



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) 528-0392 ❖ JUNE / JULY 2001

Hasta la Vista to Shirley Sparling

By Yolanda Waddell

A serious hole has been created in the volunteer ranks of SWAP and the Morro Bay Museum Docents by the recent departure of Dr. Shirley Sparling. She decided to move north, and has taken up residence in Pacific Grove. There are many of us who wished her well, but saw her leave with regret and sadness. Not only has she taught us much, and given us information and advice, but she has been a keystone to many Museum Docent activities, including coordinating the Walk Docents and acting as coordinator for the Betty Holloway Garden in Montaña de Oro State Park.

SWAP appreciates Shirley because she has led many walks for us over the years, such as "The Small Ones of the Elfin Forest" (on lichens, mosses and fungi); "By Their Leaves You Shall Know Them" (how to identify plants when they aren't in flower); and "The Fruits (seeds) of Plants and How They Travel." Before leading the walks, she would trim back the brush on a seldom-used trail to the lower Elfin Forest if need be, and would always check the path of her walk a week or so ahead of time to locate plants of interest.

As a Cal Poly biology instructor, Shirley struck fear in the hearts of her Algology (study of algae) and General Botany students by requiring accuracy and forbidding sloppiness in their work. She has always demanded the same of herself, of course. The error-free plant list in the *Elfin Forest Pocket Guide* was proof read by Shirley. Her walks were beautifully organized, with plant displays at the beginning of the walk and pictures in binders to illustrate her points along the way. And to top it all, she did this cheerfully, obviously enjoying the process.

We're all well aware that the Monterey Aquarium is very close to Pacific Grove, and will undoubtedly be the next place where Shirley Sparling becomes the irreplaceable volunteer. If you visit the Aquarium in a month or two, ask



Photo by Wilburn Woods

Elfin Forest *Sightings*

The Boardwalk isn't just for people and dogs. The inhabitants of the Elfin Forest use it too! On Monday, February 19, at noon, Petra and Jack Clayton spotted a **COYOTE** walking along the Boardwalk, apparently heading for the Celestial Meadow. Some months earlier, Pat Brown saw a **COYOTE** near the 11th Street trail, also during the day. This Spring, Pat has been keeping track of numerous **Variable Checkerspot butterfly caterpillars** which walk along the rails of the Boardwalk until they find a suitable spot to become a chrysalis, and attach themselves to the side of the rail.

While digging for veldt grass near the beginning of the 15th Street Trail in March, Kathy Dugan and Ron Rasmussen found slender silvery snake-like creatures on their shovels which turned out to be **Legless Lizards**. These lizards spend most of their lives burrowing through the sand, and are becoming quite rare as more of Los Osos is developed.

Wilburn Woods enjoyed a walk through the Elfin Forest when **Ceanothus** was in full bloom. He sent us the photo above, of a beautiful Ceanothus bush framing Hollister Peak in the background.

Veldt Grass Control Project Update

By Mark Skinner, Stewardship Director, Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County

On Saturday, March 14, the Land Conservancy led a Saint Patrick's Day Veldt Grass Pull in the South Bay Boulevard Veldt Grass Control area. There were fifteen people from Americorps, California Conservation Corps and SWAP. We nailed the northern invasion at South Bay Boulevard near Los Osos Creek. There was some old veldt grass in the Elfin Forest and some emergent veldt grass along the road cut. This was important since it is where the Elfin Forest actually touches South Bay Boulevard.

Many hours have been spent keeping up with the veldt grass. Constant maintenance is an important part of a control project like the one along South Bay Boulevard, as veldt grass seeds are viable for up to four years. The planted native stock is growing well, and thankfully the veldt grass is much more manageable. However, new veldt grass plants will continue to spring up, and help is needed in removing this year's invasion. If you wish to help with this project, phone me at the Land Conservancy, 544-9096.

Is Pulling Veldt Grass Worth It? You Bet!



Before (at left): area near Bush Lupine point in Spring, 2000. At lower right of this photo is a Silver bush lupine almost overwhelmed by veldt grass.

After (below): same area in Spring, 2001. Weeder Pat Sarafian is surrounded by Deerweed in bloom instead of veldt grass. The Bush lupine at lower right has filled out and is once again a healthy plant.

Last Spring, Pete and Pat Sarafian and their Weed Warriors put in hundreds of hours of hard labor, removing weeds in all parts of the Elfin Forest, but focusing on the veldt grass which had overtaken the meadow areas near Bush Lupine Point.

They knew that the veldt grass would spring up again after winter rains, and almost despaired of ever making headway against it. But a small miracle happened at Bush Lupine Point after the last April rain. Instead of veldt grass covering the area, a field full of Deerweed resplendent with yellow blossoms appeared. Bees found the deerweed, too.

Another part of the web of life in the Elfin Forest has been restored to the way it ought to be. Congratulations, Weed Warriors!



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 528-0392.





Toxicodendron Diversilobum “Elfinum”

Poison-Oak in the Elfin Forest

(Part one of three parts)

by Curt Beebe, Morro Bay Natural History Museum Docent

Throughout our beautiful Elfin Forest, poison-oak grows among the Coast live oaks. It helps close the canopies of small oak trees. Closed canopies shade out grass, which otherwise competes with oak trees for the scarce nutrients and moisture in this harsh dune environment. Closed canopies are also excellent habitats for insects and the small birds that feed on them. Larger birds eat the fruit of *Toxicodendron diversilobum*. Poison-oak roots extend up to twenty-five feet horizontally, helping to stabilize the soil. It is a pretty plant, especially in the fall. And it appropriately defends the fragile dune habitat from domestic pets and human intruders.

As an oak tree is growing, poison-oak keeps pace, self-pruning branches that aren't growing, and eventually becoming shaded by the tree canopy. “Elbows” form where the original growing tip was lost; otherwise the large stem connecting the roots to the canopy, like the handle of a pitchfork, is nearly straight. Poison-oak grows that way to a height of 7 to 9 feet. After that, oak tree canopies get beyond its reach, and the plant is shaded out. Thus poison-oak often grows in the periphery of our clumps of pigmy oaks, where the canopy is lower in height.

ANNUAL OBSERVATIONS OF POISON-OAK GROWTH

January: No leaves. The leaf buds are open. The leaves are longitudinally furrowed, 3/16 inch long, creamy white and hairy.

February: The leaf bud scales have dropped by mid-month. The three leaflets of each leaf are visible, but tiny, reddish green, and wrinkled.

March: The leaves are 2 inches long and light green. This color contrasts with the tree leaves, and makes it easier to see them. By March 21st the leaves have turned dark green, which matches the tree's foliage.

April: Fog is now a more important source of water than rain; fog averages twice a week in May, three times a week in June, and once a week in August. The fog also decreases the solar radiation to 30%, which is good for poison-oak. The plant does best at 20% of full sun. By the last week of April, blooming and setting of the fruit peak. Poison-oak probably blooms every month of the year: the least in January, exponentially increasing February to April 1st, and much less after mid-May. The ratio of blooms-to-leaves varies. Stem growth begins; the new wood makes new leaves.

May: As blooming peaks, the stem buds activate, all the lateral branch buds on last year's wood also open. Each is going to add leaves to the plant's canopy, to help adjust the length of stems and mature the fruit.

June 1 to August 31: Orange colored leaves can form if dehydration threatens; peak canopy density and maximum light extraction usually occur about mid-June.

July: Clusters of 3/16 inch, green-striped immature fruits are seen. Most of the fruit originally set has already dropped because of various stresses. However, fruits at this advanced

stage, often single, are found occasionally almost every month.

August: Clusters of brownish-cream mature berries are seen.

September: Leaf color peaks at bright red.

October: Leaves fall.

November: Many of the stems are bare, and most of the buds are dormant. The lateral buds are 1/16 inch long and covered by brown scales. However, there are some new leaves and blossoms. The leaves are light green.

December: Most of the stems are bare. However, if the weather has been warm for several days, there are a few leaves and blossoms in the oak tree canopies in sunny areas, often near the tips of branches. The blossoms are nearly as numerous as the leaves. They may be partly open, but usually not enough to see inside. Fruit is not yet set, and with each cold snap the leaves and blossoms drop.

As I have watched this plant for two years, my fear has changed to awe. Perhaps you too will become curious. By all means, share your thoughts with me! I am most interested in your observations, and whether you agree with me.

Editor's Notes:

Curt Beebe, as a Morro Bay Museum Docent, gives walks and talks on a variety of subjects, but during the past two years has become the local expert on poison-oak. He gives campfire talks on the topic at Morro Bay State Park, and has learned how to handle the plant, collect its seeds and grow it. On September 15, he will lead a walk in the Elfin Forest on poison-oak.

The graphic is adapted from library images at www.calflora.org.

Morro Shoulderband Dune Snail Assigned Final Critical Habitat



By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has designated three locations in the Los Osos area as final critical habitat for the federally endangered Morro Shoulderband Dune Snail (*Helminthoglypta walkeriana*). This designation is to help assure the continued survival of the snail. The critical habitats include the Morro Bay Sand Spit, South Los Osos (lower slopes south of Highland Drive) and Northeast Los Osos (between Los Osos Creek and Baywood Park residences and divided by South Bay Boulevard). The El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area is included in the last of these areas. The notice of the designation was published in the Federal Register on February 7, 2001 under 50 CFR Part 17.

This designation is to help assure the continued survival of the snail ... As much as 90-95% of the former range of

Originally, the dune snail was found throughout the dune area that comprises Los Osos and Baywood Park, California. As much as 90-95% of the former range of the snail has been developed. The snail now is relegated to small patches of native scrub within the residential and commercial developments of the community and to open plots of land around the periphery of the developed area. This is one of the main reasons for the endangered species and critical habitat designations for the snail.

SWAP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors of Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP)

consists of the following members:

Jim Weldon, Chair

Pete Sarafian, Vice Chair

Bob McDougale, Treasurer

Yolanda Waddell, Secretary

Pat Sarafian, Member at Large

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The SWAP Board of Directors meets on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Coast National Bank, 1193 Los Osos Valley Road on

Monday, June 11, and Monday, July 9.

All Board meetings are open to the public.

To confirm the date, time and location (which are subject to change), phone 528-0392.

june 11

july 9



Kathy Dugan and several other Weed Warriors celebrated Cinco de Mayo by pulling veldt grass.

April Showers

Weed Warriors

by Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

It was the first Saturday in April, and true to form, nature rewarded the Wonderful Weekend Weed Warriors with a late (for us) spring rain. Just prior to work starting, the skies let loose with a torrent that provided a healthy drink to the Elfin Forest. Not believing that anyone would dare to come out, this skeptic nevertheless trudged out to the Forest, clipboard in hand to greet the phantom weed crew. And, lo and behold! Two soggy, stalwart (but possibly as deranged as I was) individuals arrived with cheerful, smiling faces to brave the elements.

The true-blue trio trudged out to the Bush Lupine Point area to pull veldt grass (with me still mumbling to myself about the weather). Not to be outdone by our attempt to defy nature, she struck with a vengeance, thoroughly soaking one of our volunteers who failed to dress for an epic deluge. The skies indeed opened up and dumped what seemed like an immense amount of water in a half-hour or so of misery. The remaining two people who dressed for the occasion (including yours truly) managed to put in a good morning's work of yanking, pulling and digging out the accursed veldt grass. (The grass didn't seem to mind the weather a bit.) The two incredibly brave (what were they thinking?) volunteers were Brennan Leyendecker, a new warrior, and Tony Collins, a long time stalwart. As usual, Pete Sarafian presided over the festivities. All in all, considering the weather, it was an incredibly successful outing.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third Saturday Walks

June 16 - 8:30 a.m. (note early starting time)

Get a different view of the Elfin Forest through the lens of your camera on a walk designed for camera bugs of all ages and levels of experience. Marlin Harms, whose photos have been featured in the *Sun Bulletin*, nature videos, and most recently in materials published by MEGA, will provide pointers on composition and lighting as well as how to solve problems of high contrast lighting and dense foliage. Wildflowers will provide an opportunity for close-up photography. Marlin is a birder and naturalist in addition to being an excellent photographer. If you aren't in a hurry and don't want to take pictures, come along anyway; you're sure to learn about the Elfin Forest itself.

July 21 - 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 9:15 to help carry the artifacts would be appreciated.*

August 18 - 9:30 a.m.

Join us on an exciting new walk to be led by Dr. Dirk Walters, Cal Poly botanist. Dr. Walters will take us for a tour of the salt marsh at the edge of the Elfin Forest. Mud boots are a must for this one! We'll begin at the usual meeting place at the north end of 15th Street, and take the boardwalk and some sandy trails down to the marsh. We'll learn how plants that grow in the marsh manage to survive in a salt-water as well as a fresh-water environment. We'll see plants such as Salt Grass, Frankenia, Bird's Beak, Marsh-Fleabane, Marsh-Rosemary, and the predominant plant, Pickleweed. Some of these plants will be in bloom. It will be a walk that you'll long remember.

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



*Historian Dick Hitchman, Cuesta College instructor, related stories of San Luis Obispo County's "wild West" days to a rapt audience during SWAP'S March walk.
Photo by Pat Sarafian.*

A Note from the Chair

Dear Members:

Please check our Web Page through the Los Osos/Baywood Park Chamber at :

www.LosOsosBaywoodPark.org

Let us know what you think.

Do you want anything added?

Reminder that current information on Weed Pulls, Walks and upcoming events such as FamilyFest can be obtained from our phone message at 528-0392.

**Jim Weldon,
Chair**

Where To Call, Where To Write

If you have questions about SWAP activities or want to volunteer, please call 528-0392 and leave a message.

A recorded message will have information about our 3rd Saturday Walks, Work Saturdays, and other 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.



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:

Curt Beebe, Wendy Brown, Pat Sarafian, Pete Sarafian, Mark Skinner, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters, Wilburn Woods;

editing assistance by Pat Grimes and Pete Sarafian.

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Twentieth in a Series

Black Sage

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

The plant for this issue of *Oak Leaves* is one of the Elfin Forest's more common coastal shrubs. It is so common, in fact, it lends its name to the community in which it is dominant. The community is Coastal Sage Scrub and the plant is black sage (*Salvia mellifera*). Black sage is found most commonly on the ocean facing slopes from the Bay Area south along the South Coast, to the Transverse and Peninsular Ranges into Northern Baja California, Mexico. In most of San Luis Obispo County it is the only large shrubby *Salvia*. In the southern watersheds of the county, there is a second species of tall salvia, purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*) that takes over as the more common shrubby sage.

These two species are similar in habit and habitat. Purple sage has large flowers and flower whorls and foliage that appears white from a distance while black sage has relatively delicate flowers and flower whorls and appears much darker from a distance because black sage leaves lack the white trichomes or hairs on their upper surface. I suspect this is the origin of its common name "black sage." I assume it was given this name somewhere in Southern California where the similar appearing *Salvias* all have white leaves. Black sage then is the sage that produces dark vegetation in contrast to the very light colored vegetation dominated by the other shrubby *Salvias*.

Black sage is most commonly found either as co-dominant with California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) or in pure stands. In either case, few herbs are able to grow under it due to its ability to produce water-soluble chemical compounds that prevent the germination and growth of other plants. This property is known as allelopathy. Black sage does best on well-drained, hot south and west facing slopes. In general, it doesn't do well on flat areas such as valley floors. One exception to this is on our stabilized coastal sand dunes such as much of the Elfin Forest. Here black sage is sometimes common enough to be considered a co-dominant with the even more common mock heather (*Ericameria ericoides*). This is possibly due to the very sandy Elfin Forest soils which have superb drainage and low water holding capacity.

I would like to make one last note on the common name, black sage. First, "sage" is a common name that is used for many unrelated plants and signifies simply an odiferous plant. Sage is also used to signify any species in the genus, *Salvia*, a member of the mint family. So, black sage is not only an odiferous plant, it is also a true sage.

I have already discussed my current theory, (no proof) on the origin of "black" in the name, black sage; however, I did not always think this was the case. My earlier explanation can be put into the category of "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." As a biologist and taxonomist, I was aware that many of our scientific names derive from Latin or Greek. I was also



aware of the dark pigment cells in our skin called melanocytes (from the Latin, *melano-* = black & *cyte* = cells). It turns out I was sloppy, and jumped to the wrong conclusion that "mellifera" simply meant to bear or produce (*ifera*) black. With a little more knowledge, it is obvious than *melano-* is not he same as *melli*. *Melli-* is Greek and not Latin and it means honey. Therefore, the scientific name of black sage means "to bear honey'."

This fact is well known to California apiarists. I suspect most of the honey sold as "sage honey" is made from nectar produced by black sage. Charlotte B. Clarke, in *Edible and Useful Plants of California*, states "the leaves of many sage species, e.g. black sage can be used as a substitute for sage", the spice we buy at the supermarket. Most, if not all, the commercial sage comes from a European species, *Salvia officinalis*. By the way, "*officinalis*" means sold in apocathery shops (the fore-runner of our drug stores). Dr. Robert F. Hoover in his *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County*, notes that although the flowers are usually white to very pale lavender in color, plants near the coast can be found with much darker colored flowers. He suggests that some of these forms might make good additions to our native plant gardens.

A last word about Bonnie's drawing. It is unusual in that she has drawn two flowers. She had to do this because black sage, like many plants that bear both stamens (male) and pistils (female) in the same flower, mature the two sexes at different times. And this fact makes the flower look very different in the two stages. In black sage, the stamens usually mature first (flower in upper left) followed a few hours later by the elongation of the style and the separation of its two stigma (flower in lower right). Botanists call this differential maturing of stamens first followed by the female, protandry, or "pro-" first and "andry male." This maturation sequence creates a greater opportunity that pollen received by a stigma came from another individual plant, which will increase the chance that seed produced will be out crossed and not in-bred.

Gifts and Wishes

One of the wishes in our April/May list has been granted.

Paulette Perlman kindly gave us a much-needed easel to support posters and maps when we set up booths or give talks. Thank you, Paulette!

Also, Shirley Sparling donated a Riker Mount (a box with a glass front) of *Sulcaria Isidiifera*, the Elfin Forest's endangered lichen.



We still need:

- ✓ Kodak Auto-focus slide projector, Model AF-2 or newer
- ✓ 3-fold display board on legs
- ✓ Bike rack - to park bicycles at the 16th St. entrance of the Elfin Forest.

If you can donate any of these, or could sell used ones to us, call us at 528-0392. We'll pick up the item and send you a thank you note for your tax records.

Thank You to our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Wendy Brown, Membership Committee

New Members:

Mary "Moe" McGee*
 Madeline & James Medeiros Taylor
 Jean D. Wheeler*

Renewing Members:

Willa M. Butts*	James & Esther Landreth*
Ed & Carol Conway	Margaret Mehring*
Paula DeWitt	Paulette C. Perlman
Martha & Leon Goldin*	John Severson
Willma Gore	Max & Helen Sicher*
Bethany & Don Griffiths	John & Leslie Steinbeck
Kirsten Holmquist*	David H. Thomson*
Dr. Steve Jio & Family*	Marguerite Van Coops
Joseph Johnson*	Martha & Don Vincent*
Vanita Jones	Yolanda & Jay Waddell*
Robert Judd	Michael Ward

*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.



SWAP SHOPPERS ORDER FORM

(Please *print* when filling order – and indicate **HOW MANY**)

N
a
m
e

1. MURAL SHIRTS (indicate sizes)

Words on shirt: "El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area, Small Wilderness Area Preservation, Los Osos, California"

- ___ Short Slv. T-Shirt (med., Lg, XLg, XXLg) @ \$15.00 = _____
 ___ Long Slv. T-Shirt (med., Lg, XLg, XXLg) @ \$17.00 = _____
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2. BOARDWALK SHIRTS (Only Short Sleeve T-Shirts)

- ___ Small, Med., Lg, XLg, XXLg, XXXLg @ \$15.00 = _____

3. MURAL PRINTS

signed 5 1/2" X 17" prints by artist, Barbara Rosenthal

- ___ Black matted Mural @ \$20.00 = _____
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4. POCKET GUIDES

A very useful 24-page guide listing plants and animals of the Elfin Forest

- ___ @ \$1.00 = _____

5. RAFFLE TICKETS

Win a \$2500 pen, ink and oil drawing by Nancy Kolliner. Tickets are \$5 each or 6 for \$25

- ___ tickets @ \$5.00 = _____

SALE ITEMS (while inventory lasts)

Original MURAL Shirt

(says: "Elfin Forest Mural, Rexall Drug, Los Osos")

- ___ Short Sleeve T-Shirt (only Lg & XLg left) @\$10.00 = _____
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“And the Winner is...” SWAP Raffle of Kolliner Drawing

Between now and our October General Membership Meeting, we will be selling tickets to win a framed 33“ wide by 25“ high Nancy Kolliner pen, ink and oil drawing titled “Pygmy Oaks.” The drawing is valued at \$2500 to \$3000.

The tickets are \$5.00 each or 6 for \$25.00. The drawing can be seen at Coast National Bank, 1193 Los Osos Valley Road in Los Osos, near the Post Office. Just send your payment for tickets to SWAP Raffle, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA, 93412-6442. We will mail your raffle tickets to you.

Take a chance – the winner could be you! You can leave a message on our answering machine, 528-0392, if you have any questions or comments.



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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.

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Make checks payable to SWAP,
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