



# OAKLEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF FRIENDS OF EL MORO ELFIN FOREST  
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ♦ (805) 528-0392 ♦ SPRING 2024

## State of the Forest

*By Steve Hendricks, FEMEF Board Chair*

Board members continue to meet monthly on Zoom (normally on 2nd Tuesdays at 2:30 pm, but times and days can vary so please check our website) to discuss issues related to the Forest. Input from our members and the public is always encouraged and greatly appreciated. Please come join our meetings if you are able. Here is an overview of some of the most significant happenings in the last few months.

### Major Projects in the Elfin Forest Still on Hold

Unfortunately, big projects, like the Butterfly Hill overlook and plastic fence removal in the Elfin Forest remain on indefinite hold until the Los Osos Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is approved by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. County Parks believes that this timeline could be many months to several years before approval is granted. FEMEF is continuing with boardwalk and bench maintenance and other small projects in the interim. Stayed tuned for updates and keep your fingers crossed!

### Volunteers Rack up the Hours!

Volunteers working in the forest and behind the scenes have been diligently keeping everything flowing smoothly at the Elfin Forest. It literally takes an army of volunteers to make the Elfin Forest operate for everyone's enjoyment and benefit. While most folks may take it for granted, it's important to recognize that in the

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## Bob Dees Retires from FEMEF Board and Oakleaves Editorial Staff

*By Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler, Oakleaves Editors*



We are sorry to report that Bob Dees has retired from the FEMEF Board and our Oakleaves editing staff for health reasons. Bob joined the Board in December 2021, and agreed to help with *Oakleaves* editing soon after that. He came with an impressive background: English instructor at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, then chair of the English Department, then Dean of the Literature and Languages Division, and finally President of the college.

After he retired from Orange Coast College in 2009, Bob and his wife Van moved to Cambria, where Van became a docent at the Piedras Blancas seal rookery and Bob became a trail steward at Piedras Blancas Light Station.

Bob and his wife are both avid bird watchers, a hobby that has taken them to mountains, forests, and beaches throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, South America, Europe, the

Dees Retires *continued on page 2*



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*of the*

*Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest (FEMEF):*

Steve Hendricks, Chair

Rebecca Rasmussen, Vice Chair

Roger Carmody, Treasurer

Dave Bowlus, Secretary

Beverly Boyd, Acting Recording Secretary

Pat Brown

Vicky Johnsen

Pam Oulette

Skip Rotstein

Ron Ruppert

The FEMEF Board of Directors meets monthly. Meeting days and times can vary and will be posted on the home page at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org).

FEMEF Board meetings are virtual and are open to the public. To attend a FEMEF Board meeting, leave a message at 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 coming activities and other events.

If you have questions, concerns, or comments about any problems in the Elfin Forest, call or write Lasca Gaylord  
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 Lasca Gaylord at 781-1196.



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[https://www.instagram.com/  
el\\_moro\\_elfin\\_forest/](https://www.instagram.com/el_moro_elfin_forest/)

## State of the Forest *continued from page 1*

third and fourth quarter of last year alone, for example, it was estimated that volunteers racked up nearly 1,000 hours. Many additional hours are put into meetings, work on the website (a new one is coming soon), trail guides, and organizing guided walks. Volunteers participate in events like the Oktoberfest booth, writing and putting out the Oakleaves quarterly newsletter, organizing the Annual Meeting, archiving SWAP/FEMEF history, and selling Elfin Forest merchandise. Thank you everyone who volunteers time to our precious community resource!

### Speaking of Volunteers

With the steady rain we have had this winter, FEMEF is already seeing invasive weeds popping up in the Elfin Forest. Ambassador-at-Large and Weed Warrior extraordinaire Vicky Johnsen has been leading weeding parties in the Elfin Forest for about the past year (after an extended COVID hiatus). Bob Sloan, with Ecological Assets Management LLC, has not only been our keen Morro Shoulderband Snail monitor for Weed Warrior events, but is also an excellent weeder and has been working very hard to remove invasive plants while keeping a sharp eye out for snails. Thank you so much, Bob and Vicky. Weed Warrior parties occur on the first Saturday of each month from 9-12 with fresh baked cookies provided to volunteers. Check our website, [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org), for updates. Rain cancels.

There has been a steady “greying” of our Elfin Forest volunteers over the years with the “old guard” still putting in a lot of time, and not many younger folks joining to help. Recently, a few older board members have retired. At 53, I’m the youngest board member and I am already getting quite grey. If you live in Los Osos or nearby and enjoy visiting the Elfin Forest, please consider volunteering! We could use any help that you can provide, but especially need help with the *Oakleaves* publication, website development, education, archiving, working with merchandise, and coordinating events like our Oktoberfest booth and the Annual Meeting.

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## Dees Retires *continued from page 1*

Galapagos Islands, Africa, and Antarctica. Bob also collects seashells and studies the mollusks that make them. He took a marine biology course at Cuesta College, taught by our FEMEF Board chair, Steve Hendricks. In late 2021, Steve invited Bob to join the FEMEF Board, and Bob was voted onto the Board in December 2021. He was elected as Board vice chair in January 2022.

Bob drew on his interest in mollusks to provide us with a fascinating story for *Oakleaves* (April/May 2022, page 1) about the naming of the Moro shoulderband snail, its decline in numbers to endangered status, a recent increase in numbers, and reclassification leading to threatened rather than endangered. Drawing on his expertise as an English professor, Bob asked our readers on page 4 of our Summer issue in 2022 if we might be missing some Shakespeare in our lives. He then demonstrated the bard’s love of plants and flowers, citing cities around the world with Shakespeare gardens featuring 175 plants mentioned in his works. Bob compiled a staggering list on page 5 of that issue of many plants in our Elfin Forest that are related to 38 of Shakespeare’s plants, and the plays in which Shakespeare names those plants. As a retired biogeography professor, your editor Jean Wheeler is in awe of this contribution by Bob! This article can be accessed from the [elfin-forest.org](http://elfin-forest.org) website under Forest Library. Click on Past Issues of *Oakleaves*.

Both *Oakleaves* editors were delighted that Bob joined our editing staff. His eagle eye saw all the misplaced commas and apostrophes. When a sentence was awkwardly worded, he skillfully rewrote it. We will miss his very valuable editing and his writing.



# Two Outstanding Volunteers Step Up to the Board

*By Rebecca Rasmussen, FEMEF Board member*

The FEMEF Board is pleased to announce that two long-time volunteers are playing new roles as Board Members – Pat Brown and Vicky Johnsen. Both are familiar faces around the boardwalk as they have been volunteering with FEMEF for many years. Both are multi-talented women whose experience and knowledge of the Elfin Forest will be a great resource for the Board as it continues its important preservation work.

Pat Brown may be publicly known for leading our Third-Saturday Butterfly Walks since 2001, but she has spent many years working behind the scenes as well. Now retired from Cuesta College after almost 20 years of teaching nutrition, she has been a member of many FEMEF committees including the Interpretive Signs Committee, the Education Committee, and the Pocket Guide Editorial Committee. As chairperson of the Trail Guide Committee, she helped to design and install the Trail Guide boxes and has been responsible for printing and stocking the boxes since 2002. Pat and her husband, George, donated and installed the Bulletin Board that is along the boardwalk. In addition, Pat is a highly skilled photographer and has been using her camera to capture wildlife and events in the Forest since 1999. Currently, Pat serves on the Website Development Committee helping to design and edit a new FEMEF website. Some of her nature photographs will be featured on the new site. She is also involved with archiving the older records of the history of our organization.

Vicky Johnsen currently serves as Co-Chair of the Conservation Committee. In this role, she is responsible for organizing volunteers, coordinating tasks, and reporting workparty activities to the FEMEF Board. She worked hard to complete requirements to be certified as a snail monitor, long required for weeding activities in the Elfin Forest to make sure that any endangered Moro shoulderband snails encountered during our monthly Weed Warrior work parties are moved to a safe place. Just as she completed requirements to serve in the role of snail monitor, the species numbers were found to have increased, and the species was downlisted from endangered to threatened, no longer requiring a snail monitor. However, Vicky will continue to help our weeders watch for and relocate snails of this species in our efforts to assist, rather than reverse, the species recovery from past losses. Vicky's background also includes serving as a former SWAP Board member, having been elected previously in 2013. She is a volunteer extraordinaire - leading birder outings for the Morro Bay Bird Festival and the Morro Coast Audubon Society, guiding nature walks at the Elfin Forest, and even speaking on behalf of FEMEF at the Estero Bay Newcomers Club. It is no wonder that she was awarded SWAP Volunteer of the Year in 2012.

The FEMEF Board is indeed very fortunate to join forces with these two Renaissance Women. With their help, there is no doubt that El Moro Elfin Forest and FEMEF will continue to thrive.



*Pat Brown leading a Third Saturday Walk.  
Photo by Bob Meyer.*



*Vicky Johnsen, Conservation Co-Chair and leader of our Weed Warrior work parties. Photo by James Solum.*



# Argentine Ant Threat to Our Coast Horned Lizards

By Jean Wheeler, Ph. D.; photo at right by Bob Meyer

In my June/July 2013 article about our coast horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii*), I briefly mentioned, “A major conservation concern is the replacement of native ants by invasive species, especially the Argentine ant, (*Linepithema humile*), which is both less familiar and less nutritious.” Pat Brown, a FEMEF Board member, recommended an *Oakleaves* article focused just on this concern, and I agreed.

Coast horned lizards eat ants, beetles, spiders, bees, and other arthropods, but harvester ants (*Pogonomyrmex californicus*) form 50 per cent or more of their diet. Young lizards eat smaller ants and progress as they mature to larger harvester ants.

Argentine ants are believed to have arrived on coffee or sugar ships in the 1890’s. A single harvester ant is several times the size of an Argentine ant, but the invaders live in colonies totaling tremendously more ants than a harvester ant colony. The few arriving Argentine ants were genetically much less diverse than the populations they came from that war with one another in Argentina, limiting size of colonies. Here, their colonies grow much larger, waging war on our native ant species that are not inclined genetically to eating or fighting with much smaller ants. Our native ants get overwhelmed (see photo below by Dave Bowlus) by the biomass of the invading colonies. Scientific experiments to feed young harvester ants on Argentine ants discovered that the young harvester ants all quickly lost weight. If Argentine ants replace harvester ants, we may lose our charismatic horned lizards also.



## Look LOW-DOWN For Ant Wars in the Elfin Forest

By Dave Bowlus, Ph.D.

Two distinct species of ants show their “front doors” in the Elfin Forest after hiding underground during cooler, wetter months. They emerge from holes near the boardwalk and sand trails. Looking closely, you’ll see them hauling out miniscule sand grains to enlarge their living quarters below. One species is bad; the other is good. Yet both are fun to watch. The shape of the surface sand pile tells which ant colony lies below. A volcano-like pile of sand, 1-2 inches in diameter with a central hole, signals the home of invasive Argentine ants. A wider pile of sand, near but not completely surrounding a hole, marks the abode of the native California seed harvester ant. Harvester ants often add seed chaff and other debris to their sand pile.

Viewing the ants, differences are clear. Argentine ants (*Linepithema humile*) are dark brown in color and tiny, under 0.1 inch long. Most of us are familiar with them sometimes invading our homes. Harvester ants (*Pogonomyrmex californicus*) are red and, up to 1/3 inch in length, are big enough to look scary. They can sting but won’t attack unless one disturbs the nest (or absent mindedly stands on their burrow as yours truly sometimes has done while leading a field trip).

Maybe you guessed it: the Argentines are the bad guys. Argentine ants like to eat sweets, meat, and fat—just about anything we humans like to eat as most of us know from their invasions of kitchens and picnics. In the Elfin Forest their diet includes eggs and babies of other insects, making them killers as well as competitors of many native species, including other ants. There is a fight when they attack a harvester ant colony. Although smaller in size, they numerically overwhelm the harvesters. Native to the American Southwest, harvester ants are seed eaters and scavengers. Sometimes dropping a seed, they help to spread native plants, and they clean up the neighborhood generally. Fitting into a chain of life in the Elfin Forest, harvester ants are also food for the horned lizard.



*In this ant battle photographed by Dave Bowlus, at least 9 Argentine ants are attacking two harvester ants.*

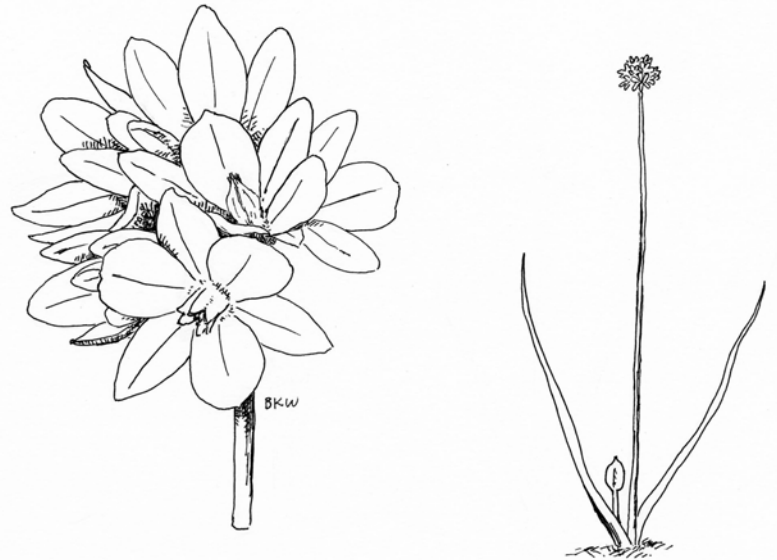
# Ookow, also Called Blue Dicks

Text revised by Dirk Walters, Ph. D. from his April 2016 article  
Drawing by Bonnie Walters

This month's plant is a repeat of one that I thought we had done several times before, and I was amazed that we'd only done it once. There are two possible reasons for this. First, it is essentially impossible to photograph the whole plant. The flowers are isolated on the top of a thin stalk (scape) a foot or more long, and the usually single leaf and scape arise from the top of an underground corm. All the photos I've seen are of only the flower cluster (umbel). Bonnie's drawing was able to do what photographers can't do, shorten the scape; it should be longer relative to the size of the flower cluster. The second reason is because this species is so common that it's taken for granted. It is seen on practically every field trip in our area. That said, I was somewhat surprised to see it on the Elfin Forest species list because I associate the species with clay soils rather than sandy ones. I also must admit that I don't remember seeing it from the Board Walk. However, it was reported last spring near the boardwalk in the Celestial Meadow.

The plant is *Dichelostemma capitatum* and it is currently in the asparagus family, Themidaceae. More on the scientific name later. First, what about its common names? In our area the most used name is 'blue dicks.' I've been asked, what is the origin of that name since it sounds a bit risqué. I didn't know. It turns out there is a website which asks the same question. It had only two responses. Both admitted they didn't know either, but one of them tried to come up with an answer. It suggested the blue comes from the color of the flowers and 'dicks' comes from the first syllable of genus name, *Dichelostemma*, pronounced 'Dick' when said out loud. That's as good as any other explanation of the name. The questioner then went on to ask if there were any other common names for the plant. Many years ago, Dr. Richard Pimentel, who taught Natural History at Cal Poly for many years, said he preferred a name he said came from native Californians, which is Ookow. I think that is a good alternative name in spite of the fact most the web sites apply this name to a different species, *D. congestum*, found mostly east and north of our area. After all, we can call it what we want as common names are not regulated. If you don't like ookow, the web suggests several alternatives: school bells, wild hyacinth, and fork-tooth.

The scientific name has been quite variable over the years. Dr. Hoover, in his original *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo*, gave it the name, *Dichelostemma pulchellum* and placed it in the Amaryllis family (Amaryllidaceae). It has also been given the name *Brodiaea pulchella*. The current *Jepson Manual* and David Keil's updated *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo* gives it the name *Dichelostemma capitatum* and places it in the Brodiaea family (Themidaceae). Why the confusion? First a little background. There is a group of monocots with showy flowers whose perianth (sepal plus petals) are brightly colored and similar in size and shape. When sepals and petals are nearly identical and can be recognized only by position (sepals are always the outer whorl



of the flower or perianth) they are labeled tepals. There are over 5,000 species of these tepal monocots. Over the years, botanists have tried to divide the large complex of species into smaller, more manageable groups. Unfortunately, they haven't agreed on the criteria. During the last century, divisions were based on such things as inflorescence (umbels in the Amaryllidaceae and racemes and panicles in the Liliaceae) and succulence in the Agavaceae. The genera in these classical (old) families have now been totally rearranged into quite different assemblages, among which are several new families. Characters defining these families are also less obvious than succulence and inflorescence. For example, two very similar genera *Allium* (onions) and *Muilla* are so similar that the author of the younger name, *Muilla*, chose that name to indicate that *Muilla* differed from onion primarily in its lack of odor. By modern family definitions, these two genera are now placed in separate families probably based on chemical and developmental character differences. The most easily observed character that can be used to separate the Themidaceae from the Asparagaceae is that members of Themidaceae produce corms (underground fleshy stem with scale leaves) while the Alliaceae produce a bulb (minimal underground stem with succulent leaves). Apparently, there is still a lot of confusion as to exact family definitions in this group.

Ookow is a major wildlife food. The corms are dug up and eaten. A few years ago, at Shell Creek, a group of feral pigs dug up a patch of ookow. The area looked like it had been plowed. We all thought that was terrible! But a few years later, the patch had lots of small, widely scattered Ookow. How did this happen? It turns out that Ookow produces tiny cormlets at the end of short rhizomes (horizontal underground stems). These are so tiny and scattered that the pigs didn't waste effort in finding them. So, as they rooted up the patch, they scattered these tiny cormlets over an expanded area. Also, since the large corms were not left at the site, the pigs won't root there for several years, thus giving the cormlets time to grow into large mature corms which will produce a new crop of flowering ookow. Even nasty behavior of plant predators can be used by the plants for their own benefit!



# Weed Warrior Reports

December 2: Fourteen stalwart FEMEF Weed Warriors assembled for the work party on the first Saturday in December. Just as they returned from their victorious efforts in several areas of our Elfin Forest, they were met by Noi and Ron Miner from Noi's Café on Second Street in Café, delivering a huge pot of delicious Thai chicken soup, made by Doi. Thank you sisters Doi and Noi for continuing your support of our hard-working volunteers!

January 6: On the first Saturday of January, our Weed Warriors had a great turnout with over 15 dedicated volunteers. The scope of work included erosion remediation, trimming vegetation back from walkways and leveling the parking area at 15th Street. Noi's 2nd Street Café again provided a tasty stir-fry with rice for lunch, which disappeared quickly.

Later in January, Conservation Co-chairperson Vicky Johnsen led a group of 7 volunteers to remove 6 bags of invasive slender-leaved ice plant. Snail monitor Bob Sloan was there to relocate one Morro shoulder-band snail that was discovered.

February 3: Vicky Johnsen reported that on this workday our regular warriors were joined by 8 students from Cal Poly's "WaterWorks" club of environmental engineering students. The students worked very hard and learned a lot from Bob Sloan, who has been our snail monitor, a position now no longer required for all work in the Elfin Forest as the Morro shoulderband snail has recently been downlisted from "endangered" to "threatened." However, moving them carefully when encountered during weeding is still a very good policy. They found 5 live snails of the species, 3 more than Vicky had ever found on any one of her many previous forays!



*Cal Poly Water Works Club students comparing two snails found while assisting our Weed Warriors. Threatened Morro Shoulderband Snails should be moved to safe locations. Photo by Zarah Wyly.*

## Join First Saturday Work Parties

We invite you to join us on any first Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon at the north end of 15th Street in Los Osos. Please dress for wind, fog, or sun in layers of clothing with work gloves, and sturdy shoes with closed toes. Take care not to park in front of driveways or mailboxes.

To request more information, call (805) 528-0392.



*December Weed Warriors. L to R: Vicky Johnsen, Carol Pilling (behind Vicky), Dean Thompson, James Solum (in van), Sharon Rooney, Noi and Ron Miner (having just delivered lunch from Noi's Café!), Caroline Boer, Vicki Marchenco, Natlie Zaragoza and Amberly Clark. Warriors Jan Moore and Dave Bowlus didn't make it to the photo. Photo by Pat Brown.*



*January Weed Warriors, left to right in back: Zarah Wyly, Dean Thompson, Vicki Marchenko, and James Solum. In front: Vicky Johnsen, Patrice Promack, Natalie Zaragoza, Cindy Roessler, and Noi with Ron Miner (providers of lunch from Noi's Café). Today's warriors missing from the photo: Sharon Rooney, Dave Bowlus, Jan Moore, Roger Carmody, and Angela and Patrick Logan. Photo by Pat Brown*



# Gardening with California Natives: Hollyleaf Cherry

By John Nowak & Suzette Girouard; photo by Jean Wheeler

Spring is a good time to see the lovely *Prunus ilicifolia* *ilicifolia*, commonly called hollyleaf cherry or Islay. The large shrubs are covered with fragrant white hanging flowers, resembling freshly fallen snow. They brighten up an early March morning, buzzing with the sounds of happily working bees, while a California scrub jay dances through their branches. *Prunus ilicifolia* is in the rose family, Rosaceae, and is related to the cherries (*Prunus avium*) we purchase at the market. Its common name can be traced to European settlers who thought its leaves resembled *Ilex aquifolium*, English holly. The name Islay can be traced to Spanish settlers during the Mission Period. The Chumash people called it 'axtatapash' and it was prized as a food source as well as for medicinal purposes (<https://www.onceuponawatershed.org/hollyleafcherry>).

Hollyleaf Cherry is found growing within the California coastal zone, ranging south from Napa County to northern Baja California, and eastward into desert chaparral areas of the Mojave Desert. The other recognized subspecies is Catalina cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia lyonia*) which grows on the Channel Islands of California, including Catalina Island. On the California Central Coast, including the Elfin Forest, hollyleaf cherry can be found growing within the coastal dune scrub on southern facing slopes alongside buck brush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*), California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), and mock heather (*Ericameria ericoides*). Hollyleaf cherry's white fragrant flowers bloom from February to April, attached to specialized stems called racemes. In July, its fruits ripen from green to dark purple. When ripe, a thin fleshy edible skin covers a hard seed coat containing one seed kernel. During its six-month bloom to seed period, hollyleaf cherry is an important source of nourishment for birds, mammals, insects and, once upon a time, humans.

Chumash uses of 'axtatapash' are well documented and are easy to research. One fact stands out: the seed (kernel) needed go through a lengthy leaching process to remove hydrocyanic acid to make them edible. Afterwards seeds could be ground and made into soups, cakes or breads. There are reports of crushing leaves (which have an almond scent) to treat colds and/or respiratory ailments. Lastly, the wood is dense and made excellent fires, tools and bows.

Horticultural uses of hollyleaf cherry are many, and it is prized for being one of the most adaptable California native plants for the garden setting. It is best located in full to partial sun, well-drained soil, and protection from direct ocean wind. It requires monthly waterings until established, usually two years. After three years only summer waterings are needed to keep it looking its best. Because the leaves and seeds are poisonous to humans and their pets, caution must be taken, especially around children who may find the fruit fun to chew on. Wildlife, especially deer, are adapted to ingesting hollyleaf cherry, and their browsing can be a problem. Applying deer repellent is somewhat effective, but a six-foot high temporary fence around the plant until it is well established is best. Fortunately only a few insects, especially spider mites and aphids,



can damage the flowers and seeds. Use a stiff spray of water to wash insects off infested areas. Some of my favorite landscape uses include garden focal point, pollinator garden, or along the property line of large parcels. It can be trained into a formal privacy hedge. Hollyleaf cherry can be purchased at native plant nurseries and online retailers. Sometimes it is available at the Fall CNPS Plant Sale or the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden retail nursery.

Hollyleaf cherry stands out among its sagebrush counterparts as a superior nectar provider through its bloom period. Its seeds supply a much-needed protein source to wildlife, and in the past, the Chumash people who once walked the Elfin Forest collected the fruits. Its outstanding horticultural adaptability is well-known throughout the plant world. It is these features that Suzette and I found interesting.



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Editors are Yolanda Waddell & Jean Wheeler  
Layout by Katy Budge

Contributors to this issue: Pat Brown, Roger Carmody, Suzette Girouard, Steve Hendricks, Vicky Johnsen, Betsy Kinter, Bob Meyer, John Nowak, Patrice Promack, Rebecca Rasmussen, Joey Rektor, Skip Rotstein, James Solum, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk Walters, Jean Wheeler.

Deadline for copy to *Oakleaves* is the first of the month before issue.  
If possible, all copy should be submitted by e-mail to [oakleaf@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org).

# Coming Up in the Elfin Forest

Story and Photos by Jean Wheeler

The amount of rain we've received promises a bountiful and lasting season of spring wildflowers. Buckbrush ceanothus, forming shrubby walls along much of the boardwalk, will continue to open white to lilac blossoms. Morro manzanitas brighten the lower boardwalk with their lovely little white bells, often blushing pink, from late winter into early spring. Black sage opens white pompons along stems. Several kinds of white flowers can be seen in the understory, such as horkelia and California croton. By late spring white flower spikes on chamise shrubs will be bordering the higher inland end of the boardwalk. Small white flowers on large leaves of cucumber vines will turn into large round fruits covered in spikes (pictured). Please do NOT "weed out" these vines as they are a native species, die back soon, and they do not kill the plants they cover during their brief lives above ground.

California poppies, in bloom virtually all year, dominate the yellow to orange-colored flowers near the shore. They are joined in spring by many other flowers from pale yellow to bright orange, including deerweed, fiddleneck, suffrutescent wallflowers, and golden yarrow. Dominating waist-high shrubs along the higher inland boardwalk are bright orange-yellow sticky monkey-flowers.

Red flowers topping short thin stems, known as cardinal catchflies, brighten the undergrowth while fuchsia-flowered gooseberries look like small bright red trumpets on low bushes. In April and May, big blue flower spikes on bush lupine shrubs should be opening along the sand dune crests near the estuary. By May there will be no doubt why Bush Lupine Point carries that name. Purple nightshade plants add that color, while Pomona milk vetch has creamy flowers on low plants.

"Flying flowers" are butterflies attracted by all these sources of nectar and are often looking for egg-laying sites on plants with good shelter and food for their offspring. Two orange and black butterfly species commonly seen in the Elfin Forest are variable checkerspots and Gabb's checkerspots. The latter have much more of the orange and cream-colored rectangles and less of the black and the white squares than do the variable checkerspots. Other butterflies to look for include small green coastal bramble hairstreaks, large yellow and black anise swallowtails, brownish common buckeyes, and colorful painted ladies. Morro blue butterflies flutter around the blue flower spikes of bush lupines. Given decades of losses from coastal housing development, stands of this lupine in our Elfin Forest are important in assisting survival of both the plant and the butterfly species.

While admiring butterflies and flowers, your eyes will no doubt also be attracted by the flight of avian residents, such as the black phoebe (pictured). Especially likely to be seen and heard are the bright blue California scrub jays, plump California quail with amusing head plumes, orange and black spotted towhees, chattering flocks of tiny fuzzy gray bushtits and blue-gray gnatcatchers, and similarly talkative little brown birds such as sparrows and wrens. Avian migrants resting here as they pass



*Wild cucumber fruit vine with leaves and fruit, a native plant present above ground only a few spring months each year.*

***It should NOT be destroyed.***



*Black phoebe.*

through from winter homes farther south may include warbling vireos, hooded orioles, black-headed grosbeaks, as well as yellow, Townsend's, and Wilson's warblers.

Among other residents we can expect to be increasingly active as summer approaches are western fence lizards, brush rabbits, ground squirrels, and coyotes.

Spring is a colorful and exciting time to visit the sand trails and boardwalk of our small wilderness area!

## Thinking of Switching to Online *Oakleaves*?

If you receive a print copy of *Oakleaves*, we encourage you to visit our online version at [www.elfin-forest.org](http://www.elfin-forest.org). You will see photos in full color, and the text is easier to read on your computer. If you decide to be an online reader, you will receive an email when each new issue is posted on our website. Your decision would save paper, ink, and FEMEF dollars for other uses. Just email us at [oakleaf@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org) with the subject "Switch me to online."



# WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

## Docent-Led Third Saturday Walks

Reservations are required; masks are optional. To reserve a spot on the walk, email us at [walks@elfin-forest.org](mailto:walks@elfin-forest.org) and indicate the number in your party in the subject line of your email.

### *March 16, 9:30 a.m. Animal Tracks*

Evan Albright, an animal track expert, will lead an informative walk about who is “tracking up” the Elfin Forest. Visitors will learn how to tell the front feet from the back feet of a raccoon and how coyote and dog tracks differ. Evan will also demonstrate how to find other signs that a wild resident of the Elfin Forest has passed that way. Attend this walk and develop an awareness of the comings and goings of the Forest’s mammal, bird, and reptile inhabitants—and enjoy some things you wouldn’t otherwise readily see while walking along the boardwalk.

### *April 20, 9:30 a.m. Butterflies & Native Plants*

In honor of California Native Plant Week, butterfly guru Pat Brown will introduce you to several native plants and talk about the butterflies that sip their nectar and the caterpillars that eat their leaves. Pat has photos of butterflies in all stages of development, from eggs to mature butterflies, and will share them along with fascinating butterfly facts. She’ll lead you to hangouts of variable checkerspot, Morro blue, swallowtail, hairstreak, and other butterflies that make the Elfin Forest their home. She will also share information about butterfly books, web sites, and butterfly-related materials. She recommends that you bring a pair of close-focusing (5-10 ft.) binoculars.

### *May 18, 9:30 a.m. Wildflowers*

Dirk Walters will take us on a delightful tour of every blooming plant that is visible from the boardwalk in the Elfin Forest. There will be bright yellows of rush-roses, deerweed, golden yarrow, and of course, California poppies. White popcorn flowers and pearly everlasting plants are in abundance, too, as well as pink cobwebby thistles and blue wild hyacinths. The silver dune lupines at Bush Lupine Point should be covered with pale blue blossoms and alive with honeybees and Morro blue butterflies. Treat yourself to a springtime experience in nature’s own garden.

*Walks 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.*

## 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 *Oakleaves* editors at: [oakleaf@elfin-forest.org](mailto:oakleaf@elfin-forest.org) or leave a message on FEMEF’s answering machine, (805) 528-0392.



*In January, John Rosen walk gave a walk and talk about monitoring Morro Bay’s Black Brant population. Photo by Vicky Johnsen.*

## In Memoriam for a Mountain Lion

*By Jean Wheeler and Skip Rotstein*

On April 1, 2023, Skip posted videos of a mountain lion filmed by cameras he has mounted in his yard, which fronts on Morro Bay, along a game trail coming about a block from the edge of our Elfin Forest. We’ve enjoyed several videos of this mountain lion along with those of many other wild animals caught by the cameras mounted on that game trail over the last few years, emailed to many of us and regularly supplied to our FEMEF website.

On January 3, 2024, Skip believed that the only Mountain Lion in El Moro Elfin Forest had been killed by a car on South Bay Blvd. on December 26. We mourned the loss of that majestic young cat. Then, on January 9, Skip emailed that a mountain lion appeared on his cameras on January 5. He immediately checked more closely previous mountain lion video dates, which had twice been paired on nearly consecutive dates. He realized not one but at least two different lions were involved, which he called Notch Ears and Smooth Ears. The lion on the Jan 9 video was Notch Ears, and we did not know whether the one killed was Smooth Ears or a third lion.

On February 8, 9, 10, and 11, Smooth Ears also reappeared on the video cameras. Detailed examination of the many videos by Skip and Jeff Reifel, as well as others, leave us assured that we still have two lions. Smooth Ears is now known to be slightly smaller than Notch Ears and is believed to be a female, while the lion killed on South Bay Blvd was a young male that graced El Moro Elfin Forest only briefly.

We are very relieved to know both Notch Ears and Smooth Ears are alive and seem well, but we continue to mourn the December 26 death of a young male lion.

# Thank You to Our Generous Members

*Compiled by  
Betsy Kinter, FEMEF Database Coordinator*

## **NEW MEMBERS:**

Marilyn & Karl Collins\*  
Frank Di Stefano\*  
Jennifer Golden\*  
Jennifer Roe\*  
Mark Skinner\*  
Claudia Tyler & Peter Slaughter

## **RENEWING MEMBERS:**

Bob & Linda Bailey*	Deborah Marzetta*
Craig Baltimore*	Bob & Sharon Meyer*
Kathryn Bay*	Marilyn Moore*
Sandra Beebe	Larry Morrison & Kathy Cahill*
Kay Blaney*	Jerry Mullins*
Kate Blickhahn*	Denise Fourie & Mike Multari*
David Bowlus & Beverly Boyd*	Jim & Barbara Murray*
Steve & Sue Burns*	Pat Murray*
Ruth & Les Christiansen*	Jen Nelson*
Charlie & Leslie Cohn*	Bill Newman*
Kathleen M. Copeland*	Al Normandin
John Cosner*	Anne Norment & Lawson Schaller
David Cox & Carolyn Niblick*	Robert Pavlik*
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Robert & Van Dees*	Judith Resnick*
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George Lusich*	Rex & Janice Wolf*
George & Vicki Marchenko*	Dave & Julie Wolter*

# Archiving the History of SWAP/FEMEF

*Article by Patrice Promack, FEMEF Property and Records Chair*

On January 29, Pat Brown and I had the pleasure of meeting Jessica Holada (Director of Special Collections and Archives at Cal Poly) and her colleague Laura Sorveti (Archivist). They spent about 2 hours with us at our storage unit to take an initial look at our files. They feel there is quite a lot worth archiving. Cal Poly will prepare an agreement for archiving FEMEF's materials and, if approved by our Board, the materials will be transferred to Cal Poly Archives in the coming months. Cal Poly Special Collections staff will organize and digitize the files.

Thanks go to Yolanda Waddell for initiating contact with Jessica years ago, and to Bob Dees for reactivating this project last January. It will be a great way to honor and preserve the history of SWAP/FEMEF and allow interested researchers and FEMEF members to have access to our organization's history.

## FEMEF Education Books Placed in Los Osos Public Library

Books owned by FEMEF and used for Docent Training and other teaching and school walk materials, originally stored in the FEMEF/SWAP storage unit, were moved to Vicky and Craig Johnsen's "SWAP Shed" for easier access by docents and other volunteers. Because of a recent donation of quite a few books to the FEMEF reference library, the shed has run out of room.

After telling the FEMEF Board of Directors about the storage problem and receiving several suggestions, Vicky decided to ask for help at the Los Osos Public Library. Library Manager Bonnie Richan told her that there is an empty shelf that can hold our books as an "honor lending" collection. Users will check out these books and record the book's return on a sheet placed next to the books.

Bookplates suggested, by Bob Dees and ordered by Vicky, say "This Book Donated by Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest." One will be placed inside the front cover of each book in the collection.

This is a good solution of the problem of easy access by FEMEF docents. Other library users can also borrow a book like *Secrets of the Oak Woodlands: Plants & Animals Among California's Oaks*, and learn why it is so important to preserve the oaks in the Elfin Forest. Thanks to Vicky for her work in placing FEMEF's natural history books in just the right place.

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## **DONATIONS:**

Anonymous donation at  
the recommendation of the Halcyon Charitable Fund  
Ruth & Les Christiansen  
Kevin Lee  
Noi's 2nd Street Café provided lunch for Weed Warriors  
Fredric Steinert  
Wallace Group, San Luis Obispo  
Jean D. Wheeler, Life Member

*\*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 quarterly 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.*





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 & SWEAT SHIRTS

Large mural design by artist Barbara Rosenthal on both front and back. Forest green fabric with the words "Friends of the El Moro Elfin Forest" above mural and "Los Osos, California" below mural.

"New" Forest Green T-Shirts (sizes S,M,L,XL,XXL,XXXL)

\_\_\_ Short Slv. (no XXL) size \_\_\_\_\_ @\$25.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Long Slv. T-Shirt size \_\_\_\_\_ @\$30.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Hoodie Sweat Shirt  
(no S, L, XXXL) size \_\_\_\_\_ @\$40.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

"Old" Black (limited sizes avail., please circle your choice)

\_\_\_ Short Slv. T-Shirt (S) @\$15.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Long Slv. T-Shirt (M, XL, XXXL) @\$15.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Crew-Neck Sweat Shirt  
(S,M,L,XL,XXL, XXXL) @\$20.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. POCKET GUIDE

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

\_\_\_ @ \$3.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. ELFIN FOREST MURAL PRINTS

Signed prints by artist Barbara Rosenthal. Image size 4 1/2 x 16 1/2 in. Mounted on foamcore.

\_\_\_ @ \$35.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. ALPHABET BIRD BOOK

With 26 clever verses and superb photos on facing pages, this book is sure to please young and old.

\_\_\_ @ \$20.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. MURAL MUG

A 15- ounce beverage mug with wrap-around mural design. Microwave-safe; hand-wash suggested.

\_\_\_ @ \$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. ELFIN FOREST CAPS

One-size-fits-all cap with adjustable straps in back, 100% cotton. Two colors, forest green and maroon. Specify color when ordering.

\_\_\_ @ \$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Color(s) \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. NOTECARDS

Featuring scenes from the El Moro Elfin Forest

\_\_\_ @ \$2.50 / each or \_\_\_ 5 @ \$10

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*Harvester ants busy near the Fairbanks Monument in the El Moro Elfin Forest. Photo by Joey Rektor.*

*See page 4 for information about the threat to Harvester Ants (and Coast Horned Lizards).*



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| <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$1000    |  |

I want to help, please call me!

FEMEF has permission to email me.

Memberships include an online subscription to FEMEF's quarterly newsletter *Oakleaves*.

- Check here to receive the online version by email.
- Check here to receive the print version by U.S. mail.
- Check here if you do not wish to receive *Oakleaves*.

All donations to FEMEF are tax-deductible.

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