OAKLEAVES

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 ❖ OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2000

Art Gallery Fundraiser for SWAP!

The members of The San Luis Artists' Gallery, located in The Creamery in downtown San Luis Obispo, are planning a fundraising evening to benefit SWAP on Saturday, November 10th from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Barbara Rosenthal, member of the gallery's Special Events Committee, says that the works of thirty artists are on display in the gallery, including ceramics, sculpture, paintings and mixed media. The gallery was opened in November, 1999 by a group of artists including Barbara Rosenthal and her husband Rosey Rosenthal, both of whom are long-time supporters of SWAP. Barbara designed and painted the Elfin Forest mural which can be seen on the wall of Los Osos Rexall on Los Osos Valley Road.

There will be no admission charge for the benefit. SWAP members will be on hand to serve refreshments, talk to visitors about the Elfin Forest, and sell SWAP T-shirts or Pocket Guides to those who are interested. The artists will donate a percentage of any sales made during the evening, to SWAP.

Why not combine a visit to the San Luis Artists' Gallery with dinner or a movie downtown on Saturday, November 10th? The Creamery is located on Higuera just west of

'Big Sit' on October 22 Will Raise Funds for SWAP

By Jim Royer,
Morro Coast Audubon's Big Sit Coordinator

The Big Sit was apparently officially begun in Connecticut by the New Haven Bird Club in 1993. The first two Big Sits occurred only in Connecticut, but in 1995 it went national This annual birding event has spread across the country and is being enjoyed in several foreign countries. One

Big Sit *continued on page 2*

August War on Weeds

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

The SWAP Weekend Weed Warriors waged their battle against narrow-leaved iceplant and veldt grass again in August. Those who came out to help included Karl Appel, Jay Bonestell, Leslie Cohn, Kathy Dugan, Sonja Manor, Stan Reichenberg, Pat and Pete Sarafian and Yolanda Waddell. Part of the crew cleared the area below Bush Lupine Point of the iceplant. The rest of the volunteers continued previous months' efforts in the large veldt grass infestation near the same area. Despite dire predictions earlier in the year, the efforts are showing signs of paying off. Most of this year's narrow-leaved iceplant has been harvested from the disturbed areas along the boardwalk. At the beginning of last summer, the same paths were lined with hundreds of bright, hairy, yellow iceplant flowers. Most of this year's veldt grass seed has been removed from the large meadow area near Bush Lupine Point as well. Many of the grass bunches also have been dug up.

Hopefully, the advance of the grass has been slowed around the worst internal infestation in the park. This area had previous soil disturbance by motorized off-road vehicles and had become a virtual sea of grass.

Action Alert:

To the vigilante weed warriors who are leaving a trail of pulled-up plants: thank you so much for your care and concern for the Elfin Forest, but please cease immediately and call Pete Sarafian at 528-3194. Your efforts are effectively sowing seeds and spreading weeds for the next growing season.

The seeds have to be collected and not scattered throughout the park. Pete would be glad to share with you more effective methods in weeding.

Archaeologist Bill Nipper (in the shade) and biologists Heather Kelly, Steve Boland and Mercy Vaughn of MCI-World Com, after "harvesting" ten bags of veldt grass and delivering them to Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian. Photo by Pat Sarafian

'Angels from Heaven' Assist in Weed Wars

In a surprise visit, angels from heaven or forest elves harvested ten large bags of veldt grass from the Elfin Forest recently. Actually, they were four workers from the suspended MCI-World Com fiber-optic cable project who volunteered to come out to the Elfin Forest on Sunday, August 20th and pull weeds. They included biologists Steve Boland, Heather Kelly and Mercy Vaughn and archeologist Bill Nipper. The four had attended the third Saturday walk on the previous day given by archaeologist John Parker. They succeeded in virtually eliminating this year's veldt grass crop from just south of the boardwalk extension to Bush Lupine Point. All that remains in this area is some mop-up work. SWAP's thanks go out to these energetic young people whose results were amazing! The Elfin Forest really got lucky to have these out-of-town visitors help out.

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, Wendy Brown, Jim Royer, Pat Sarafian, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk & Bonnie Walters, and Jim Weldon; editing assistance by Pat Grimes

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Big Sit *continued from page 1*

inspiration for its inception was the thought that if you stay in one spot long enough you will see just as many bird species as moving around (a dubious theory). Nevertheless, it was the start of something fun - a big day for lazy people. It also sounds "official" for those who need a reason (for themselves or spouses or parents) for sitting around all day and looking at birds. Additionally, it is a challenge to the eyes and ears of the participants as they "rack up" the species over the first few hours at a good spot, followed by an even greater challenge to add more species during subsequent hours.

One of the Big Sit rules states that participants must see or hear all birds from within one 17-foot diameter circle. Why seventeen feet? Besides being a comfortable-sized circle for a small group of birders with their chairs, drinks, scopes, etc., there is another reason. One of the founders of the official "Big Sit", John Himmelman, states that an appealing reason for such an odd size was that long after he passed on "into that big count circle in the sky," future counters would be asking "why seventeen feet?" Bird counters can come and go as much as they want within the 24 hour Big Sit period. They can even leave the circle to identify birds which they cannot see or hear well enough to identify from the circle, but they cannot locate other birds while outside the circle.

Bush Lupine Point ... has had the highest total in the

Obviously, the most important two ingredients for a successful Big Sit are experienced birders and a location with a broad range of habitats. The clear choice in our area is some location next to Morro Bay, with its high number of waterbird species. Sweet Springs, the Audubon Overlook on 3rd Street in Los Osos, and the Elfin Forest are all possible locations for the circle. The Elfin Forest has turned out to be the best spot. The highest total number of species heard or seen from one Big Sit circle nationwide is 112 species, recorded from Bush Lupine Point at the Elfin Forest, both in 1998 and 1999. In fact, Bush Lupine Point is so good that it has had the highest total in the United States for three years running - our own "threepeat."

This year participants will be counting in shifts at the Elfin Forest on Sunday, October 22, with an experienced birder/leader for each time period. It will also be a fund-raiser for S.W.A.P. as people will pledge a given amount of money for each species found (like a walk-a-thon). People who are interested in taking part in a fun event can just pledge to a birder/counter, or they can take part themselves as a counter (the more the merrier) with people pledging on their form. Traditionally we have had a party at sunset to celebrate the successful count. Call Jim Royer at 528-8933 for more details and to take part.

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SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

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, October 9, and Monday, November 13.
All Board meetings are open to the public.
To confirm the date, time and location
(which are subject to change), phone 546-1199.

november 13

Vince Cicero,
State Research Ecologist

By Sandra Beebe

Vince Cicero, State Parks Research Ecologist for the San Luis Obispo Coast District, serves a large territory, including Morro Bay State Park (in background) and 50 acres of the Elfin Forest.

> " ... people who visit the Elfin Forest are usually unaware of what one person's footprints can

Vince Cicero, who has been the State Research Ecologist in our area since 1994 is a native Californian from Pomona, California. Even though his career is based on his interest in plants and environmental concerns, he was not raised in an environment where that was paramount. He left home around 18 and worked his way through Cal Poly Pomona, performing a variety of jobs. He obtained his degree in 1980 with a major in agronomy. He felt that work in the field of agriculture would be a practical use of his academic achievements.

Although many can relate a time when concerns about the environment became their focus, Vince feels his awareness of these issues was evolutionary. During college he did some work with wildfire management. He participated in several internships, which helped this process. Among the agencies where he interned were the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and also the Nature Conservancy. Each one of these contributed to his knowledge and piqued his interest in ecology and how each of us affects it.

After college he worked for the Department of Defense at Vandenberg Air Force Base as a range conservationist. He began his career with the State as a research ecologist in September of 1986, based in Monterey but actually working most of the Central Coast. Following that, he came to this area in 1994 to take the position as Research Ecologist for the State Parks system.

Vince mentioned that we have a unique environment here for plants, even some rare ones. He said that this area has one of the highest levels of park development such as hiking trails and camp grounds, in California. Although he feels it is important to make parklands accessible to a wide range of people, he has observed that plants are damaged by such access. A balance between access and protection is difficult. The Elfin Forest is an example of this tenuous balance. Since the boardwalk opened in the Elfin Forest, bringing greater numbers of people and their dogs, he has perceived that more damage to the plant life has occurred there. Using the boardwalk, people have gone into areas previously inaccessible and protected from their tramplings. "Ad hoc" trails are definitely causing problems in parts of Elfin Forest.

In Vince's opinion the extent of plant damage is related to the number of people using an area. In sections of the Forest that are more protected and less accessible, less damage occurs. He continued that the people who visit the Elfin Forest are usually unaware of what one person's footprints can do to a fragile plant system. Although, ideally, the public can be educated to be careful where they walk, he feels it is a hard thing to teach the general public. They often fail to see the overall picture and cannot see beyond the small amount of change they have caused, if they even notice that.

One of the ecological impacts on the Elfin Forest that Vince is most concerned with, as are members of SWAP's conservation committee, is the invasion by alien plants. Veldt grass is a major concern, but there are others causing havoc also - Italian thistle, smilax, and cape ivy to name a few of those he is working to control.

Vince's major weed control project is at Montaña de Oro. Mechanical means of eradicating veldt grass in such a vast area is very difficult because many workers would be needed, and pulling weeds disturbs the soil, thus making it perfect place for seed germination. In small areas like the Elfin Forest, manual pulling of veldt grass and other invasives is still in progress, but long term success is not known. Veldt grass is a hardy plant and must be watched for future germination for years. He noted that fire also has been attempted as a control, but has been unsuccessful as it actually makes a better environment for seed germination.

Currently, Vince is working with grass-specific herbicides, which are safe for all the native plants that are not grasses. The grass-specific herbicide Fusilade appears to have no impact on the Morro shoulder banded snail. A major eradication project at Montaña de Oro is currently being planned.

Although Vince is a State Employee, he works closely with County Parks staff members who are also overseeing the Elfin Forest. Since there is no County ecologist, Vince is the resource person whom County Parks must turn to when they want to understand plant life and the impact that the public has on it. There are many who are studying public impact and alien plant invasion in the Elfin Forest; cooperation among agencies, educational institutions, conservation groups and individuals is a necessity for success.

Alien Invasion, Part 8:

The Big Picture

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

This is the eighth 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 in controlling these pests. Community involvement could make a big difference in restoring and maintaining the health of the park for the long term.

When Europeans set foot in America, an alien invasion began. This invasion was comprised of people, plants, animals or any organism from another country that was introduced and thrived under local American conditions. Some of the most notable examples have been Asian flu virus and zebra mussels; European diseases, starlings, sparrows and grasses; African AIDS virus and Africanized honey bees; Australian eucalyptus trees; and weeds from all over the world. The California Exotic Pest Plant Council lists the most invasive wildland pest plants. The USDA has data on the most troublesome agricultural pests. The introduction of alien organisms increases each year with the increase in the speed and number of transoceanic shipments and travels by tourists and business people. This trend may be expected to continue.

In California, the rise in alien species took a large jump about 150 years ago with the flood of human immigrants during the gold rush. The population of outsiders exploded, and so did the carrying-in of alien organisms. Large quantities of foreign species came into California as deliberate or accidental agricultural imports. Smaller but significant numbers of aliens came in as ornamental horticulture imports. Some aquatic aliens attached themselves to ships and infested our harbors. Additionally, tourists and businesses accidentally or deliberately brought in other pests.

"At least a dozen invasive species are scattered through

While the alien invasion has been proceeding on a statewide, national and global scale, most efforts at eradication have been proceeding on a local or county scale. Few efforts other than disease and some agricultural pest eradication have been on a state or national scale. Thus, many of the aliens have been gaining the upper hand in California and other regions for over a century.

At least a dozen invasive species are scattered through the Elfin Forest. These species make a home here, especially in areas where the soil has been disturbed and seeds can take root. Human activities have badly eroded and denuded some areas of ground cover. This abuse continues to this day with human and pet traffic on the dune soils and fragile native vegetation. Wild game used to create narrow avenues with minor plant damage.

Big Picture *continued on page 7*

From the Chair

By Jim Weldon

Each and every member of SWAP is very important to our ongoing work of maintaining and restoring the Elfin Forest. We value your interest, participation and financial support, and do our best to keep you informed of SWAP's activities through the bimonthly *Oakleaves*.

Most of your $12 minimum membership fee is returned to you in the form of this 8-page newsletter. Producing the newsletter and mailing it to you is labor intensive and a difficult task for those involved. We also distribute *Oakleaves* free of charge to local school libraries and government agencies.

To make the process more efficient and cost effective, we have decided to discontinue sending *Oakleaves* to members whose dues are in arrears. Your membership renewal date appears on your label. Please check it now to see if your dues are current, and use the form on the back of this issue of *Oakleaves* to renew. Thank you for your continued support of SWAP and the Elfin Forest.

T-Shirt News

By Pat Sarafian, SWAP's Property Manager

For the Bargain Shopper

There is a limited supply still available of our Original Black "Elfin Forest Mural" (mural on both sides) T-shirts and Sweat Shirts. Buy while they last- $10.00 for T-Shirts and $15.00 for sweat shirts.
Our current stock is: Short Sleeve T-Shirts - 18 Large, 23 X-Large, and 2 XX-Large. Long sleeve T-Shirt -11 small; Sweat Shirts - 1 Medium, and 18 XX Large. Interested? Phone our voicemail, 546-1199. Pat Sarafian will contact you.

Boardwalk T-Shirts

Step into the feel of our wonderful Boardwalk by purchasing one of our newest style T-Shirts showing a portion of the Boardwalk, the Elfin Forest and Morro Rock in the back ground. The T-Shirt material is a light sand color; with a 4-color design on the back and a pocket size print on the front. T-shirt sizes range from Small to XXX-Large and sell for $15.00 each, short-sleeved only. Call our voicemail, 546-1199 to place orders.

T-Shirt Survey

Are you interested in a new production of the original black Elfin Forest Mural T-shirts and sweat shirts??? The original mural T-shirt, using the design created by artist Barbara Rosenthal, includes the words "Rexall Drug" since the Elfin Forest Mural is painted on the side of the Rexall Drug building on Los Osos Valley Road . The new version would leave off "Rexall Drug" and add "Small Wilderness Area Preservation." The new T-shirts, like the original Mural T-shirts and sweatshirts would be black. The SWAP board needs to know if there is enough interest in the Mural T-shirt among our members before we order them. We need to hear your opinion so we can proceed. Please call our voicemail, 546-1199 ASAP and let us know if you would buy a Mural T-shirt or sweatshirt if it were available. Thanks for your

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

October 21 - 8:30 a.m.

Join Jim Royer, avid birder and active member of Morro Coast Audubon in a "pre-Big Sit" birding tour of the Elfin Forest. This walk is for those who just enjoy looking at birds, as well as those who know how to identify them. Jim will help us to spot Northern flickers, Spotted Towhees and other birds of the chaparral and oak woodlands. He knows most birds by their songs, and will tune us in to the ping pong call of the Wrentit and the clear song of the Bewick's Wren. We'll also look at shorebirds and ducks through his spotting scope. The following day, Sunday October 22nd, you can join Audubon members at Bush Lupine Point to take part in the Big Sit if you'd like. See the article on the Big Sit in this issue. Bring your binoculars.

November 18 - 9:30 a.m.

Al Normandin will lead us on an enjoyable fall season discovery tour of the Elfin Forest. During November, many of the plants are "resting," waiting for the winter rains, but there is much to observe. Al, a Natural History Association docent who also spends a good deal of time in the Elfin Forest, will help us to tune in to the sounds, sights and - yes - smells of the varied habitats in this small wilderness. Bring a hand lens and binoculars.

December 16 - 9:30 a.m.

"The Estuary and the Forest" will be the focus of walk leader Mike Multari, Director of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program. He'll help walk participants view the Elfin Forest and Morro Bay Estuary as a complete wetlands system, and will talk about where SWAP and the Elfin Forest fit into the MBNEP's management plan. Just for fun, he'll bring his spotting scope for a look at birds in the estuary. He insists that he's a "bad birder," but anyone who has a spotting scope must know birds better than the rest of us.

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 dogs or other pets.

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.

Archaeologist Dr. John Parker displays a spear of the type used by ancient dwellers of the Elfin Forest, during the August 3rd Saturday Walk for SWAP.

New Brochure

SWAP's current brochure is in the process of getting a new look. The highlights of the 2-color, 4-section brochure will be a picture of the boardwalk for the cover page and a new map of the Elfin Forest which includes the boardwalk. The brochure will explain what SWAP does, and gives a brief history and description of the El Moro Elfin Forest, along with new and updated information. SWAP brochures are currently distributed throughout the San Luis Obispo, Los Osos and Morro Bay areas.

We are looking for an interested volunteer to monitor the distribution of the brochures and also our Pocket Guides. This takes only about one or two days a month getting to each location and checking on their supplies. Helpful hands are very much needed for several other types of small jobs. Please call and leave a message for Pat Sarafian in our voicemail, 546-1199 if you feel you could assist.

Octoberfest

Festival time — and Baywood is the place — Sunday, October 29th! Come join the fun at the Octoberfest and look for SWAP's booth which will be located a short distance from the Baywood pier. If you like talking to people, and would enjoy spending 3 hours chatting with visitors about the Elfin Forest and SWAP, we could use your help. Call our voicemail, 546-1166 and leave a message for Jim Weldon. Mark your calendar and enjoy great entertainment, good food, and a wonderful variety of vendor and information booths — including SWAP's, of course.

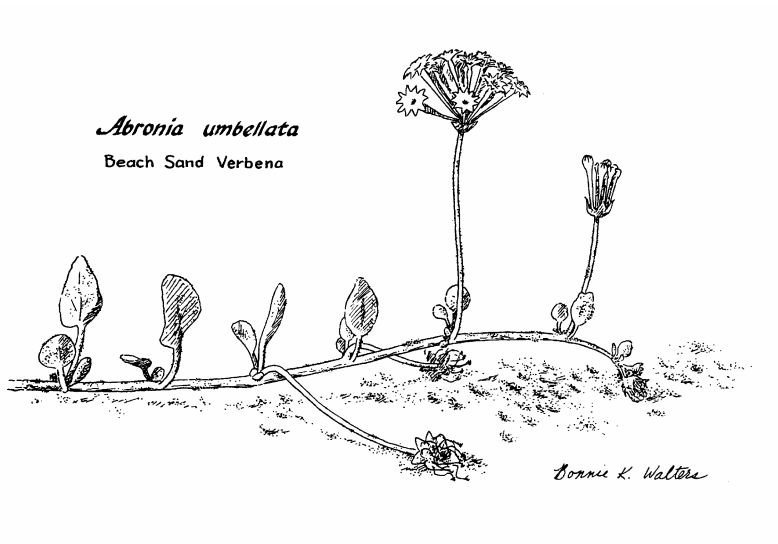
Let's All Pull Together!

SWAP First Saturday 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.

Eighteenth in a Series

Sand Verbenas

By Dirk Walters, Ph.D.; Drawing by Bonnie Walters



This time I am going to discuss three species from a single genus commonly known as sand verbenas. The genus is Abronia, in the four-o-clock family (*Nyctaginaceae*). Besides the sand verbenas, the Nyctaginaceae family includes the garden four-o-clock (*Mirabilis*) and the tropical vine bougainvilea.

Members of the four-o-clock family do not have petals, but possess a set of showy colored (petaloid) sepals (calyx). These sepals are usually fused into a tube. The flowers are usually arranged into a rounded cluster with all the flowers arising from a single point at the end of the stalk. Such an inflorescence is called an umbel. In most of the genera, the base of the pistil (ovary), which produces the fruit, is enclosed within the hard to leathery base of the calyx. The "fruit" is therefore an achene that is totally enclosed by an often-winged calyx base. Botanists call such a "fruit" an anthocarp.

Our sand verbenas have all of these characteristics. There are approximately thirty species worldwide; most of them are native to Western North America and most occur in the interior deserts. However, three species are found in sandy soils along the Pacific Coast: the beach or pink sand verbena (*Abronia umbellata*), the one pictured; yellow sand verbena (*A. latifolia*), the only sand verbena with yellow flowers; and purple sand verbena (*A. maritima*), the one found closest to the ocean.

The beach sand verbena is found along the Pacific Coast from Southern California to Washington. The yellow sand verbena ranges from Surf in Santa Barbara County north into British Columbia. The purple sand verbena ranges from just north of Morro Bay south into Baja California, Mexico. In other words, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties are the only places where all three species occur together.

This multiple occurrence is of particular interest because the yellow sand verbena occasionally hybridizes with the other two species. Hybrid plants are actually fairly common around Morro Bay, especially on the sand spit. I have been watching one hybrid individual for nearly thirty years. Although hybrid individuals occur regularly, I have never heard of any of them producing viable seed.

Morro Bay's three species tend to occur in distinct habitats. Usually, the purple sand verbena is found just above the high tide line and in visual sight of the ocean. It sometimes is found in sandy areas close to the edge of the bay. Although *A. maritima* is listed in the Elfin Forest species list, it will not be visible from the boardwalk. It would be found rarely, just above the high tide line next to the bay. Yellow sand verbena (*A. latifolia*) has the most restricted range. It is found almost exclusively in the higher dunes back from the beach. The beach or pink sand verbena (*A. umbellata*) is found from the back of the high dunes inland as far as coastal sand dunes are found. The beach sand verbena is the only one commonly visible from the Elfin Forest boardwalk.

As well as occupying relatively distinct ranges, the three species are easy to tell apart. Obviously, the yellow flowers of the yellow sand verbena are unique. Further, this species has fleshy leaves that are as wide or wider than they are long. Both the beach and purple sand verbenas have reddish to purple flowers and leaves that are slightly longer than wide. The umbel of the purple sand verbena is very tight and the flowers are sticky to the touch. They are uniformly dark purple in color. Its stem is very thick, and like the yellow sand verbena, it is very sticky. Blowing sand grains tend to stick to the stem forming a protective shield around the soft stem beneath. The beach sand verbena has thinner leaves and more delicate stems. It is not as sticky and its flowers are not uniform in color, ranging from a lighter red-purple to pink. Pink sand verbena has a white area at the entrance to its thin floral tube. A yellow throat instead of a white one is often an indication of a hybrid between *A. latifolia* and *A. umbellata*. Pink sand verbenas have a loose umbel and non-sticky flowers.

I found one reference to the Chinook Indians of California using the stout roots of the yellow sand verbena as food. All three species should be amenable to cultivation. The *Sunset Western Garden Book* states that all three species can be propagated from seed. Unfortunately seed is hard to find commercially. They suggest that it might be available from firms specializing in wildflower seed.

Pete Sarafian, SWAP Conservation Chair, recently met a group of Coastwalks participants in Morro Bay State Park and hiked with them to the Elfin Forest and back.
The group rested and ate lunch at Bush Lupine Point, and later bought several SWAP T-shirts from Pat Sarafian.

Thank You to our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Wendy Brown, Membership Committee

New Members:

Linda Hansen*
Kirsten Holmquist*
Janet F. Husung, CSJ

Renewing Members:

Arthur & Lillian Armstrong
Susan & John Armstrong
Morro Coast Audubon Society*
C. Dawn Aulenbrock*
Jay Bonestell
Carolyn Boomer
William Bouton
Jean P. Boyd
Wendy Brown*
Elizabeth Caldwell
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Dr. Jan William Simek*
Lesa Smith
Mr. & Mrs. D. R. Thompson*
Alphonso Topp
Dirk & Bonnie Walters*

**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.*

Big Picture *continued from page 4*

Now, humans and pets have greatly increased the amount of damage, leaving wide avenues of open sand and broken vegetation. This invites increased erosion and sedimentation of the bay or invasion by the aggressive aliens.

The alien invaders come to America's landscape with no natural predators to hold them in balance. Often they are prodigious multipliers. Some individual weed plants can produce thousands of seeds in a given year. The average invasive plant spreads 15% per year. That translates to a doubling in the number of plants or infested acreage about every five years. Given the current degree of infestation in the Elfin Forest, the entire park could be infested with one or more invasive alien species within our lifetimes.

The dune scrub and chaparral in the Elfin Forest are being invaded currently by veldt grass and narrow-leaved iceplant. The infestation is quite bad in the southern two-thirds of the park. In places veldt grass has nearly obliterated the other species. Both invasive species are encroaching on the oak and Morro manzanita groves. The iceplant loves the open spaces along trails in the sand and where a large manzanita has died. The veldt grass is more indiscriminate and encroaches everywhere. Efforts to spray veldt grass a few years ago had the infestation nearly controlled. Today, the delay in following up with a multi-year treatment has allowed the infestation to expand to nearly all corners of the park. The endangered Morro Shoulderbanded dune snail is sure to suffer from this loss of habitat. When the grass moves in, the native plants favored by the snail are eradicated. The threatened Morro Manzanita also is in danger from the infestation. As the pest plants encroach on the manzanita stands, fewer can reproduce and continue the species.

Some of the other invasives are attacking the pygmy oaks. Smilax, cape ivy, and English ivy are smothering the trees, blocking their sources of sunlight and nutrients. The upper six inches of the soil under smilax-infested oaks is a mass of interlocking smilax roots. Whole forests in New Zealand have been smothered by smilax and cape ivy.

Italian thistle is pushing out the native vegetation from the understory of the oak groves. This also is changing the habitat needed for survival of the endangered dune snail.

The two open meadow areas in the Elfin Forest are infested with yellow star thistle. This scourge is all over the northern part of the county. It is also in nearby land across (east of) South Bay Boulevard.

Not only are the present aliens in the Elfin Forest a concern, but there are also nearby species that could strike at any time. Birds, land animals, water, wind, and careless hikers could spread invasives such as giant reed (*Arundo donax*) from nearby creeks or pampas and jubata grass (*Cortaderia selloana* and *Cortaderia jubata*) from nearby landscapes.

Given the state of the invasion and the potential for an ecological disaster, only continual vigilance will allow the Elfin Forest to survive in a native state. Weed surveys need to be done each year, and yearly weed abatement and replanting with native species have to be done. Given limitations in funding and manpower, priorities will have to be established and reviewed each time a change is noted. Preservation and conservation of the

Los Osos / Morro Bay Chapter
SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
A Non-Profit Public Benefit Corporation
P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6442
(805) 546-1199 (voicemail)

How Do I Know When It's Time to Renew?

To find out, check the RENEWAL DUE DATE located next to your name on the address label. You can use the adjacent membership form for your renewal. Select your membership category and mail off the form along with your check as your anniversary approaches. Joining S.W.A.P. for the first time is just as easy.

Our basic membership is $12 which covers our operating costs and brings you our bimonthly newsletter, *Oak Leaves*. Membership donations above the basic level provide our all-volunteer organization with funds for habitat restoration and weed control projects.

Thank you for your membership and support of S.W.A.P. We look forward to hearing from you!

PLEASE RENEW YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE ELFIN

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone_____

❑ *New Member* ❑ *Renewing Member*

❑ Member $12 ❑ Defender $100
❑ Steward $25 ❑ Champion $250
❑ Protector $50 ❑ Guardian $500
❑ Life Member $1000

❑ I want to help, please call me!

Have you renewed your membership on time?
Check the label on this newsletter
for your renewal due date.
EVERY membership counts!!

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