



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 ❖ AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1998



SPECIAL VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION ISSUE



Getting Things Done: SWAP's Behind-The- Scenes Volunteers

By Yolanda Waddell

The wheels of our all-volunteer organization turn smoothly because of many energetic SWAP volunteers, many of whom have no wish to be in the limelight-and if the truth be told-many of them dislike attending meetings.

But when they are asked to do phoning, mailings, staffing booths or any other task, they perform it without hesitation. As a group, SWAP volunteers are reliable, prompt, efficient, creative and APPRECIATED.

As you read about these hard-working "elves," ask yourself if you could enjoy being a part of this action team. Volunteer opportunities are available: help the Education Committee produce a trail guide; join our booth committee, help organize special events such as the annual meeting; or do outreach activities at environmental faires and festivals. Call Janice Verity, our Volunteer Coordinator at 528-8151. She will chat with you about your interests and connect you with a SWAP committee or individual with an ongoing project.

As a group,
SWAP volunteers
are reliable, prompt,
efficient, creative and
APPRECIATED.

PETRA CLAYTON, WALKS COORDINATOR

Petra organizes our monthly Third Saturday walks along with Yolanda Waddell (who goes to the board meetings!). After selecting a topic for the month she phones possible walk leaders with the appropriate expertise. Often it takes

Volunteers Feted in the Elfin Forest

One of the defining characteristics of SWAP as a non-profit organization is the total absence of paid staff. EVERYONE volunteers time, energy and talent. Almost every job is done by a volunteer. SWAP is justifiably proud of this fact and celebrated it at a Volunteer Recognition Luncheon in the Elfin Forest recently.

Rosemary Bowker, longtime president of SWAP, was honored as the "Volunteer of the Decade" for her volunteer leadership in securing the preservation of the Elfin Forest.



Rose Bowker with her recognition plaque made by Jocko's Woodworks in Baywood.

Speakers Barbara Machado, Elsie Deitz and Pat Grimes roasted and praised Bowker before Gordon Hensley presented her with a custom made Elfin Forest plaque to recognize her achievements. Machado recalled memories of the

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Volunteers Feted

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incredible energy, intelligence and talents Rose poured into a vision of the Elfin Forest as a

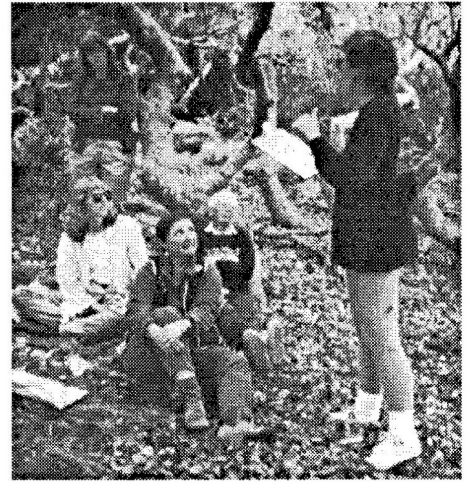
county jewel, recalling late-night grant writing and thousands of personal thank you notes. Deitz and Grimes listed 10 silly and serious reasons why Bowker should be honored from her "pit bull" tenacity to her thoughtfulness; from her non-stop talking about the Elfin Forest to her willingness to do any job to facilitate the project; and from her amazing ability to recruit allies in the acquisition process to her ability to turn any task into a fun time.

In accepting the honor, Bowker pointed to the inspirational beauty of the surrounding Elfin Forest and recalled



Marcia Munson, Virginia Black (front), and Ceil and Bob McDougle enjoy gourmet sack lunches at SWAP's recent Volunteer Recognition Party held in the Elfin Forest.

At SWAP's recent Volunteer Recognition Party, Barbara Machado honors Volunteer of the Decade Rose Bowker, calling her the "little sister" she never had.



the pleasure of working with the many, many exceptional volunteers and supporters of the project. She said she was proudest of the inclusivity of the fund-raising efforts in which the contributions of the smallest donors and the largest donors were recognized with equal importance on the Elfin Forest Mural.

Volunteer Coordinator Janice Verity recognized the specific work of all the volunteers present and also of those who were unable to attend. Bethany Griffiths presented each volunteer with a small thank you gift as a reminder of SWAP's appreciation for all the jobs done so well. Verity specially thanked Karl and Flo Appel for setting up as well as Robin Knapp, Yolanda Waddell, and Pat Grimes for making sandwiches, and Marty Goldin for her delicious couscous salad. The marvelous tomato-basil bread came from the House of Bread and the oatmeal cookies came from Utopia Bakery. Janice didn't let any volunteer go home hungry or unappreciated!

Board Vacancy Filled

With regret, the SWAP Board has accepted the resignation of Sherry Lampert as Membership co-coordinator. We'll miss her good work and cheery smile. Thanks go to Flo Appel who has volunteered to replace Sherry. Welcome aboard, Flo.

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The regular, second Sunday board meetings for September and October will be held at the NEP Office, at 3rd and El Moro Streets in Baywood Park at 5:00 pm on Sunday, September 13 and Sunday, October 11.

Call 528-4540 to see what's on the agenda. See you there!

September 13

October 11

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*

Flo Appel, *Membership Co-chair*

Teresa Larson, *Education Committee*

Les Bowker, *At Large*

Ann Doscher, *At Large*

Caroline Gmelin, *At Large*

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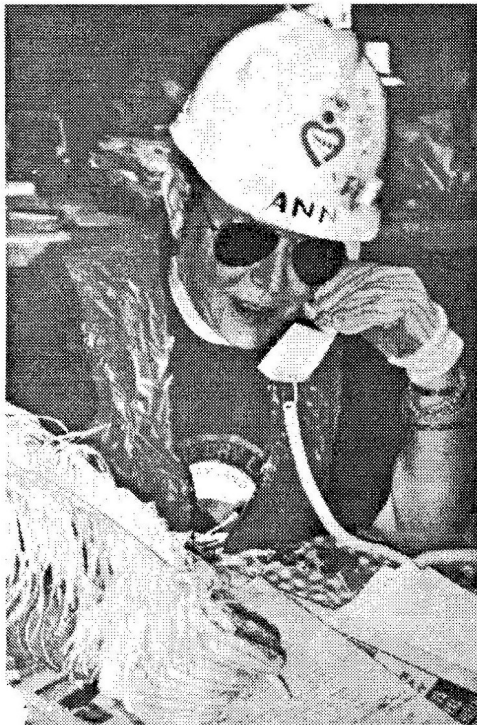
several calls to firm up a walk from the initial contact to the reminder call about a week before the walk. Petra often joins each walk to help with organizational tasks and to announce upcoming walks. Afterwards she writes a customized thank you note featuring one of her own photos of the Elfin Forest. Petra had been coordinating SWAP walks for six years and she still enjoys the people she gets to know and what she continues to learn about the Elfin Forest.



Walks Coordinator, Petra Clayton

ANN CALHOUN, MAILINGS AND WEEDING CREW, PHONING

Ann does monthly press releases and public service announcement mailings for routine and special events. Without much lead time, Ann copies the masters, addresses the envelopes, and gets them to the Post Office in time to meet



Commando Ann of the SWAP SWAT Weed-Killing Team calling out the troops.

publication deadlines so we'll all know what's happening. As dispatcher of the "SWAP SWAT Weed-Killing Team," Ann phones a list of regulars each time a work day in the Elfin Forest is scheduled for pulling weeds, clearing a trail, planting or any other necessary land maintenance project. And, of course, Ann will be out there with her gloves and shovel, ready to

go. She also manages to cover at least one shift in the SWAP booth at any festival or special event. Ann Calhoun volunteers with gusto!

RON BAYHAN, PHOTOGRAPHY COORDINATOR

Ron teaches photography at Morro Bay High School and Cuesta College. He first volunteered to lead a Third Saturday Walk and later he brought his ideas to the brain-storming sessions that resulted in the formation of SWAP's Education Committee. Ron co-coordinated our slideshow contest in 1997, and is now supervising the reorganization of our slide collection. We're all looking forward to seeing his revised production soon.



Ron Bayhan

GLORIA WALTERS, POCKET GUIDE MARKETER

Gloria is an active docent for the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History who enjoys the Elfin Forest especially, so she often joins our walks. Looking for a SWAP Pocket Guide, Gloria

called Yolanda Waddell. The conversation led to the fact that SWAP had no one to market the guide which had been sold out at the Museum. Gloria promptly volunteered to contact two bookstores and the Museum. Fifteen minutes later, she called Yolanda back with an order for 130 Pocket Guides! Since that time she has placed the guides in several other book stores. Thanks to Gloria, our Pocket Guides are consistently available to the general public instead of sitting in our storage room.



*Want a Pocket Guide?
Ask Gloria Walters where to get one.*

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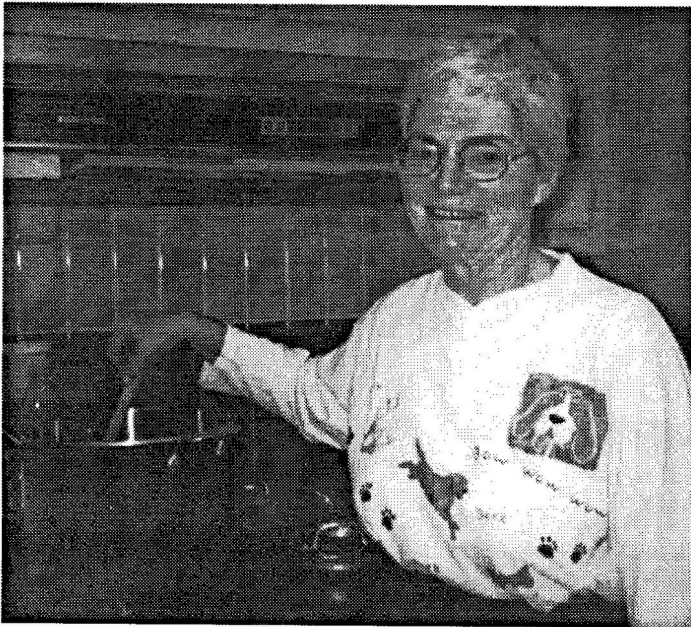
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Behind-The-Scenes Volunteers *continued from page 3*

MARTY GOLDIN, SWAP CHEF

Marty, a semi-retired judge from the Los Angeles area, has recently moved to Los Osos.

How does a judge end up cooking for a volunteer organization? It helps if her cousins (Jerry and Elsie Deitz) are active in the organization and if she loves to cook. Chef Goldini (a name bestowed by Elsie) has provided scrumptious food for SWAP's annual meeting and, more recently, for our vol-



Marty Goldin, aka Chef Goldini, whips up a scrumptious treat.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

to New and Renewing Members:

- D. Fourie, R. Zank, E. Peter,
Mr. & Mrs. D.R. Thompson, G. & E. Walter,
E. Caldwell, K. Karikka, P. Smith, N. Page, R. Ball,
R. & L. Ruppert, J. Otto,
P. & N. Wightman, B. Pewitt, R. Ralston, D. Graves,
H. Schuchardt, D. & K. Keil, Mr. & Mrs. B. Harris,
B. Wilson, F. Ross, E. Walt, V. Hodge, H. L. Winter,
A. Cushing, R. & S. Bracken, D. & B. Griffiths,
R. Parker, D. Patterson, V. G. & D. Croy,
M. & G. Hamilton, M Engle-Lauser,
E. J. & M. Mathias, S. Boydston, M. Tittle,
A. & L. Armstrong, E. Eglash, W. Jackson,
L. & I. Doering, J. Burns, R. & L Bowker,
and P. L. Grimes.

unteer picnic. Volunteer Coordinator Verity says, "Anytime I ask her to cook for us, she says yes and she comes up with something really delicious."

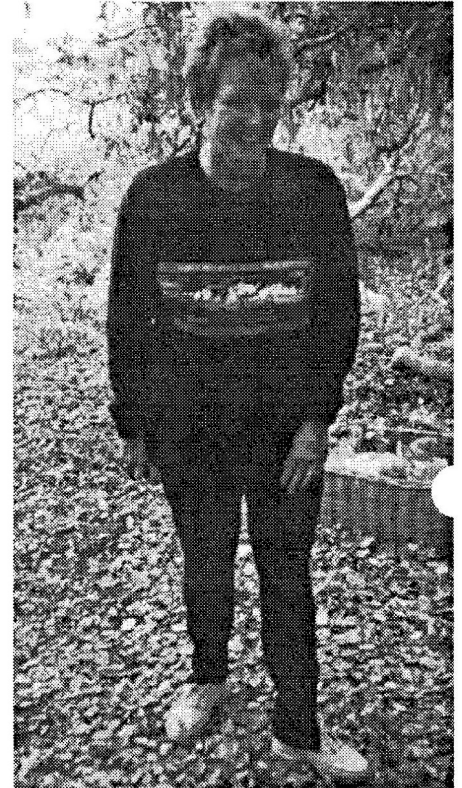
SWAP's not only an army that travels on its stomach, it eats well too, thanks to Marty.

JANICE VERITY, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Janice is well-known to most SWAP members because she is regularly in contact with many of them by phone and we read about her organizing efforts in Oak Leaves. However, there are many more things Jan-

ice does for SWAP with no fanfare whatsoever. When four key Board members announced their retirement last year, Janice took the responsibility upon herself to organize a nominating committee and a walk/picnic in the Elfin Forest for potential board members. Then she co-coordinated a training session for new board members and provided all the food for the first supper meeting. She not only finds volunteers to staff the booths, she fills some of the shifts herself. Janice is quite artistic as well.

When she plans an event, everything from the invitations to the smallest details of the presentation looks beautiful. Whether in front of an assembled group or working behind the scenes, Janice is a person who makes SWAP the dynamic organization it is. **AND SHE WOULD LOVE TO MEET YOU AND PUT YOUR TALENTS TO WORK FOR SWAP TOO.**



Volunteer Coordinator Janice Verity knows how to plan a great picnic.

Los Osos residents:

Remember to vote in the special mail-in election on Measure E-98 (community-wide drainage district) when you get your ballot in early August!

THIRD SATURDAY WALKS

August 15

Join Dr. Dirk Walters, Cal Poly biologist, for a botanical stroll through the Elfin Forest. Oak Leaves readers have seen Dr. Walters' column, "Plants of the Elfin Forest" in the past few issues. His focus on this walk will be the stories plants have to tell. Bring a magnifying glass if you have one. There are many late summer flowers in full bloom during August.

September 19

Last year, Dr. Shirley Sparling, retired Cal Poly biologist, led a walk which focused on the leaves of plants. This September, at our request, she will talk about seeds. Her title is "Fruits of Plants and Their Dispersal." Follow Dr. Sparling through the Elfin Forest and learn about many different kinds of fruits or seeds of the forest's native plants, and the fascinating and varied ways in which they are dispersed. She will also answer questions about propagation of native plants using seed.

October 17 (starts at 8:00 a.m.!)

This walk will begin at 8:00 a.m. because walk leader Jim Royer, an avid birder and active Audubon member for almost twenty years, knows that the early birder sees the most birds. This is the weekend of the "Big Sit," a day-long Audubon event which restricts participating birders to a 17-foot circle. Last year, 101 species were spotted from Bush Lupine Point in the Elfin Forest! Jim will guide bird enthusiasts to places in the Elfin Forest where they can see the striking Spotted Towhee, hear the ping-pong song of the Wrentit and look at shorebirds and ducks through a spotting scope. Bring 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.

For more information call 528-4540 evenings.

Where To Call, Where To Write

If you have questions about SWAP activities or want to volunteer, please call our phone message service at 546-1199.

A recorded message will have information about the Third Saturday Walks and other current events.

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, SLO, CA 93408, (805) 781-5930.

Thanks to Saturday Walks Leaders

Many thanks to all the Third Saturday Walk Leaders who volunteer their time and help all of us get to know the Elfin Forest a little better.

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In June 1998, Steve Mueller led a walk about plant communities in the Elfin Forest

Mark Your Calendars For September 13 Estuary Day Efforts Still in Planning Stages

At press time, the final touches were still being put on plans for the 5th Annual Estuary Day at Morro Bay State Park. The day's events will follow a similar format to those in years past, with nature walks throughout the day and an early supper gathering at Morro Bay State Park.

Estuary Day is an annual event spearheaded by Friends of the Estuary, and heartily supported by the Museum of Natural History docents, California State Parks, the Central Coast Natural History Association (NHA), and SWAP. It is a day to celebrate the successes of the estuary, and to honor those individuals, groups and agencies who have made those successes possible.

More information about Estuary Day details will be made available through the newsletters of Friends of the Estuary, the NHA/Museum, and the Morro Bay National Estuary Program.



Plants of the Elfin Forest: Poison Oak

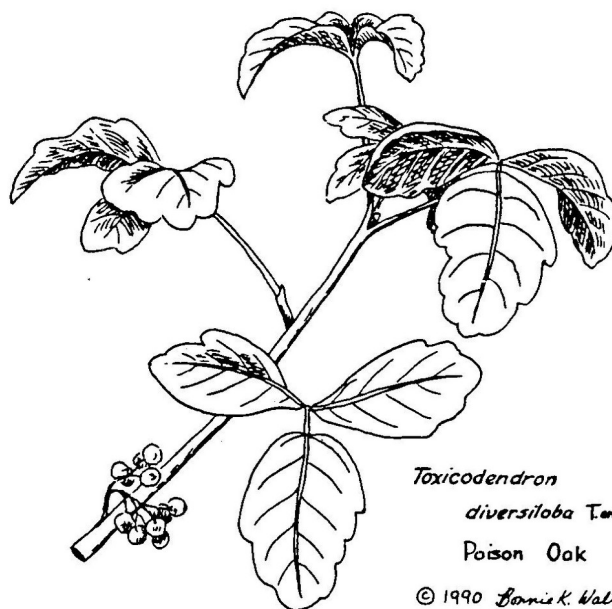
by Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

Do you recognize the plant in the accompanying illustration drawn by Bonnie? A hint: I tell my plant identification students that this plant is self-testing. That is, if they don't know it, it will identify itself to them eventually. That's right, it's poison oak. *Toxicodendron diversilobum*. Unfortunately, poison oak is quite common in the Elfin Forest. Watch out for it in areas where soils accumulate a little extra soil moisture. Plant ecologists call these sites, mesic sites. Mesic sites tend to be at the bottom of drainages and on north and east facing slopes. Poison oak also seems to have an affinity for the shady areas under coast live oak trees (*Quercus agrifolia*). In fact, a study done at U.C. Santa Barbara found the only plant positively correlated with coast live oak in a habitat similar to the Elfin Forest was poison oak.

The good news is that the Elfin Forest trails are not near the plant; the bad news is that if you leave the trails, you will come in contact with it. Poison oak is a native plant and as such should be allowed to grow within the Elfin Forest. Most references to poison oak, ivy, or sumac indicate that the skin rash caused by the plant only occurs in humans and closely related primates. Only one reference mentions a couple of possible cases of skin irritation in animals. In fact, deer and cattle readily eat its seedlings and saplings. My guess is that the plant would be much more widespread than it is if this were not true.

Poison oak has been given several scientific names over the years. When I first started to learn scientific names, *Rhus diversiloba* was the more popular name. Then, plant taxonomists began to recognize the white fruits, dermatitis causing sap, and other differences as sufficient to separate the poisonous species out as a separate genus. Thus poison oak becomes *Toxicodendron diversilobum*. The genus, *Toxicodendron*, contains 2-3 or sometimes more recognized species. Three repeatable, common names have been most commonly applied to individuals in *Toxicodendron*. They are poison oak for those forms in the Western third of the country, poison ivy for the forms growing in the rest of the country and poison sumac for the very distinctive species restricted to acid bogs in the northern part of the United States. The variation in appearance of poison ivy and oak is so great and the level of overlap is so great that some have questioned whether or not they are actually two different species. The major difference between the two, size and degree of lobbing of leaflets and vining versus shrubby habit could be related to dryness of habitat. The shrubby habitat and smaller, less lobbed leaflets characteristic of poison oak are also characteristics found in other species of plants that occupy drier habitats. In canyon bottoms, our poison oak can become stout vines and produce very large lobbed leaflets.

The good news is that the Elfin Forest trails are not near the plant; the bad news is that if you leave the trails, you will come in contact with it.



*Toxicodendron
diversiloba* T. and G.
Poison Oak

© 1990 Bonnie K. Walters

All of the species have the same allergen in their sap, however. The active ingredient is Urushiol, an oil. Urushiol works by "complexing" with the proteins in skin cells and in so doing changes their structure so much that the immune system "thinks" they are foreign bodies. Foreign proteins are first isolated (the exposed parts become hot and itchy) and then the cells containing the altered protein are destroyed. Of course, these are an individual's skin cells that are being destroyed with these areas becoming blistered. If the area of exposure is very large, then whole sections of skin will be sloughed off and people get what resembles a third degree burn. In the worst case, the immune system becomes super sensitive and begins to attack skin cells that haven't been changed by the allergen and reaction is said to have gone "systematic." When this happens, exposure to even a few Urushiol molecules is enough to send the immune system into overdrive. In a few hypersensitive people it can set off allergic reactions to other substances as well. When this happens, poison oak, ivy and sumac reactions are very serious, and could even be life threatening.

Sensitivity to poison oak in people is extremely variable. Approximately 10-15% of us have very stable immune systems and/or our skin proteins resist being changed by the Urushiol, and therefore seem to be immune to poison oak. The rest of us will get poison oak to one degree or another. Lastly, a word of warning to those who think they are immune to poison oak. Since "immunity" is based on the functioning of the immune system and this system is dependent upon health, age, level of stress, degree of exposure to the allergen, etc., then it would be expected that "immunity" might leave one without warning. The best defense against poison oak is not to come in contact with any part of the plant. In other words, if there is any plant that people should learn to recognize from a distance, this is the one.

Meet Dirk and Bonnie Walters

In several of our recent issues, *Oak Leaves* has featured the work of two very special volunteers whose contributions have helped everyone learn more about specific plants in the Elfin Forest in great detail. In order to get to know the people behind this very enjoyable and informative column, *Oak Leaves* interviewed Dirk and Bonnie Walters.

Dirk, what is it about plants that you've made them the focus of your life's work?

I like them, and the stories about them, and they're handy compared to some other things. While I'm studying plants scientifically I also learn more about the world. I think of plants as passive reactors. They respond to all kinds of conditions thrown at them and they also react chemically in fascinating ways such as making some creatures distasteful to predators. The classic example is the milkweed and the Monarch butterfly, but I was just reading in *Science News* about the same process occurring in a Caribbean slug which eats a certain algae for the same reason.

I was just reading a column by Jeremy Rifkin who wrote Biotech Century: Harnessing the Gene and Remaking the World, and he wrote about the problems presented by the consolidation of corporate control over the genetic blueprints of life. He described the corporate process of locating, modifying, and patenting plants with rare genetic traits for market potential in a new, bioindustrial society. What do you see in the future for plants?

Great promise; that's a neutral statement because there is much possibility for ill and good. Some seed companies have modified a genome so that germination has to be "turned on" by a particular chemical. That means we can't save seeds from one generation to the next, but must purchase them for each planting season. You can't do your own selection like Bonnie's dad did trying to get more neck and fewer seeds in a crookneck squash.

Bonnie, your work as an illustrator is well-known locally, but what is your connection to plants?

As a youngster I spent a great deal of time drawing horses. Then I studied art and biology for quite a while, but when I had to make a decision, I chose zoology which is my greatest interest. Luckily ecology classes cover plants and animals or I never would have met Dirk! I've been raising mice, rats, guinea pigs, and hamsters for pet stores for many years now, and I'm probably more of a reluctant artist.

You're too modest. Your work illustrating Dirk and David Keil's textbook, Vascular Plant Taxonomy is no little effort and I know your work is part of the Betty Holloway Garden at Montaña de Oro.

Right now I'm working on another textbook which requires tiny drawings of beakers, test tubes, and other glassware in setups for experiments. It's very demanding although it's



not as detailed as the botanical work. My work does seem to be in a lot of places.

Do you two work together?

Bonnie: We help each other. Dirk works with CNPS and SWAP and I help him.

Dirk: And I help her with ZPG and the Sierra Club. We share our home with lots of little creatures who are usually very good at helping people lower their blood pressure.

Dirk, can you recommend some books for our readers?

Well, that could be a whole article in itself because it depends on what a person is interested in. Peterson's *Guide to Wildflowers* is a good one and so is McMinn's *Shrubs of California*. McMinn and Maino's *Pacific Coast Trees* is worthwhile and Mary Coffeen's book, *Wildflowers of the Central Coast*, is very readable.

Bonnie: It's important to know the names so you can find out what you really want to know.

Dirk: Yes, names are just a substitute or shorthand for all the other descriptive characteristics of a plant, but they are not enough. You have to make some kind of connection with a special tidbit about a particular plant to really know it.

So, what can our readers look forward to on your August walk in the Elfin Forest?

Dirk: Oh, a nice walk talking about plants.

You make it sound like the most wonderful thing to do in the world.

Bonnie: We'll have to get out there soon and scout the possibilities for that walk.

And we'll look forward to more botanical details and tidbits about the plants of the Elfin Forest from both of you! Thank you very much.

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Membership Renewals

Please check your address label on the front of this newsletter for your "anniversary date." If you have not renewed your membership in the last year, your renewal is due. Please fill out the membership form and send it in as soon as possible. Help us keep our costs down by not having to mail you a reminder letter. All memberships are tax-deductible.

Your continuing annual dues help with SWAP's overhead expenses, including the costs of printing and mailing this bi-monthly newsletter. Dues also help with the costs associated with the reforestation and watering of the seedlings and the cost of a weed abatement program fighting invasive non-native weeds that threaten to take over the native plants in the forest. The size of our membership is also one of the factors weighed by foundations who consider our grant applications.



**RENEW YOUR COMMITMENT
TO THE ELFIN FOREST NOW!**

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