon Hensley, grants coordinator, is a native of San Luis Obispo whose passion for the people and the environment of this unique county has directed most of his academic and professional career. He earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Biological Sciences Department at Cal Poly. His senior project was entitled "A Natural History of the Los Osos Oaks" which was the original SWAP preservation project in California so his connection to SWAP is a long-time one as well. Presently a field biologist for BioEnvironmental Services in Los Osos, Gordon's background includes work as a docent at Matrago Museum of Natural History in Ridgecrest and as a naturalist at Rancho El Chorro. He has also done much work with young people in recreation and education programs. He was a member of the Biological Workgroup for the Morro Bay National Estuary Program and he has been very active with the Solutions Group in Los Osos. Gordon brings important experience and extensive knowledge of the local environment to the SWAP Board.

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Sherry Lampert, membership co-coordinator, has returned to the Central Coast after a short sojourn in the high country of Prescott Arizona. Originally she lived in Sunset Terrace near the entrance to Montaña de Oro where she first became involved in issues concerning the impact of people on nature. She lives in Morro Bay now and works in the interior design field. In addition to her work on the SWAP board, Sherry also belongs to Morro Bay Beautiful. You'll hear from Sherry if you forget to renew your membership on time!

An Invitation To SWAP Membership

*from Membership Co-Coordinators
Bethany Griffiths and Sherry Lampert*

If you are not yet a member of SWAP, please join. Your dues help in the usual overhead expenses such as costs of printing this bi-monthly newsletter which informs the community about SWAP's activities, monthly operating expenses, educational community outreach, purchase of materials for weed abatement and re-forestation projects. Consider volunteering your talents and time too. There are many opportunities to meet people and learn about the Elfin Forest when you volunteer.

Please take the time from your busy schedule to complete the membership form and make your dues payment at the highest level comfortable for you.

As a member, you will feel satisfaction that you support a very special legacy for generations to come.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

to M. & S. Autrey, G. Black, J. Frawlegtest,
A. Lindeman, F. Little, R. & R. Lane, C. Lancellotti,
D. Minnit, A. Owens, R. & C. Riggins,
J. Van Camp, R. Avelar, E. Bowen, E. Cunningham,
D. Casey, M. Mehring, J. Dunn, G. Wondra,
N. Friedman, A. Cushing, W. Butts, P. Childers,
E. Peter, E. McCracken, L. Daniel,
M. Harrison, J. Parham, D. Youngman, P. McAulay
and J. Wright.

Seashore Wonders At Museum In April

The Central Coast Natural History Association (NHA), in collaboration with Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), will present its semi-annual Seashore Wonders Program for two weeks in April, from April 4-18. The tidepool exhibits will be on display at Museum of Natural History in Morro Bay State Park from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.



Sea Stars, anemones, crabs, barnacles, octopi and other creatures that populate our local seashores will be on hand. There will be specially trained museum docents present to describe the lives of the specimens, including their eating habits,

their environmental enemies, and their protection from those dangers. Docents will also lift some specimens from the tanks so visitors may touch and hold them. Children, young and old, seem to thoroughly enjoy this experience.

At 10:30 a.m. on each Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday of Seashore Wonders, the Museum Puppeteers will present a special show about the creatures that live in our tidepools, entitled "The Bucket Monster."

The Museum of Natural History is located on State Park Road in Morro Bay. For directions, more information, or to become a member of the NHA, call the Museum at (805) 772-2694.

Earth Day '98 To Be In Los Osos

The San Luis Obispo County Earth Day Coalition will present Earth Day '98 on Saturday, April 25 at the South Bay Community Center from 9 a.m. until dark. The theme of the event is "Celebrate, Educate, Motivate."

Local groups and/or individuals are encouraged to sign-up for booth space, giving presentations, playing music, etc., and may get the appropriate information by calling the Earth Day Hotline number at 546-4884. The deadline for reduced exhibition fees is April 17, after which time the community/non-profit fees increase from \$15 to \$20, and the commercial fees go from \$50 to \$60.

This year's event offers the opportunity for all Los Osos groups to be placed together. If you would like to take advantage of this placement, specify your request on the Exhibitor Application under "Special Needs."

If your group has an Earth Day event you would like publicized, there is still time to get it on the Earthmonth calendar. Send your information to P.O. Box 1810, SLO, CA 93406, attn: Earthmonth, or call the Earth Day Hotline.

Friends of the Estuary General Meeting National Estuary Program Update

Find out what's going in the Morro Bay estuary and watershed when Friends of the Estuary welcomes Ellen Perryess and Katie Kropp of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (NEP) to the General Meeting on Wednesday, April 29 at 7:30 p.m. at the Inn At Morro Bay. Perryess and Kropp will discuss ongoing research and monitoring efforts being conducted in Morro Bay and its watershed, and give an update on the status of other NEP efforts.

Kropp is currently the NEP's scientific coordinator charged with coordinating technical studies and the volunteer monitoring program for the NEP. She is also involved in the Regional Water Quality Control Board's National Monitoring Program in the Chorro Valley and Los Osos Valley. Before being named scientific coordinator, Kropp served as the program's technical coordinator and interim director.

Perryess, the NEP's public participation coordinator, is also responsible for writing the program's Characterization Report, which will serve as a "report card" for the bay and watershed. She is a long time member and past president of Friends of the Estuary, and also served on the State Estuary's Watershed Council and the NEP's Local Policy Committee.

Everyone is welcome to attend this free Wednesday night meeting of the Friends of the Estuary at Morro Bay. For more information contact Ray Easton at 528-7874 or Katy Budge at 466-3472.



Be Aware of Plover Nesting Areas

The Western Snowy Plover is listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Between April and June, these birds nest on the sand in the dry sand areas of local beaches. Unfortunately, the nesting sites are the same areas usually favored by picnickers and many other beachgoers, which is why you may see parts of the beaches closed during this period. Please respect the closures and be aware if nearby plovers start acting agitated or disturbed.

The plover favors broad beaches for its nesting habitat, as narrow beaches have too much tidal influence which can disturb and/or destroy the nests. Two or three sand-colored eggs are laid on the sand and incubated by the female for 28 days. At hatching, the precocial (free range) young are raised by the male only, while the female goes off to find another mate! The young are able to forage on their own after 4-5 weeks.

Plants of the Elfin Forest:

Arroyo Willow

by Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

The plant pictured in this newsletter is the arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*) drawn by Bonnie Walters. It is in full bloom now. Willow flowers are small, but aggregated into small linear clusters called catkins. The small leaves (bracts) that enclose the flowers are often fuzzy and in a few species give the appearance of a cat's paw. These are given the name of pussy willows. Arroyo willow plants are either male or female. That is some plants produce only male (staminate) flowers and other plants produce only female (pistillate) flowers. The male sex cells (pollen) is usually carried by insects in spite of the fact the flowers are very small and lack any showy colored parts such as petals or sepals. Most willows do produce lots of nectar which is the sugary attractant that induces the insects to carry the pollen.

All willows require moist soils and a lot of fresh water. In fact, willows can be used as an indicator of fresh water close to the surface. In the Elfin Forest, the willows are obtaining their water from a reservoir found under the dunes. The reservoir is formed when rainwater falls and quickly penetrates the dune. The water is then rapidly drawn down below the root level by gravity. It continues to go deeper until it encounters the layer of salt water that underlies all of the coastal dune complex. Here the fresh water collects to form a lens shaped reservoir deep in the sand. Fresh water is lighter than salt water and water of different densities do not mix. Since the fresh water is prevented from going deeper, it will tend to spread out laterally until it reaches the edge of the dunes where it emerges as fresh water seeps. It is these shallow reservoirs and seeps that support the dense stand of willows that encircle the salt marsh. Therefore, look for arroyo willows in the upper transition zone between the band of coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) and the upper most reaches of the salt marsh.

Arroyo willow is one of seven willow species in the county and approximately 150 species worldwide. In the Elfin Forest area, the arroyo willow is most common, and the only one likely to be encountered. It has leaves that are green on top and quite gray below. Willows have had a long association with humans. The most common uses of willows include basketry and medicine. Willows are fast growing trees or shrubs that produce long straight branches that tend to bend rather than break. Secondly, the bark of various willow species tends to bright red to orange or even occasionally black. Thus willow can not only produce strong baskets but also colorful ones as well.



Arroyo Willow illustrations by Bonnie Walters.

One of the longest associations with humans is our historical use of will bark and leaves in medicine. Our earliest records of medical practices of pre-industrial peoples record the use of willow for treatment of pain, fever and skin problems. The active ingredient is the glycoside, salicin, a compound now thought to be widespread in the plant kingdom. Recent evidence implicates its use in the communication between different plant individuals of the same and different species. An individual plant that is attacked by insects will begin to produce an array of indigestible, distasteful and/or poisonous compounds as a way to discourage its attackers. It is now known that surrounding plants, unattached to the attacked plant also produces these compounds. How this communication takes place is not understood, but it is believed that compound, salicin, plays a key role. Salicin is readily hydrolyzed into Saligen which has some use as a pain killer. When salicin is digested it is converted into salicylic acid which was first isolated from a spirea plant in 1839. Salicylic acid is a powerful pain killer and fever reducer, but it also causes severe abdominal distress. In 1853, it was discovered that salicylic acid could also be synthesized artificially from carbolic acid. This fact was then forgotten until 1899, when scientists working for the Bayer company re-discovered the process and were able to synthesize a new derivative, acetosalicylic acid. This new compound still worked as a fever reducer and painkiller but didn't have as severe abdominal side effects. They had to come up with a trade name for this 'new' compound and they called it aspirin. The 'a' is from 'aceto-' and 'spirin' comes from Spiraea, the plant from which salicylic acid was first isolated back in 1839.

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

Diablo Canyon Power Plant
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A Non-Profit Public Benefit Corporation
P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6442
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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

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

- 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