



# OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF FRIENDS OF EL MORO ELFIN FOREST

P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 528-0392 ❖ FEBRUARY / MARCH 2020



## SWAP 2019 Annual Celebration

By Yolanda Waddell; Photo by Dave Bowlus

SWAP’s Annual Celebration, our official annual membership meeting, was held on Saturday, November 9th, at the Morro Shores Mobile Home Park Community Center.

Sixty-five SWAP members and other guests enjoyed a light lunch followed by a brief business meeting and a talk by Kristen Nelson, lead botanist for Terra Verde Environmental Consulting.

Eleven dedicated SWAP volunteers led by Jan DiLeo arranged for and brought the food, set up the meeting room, and cleaned

Annual Celebration *continued on page 2*

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## SWAP Name Change is Official

By Dave Bowlus, SWAP Treasurer

SWAP is now also known as Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest and FEMEF.

Small Wilderness Area Preservation (aka S.W.A.P.), an all-volunteer organization, has a long and glorious history, dating back to 1970, when SWAP founder Emily Polk invented the name and its acronym, SWAP. She began a campaign to prevent 90 acres of unique natural area on the east side of Los Osos/Baywood Park from becoming a mobile home park. That effort was successful, culminating in that same year, 1970. The property, now known as the Los Osos Oaks State Natural Preserve, was purchased with \$250,000 dollars raised by local citizens and grants from Dart Industries and State Parks, using funds from the U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund. SWAP, under the leadership of Emily Polk, went on to save many small wildernesses all over California.

Although Emily Polk retired from SWAP in 1980, the organization continued to add chapters for saving precious pieces of land. The El Moro Elfin Forest was purchased in 1994 by the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter, a group of dedicated citizens with wide community support and assistance from San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation in obtaining large grants.

SWAP has an Adopt-a-Park agreement with County Parks and maintains the Elfin Forest (officially known as El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area). We hold volunteer work parties every month and pay for big jobs (like building the boardwalk in 1999) with State and Federal grants and member donations.

Unfortunately, with the passage of time, many residents of our area who enjoy visiting the Elfin Forest and know it to be an important feature of our town have no idea that SWAP is responsible for its care. In 2019, the SWAP Board voted to file “Doing Business As” paperwork so we can also call our organization the Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest and FEMEF (not as catchy as SWAP, but acceptable for writing a check when joining or renewing membership). You can still write SWAP on checks, by the way.

Why not be “Friends of the Elfin Forest” instead of the longer name? Down in San Diego County there is another Elfin Forest, that’s why. If you have ever forgotten to put the hyphen between elfin and forest when typing our website elfin-forest.org, you’ll find that other Elfin Forest on your computer screen.

So the organization is the same. We can now make use of a name that accurately informs people what we do.



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

of the

*Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest (FEMEF)*

consists of the following members:

Jan DiLeo, Chair

Skip Rotstein, Vice Chair

Dave Bowlus, Treasurer

Yolanda Waddell, Secretary

Beverly Boyd, Acting Recording Secretary

The FEMEF Board of Directors meets monthly at 2:00 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Hobby House, Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, 633 Ramona Ave., Los Osos.

The next meetings are

***Tuesday, February 11  
and Tuesday, March 10.***

**All Board meetings are open to the public.  
To confirm the date, time and location  
(which are subject to change),  
call (805) 528-0392.**



## CONTACT FEMEF

If you have questions about FEMEF activities or want to volunteer, please call (805) 528-0392 and leave a message.

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

If you have questions, concerns or comments about any problems in the Elfin Forest, call or write: Bob Yetter  
SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger  
1144 Monterey Street, SLO, CA 93408  
(805) 781-1196

Owners of dogs off-leash can be cited. If you witness dogs off-leash, vandalism or obvious crimes, call the County Sheriff at 781-4550 or Bob Yetter at 781-1196.

# Annual Celebration *cont. from page 1*

up afterwards. Thanks to Dave Bowlus, Jan DiLeo, Dave Moran and Jay Waddell for hauling out tables and chairs and putting up signs, then taking everything down after the meeting. Leslie and Skip Rotstein covered each table with brown paper and scattered crayons on them for a bit of entertainment for guests. Leslie also provided centerpieces for the tables and worked at the food counter. Pat Murray brought supplies from SWAP storage and set up the SWAP table and displays. Vicky Johnsen brought cookies baked by her husband Craig, as well as making coffee, working at the food counter, and helping with cleanup. Yolanda and Jay Waddell and Pat Murray furnished the lunch items, and Yolanda and Beverly Boyd worked two sign-in tables. Many hands make light work!

Kristen Nelson had a rapt audience for her talk, as can be seen in the accompanying photo by Dave Bowlus. She said that it is important to strike a balance between recreational use and resource protection.

The assessment team recommended a long-term plan to control erosion; create and implement a fencing and signage plan; continue weed maintenance, and establish long-term monitoring and research in the Elfin Forest. Kristen found four new native plants and five introduced plants to add to the Forest plant list. The audience asked good questions in response to Kristen's presentation.

SWAP members in attendance voted for re-election of four Board members:

- Dave Bowlus, Treasurer, whose term will expire in 12/31/20;
- Jan DiLeo, Chair, whose term will expire on 12/31/2020;
- Skip Rotstein, Vice Chair, whose term will expire on 12/31/2021;
- and Yolanda Waddell, Secretary, whose term will expire on 12/31/21.

A few items of merchandise were available for sale. We also thank some folks attending who decided to become SWAP members. Because Pat Murray is a resident of Morro Shores Mobile Home Park, the management allows SWAP to utilize their facilities. ***We are most appreciative to Morro Shores, not only for hosting our Annual Celebration, but also for providing a room for SWAP's monthly board meetings.***

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## Elfin Forest Work Party Day Moved to Friday

Pulling invasive weeds is going to be the Weed Warriors' number one task during the coming winter and spring months. When weeding and other work that could possibly affect the endangered Shoulderband Dune Snail is done in the Elfin Forest, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requires that a snail monitor with an Endangered Species Permit must be present.

Snail monitors are hard to come by, so FEMEF has contracted with SWCA Environmental Consultants to provide a snail monitor on the first Friday of each month from February on. Our Weed Warriors have been notified of the change from the first Saturday to the first Friday, and most of the "regulars" are able to make the change.

At the beginning of each work party, the snail monitor will give instruction on how to identify the Morro Shoulderband Snail. Working closely with the Weed Warriors, the monitor will move any Shoulderband snails that are found to a safe place. In this way, FEMEF will comply with the requirements of USFWS and be able to remove veldt grass and other invasive weeds.

# New County Ordinance Signs for Forest



County Parks Supervising Ranger Bob Yetter, who oversees the Pecho District that includes the Elfin Forest, noticed a very faded and almost unreadable County Ordinance sign when he visited the Elfin Forest last Fall. He told SWAP Conservation Committee Co-Chair Skip Rotstein that he planned to install a new ordinance sign at each of the Forest's seven entrances, as time allowed his staff to do so.

Over the past few months the new ordinance signs have appeared at the Elfin Forest entrances. As shown in the accompanying photo, the signs clearly state to visitors the do's and don'ts for use of the Elfin Forest. It reminds everyone that the El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area belongs to San Luis Obispo County. And though the vast majority of visitors to the Forest are happy to abide by the ordinances, the sign tells the few scofflaws that they could be ticketed.

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## Photo From the Forest

Here is a rare view of the boardwalk's underpinnings taken by Dave Bowlus after he replaced a section of a vertical "stringer" board. Stringers support the planks of the boardwalk.



*Skip Rotstein, in Rose's Grove, joyfully completed sanding and painting the last of the Elfin Forest's 22 benches in December.*

*Photo by Rich Johnson.*

## Elfin Forest Bench Project Complete

*By Benchy McBenchbottom,  
with help from Dave Bowlus and Yolanda Waddell*

In the December, 2018 issue of Oakleaves, I put out a call to FEMEF's members for help in restoring and refinishing the 22 of us benches that inhabit the Elfin Forest along the boardwalk, in Rose's Grove and at the two overlooks. Many of us were looking very well worn, and a few of us even had the dreaded dry-rot.

Three of us needed special attention, and three awesome repair volunteers spoke up: Gerald Clare, Bill Richmond and Jay Waddell. Two of our sturdy friends, Dave Bowlus and Skip Rotstein, removed us from the Elfin Forest and delivered us to the volunteers. They removed the dry-rot (one of us even housed a nest of carpenter ants!) and made us look like new. Bill Richmond's bench turned out to be beyond repair, so he built a new bench!

The rest of us were sanded and painted without removing us from the Elfin Forest, a few each month during the 2019 Saturday work parties, using sandpaper, elbow grease and a stain called "New Redwood." We love our new color!

During the December 7th work party, Skip Rotstein sanded and painted the last two benches, both of them in Rose's Grove. Dave Bowlus, who keeps track of such things, reported that four gallons of stain were used, but one gallon was free thanks to a "two for one" sale at Los Osos Miner's Hardware.

We thank the FEMEF volunteers for their work in keeping the Elfin Forest, and us, ready for visitors!

# Black Elfin Saddle Mushroom

Text and Photo by Jean D. Wheeler, Ph.D.

This is the first feature article we've done on any species of mushroom, of which we list 37 species in *Plants and Animals of the Elfin Forest Natural Area*, our pocket guide sold on page 11. So, of course, I've selected the one that would almost seem to have been either named for our small wilderness area or vice versa.

However, the so appropriately matching names came about quite independently. The name of our little park comes from the short size of our oak trees, *Quercus agrifolia*. Most are only 3-12 feet "short" in our restrictive coastal environment while normally up to 70 feet tall in most of our state. The mushrooms, on the other hand, were given their name because the cap of the mushroom was thought to look like a rather bumpy tiny saddle that only an elf would be small enough to ride!

The common name of elfin saddle mushrooms comes from the British Isles and European continent, with the scientific name *Helvella lacunosa* given there to the species that ours most resembles. That species name is still used in most North American mushroom guide books, including our pocket guide. However, among several online sources, I found one that asserts *H. lacunosa* probably does not occur in North America and states that our Black Elfin Saddle is *H. dryophila*, the black saddle mushroom growing under oaks on our west coast. Another well-known mushroom expert online commented that if DNA studies were made of genus *Helvella*, he suspects a much larger number of American species would be recognized.

Mushrooms may look like very small plants to us, but they are really quite large as fungi go. What we see is only the fruiting body of the mushroom. Most of it is underground as an extremely fine mass of minute tubes, far finer than a spiderweb. This weblike body is invisibly spread through the soil absorbing nutrients from organic matter in the soil. The body part we see protruding above ground exists only to develop spores for reproduction.

There are two main classes of mushrooms, ascomycetes and basidiomycetes. Most large fungi are basidiomycetes, with spores forming on outside projections from clublike cells, termed the basidia. A smaller number of large mushroom fungi are in ascomycetes, with spores produced inside club shaped cells, the asci, and shot out at maturity. Ascomycetes includes Family Morchellaceae (the famously delicious morels) and Family Helvellaceae, false morels and saddle mushrooms.



Our species goes by the common names of Black Elfin Saddle or Fluted Black Elfin Saddle. This beautiful little mushroom can be found, sometimes in large clusters, on our west coast in woodlands in rainy winters. They are about 2-4 inches high and the cap is about 1-1 ½ inches across. The cap is a very lumpy and glossy or matte black, housing the asci with the spores. The stem (called a stipe in mushrooms) is vertically grooved, looking almost like miniature columns carved into white jade.

Although older mushroom guide books list the Elfin Saddles as edible, more up-to-date sources contain serious warnings. Severe stomach distress has occurred too frequently following consumption. Trace amounts of the chemical Gyromitrin have been found in Elfin Saddle mushrooms. That chemical in mushrooms of genus *Gyromitra*, also in Family Helvellaceae, have caused deaths from eating them. Warnings on consuming Elfin Saddles now advise never eating them raw, discarding the stipe, par-broiling the caps thoroughly and discarding the water before cooking some more with other foods and spices. The flavor after "cooking the hell out of it" is described as bland and gunky. It is advised that Elfin Saddle mushrooms are best admired and photographed for their beauty.

## Warning: Mushrooms can be deadly to Dogs as Well as People

FEMEF Officers have heard indirectly that **someone's dog died** after eating a mushroom in the Elfin Forest. Our park has dozens of native mushroom species, a number of them containing toxic chemicals causing problems from gastric distress up to death for humans and other animals. Keeping your dog on a leash, so you can fully control what it eats as well as its interaction with other people and animals, is the law in the Elfin Forest and can save your pet's life as well as you from a citation.

# Miner's lettuce

Text by Dirk Walters, Ph.D.; Illustration by Heather Johnson

The plant shown in Heather Johnson's new watercolor is Miner's lettuce (*Claytonia perfoliata*). It is found throughout California as well as all the neighboring states. One or more of its varieties spread north into British Columbia and south all the way to central America. The plant is seen on practically every spring field trip, but I'm reluctant to call it common. I'd rather think of it as widespread. Miner's lettuce prefers shaded, moist, disturbed areas. It tends to be common during the rainy season and spotty at other times. I don't remember seeing much of it in the Elfin Forest, but I'd expect to find it under the oaks at lower elevations where there is a little extra moisture.

In a book by Oliver P. Medsger entitled **Edible Wild Plants** (in my library since my childhood) it has also been called Indian lettuce, or Spanish lettuce and in Europe it's cultivated under the name of winter purslane. All these names refer to its use as a spring green. I suspect miner's lettuce is the most recent name and probably dates back only to the mid-1800's, when California was over-run with miners looking for gold. I am also sure the miner's diet was mostly tubers, grain, legumes with some meat and whisky. All of these 'foods' lacked enough required vitamins and minerals which would have been amply supplied by grabbing a handful of miner's lettuce leaves on the way to a stream to pan for gold.

Heather's watercolor is of a couple of flowering stems which produce the leaves with the characteristic that was used to coin the second part of the scientific name – *perfoliata*. The situation where a leaf blade base appears to pass through (be perforated) by its stem is said to be perfoliate. The regular leaves are all basal and form a mound a few inches high and wide. Each basal leaf is modestly succulent and is in the shape of the spatula from your kitchen, i.e. it has a long tapering base and broad squarish or egg-shaped tip. I suspect it's these basal leaves that were eaten.

You may have also noticed that there are two possible generic names for this plant – *Claytonia* and *Montia*. So, which is the correct genus? Also, if you go to older floras and wildflower books you will find that its botanical family seems to have changed from Portulacaceae to Montiaceae. The name currently valid according to the **Jepson Manual, 2nd Ed.** is *Claytonia perfoliata* and is placed in the Montiaceae. According to the **Jepson Manual**, the change in genus and family is referenced to a paper published in 2006. This means that the change is probably based on modern DNA sequence data as well as new technical descriptive data which was then organized using current computer classification techniques. The **Jepson Manual** also noted that some of the characters used required a microscope with 20X magnification, which most of us don't have.

This procedure resulted in miner's lettuce (along with a couple of other species) being moved from the genus, *Montia*, to the genus *Claytonia* which included several species of spring beauties. The remaining species in *Montia* remained in *Montia* and a new family



Miner's Lettuce  
*Montia perfoliata*

was created – Montiaceae. Why didn't the species name (*perfoliata*) change when the species was moved to a new genus? This is due to another rule of Botanical Nomenclature. When a species is moved from one genus to another, the species epithet moves with it unless the species epithet already exists in the new genus. If it does, the mover must come up with a new name for the species in its new location. Since the epithet, *perfoliata*, didn't already exist in *Claytonia*, the epithet moved with miner's lettuce's scientific name to its new location. This rule helps keep track of name changes.

## Please Report Sightings

Have you observed any unusual birds in the Elfin Forest? Mammals? Reptiles? Amphibians? Insects? Interesting activities or footprints of wildlife in our Elfin Forest? Unusual plants? Taken a good photo?

Please report any interesting sightings to your Oak-leaves editors at: oakleaf@elfin-forest.org or leave a message on FEMEF's answering machine, (805) 528-0392.

# Weed Warrior Reports

By Vicky Johnsen and Skip Rotstein, Conservation Co-Chairs

## November 2 - Maintaining Boardwalk, Benches, Trails and Shrubs

Much was accomplished during the work morning, given the small number of workers (7). Dave Bowlus repaired two sections of the boardwalk that were sagging with help from Jeff Reifel. Skip Rotstein, Jeff Reifel and James Solum sanded and painted four benches.

Vicky Johnsen and Clara Gontero continued trimming vegetation along the lower boardwalk. Later, Vicky returned with a broom to sweep up areas of debris, much to the delight and amusement of passer-by visitors!

Dean Thompson continued moving sand away from the water bars along the trail from 17th street. He wants to reconfigure the final set of water bars and anchor them with rebar.

Craig Johnsen's giant molasses-ginger cookies were enjoyed by all!

## December 7 - Wind-up of a Productive Year

Invasive plant growth in the Elfin Forest almost ceases during the cool, dry Fall months. The first rain of the season thoroughly soaked the sandy soil, but cool weather postponed return of the invasives until the new year. Weed Warriors wound up the year doing erosion control, boardwalk repair and painting benches.

Dave Bowlus, Sharon Rosney, and Lannie Erickson prepared for the next downpour by repairing erosion damage on the 11th through 14th street trails. Jeff Reifel found the recent storm had washed sand up to the deck of the boardwalk near 14th street. He shoveled a remedial channel under the boardwalk to carry away sand during future storms.

Rich and Prisila Johnson replaced rusted screws in the boardwalk and reported nice tight boards well soaked by the rain. Thanks to another year of diligent maintenance, the boardwalk is a year older, well worn, but capable of lasting into the foreseeable future.

Skip Rotstein sanded and painted the final two benches needing paint; both of them were in Rose's Grove. The bench repair and repaint project that started earlier this year is now complete. It is the second repaint project in the nearly twenty-year history of the benches. All benches are structurally sound and should last for many years to come.

We all missed Weed Warrior crew leader Vicky Johnsen who was recovering from a severe cold. Craig Johnsen, her husband and cookie baker extraordinaire, helped Vicky by bringing the sign-up list, shovels and rakes, and the traditional Weed Warrior oatmeal cookies, which were enjoyed by appreciative volunteers at the end of their morning of labor.



*During the November work party, Vicky Johnsen (at left) and Clara Gontero trimmed an enthusiastic ceanothus bush away from the boardwalk. Photo by Dave Bowlus.*



*In December after a few good storms, Jeff Reifel and Sharon Rosney had some digging to do, to clear sand away from the boardwalk. Photo by Rich Johnson.*

### Join First Friday Work Parties (Note change, see page 2)

We invite you to join us on any first Friday from 9 a.m. to noon at the north end of 15th Street in Los Osos to enjoy satisfying physical activity in fresh air amid lovely surroundings. Please dress for wind, fog, or sun. Layers work well. Long pants and long shirt sleeves are good. Sturdy shoes are a must. Take care not to park in front of driveways or mailboxes. To request more information, call (805) 528-0392.

# 2019 Christmas Bird Count in the Elfin Forest

By Yolanda Waddell and Jay Carroll, CBC Count Compiler

Morro Coast Audubon Society held its 2019 annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 14. This annual census, a national event sponsored by the Audubon Society, began in 1900 although our local counts in the Morro Bay area first started in 1948. The original purpose was to counteract an annual bird shoot, but now it provides valuable long-term information for scientific study about winter bird populations in over 2,000 areas throughout North America.

The Morro/San Luis Obispo count area is a circle 15 miles in diameter encompassing a wide area from San Luis Obispo to Morro Rock and Cuesta Ridge to the Irish Hills. This year the circle was divided into 54 count areas, one of which included the Elfin Forest and surrounding shoreline.

CBC Count Compiler Jay Carroll reported, "Two teams counted birds in the Elfin Forest this year. Joanne Aasen, Megg McNamee, and Julia Braeger covered the trails and saw 20 species. Rick Saval counted a smaller part of the forest and also scoped the estuary around the Elfin Forest shoreline, spotting 16 additional species, for a total of 36 in this part of the sector." Jay sent a list of the species and the total numbers of each bird sighted.

Jay wrote that in a preliminary summary of the data, there were 199 bird species seen during the one-day count, with 120 birders participating. He noted that our species total usually ranks in the top 5% of counts throughout California. The total number of birds seen in the Count Circle was 38,993, which was about



*Birder Rick Saval, accompanied by his dog Soulie, spotted 16 bird species, including a bald eagle, during the Christmas Bird Count in the Elfin Forest. Photo by Rich Johnson.*

10% fewer than in the 2018 count. The lower counts were probably influenced by the cool and blustery weather conditions that decreased bird activity on Count Day. He commented that the Brant count, while still low compared to historical averages, had increased slightly since last year and totaled 571 birds, or 36% of the average since 1980. Notable sightings visible from the Elfin Forest estuary overlooks were a Bald Eagle, a pair of Eurasian Wigeon, and two Snow Geese.

*If only the bird with the loveliest song  
sang, the forest would be a lonely place.  
~ John James Audubon ~*



## OAK LEAVES

is published six times per year beginning in February.

Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler;

Layout is by Katy Budge.

Editing assistance by Pat Grimes.

Contributors to this issue: Dave Bowlus, Jay Carroll, Petra Clayton, Cheryl Dove, Vicky Johnsen, Heather Johnson, Rich Johnson, Betsy Kinter, Barbara Renshaw, Skip Rotstein, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk Walters, and Jean Wheeler.

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If possible, all copy should be submitted by e-mail to: oakleaf@elfin-forest.org.

## Education News

### Chumash Walks for Second Graders

By Cheryl Dove, Education Committee Co-Chair

Two classes of second-graders from Baywood Elementary School visited the Elfin Forest on November 21st and 22nd in 2019. They were led by docents Barbara Renshaw, Jeff Reifel, Cheryl Dove, Vicky Johnsen, and Chris Van Beveren, and focused on ways that the Chumash people used the resources found in and near the forest. We received feedback from one of the classes in the form of thank-you notes, which I have summarized as a poem:

Thank you for showing us the marks of our ancestors.  
My favorite part was when we  
Collected acorns and saw the inside of an acorn,  
Learned about how the Chumash made baskets, tools, and toys,  
Sat in a place under the trees,  
Saw the estuary.  
I love the Elfin Forest - I love it!

# Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

*Text and Photos by Jean Wheeler*

With lots of rain since Thanksgiving, Morro Manzanitas along the lower boardwalk are covered with gorgeous little white and slightly blushing pink bell-shaped flowers as I write in early January. They should still be in bloom as February opens, with lots of the “little apples” soon following as fruit, from which they get their Spanish name, manzanita. Ceanothus (aka “California Lilac”) shrubs are now covered with large buds, a few of which have begun to open in white to pale lilac color. The boardwalk should be surrounded with their flowers throughout most of the two months of this issue, as in the photo I took on a previous February 20.

Prickly-stemmed Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberries are showing their long red flower tubes and providing nectar for hummingbirds among shrubs along much of the lower boardwalk. California Peonies are raising their unusually large lush leaves, rising barely a foot or two directly from the soil along the 11th street sand trail. The leaves are protected from hot sun by surrounding shrubs. By early February, they should be adorned by a few drooping red balls of flowers an inch or two in diameter. They remain only for a few weeks; then the entire plants disappear completely for nearly another year, until rains again reach their bulbs in the soil..

During the two months covered by this issue, we can expect lots more of our late winter and early spring plants to respond to the return of winter rains by bursting into bloom in a variety of colors.

The frequent rains since Thanksgiving are also bringing on an excellent display of mushrooms, especially in the shelter of our live oak groves. Even in the driest years our annual mushroom walk (see page 9 for Dennis Sheridan’s walk this year on February 15) revealed a few of these special and short-lived fruiting bodies. In years with enough rain before that walk, we’ve been treated to a wide variety of these spore-bearing reproductive parts of fungus organisms. Their bodies are usually spread widely throughout the soil below the much smaller fruiting structure we see above ground.

Mushrooms come in an amazing variety of shapes and colors, as in my adjacent photo of “Witches Butter.” Some are delightfully edible, but many are deadly poisonous, and it can be very difficult to discern which of those is which. See my article on page 4 about a very appropriate resident of our Elfin Forest—the mushroom called a “Fluted Black Elfin Saddle!”

There are a number of migratory ducks on the estuary, including American Wigeons, Buffleheads, Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, and Teal, but the waters are not nearly as crowded with them as they used to be each winter until just the last few years. Periodicals by birding organizations such as Audubon and Cornell Ornithology Lab are suggesting many more birds are not migrating as far south in the last few years in response to global warming, which has raised temperatures in arctic and subarctic climates much more strongly than in middle and lower latitudes.

Even so, virtually all species of water birds and wading birds listed in our Pocket Guide (sold on page 11) are at peak populations for the year between November and March, as are all the



*Witch's Butter (above)  
Ceanothus (below)*



raptors listed, and a great many of the passerines. Watch the shrubs around the boardwalk for flitting finches, sparrows, warblers, wrens, phoebes, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and other little brown and little grey birds. The larger thrashers, towhees, scrub jays, quail, blackbirds, and doves can be seen and/or heard regularly. By the end of February and through March into April, we’ll also have the spring migration of birds passing through, and possibly remaining for a few days, en route from their winter homes in Central and South America to their summer breeding ranges in our northern states and Canada.

This winter and spring are excellent times to visit the Elfin Forest to see beautiful flowers in full bloom and active birds flitting around or swimming on the estuary. You may also catch a glimpse of lizards, rabbits, squirrels, or maybe even a wild coyote.

**WALKS in  
the ELFIN FOREST**  
**Saturday Walks**

**February 15, 9:30 a.m. –  
Fungus Foray – Mushrooms and More**  
Join fungophile Dennis Sheridan on a delightful exploration of the Elfin Forest floor for fascinating mushrooms such as wood bluetts, black elfin saddles, earthstars, golden caps, boletes, and poisonous amanitas. Dennis will take us on a trek to the lower oak grove next to the bay to find these marvelous fungi. Bring a magnifying lens and, if you have a mystery mushroom in your yard, bring a sample for Dennis to identify. This is not a mushroom collecting walk. All plants in the Elfin Forest are protected by law. Only a very heavy rain will cancel the walk.

**March 21, 9:30 a.m. – Insect Walk**  
Although we generally see just a few kinds of insects and spiders while walking through the Elfin Forest, there are dozens, perhaps hundreds of different species of arthropods living in the Forest. Entomologist Dr. Norman Smith will search every nook and cranny along the boardwalk for the Good, Bad, and Ugly of these creatures. The importance and ecology of our local insects will be discussed during the walk. If you'd like to see the insects close up, bring a hand lens or close-focusing binoculars.

*Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at times stated above at the north end (1100 block) of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Wear closed-toe shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes. Park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes, and leave pets at home. The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. For more information or if you use a wheelchair call (805) 528-0392*



*Vicky Johnsen's photo shows geologist Jeff Grover drawing a diagram to show how the Morros were formed during his 3rd Saturday walk in November.*



*Dr. Bob Field, a cosmic evolution scholar, explains why summer and winter solstice days occur with the help of evolutionary biology professor Jenn Yost during their Winter Solstice walk in December. Photo by Petra Clayton.*



**Photos From the Forest**

(At left) Vicky Johnsen titled this photo "After the Storm on Thanksgiving Day." She caught an especially beautiful moment in the Elfin Forest when everything smelled fresh, the setting sun glinted off of water in the estuary and bay as well as mock heather going to seed in the foreground, and golden clouds.

(At right) Dave Bowlus caught this California Thrasher singing away on a ceanothus bush on December 14, even though the sky was cloudy and overcast that day.



# Thank You to Our Generous Members

*Compiled by Betsy Kinter, FEMEF Database Coordinator*

## NEW MEMBERS:

Daniel Boyd  
George & Vicki Marchenko\*  
Jeff Reifel\*  
Alice Welchert

## RENEWING MEMBERS:

David & Rosemary Bentley*	Bonnie Heikes*
Katy Budge*	Martha MacGillivray
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*\*Thanks to those listed above who donated more than the \$25 (regular) or \$15 (senior or student) membership dues. The additional donations will be used for special projects in the Elfin Forest. If you recently sent a donation to FEMEF and don't see your name in this issue's New and Renewing list, be assured that your gift will be acknowledged in the next bimonthly issue. Gifts are processed by two different volunteers before reaching our editors, and newsletter copy deadline is one month before the date of the issue.*

## Thinking of Switching to Online Oakleaves?

If you use your computer a lot, we encourage you to take a look at the online Oakleaves at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org). Being able to see the 20 or so photos in full color makes it a very attractive alternative to the black-and-white printed copy. If you miss an issue for some reason, it is there, waiting for you. Simply click on "Forest Library," then "Oakleaves Index" and finally the year and month of the issue that you want to read. Just e-mail us at [oakleaf@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org) with the subject: Switch me to online.

# Remembering Rachael Winn Yon

*By Yolanda Waddell*

Rachael Winn Yon grew up in rural Anderson County, South Carolina. As the fifth of six children, her older siblings quickly learned to give her crayons or pencils and paper to keep her busy. Rachael had a wealth of models on the family farm: goats, pigs, horses, cows, chickens, flowers, and vegetables. Her father also kept a fish pond with many kinds of fish, and there were riparian areas and woods where wild animals lived. Rachael found many live models for her drawing besides the family members and the house.

By age three or four Rachael expressed a serious and consuming interest in making art. This vocation stayed with her; she lived her life as a mixed-media artist with a fondness for creating images and objects inspired by botanicals, family members and literature. Her art was influenced by her dreams, mythology and life on the Central Coast. Her three-plate color etching, "Family Legends: My Mother, in Death as in Life," shows an energetic skeleton harvesting beets in a garden, and is in the permanent collection of the San Luis Obispo Museum of Art.

Rachael became acquainted with the Elfin Forest and SWAP through her artist friend, Barbara Renshaw, who leads sketching walks in the Forest periodically. She became a member of SWAP, and during the period when we published Elfin Forest calendars, Rachael had a painting in each of the 2009 and 2011 calendars. Her watercolor of California Peonies from the 2009 calendar, is shown.

Rachael's obituary states, "Rachael lived with joie de vivre up until her last breath, and spent every moment doing exactly what she wanted to do. Rachael passed peacefully in her sleep on December 12, 2019, at age 84." SWAP shares the sadness of her loss with Rachael's family and her many artist friends in Los Osos and beyond.



*Rachael Winn Yon, sketching California peonies. Photo by Jeff Reifel.*



## Mural Print

Do you enjoy the mural by Barbara Rosenthal painted on the wall of the Rexall Drug Store in Los Osos? Get a signed full-color print (mounted on black foam core as shown) to hang on your wall or give as a gift (#3 below)!



# FEMEF Shoppers' Order Form

See Photos of All Items at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org)

All Prices Include Sales Tax

### 1. MURAL SHIRTS

Mural design by artist Barbara Rosenthal on both front and back. Words on shirt: "El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area" above mural and "Small Wilderness Area Preservation" and "Los Osos, California" below mural.

Circle Sizes:

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Useful 56-page guide to plants and animals of the Elfin Forest. Lists for mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, arthropods including moths and butterflies, gastropods, vascular plants, lichens, and mushrooms. Some with charts for seasonality, color and more.

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Wildflowers are in bloom with winter rains, resident and wintering birds can be seen, and tracks in the sand testify to passage of nocturnal animals. How about introducing a friend to the winter beauty of our small wilderness preserve?

Pick up a trail guide where the 16th Street Entrance meets the boardwalk or where the Bush Lupine Point spur leaves the boardwalk loop. Encourage your friend to enjoy the information in the trail guide and on beautifully-illustrated Interpretive Signs.

Report your friend's reactions and especially wonderful or unusual sightings to the editors for printing in a future issue of Oakleaves at oakleaf@elfin-forest.org.

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