

# Los Osos Oaks State Reserve



## Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

GRAY DAVIS  
Governor

MARY D. NICHOLS  
Secretary for Resources

RUTH COLEMAN



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**Los Osos Oaks State Reserve**  
c/o Morro Bay State Park  
State Park Road  
Morro Bay, CA 93442  
(805) 772-7434/2694

**L**os Osos Oaks State Reserve, a 90-acre grove of dwarfed, 800-year-old coast live oaks, occupies an ancient dune habitat eight miles west of San Luis Obispo and five miles east of Morro Bay. This centuries-old oak woodland protects an unusual variety of plants, animals and biotic communities. Explore the cool, quiet surroundings of these moss-draped, fantastically gnarled trees, and let their enchantment surround you.

## FORMER RESIDENTS

Native Chumash and Salinans once used the area now encompassed by the reserve. Evidence of the early presence of these Native Americans is found in middens (ancient trash and garbage dumps). However, the native people, who had no immunity to the diseases that arrived with the European settlers, sickened and died in great numbers. In a short time, one of



*Closed canopy forest shades the trail*

the largest and most culturally advanced Indian nations in California had been greatly reduced in number.

## SAVING THE OAKS

Similar woodlands were once widespread along the coast, but most fell victim to clearing, grazing, firewood cutting and development. In 1971 a campaign was launched to preserve these remaining 90 acres of trees as a state reserve. On June 29, 1972, thanks to the Small Wilderness Area Preservation Foundation, and grants from Dart Industries, Inc. and the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, the grove was purchased and turned over to California State Parks.

## PLANT COMMUNITIES

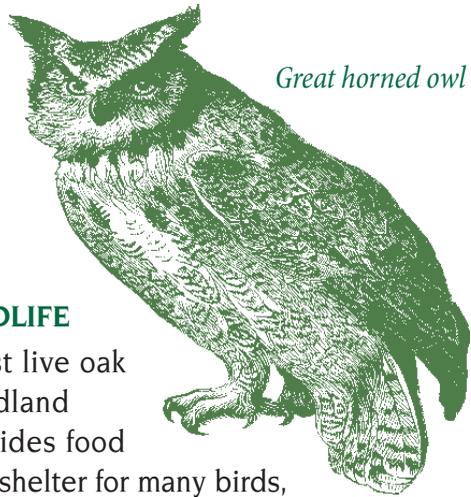
Three major plant communities exist in the grove.

**Coastal sage scrub**—dense, highly-branched, semi-woody shrubs, including California sagebrush, black sage, buckbrush, holly-leaf cherry, mock heather and coast buckwheat.

**Coast live oak woodland**—occurring in areas with greater soil moisture, a closed-canopy forest with multi-trunked trees 20 to 25 feet high. The smaller forms in the Reserve are not younger trees—their growth has been stunted for various reasons related to their location. A sparse understory

includes miner's lettuce, bracken fern, poison oak and crimson sage.

**Riparian**—occurring along the seepage areas and banks of Los Osos Creek, species include sycamore, arroyo willow, red willow and black cottonwood, with western dogwood, stinging nettle and giant horsetail in areas of sparse riparian growth.



*Great horned owl*

**WILDLIFE**

Coast live oak woodland provides food and shelter for many birds, mammals and insects. Spring and fall are the best times to see animals, and the hour after sunrise and the hour before sunset are good times for viewing.

Birds that visit the grove include acorn woodpeckers, Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds, western flycatchers, common flickers, California thrashers, California quail and brown towhees. Mourning doves, Brewer's blackbirds and dark-eyed juncos are common grassland species. Red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, barn owls and great horned owls are among bird predators.

Mammals include the dusky-footed wood rat, deer mouse, California pocket mouse,



*Trail through the oaks*

striped skunk, gray fox, brush rabbit, bobcat, coyote, deer, opossum and raccoon.

Dragonflies, butterflies and other insects serve as food for reptiles and amphibians, including Pacific tree frogs, western skinks, and southern alligator and western fence lizards.

**RECREATION**

- An easy, flat system of trails covers about 1-1/2 miles.
- The San Luis Obispo de Tolosa Mission is eight miles away in San Luis Obispo.

The year-round climate is mild, with winter temperatures from

50 degrees to the low 60s, and summer from 65 to 70 degrees.

**ACCESSIBLE FEATURES**

Some visitors with limited mobility can negotiate the gentle terrain, but wheelchair access is impeded by soft, sandy soil.



*Opossum*

**PLEASE REMEMBER**

- Poison oak is a natural part of the area. Learn to recognize and avoid it.
- The park is open during daylight hours.
- There is no entry fee.
- Pets are not permitted.
- Fires and smoking are not permitted.
- There are no restrooms, telephones or facilities for camping or picnicking.

**NEARBY STATE PARKS**

- Morro Strand State Beach, two miles south of Cayucos (805) 772-7434
- Morro Bay State Park, in the town of Morro Bay (805) 772-7434
- Montaña de Oro State Park, seven miles south of Los Osos (805) 528-0513

*Cover and introductory photos by Jim Little.*



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