

1 WELCOME

to the Elfin Forest! Enjoy a walk through this 90-acre natural area along the one mile boardwalk loop. Rest on the benches, listen and look during your walk. The numbers in this guide match numbers along the toe rail of the boardwalk.

Please remember the following:

- **CAUTION:** *Poison Oak occurs throughout the natural area.*
- Baby strollers and wheelchairs are welcome.
- Bikes, skates, skateboards, and scooters are prohibited.
- There are no restrooms and no access to the bay.
- Dogs must remain on leash. Please bag your dog's droppings and carry them and any litter out of the natural area.
- Please stay on the boardwalk and designated trails to minimize erosion and damage to native plants.
- Please do not collect, remove or place any items.
- There is an elevation change of 80 feet.

ENTERING COASTAL DUNE SCRUB

2 SAND DUNES

here have been stabilized by native vegetation. These low-growing shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers thrive in the nutrient-poor sand. Without vegetation, the dunes would blow away.

3 CEANOTHUS (*Ceanothus cuneatus*)

is the heavy growth visible through much of this part of the natural area. Also called Buckbrush or California Lilac, it has thick, hardy branches and white or lavender blooms that produce a wonderful sweet fragrance from January to April. In late spring you may see foamy nests of *Spittle Bugs* (*Aphrophora permutata*) among the leaves. It looks as if someone has spit on the plant! Spittle Bugs are native and do not seem to harm the plant.

REMINDER — please stay on the boardwalk or designated sand trails. The roots of oak trees are sensitive and can be damaged by foot traffic. There is a large, older grove near the lower boardwalk that is open for visiting at #14.

4 MOCK HEATHER (*Ericameria ericoides*)

Lush, green, spiky leaves at the top of the plant contrast with dark woody branches at the base. This plant has many golden flowers in the fall.

5 REVEGETATION AREA

Before SWAP preserved the Elfin Forest, this open area had been used by motorcyclists. By the late 1980s the area was devoid of plant life and subject to severe erosion. This was followed by a heavy infestation of Veldt grass (a non-native invasive weed from South Africa). But restoration has allowed a variety of native plant life to return including *Deerweed* (*Acemispion glaber*), which has many yellow flowers in the spring. With the aid of San Luis Obispo County Parks and many caring volunteers, SWAP continues to rehabilitate this and other areas. Would you like to help? See the information at the end of this guide.

6 COAST SILVER LUPINE (*Lupinus chamissonis*)

has silver-gray leaves with fragrant lavender/purple flowers that bloom from April to June. Notice young lupines growing along the boardwalk. This is a critical food plant for the *Moro Blue Butterfly* (*Plebejus icarioides morroensis*). The overlook area just ahead has been called Bush Lupine Point for many years.

7 CALIFORNIA SAGEBRUSH (*Artemesia californica*) and BLACK SAGE (*Salvia mellifera*)

Sagebrush has slender, gray-green leaves. Black Sage has flower heads that resemble a stack of pompoms. Rub your hand carefully over the leaves and then smell. Do you recognize the odor?

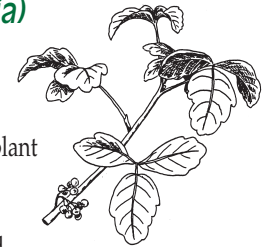
8 FUCHSIA-FLOWERING GOOSEBERRY (*Ribes speciosum*)

OUCH! Notice the long thorns. This shrub has red flowers that attract hummingbirds in early spring. It loses all its leaves by fall. Poison oak can be seen creeping through this area.

ENTERING PYGMY OAK WOODLAND

9 POISON OAK (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) in COAST LIVE OAK groves (*Quercus agrifolia*)

CAUTION — Allergic reactions, including itching and blisters, are often caused by poison oak. Here the 3-leaved green or red plant can be seen creeping up into the pygmy oak tree canopy. Poison oak leaves turn bright red in summer and fall and are absent in winter. Remember, "Leaves of three, let them be." This native plant can be seen throughout the lower part of the natural area, just off the boardwalk.



10 SIENA'S VIEW

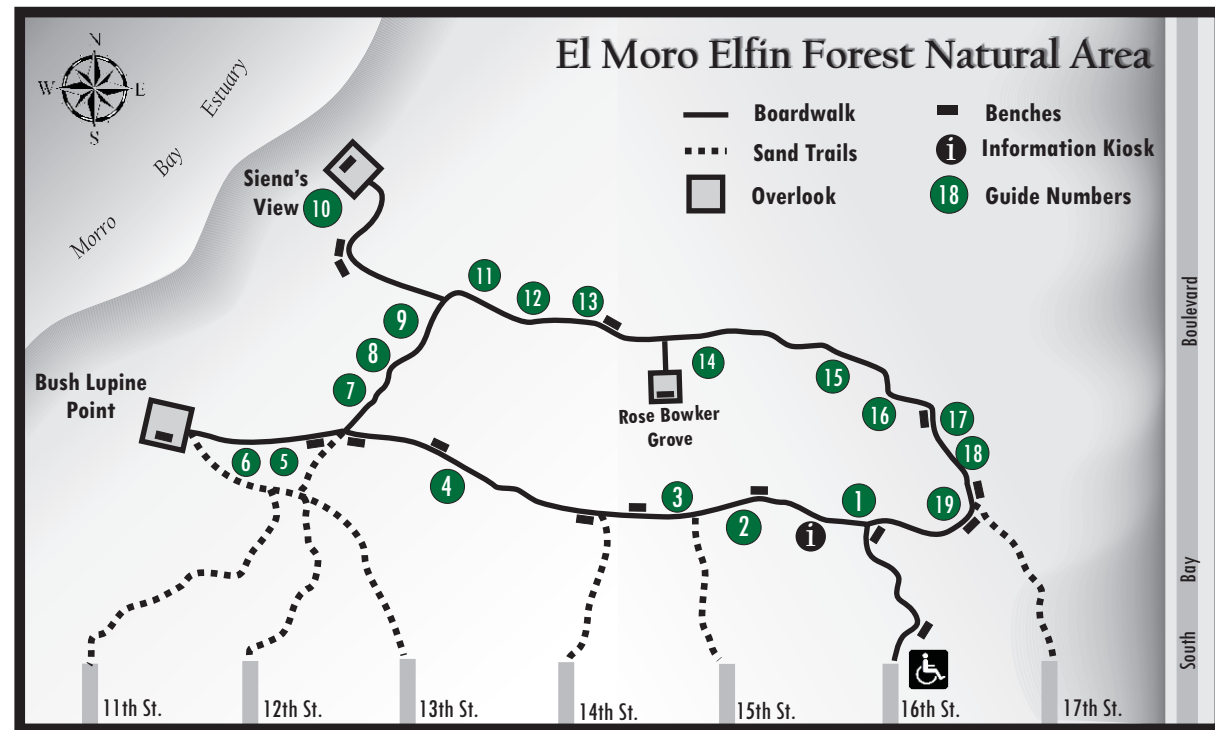
This overlook provides an excellent view of the estuary and its bird life.

11 COFFEEBERRY (*Frangula californica*)

This tall bush has small greenish-white flowers in spring. Its berries turn from yellow to red to black in summer. The berries and bark are known to have laxative qualities, and may have been used by the native Chumash people for this purpose.

12 MORRO MANZANITA (*Arctostaphylos morroensis*)

The Spanish name, Manzanita, means "little apple" which describes the fruit. Some of the new leaves are bright red. Notice the remains of beautiful, twisted branches from old growth in the distance. This threatened plant is found only from Morro Bay to Montaña de Oro State Park.



El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area is owned by San Luis Obispo County Parks and California State Parks.

13 A FORMER MEADOW

In front of you is a good example of plant succession. Twenty years ago, it was a true meadow. Many of the plants were short herbs. Over the years, Coastal Dune Scrub plants such as **California Sagebrush**, **Black Sage** and **Morro Manzanita** have taken over.

- * * * This area of the boardwalk is an excellent place to view stars at night. Hence it was given the name "Celestial Meadow."

14 ROSE BOWKER GROVE

Take the spur to the right and follow it into the oak grove. **PLEASE stay on the deck and don't climb or sit on the branches.** This grove was named in memory of one of the individuals who was instrumental in establishing this natural area. The centuries-old trees here are a unique form of **Coast Live Oak** (*Quercus agrifolia*) growing elsewhere as tall as 50 feet. However, here they only grow to about 12 feet high limited by the coastal dune environment. The name "Elfin Forest" refers to the stunted height of the vegetation.

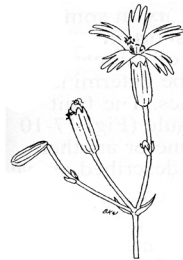
- These oaks are about 200 years old. In other groves they could be up to 400 years old.
- It is difficult to determine how many trees are actually growing in this grove; their trunks twist and turn down into the ground and return back up.
- Notice the **Lace Lichen** (*Ramalina menziesii*) dangling from branches. These "plants" are actually fungi and algae living together in symbiosis.
- Unlike a parasite, Lace Lichen is helpful to the oaks, collecting moisture and nutrients from the foggy air.

15 BRACKEN FERNS (*Pteridium aquilinum*)

thrive in the shade along the boardwalk where pygmy oaks and other trees or shrubs protect them. These ferns are lush green from about May to late July.



16 CARDINAL CATCHFLY (*Silene laciniata*)



Also called Indian Pink, this plant has grass-like leaves and slender stems, growing next to other plants for support under the oak canopy. Bright red flowers with five fringed petals at the end of a long tube bloom mainly from April to August, with occasional blossoms throughout the year.

ENTERING MARITIME CHAPARRAL

17 CHAMISE (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*)

is a wiry bush with small dark green leaves and spikes of delicate, miniature cream-colored flowers. It blooms late May to July and occasionally in the fall. As you continue uphill along the boardwalk you'll notice this plant on both sides.

Plant illustrations in this guide
by Bonnie Walters;
butterfly photo by Pat Brown



18 STICKY MONKEY FLOWER (*Diplacus aurantiacus*)

has pale orange trumpet-shaped flowers from late March through early July. A perennial, it loses its leaves and goes dormant by winter. Although it appears dead, green leaves will emerge in the spring. It is a food plant for the larvae of the **Variable Checkerspot Butterfly** (*Euphydryas chalcedona*) (pictured below to left), which is common in the Elfin Forest. The female butterflies lay eggs on this plant in May and June and the caterpillars will live on it for 10 months until they metamorphose the following spring.



19 HIGHEST POINT

Here the elevation is about 125 feet above sea level. Looking north, you can see the estuary and Morro Bay State Park. The volcanic Morros form a chain from northwest to southeast. The Irish Hills rise in the south. The Pacific Ocean, sandspit and Morro Bay lie to the west, while the landmark, Morro Rock, lies to the northwest.

Please return this guide to a dispenser so that others can enjoy it.



To receive information about becoming a member of SWAP, please call 805-528-0392 and leave your name and address.

A **Pocket Guide** listing plants and animals in the Elfin Forest is available from SWAP.

First Saturday of the month Work Parties are from 9 am to noon. Meet at the north end of 15th Street.

Third Saturday of the month Guided Nature Walks usually begin at 9:30 a.m. Meet at the north end of 15th Street. Please go to www.elfin-forest.org for more information.

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El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area

GUIDE



**Small Wilderness
Area Preservation
(SWAP)
Los Osos / Morro Bay Chapter**

Donations appreciated at:
**P.O. Box 6442
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(805) 528-0392 (Voicemail)
www.elfin-forest.org**

Reporting Trouble: Emergencies and crime: 911
Vandalism in-progress: SLO County Sheriff 781-4550
Vandalism not-in-progress or other problems:
County Parks 781-1969 AND SWAP 528-0392 (message phone)

This trail guide was produced by SWAP in cooperation with San Luis Obispo County Parks.



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Thank you for visiting and supporting El Moro Elfin Forest!