



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 ❖ JUNE / JULY 2000

Veldt Grass Control Project Update

By Yolanda Waddell

A year ago, the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County and the Morro Bay National Estuary Program teamed up to tackle a serious problem on the Central Coast – the Veldt Grass invasion of our native Coastal Dune plant habitat. The problem is especially serious in Los Osos, where just about every vacant lot is filled with the waving red tops of this pest plant from South Africa. The Elfin Forest is no exception; SWAP volunteers have expended much energy in digging out the grass, only to have it return full force the following year.

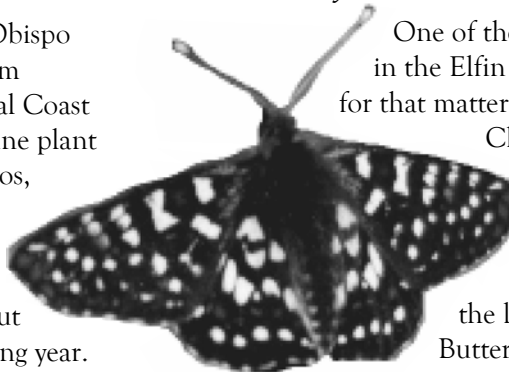
In April, 1999, Mark Skinner of the Land Conservancy began the coordination of a project to remove the Veldt Grass from an acre of land along South Bay Boulevard in Los Osos. With funds granted by the National Estuary Program, a professional landscaper sprayed the grass with an herbicide in order to kill the roots. The grass was then pulled up, and a variety of native plants were planted in place of the grass. Next, a deep redwood mulch was placed around the plants to hold moisture while they grew, and of course the plants were kept watered for awhile. The final step was to mulch all areas of the test plot with chips donated by the County and local tree trimmers. SWAP volunteers assisted with preparing the chips and with mulching.

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Veldt Grass continued on page 2

Variable or Chalcedon Checkerspot Butterfly

Text and Photo By Pat Brown



One of the more common butterflies in the Elfin Forest, and in California for that matter, is the Variable or Chalcedon Checkerspot Butterfly, *Euphydryas chalcedona*.

Checkerspots are a subfamily, Melitaeinae, in the large family of Brush Footed Butterflies, Nymphalidae. This is a medium sized black butterfly, 1 - 2

inches, with a multitude of cream colored spots and smaller red spots on the upper front wing. There will be cream colored dots on the back of the abdomen. Be aware that the underwings of butterflies are usually radically different from the upper wings. The Variable Checkerspot has very little black on the underside, being mostly cream and orange.

This butterfly has one brood per year. They lay eggs in clusters and the caterpillars feed communally. Variable Checkerspots hibernate as larvae. During droughts, larvae can hibernate for several years. Larvae are black with speckles or stripes and many spines; those spines on the back and side are orange. The chrysalis is white with blackish spots and orange tubercles. Adults fly from April through June, with an average life span of nine to ten days. Adults feed on flower nectar; I have observed a Variable Checkerspot feeding on Yellow fiddleneck, *Amsinckia spectabilis*, in the Elfin Forest. This past April one of the larval plants, Sticky monkey-flower, *Mimulus auranticus*, hosted numerous Checkerspot caterpillars, especially along the boardwalk in the area east of the Celestial Meadow. The larvae will eat both the leaves and flowers of this plant.

Checkerspots lay their eggs on plants that contain iridoid glycosides, which are toxins. This makes the larvae,

Checkerspots continued on page 2

Designer Chosen for Boardwalk Interpretive Signs

County Parks has chosen Pandora & Company to design six interpretive signs for the Elfin Forest Boardwalk. Graphic designer Pandora Nash-Karner, a resident of Los Osos, is well known throughout California, and submitted the winning bid. The design and approval process as well as sign production will



"This sudden splash into pure wilderness -- baptism in Nature's warm heart -- how utterly happy it made us! Nature streaming into us, wooingly teaching her wonderful glowing lessons, so unlike the dismal grammar ashes and cinders so long thrashed into us. Here without knowing it we still were at school; every wild lesson a love lesson, not whipped but charmed into us."

-- John Muir (selected by Joseph Johnson)

Checkerspots *continued from page 1*

pupae and adults poisonous to vertebrates. Checkerspots will bask with their wings spread out flat, so that predators can get a good look at them and recognize that they taste bad. Other tastier butterflies will perch with their wings closed to avoid being spotted by predators. Males will perch or patrol for females throughout the day. I have seen a male perched with wings out flat until another butterfly, say an Anise Swallowtail, flutters by. The Variable Checkerspot would spiral up in the air with the newcomer, checking it out for species and gender. Then determining that this was not a potential mate, it would settle down on the same perch and wait again.

As you walk in the Elfin Forest through June, look for the Variable Checkerspot butterfly.



O A K L E A V E S

is published six times per year beginning in February.
Editor is Yolanda Waddell; layout is by Katy Budge.

Contributors to this issue:

Sandra Beebe, Pat Brown, Wendy Brown, Joseph Johnson,
Bud Meyers, Pat Sarafian, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell,
Dirk & Bonnie Walters, and Jim Weldon

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Veldt Grass *continued from page 1*



Mark Skinner has volunteered his time to weed Veldt Grass from the 1-acre Veldt Grass Control plot on South Bay Boulevard. Veldt Grass seed is viable for three years.

Most of the new native plants have survived; this Spring, the Monkey-flowers planted last year are in full bloom. Passers-by, including myself, have also noticed the waving red tops of Veldt Grass scattered among the new plants. I phoned Mark Skinner to ask what will be done about the new crop of Veldt Grass. Mark said that Veldt Grass seeds are viable for three years, and he expected to have to remove it manually this Spring. He mentioned that he was planning to do some weeding that very evening, so I stopped by the test plot to get more information.

Mark told me that in any weed control project, follow-through is the most important thing. In this case, there are no funds for follow-up weeding, so Mark is doing it as a volunteer with help from a community service worker.

His method is interesting: he grabs a tuft of grass, snips off the top with a pair of sharp scissors and drops the top into a grocery bag. This prevents seeds from dropping onto the ground when he pulls or digs up the plant. As of the writing of this article, he is just about done with this year's weeding of the test plot.

There are other pilot projects for Veldt Grass removal being conducted in the county. State Parks, under the leadership of parks ecologist Vince Cicero, is trying a grass-specific herbicide, Fusilade, at Montaña de Oro State Park. A plot of Veldt Grass-infested land at the Tosco Refinery on Highway 1 near Nipomo is being grazed by cattle; the cattle are eating the Veldt Grass, and the infestation is under control. Other projects use mowing to suppress the grass, followed by spraying of an herbicide and then a pre-emergent. The information gained from these efforts should lead to an efficient and effective campaign to remove this pest plant -- hopefully before it takes over the Elfin Forest.

Ernie Del Rio

County Parks' Second in Command

By Sandra Beebe

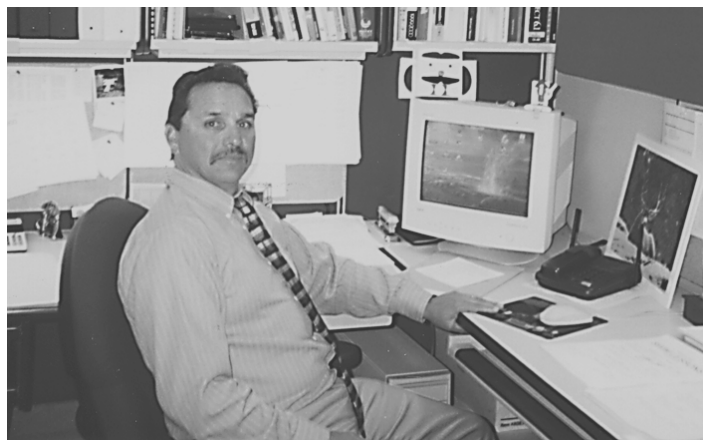
Ernie Del Rio, County Parks' Operations Superintendent knows and loves San Luis Obispo County well for he was born and bred in the area. He recalls his childhood with great fondness and feels he got his love of the outdoors from hunting, fishing and hiking with his family as a youth. Because there were so few people in the area then, he remembers fewer restrictions and rules about their adventures. The public interest and increased population that he has observed over the years have changed this.

At age 10 Ernie moved to Santa Maria where he went through the local school system and graduated from Santa Maria high school in 1972. While in high school he was a State Champion wrestler. He went on to attend and wrestle for Cal Poly and majored there in Recreation Administration. Like so many others, he had to forego the completion of his college degree and go out into the world to earn a living. He did so in many different jobs, most of them having to do with athletics or the outdoors. Eventually he finished his college education, earning his degree in 1994. He is rightfully proud of the fact that he did so while working full time and taking responsibility for his family.

He began his work for the parks system in 1985 when he took a job with Santa Barbara County Parks as a seasonal employee at Cachuma Lake. After seven years he had advanced to Ranger III. He then spent seven more years working in the Santa Maria district before taking his present job with San Luis Obispo County Parks in 1997, when Pete Jenny vacated it. He and his family currently reside in the Santa Maria area.

As Parks Operations Superintendent Ernie wears many different hats. Among these responsibilities: he markets and promotes the county parks, plans for land acquisitions, and is involved with community relations and personnel. Pools, parks

“To combat the new problems in the forest, new solutions have to be found. One of the things that (Del Rio) hopes to begin in the near future is a Host program ... to attempt



Ernie Del Rio, Operations Superintendent for County Parks, works to prevent damage to the Elfin Forest. Photo by Sandra Beebe

and beaches are all under his office's supervision.

The Elfin Forest is a new part of this system and is unique in several ways. One of the reasons the county wanted the current boardwalk was their concern about protecting the fragile vegetation there. They also desired to make it accessible to many others by this addition. However, with the completion of the boardwalk for these purposes, certain side effects have sprung forth. Because access is so much easier, visitors come to the Elfin Forest and intrude into areas they could not reach before. Some of them are youths who bring their bikes and skateboards. Dogs allowed to run through the endangered plant growth continue to be a problem. The damage that is currently occurring is a concern to all.

To combat the new problems in the forest, new solutions have to be found. One of the things that Ernie hopes to begin in the near future is a Host program. The Host volunteers would wear shirts and patches to identify them and add authority to their presence. Their function would be to attempt to educate the public on the correct use of the forest and to ask those who could not or would not comply, to leave. Hosts will carry cell phones so that a ranger or Sheriff's department could be called if compliance is not forthcoming. In addition, they would pass out informational sheets to those who seem to need more information on why their behavior is harming the forest.

Secondly, he hopes that soon his rangers will have a wider range of authority than they now have. The rangers are not officers of the law. They have all had such training but are waiting for the passage of ordinances that would give them more authority and a wider range of options to correct the behavior that some who visit the Elfin Forest, and all other county parks, exhibit. Among the things they are seeking is the ability to issue citations so that those who are not in compliance with county rules governing park usage could be fined for their behavior.

Ernie hopes that the future will bring "an acceptable level of consumption with the appropriate level on compliance" so that many can enjoy such treasures as the Elfin Forest. He would prefer doing this without having to add more and more restrictions to their use. He feels that the public is better off now with the boardwalk than they were before, because more can enjoy it. He stated that he hopes that the problems associated with this use can

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,
1087 Santa Rosa Street, SLO, CA 93408, (805) 781-5930.



Alien Invasion, Part 6:

Narrow-leaved Iceplant



Conicosia pugioniformis has several common names: Narrow leaf ice plant, Slender-leaved ice plant, or False ice plant.

This photo, by Beatrice F. Howitt of the California Academy of Sciences, was located on UC Berkeley's CalPhotos web site.

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

This is the sixth in a series of articles on alien plant species that are invading the Elfin Forest. Unchecked, the aliens will take over and destroy the plants that have been part of the Elfin Forest for centuries. It is hoped that these aliens will become more recognizable to members of SWAP and the Los Osos community. Community members are encouraged to volunteer to assist SWAP and San Luis County Parks Department in controlling these pests. Community involvement could make a big difference in restoring and maintaining the health of the park for the long term.

Narrow-leaved iceplant (*Conicosia pugioniformis*) is a member of the plant family *Aizoaceae*, or fig-marigolds. It is listed in the California Exotic Pest Plant Council's List A-2: "Most Invasive Wildland Pest Plants; Regional." This weed is found on coastal dunes and in sandy soils near the central coast of California, especially in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. It is a perennial plant that is native to South Africa, as are so many of the invasives in the Elfin Forest.

Conicosia pugioniformis can be distinguished from other iceplant species by its bright yellow, hairy blossoms and narrow, bright yellow-green leaves and branches. The common iceplant seen throughout coastal California is another invasive, Sea fig, *Carpobrotus edulis*, which has much thicker, stubbier, succulent leaves and has either pink or cream colored blossoms.

Narrow-leaved iceplant starts sprouting in the spring as a cluster of narrow, tubular, succulent bright green spikes in the spring. The plants can germinate from seeds or re-sprout from an existing taproot. The sprouting spikes eventually develop into a basal rosette of succulent

Iceplant continued on page 7

From the Chair

By Jim Weldon

I wish to thank all our members for their contributions, but we need more.

No, not dollars – time! We need your help to put together an informational manual, and slide programs that can be used both to teach our docents and to teach students at all levels. We need slides and photos of birds, insects, and mammals which inhabit the Elfin Forest. We have many slides and photos of plants, but lack some. These will be included in our

presentations to schools, clubs and organizations. We are sure that some slides or photos could be obtained from Audubon Society, the Natural History Museum, or Cal Poly, and need help in

gathering them as well as information about them. We need writers who will transform the information into readable manuals and scripts. Those of you who can give us an hour or two a month to help with this research, please contact us at 546-1199. We will have a committee meeting soon to schedule what is to be done and where information

"I wish to thank all our members for their contributions, but we need

Katie Steps Down



At our monthly meeting on May 8, the SWAP Board sadly accepted the resignation of Katie Davis, our Membership Chair and Secretary. Because teaching kindergarten is very time consuming, and because her family needs her as well, Katie found it necessary to trim down her volunteer activities.

She did a fantastic job as Membership Chair, bringing in new members with her cheerful letters, and gently reminding current members to renew when they forgot. She also wrote excellent minutes as Secretary of the Board.

Thank you for the time and energy which you gave to SWAP, Katie. We'll miss you, but we know that you made a wise choice. Yolanda Waddell was elected Secretary to replace Katie. SWAP now needs a Membership Chair – any volunteers? Oh, yes – we need a Volunteer Chair as well.

june 12	SWAP BOARD MEETINGS	july 10
	The SWAP Board of Directors meets on the second Monday of each month at 7 p.m. Board meetings will be held at the Coast National Bank, 1193 Los Osos Valley Road on	
	Monday, June 12, and Monday, July 10. All Board meetings are open to the public.	
	To confirm the date, time and location (which are subject to change), phone 528-4540.	

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

June 17 - 9:30 a.m.

Insects are a large and very important class of creatures in the web of life, but most of us think of them as a nuisance, and in some cases, “the enemy.” Entomologist David Headrick will help us to appreciate and understand the importance of those much-maligned “critters,” as we walk along the boardwalk.

July 15 - 9:30 a.m.

TBA

August 19 - 9:30 a.m.*

Learn the ancient history of the Elfin Forest from archaeologist Dr. John Parker, archaeological consultant and director of the San Luis Obispo Chinese artifact cataloging project. Dr. Parker will take us back in time to learn about the ancient inhabitants of the Elfin Forest and Central Coast. He will also use artifacts to demonstrate the culture and processes of the Chumash and earlier peoples.

**A few strong-armed volunteers who can arrive at 9:00 to help carry the artifacts would be appreciated.*

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. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak. Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes. We ask that you not bring



Botanist Dirk Walters helped a rapt group of listeners to understand the workings of wildflowers in the Elfin Forest during SWAP's Third Saturday Walk in April.

April Fools Fool Weeds

by Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair



SWAP work party volunteers had the last laugh on weeds in the Elfin Forest on April 1st. Six strong backs struck back, mostly at Italian thistle and narrow-leaved iceplant. They thwarted the thistle in the oak grove near Bush Lupine Point. As if that weren't enough, they also intimidated the iceplant as well. The friendly, foppish fools included Jay Bonestell, Ann Calhoun, Tony Collins, Jim Gold, Dorothy Norwood and Pat Sarafian. SWAP depends on folks like you to help keep the evil, exotic weeds controlled.

THANK YOU!!

No – she isn't an Elfin Forest elf. Weed Warrior Norma Wightman (above) was caught in the act of removing the invasive Smilax vine from an oak grove.

At left, Weed Warrior Joseph Johnson joined a First Saturday weeding session to uproot the thousands of Slender-leaved iceplant seedlings which appear in the Elfin Forest each Spring.

Photos by Pat Sarafian.

First Saturday Work Parties

SWAP work parties are held at 9 a.m. to noon on the first Saturday of each month. Volunteers should meet at the north end of 15th Street. Dress for sun and wind and bring work gloves if you can. Some work gloves, tools and drinking water are provided. Call 528-3194.



Pickle-weed

By Dirk Walters, Ph.D.;

drawing by Bonnie Walters and photo by Bud Meyer

The plant chosen for this article cannot be seen closely from the boardwalk. In order to see it as close as the picture (a scanned slide taken by Henry 'Bud' Meyer many years ago) one must actually enter the marsh and risk getting either wet or muddy or both. We will describe it as it would be viewed at a distance from the overlooks. It is one of the most common plants of the salt marsh. Locally, it is most commonly called pickle-weed, but it is also known as glasswort, samphire, or chicken claws. Its scientific name is *Salicornia virginica*.

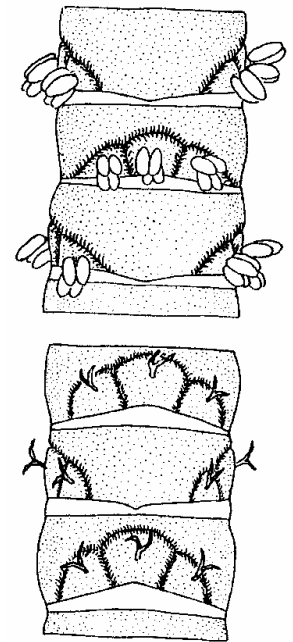
The name glasswort refers to the practice of burning large amounts of it for its high soda ash content. The ash was used in the past for glass making. The name, samphire, is a corruption of the French name, le herbe de Saint Pierre. I have no idea to what the name, chicken claws, refers.

The picture and drawings are of the most common pickle-weed in Morro Bay as well as on the West Coast. The species is also common on the East Coast of the U.S. It generally grows only in coastal salt marshes. Here it is one of the most salt tolerant species.

From one of the overlooks, one can visually divide the salt marsh into three habitats. There are the channels where few rooted plants grow (we will ignore these), and the flat areas can be divided into two types depending on whether they are vegetated. The bare areas where no plants seem to grow is the more restricted habitat. These very shallow depressions are only a few inches deep. Because of poor drainage, tide water can only escape from them via evaporation and this leaves the soil too salty for anything to grow.

The plant-covered habitat constitutes the majority of the salt marsh. Pickle-weed is the most common plant here. It is the plant species which can tolerate the highest soil salt concentrations (greater than 6%). As a person journeys from the edge of a depression toward the edge of the marsh, s/he climbs in elevation only a few inches at most. However, the amount of salt residing

“ Pickle-weed is relished by cattle and was used extensively for cattle grazing in Europe. The name pickle-weed is a reference to another use of the plant. Pre-industrial peoples of coastal Europe and



in the soil and the length of time the plants are covered by tide waters decreases rapidly. Pickle-weed is found throughout the entire transect, but as the soil salt concentration begins to approach normal and length of submergence approaches zero, more and more other kinds of plants are able to join the pickle-weed.

Bud's photo shows the succulent stem divided into segments which is characteristic of this herb. Its leaves appear only as a pair of tiny, fleshy triangular scales at the top of each segment. They are shown unshaded in the drawings. This perennial species is most obvious in the early fall when its aerial parts begin to decline. At this time, the whole plant can turn crimson red (the only really pretty feature of this plant), giving the estuary a distinctive fall color. Its flowers are exceptionally tiny and inconspicuous. They are hidden by fleshy scale bracts and are borne at the tip of branches.

The plant in the photo is a staminate (or male) plant. The upper drawing is a closer view of the flowers. Flowers occur in threes. Flowers consist of only some tiny fleshy sepals and either one or two stamens or a single pistil bearing 2 styles that join near the top of the ovary. The two drawings are close-ups of a few flowering segments. The upper one is from a staminate (male) plant and the lower one is of a pistillate (female) plant. Bonnie drew them originally for Dr. David Keil's and my plant taxonomy textbook.

Pickle-weed is relished by cattle and was used extensively for cattle grazing in Europe. The name pickle weed is a reference to another use of the plant. Pre-industrial peoples of coastal Europe and Eastern U.S. would gather the fleshy stems and make a pickle of them. Today, we mostly just take a few 'joints' and nibble on them for the crunchy

Iceplant *continued from page 4*

branches. The leaves consist of alternate, linear, succulent spikes.

Eventually, buds and flower heads develop. Flowers consist of large (two- to three-inch diameter) hairy yellow blossoms. The flowers have an unpleasant odor. The plant is low growing, never reaching more than about one foot in height.

As *Conicosia* matures and its flowers become fertilized, a conical green seedpod forms under each blossom. Each pod has from ten to twenty chambers, each with a smooth, spherical seed. In the late summer and fall, the plants dry out, become woody and die. The seedpods open and release the seeds.

With over a dozen blossoms occurring on each plant, it is easy to see how this weed can multiply out of control in a short time. Theoretically, each plant could produce hundreds of seeds for the next generation of plants. Narrow-leaved iceplant has spread throughout much of the Elfin Forest, infesting at least the southern two-thirds of the park. It is especially prevalent in disturbed areas around the new boardwalk and along older sand trails.

Mechanical control of *Conicosia* is easiest by uprooting it when the plants are young and have slender, hair-like taproots. The plants can be left to desiccate on the surface. However, each year an existing narrow-leaved iceplant will expand its root system. After one or two years the root can become large, over an inch in diameter. In such cases, the plants become very difficult to destroy by mechanical pulling. If severed near the surface, a taproot will re-sprout in the following growing season. To prevent re-sprouting, the root must be dug up, deep below the surface, or the plant must be treated with a systemic herbicide. Another problem with mechanical control is that uprooting may not control a plant that has matured enough to form branches and buds. There is enough moisture stored in the succulent plant to allow it to produce flowers that become fertilized and produce viable seeds. With more mature plants, removal from the site or composting must accompany uprooting.

In the Elfin Forest, only a professional who is licensed or certified to apply herbicide chemicals and who has federal, state, and county permission may do so. Herbicides used on iceplant may include systemic poisons such as Roundup. No biological controls (insects, etc.) are available at this time.

Anyone interested in helping to eradicate narrow-leaved iceplant or other invasive weeds in the Elfin Forest is encouraged to join the SWAP work party on the first Saturday of each month at 9 a.m. For more information, you may contact SWAP at 546-1199.



Jim Weldon, SWAP Chair and Bob McDougale, Treasurer, became SWAP's Shipping Department one Saturday morning to fill T-Shirt orders which poured in as a result of our special T-Shirt sale, advertised in the April/May issue of Oakleaves.

Thank You to our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Wendy Brown, Membership Committee

New Members:

Thomas H. Alden, Char Bruzenak, Jan & George Clucas*, Charles Gerson, Barbara Hardin, Beverly Hardy*, Lori Olson, Brenda Ostrander, Maureen Titus, Dean Weldon*

Renewing Members:

Barbara Akle, Donald & Karen Antonel*, Jerri & Mark Chadwick*, Peggy Childers*, Virginia Culbert, Louise J. Daniel*, Siegrid Fenn*, Martha & Leon Goldin*, Myron & Priscilla Graham, M.E. & Helen Graves*, Wes & Betsy Hamilton, Mary Harrison*, Joyce Heller, Vivian L. Hodge*, Jean & Robert Hoffman*, Patricia Hudson, Ereign Hutchinson, Dr. Steve Jio & Family*, Robbert Judd, Robert Lane*, Margaret & Earle Mayfield, Sylvia McLaughlin, Diana A. Minnix, Bill & Beverly Moylan*, Kelley & Erick Nelson, Margo Osherenko*, Don & Jo Parham, Richard S. Parker, Donald J. & Rita J. Robinson, Jay & Tina Salter*, Max & Helen Sicher, Lora Stelle, Yolanda & Jay Waddell*, James & Jeane Wood**

**Thanks to those listed above who donated more than the \$12 membership dues. The additional donations will be used for special projects in the Elfin Forest.*



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(805) 546-1199



Swap Membership: A Good Deal!



A membership in SWAP is the best bargain around. Memberships start at \$12 annually, and have not increased for years.

Not only do your dues help maintain and protect the Elfin Forest, you will receive our bimonthly publication, *Oakleaves*, delivered to your home six times a year.

You can rest assured that your membership dues will be used to preserve the Elfin Forest, a local natural environment unequaled in character and quality.

**PLEASE JOIN OR RENEW
YOUR SWAP MEMBERSHIP TODAY!**

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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