

A Blend of Restoration Ecology and Agriculture Yields Greater Efficiency

Julian Meisler, Restoration Program Director

Ecological restoration is carried out on many scales and in a great diversity of environments. The definition of "successful" restoration varies tremendously among practitioners but most agree that ecological function is the most appropriate index. In a riparian setting function includes provision of habitat for multiple species be they invertebrate or vertebrate, aquatic or terrestrial. Bank stabilization, water filtration, and shading are other key functions. The list goes on.

As it happens, some of the Laguna Foundation's biggest restoration projects are in riparian settings. And while there are many strong opinions in this field about how riparian restoration ought to be done, we have tended to follow widely accepted methods used by many practitioners throughout California. These include using locally appropriate native species derived from local stock; selecting species that will eventually occupy the canopy along with those that will make up the sub-canopy, shrub and ground layers; controlling the most invasive species; and often providing each plant with irrigation, a weed suppression mat, and a protective sheath to reduce damage from browse and particularly girdling by voracious and hyper-abundant voles. Although the plantings appear random, elevation, soil, and duration of flooding are some of the factors that determine where a plant will go. In the end we hope to end up with something that closely resembles existing riparian forest.

Planting an individual tree is a multi-step process – scalp the ground, dig a hole, install the plant, install weed mat, install browse protection, and install irrigation. You'd be right in surmising that doing this 4,000 times, as we have done on the Middle Reach Restoration Project, takes a while. But what is equally or more consumptive of a limited budget is the intensive labor required to maintain these plants for a typical 3-year period. Consider that 4,000 plants can require over 25 miles of drip hose, every mile of which must be checked regularly to be sure the lines have not been chewed through by coyotes or that the emitters placed at the base of each plant are not clogged. Weeds surrounding the weed mat may also need to be trimmed as their height becomes light limiting to a slow-growing oak. Or more importantly, the tall weeds provide cover to voles and other rodents from raptors that keep the population in check.

Voies are a leading cause of seedling mortality in restoration areas due to their habit of chewing around the base of the tree and cutting off its ability to transport food and water from roots to leaves and back. Following an oak mast year, the population of voies can explode with a single female having up to 12 litters per year and nine young in each litter. Winter flooding can also wreak havoc by carrying away browse protection, ripping up drip hose, or drowning or washing away new plantings.

In an ongoing quest to increase efficiency, some members of the Laguna Foundation staff and other local practitioners visited a project site in the Central Valley where riparian restoration is approached in a wholly different manner. The group implementing the project, River Partners, mixes agricultural methods with ecological principles to rapidly reforest large areas. At the site we visited over 25,000 trees were planted in 3 days, fanning out in rows that followed the floodplain contour. In a few years tens of thousands of grasses and other groundcover will be installed between the rows.

Continued on next page

Laguna Art & Garden Gala

See page 4



Mystic Family Circus performers at the Gala.

Photo credit: Roger Graeber

Executive Director's Report

Dan Schurman

We were thrilled at the turnout for this year's Art & Garden Gala, the Laguna Foundation's annual fund raiser. Given the national economic news, we were understandably worried about how well the event would fare. However, 300 people attended and we raised nearly \$50,000. If you were there and helped make that possible, thank you for your support.

In talking to many of the guests at the party, I was reminded that it's not only an important way for us to raise needed funds to carry on our work, but it is also an essential gathering of the Laguna faithful. As Michael Presley from Lynmar Winery, the event's primary sponsor, said to me, "There's something sacred about people coming together to heal a watershed."

The work of healing the Laguna is often a daunting political, technical and scientific challenge. For the Laguna Foundation staff, consumed by those challenges on a daily basis, it's easy to forget that we are working on behalf of you and the thousands of other Laguna watershed residents and neighbors who care deeply about the health of the Laguna. Whether it be the simple beauty of the place and the solace it inspires, or the habitat it provides for an abundance of

plant and animal life, or the water quality and flood control benefits it provides, the Laguna offers much to all of us who are fortunate enough to live here.

The Laguna, too, is fortunate that so many conscious, concerned and committed people live in its watershed. Our purpose at the Foundation is to be the funnel through which that concern and commitment is channeled and transformed into meaningful programs and projects that analyze, interpret and enhance the Laguna and its functions. And gatherings such as the Gala are an important reminder to all of us that it takes a watershed's community of people, working together, to achieve lasting results and improvements in its ecological function.

Speaking on behalf of the board and staff of the Foundation, I can tell you that we are proud to be able to undertake this work on your behalf for the benefit of the Laguna and all it gives us. And we remember that without your support and involvement, none of this work would be possible. For that we say thank you as we look back on our significant accomplishments in the past year and we look ahead to another year of the same.

A Blend of Restoration Ecology and Agriculture...

Continued from page 1

Efficiencies realized by this method are many. For example, the length of hose required is diminished and can be followed in a relatively straight line. Weed control can be done with a tractor rather than on foot. Vole damage is virtually eliminated because the raptors can see the open ground between rows. The resulting reduction in maintenance can amount to savings of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of dollars over a project period.

Although the site initially looks a little more like an orchard than a forest, older sites become more natural in appearance as natural processes of recruitment and mortality take over. Grasses, forbs, and shrubs fill in the inter-row spaces. Ecological function appears to be intact. A recent article in the journal of the California chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration described the results of bird surveys at an older project site. The number of bird species using the site was nearly equal to existing riparian forest within five years.

So why bring all this up? As Restoration Program Director I am challenged with making decisions that result in cost-efficient successful projects that follow ecological principles and achieve the goals we set out. The described method that blends agriculture and ecology is highly efficient in both initial implementation and ongoing maintenance. By saving resources on a project we are able to implement more projects elsewhere. And given the number of miles of unvegetated



California vole (*Microtus californicus*)

Voles are a leading cause of seedling mortality in restoration.

banks along the Laguna and its tributaries, there is no time to waste. The Laguna Foundation is trying this method in small areas of the Middle Reach Restoration Project area between Highway 12 and Occidental Road. We will evaluate its success there and decide whether we want to pursue bigger projects in this manner.

So if you happen upon a recent restoration planting and wonder to yourself why the trees appear in rows, this is the reason. It's our job to keep up with new innovations and evaluate them in our own local environment. That's exactly what we are doing. If you have any questions about this method or our restoration program in general, feel free to contact me: Julian Meisler at 527-9277 x106 or email: julian@lagunafoundation.org.

Education - Engaging the Community, Serving our Youth

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

"You've got a superlative program! Thanks for the fun, educational days and important information about our local ecology." 4th grade teacher, Rohnert Park

Teachers value and appreciate Learning Laguna. Students say, "You rock" and, "It was the best time of my life" and, "You are the best docents and we kids can't learn about the environment without you!" This year Learning Laguna turns 10 years old and we celebrate 213 classroom visits, 213 field trips and the 4685 students we've had the honor to teach about the Laguna since the premier of the program in 1998.

Learning Laguna works and is successful because interested people join the docent team and become dedicated to the Laguna and committed to sharing what they've learned. To keep the program going strong, we need you! All it takes to get started is curiosity, enthusiasm and a desire to foster children's understanding of and connection to nature.

During the 10-week training class we teach you about the cultural and natural history of the Laguna during dynamic and fun in-class presentations and field trips. We also teach you how to run our engaging activity stations and give you lots of practical skills for working with 2nd-4th grade students both in the classroom and in the field. Plus, you'll have opportunities to shadow working docents so you can experience everything in context.

Docenting for the Laguna is important and deeply meaningful work—and it truly is fun. It benefits schools, children, the community, the Laguna and each person who becomes a docent feels the rewards personally from experiencing the wonder of nature with children.



Fourth graders investigate insects with Docent.
Photo credit: Christine Fontaine

Additionally, the docents create strong connections with each other. Sharing common interests and the bond of working together for a greater good makes for a lovely group of people to spend time with!

Teacher demand for Learning Laguna continues to grow and we truly want to work with every teacher who applies for the program. In order to teach those kids and teachers about the Laguna, we need our team of docents to grow proportionally to the requests. Won't you consider joining us for the enriching experience of being a docent?

Training begins Monday, March 9, 2009. The ten training classes will be held from 9:30am to 2:30pm on consecutive Mondays with a spring break on April 13.

To learn more about training and what it means to be a Learning Laguna docent, visit our website or contact Christine Fontaine at 527-9277 x.102 or email: christine@lagunafoundation.org. The application can also be found on our website. We look forward to welcoming you into the docent circle!

"You are so helpful for the environment and you are getting other people to care for the environment. You are the best in the world. Because of you we learned." 3rd grade student



Docents birdwatching at City of Santa Rosa's Brown Farm.
Photo credit: Christine Fontaine

Put Your Support Where It Will Count Most - Give to the Annual Fund Campaign

Mark Green, Associate Executive Director

The Laguna Foundation relies on our end-of-the-year fundraising campaign for a critical part of our annual budget. We can't continue to provide education programs for children, advocacy for protection of the Laguna, and restoration and science work to enhance its health without the support of people like you.

Soon, you will receive an annual appeal letter from the Foundation, describing the Foundation's many accomplishments this year and laying out our plans for 2009. It's an exciting and ambitious agenda, and we're well on our way to making it happen—as long as we have the support of our community behind us.

We know you're asked by many organizations for support. And these are tough times. But consider this: *by supporting the Laguna Foundation, you're supporting local kids, our environment, our county's future quality of life and a strong, sustainable local economy, all at once.*

That's our vision. We see the Laguna as the centerpiece for Sonoma County's sustainable future: rich with wildlife, accessible by trail,

kayak and canoe, and drawing millions of dollars in ecotourism revenues and restoration grants into our local businesses and public budgets.

Public attention to the Laguna has climbed sharply in recent years due to the Foundation's efforts. We need your continued tax-deductible support to keep that momentum alive.

So please: give generously to this year's Annual Fund Campaign. To meet our goal, we need to secure \$100,000 in this effort. Our board of directors and staff will be working diligently—and giving themselves—to ensure we meet that goal. For the Laguna's future, please give what you can.



5th Annual Art & Garden Gala: The Best Yet!

Mark Green, Associate Executive Director

The Foundation's fifth annual garden party fundraiser took place in perfect summer weather at the beautiful Vine Hill House on September 14th. In every way, this was the best Gala yet: abundance, delicious and beautifully presented food by Trends Catering, paired premium local wines, a truly amazing silent auction of donated original artworks and special wine lots, and fascinating entertainment by performers of the Mystic Family Circus and Ken Garr, of Santa Rosa's The Magic Shop, and the star of the show: a view across the Laguna and the Santa Rosa Plain that has to be seen to be believed.

Live auctioneer David Katz worked up the crowd for a live auction of adventurous experiences in the Laguna, the Alexander Valley and up the coast, raising much-needed funding for the Foundation's work to protect, restore, and build public appreciation for our most important local wildlife area.

The Foundation is grateful to the Gala's generous sponsors, to the many artists who donated their work for auction, donors of the exciting live auction "adventure packages", to caterer Susan Borowicz of Trends, David Katz and the donors of the exquisite wines enjoyed onsite and auctioned, and the volunteers who made the Gala possible. Please visit the "Thanks to Our Supporters" section of Meanderings for a complete list of those who helped the Art and Garden Gala to be such a wonderful day.

If you missed the Gala, please put September 13, 2009 on your calendar: it's less than a year away!

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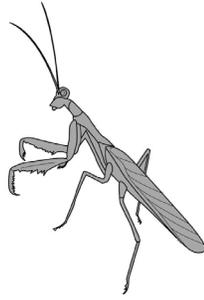
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Native Plant Demonstration Garden at Water Treatment Plant

Catherine Cumberland, Restoration Project Supervisor

There's an interesting addition coming to the landscape at the City of Santa Rosa's Laguna Water Treatment Plant. In partnership with the Laguna Foundation, a native plant demonstration garden will be installed adjacent to the Joint Wetlands area. The garden will showcase sustainable landscaping practices, with emphasis on native plants that can help attract beneficial insects.



Visitation to the Water Treatment Plant has been steadily increasing – last year over 1500 visitors toured the facility. The Demonstration Garden will provide an excellent opportunity to educate the public on the water savings potential and wildlife benefit of native plants and low-flow irrigation. Visitors will observe a variety of attractive, drought-tolerant plant species, learn why these plants are important to insects and birds, and discover water-saving irrigation and landscaping techniques suitable for use in home gardens.

Work began this summer on the paths and irrigation layout. This fall, LagunaKeeper volunteers will add the "structural" plantings (trees and larger shrubs that give the garden its shape). A final planting day and the grand opening of the garden is scheduled for April 23rd of 2009. Save the date!

Cotati Creek Critters

CREEK STEWARDSHIP DAYS

We have now planted native trees and shrubs along a one-mile section of the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Cotati/Rohnert Park. This fall we will focus on planting an understory of native grasses, sedges and rushes. Other tasks include weeding and mulching to maintain existing plants, plant propagation and other tasks in the plant nursery. *For all workdays meet at "Ladybug Lot," Cotati City well lot #2 on Lakewood Ave.*

Saturdays • 9 AM - Noon (Second Saturday of the month)
November 8, December 13, January 10 and February 14
Sundays • 10 AM - 1 PM (Last Sunday of the month)
November 30, January 25 and February 22



INSIDE/OUTSIDE NATURE EDUCATION SERIES

The following presentations will be held on the first Monday evening of the month at 7 p.m. at the Ray Miller Community Center, 216 E. School St., behind Cotati City Hall which is at 201 W. Sierra Ave. Refreshments provided. Suggested donation \$5.

December 1: Urban Streams: Balancing Humans and Habitat
January 5: Rethinking Plastics, Rethinking Our Lives
February 2: Sonoma County Oaks
March 2: Down in the Murky Depths of Water Policy

For more information about the Creek Stewardship Days or the Inside/Outside Series, please visit www.CotatiCreekCritters.info or contact Jenny Blaker at 792-4422 or email: jenny@creeks.cotati.info.

LagunaKeepers

Volunteers Restoring the Laguna

LagunaKeepers are the Foundation's habitat restoration volunteers. Each month, in partnership with the City of Santa Rosa, we meet to give the Laguna a little hands-on love! This can mean fence removal, willow sprigging, weed control, or planting, depending on the site and the time of year.

Be sure to wear shoes & clothes you don't mind getting dirty. Only heavy rain cancels. Snacks are on us, but do bring gloves, water & friends!

*All workdates are on Saturdays
from 9 AM to noon.*

November 22 Duer Creek

We're continuing to expand riparian habitat along this seasonal creek. A perfect site for adoption by a special group; come check it out! Meet at Kelly Farm, 5344 Occidental Rd.

December 13 County Parcel

You may be familiar with this popular fishing spot and kayak boat launch area. We'll plant trees and grasses on the banks. Meet at Stone Farm, 900 Sanford Rd. We'll caravan to the site.

January 17 Rain date: January 24 Middle Reach

Willows can help stabilize bare spots or minor erosion on the banks of the Laguna. Help us cut and install sprigs. Meet at Stone Farm, 900 Sanford Rd. We'll caravan to the site.

February 14 Laguna Uplands

Let's give the Uplands some tender lovin' care on Valentine's Day, and eat cupcakes too! Meet at the end of Palm Ave. in Sebastopol, just south of Palm Drive Hospital.

For more information, or to receive a monthly email or postcard reminders of LagunaKeepers workdates, please contact Catherine Cumberland at 527-9277 x108 or email: catherine@lagunafoundation.org

Profile: 2008 Board President David Bannister

David Bannister is currently our Board President, after being Vice President during 2006-2007 and Secretary in 2005. David joined the Board in 2004 because he believes in volunteering his personal time to help protect and improve the environment in general and because he recognizes the importance of the Laguna ecosystem in particular. In addition to the Board and Executive Committee of the Board, David also sits on the Finance Committee.



David received an undergraduate degree in History & Political Science from the University of Kansas and also got his MBA there. David has had a varied business career, including being a District Manager for the Southland Corporation, a Management Consultant for Hay Management Consultants and he was the owner of the Nature! store in Coddington Mall. For the last ten years David has been self-employed as a Business Broker with BTI Group.

While David was the owner of the Nature! store he became involved with the Sonoma Group of the Sierra Club, eventually becoming Chair of the Group. During his tenure as Chair, David helped convene the coalition of environmental groups that engaged in a collaborative process with grape growers to produce the agreement to regulate vineyard development called the Vineyard Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance. This important Ordinance has resulted in major improvements in the way vineyards are developed, including protections for riparian corridors. He also worked for several years to help the County extend that ordinance to include regulations for agricultural grading, orchard development, wetland protection, and more.

David enjoys spending time in nature and is always amazed at its diversity. He has long been a winter time kayaker on the Laguna, so he has a special affinity for the mission of the Foundation to "improve the ecological health of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, Sonoma County's richest wildlife area, and to inspire appreciation and enjoyment of this unique natural treasure."



State of the Laguna Conference and Science Symposium

Twenty years ago, concern about the condition of the Laguna led to the first-ever State of the Laguna Conference in 1989. And out of that Conference, recognizing that progress couldn't be made unless there were an advocate for the Laguna, the Laguna Foundation was born.

In 2002, we ramped up our efforts: hired professional staff, organized stakeholders and experts to plan a vision for a restored Laguna, and began the long process of designing restoration projects, education efforts, and research projects to enhance the ecological health and public stewardship of our region's most important natural area.

In 2007, we convened another State of the Laguna Conference. So much interest and energy resulted that we resolved to do one every two years, and to release a State of the Laguna Report at the same time, reporting to the public on progress in improving the Laguna.

Save the dates! The third State of the Laguna Conference will take place May 13-16, 2009. The Conference will include presentations on current research, water quality, restoration efforts, invasive species, and the status of public access, California Tiger Salamander and other high-profile issues in the Laguna. A day of field trips will be included. Come for one, some or all the days, as you wish. We look forward to seeing you there.

Laguna Knowledgebase Goes Online

The Laguna digital library or 'Laguna Watershed Knowledgebase' (formerly referred to as Laguna Ecosystem Database) will come online in the next few weeks. The knowledgebase will be accessible through our website and users have to sign up to receive a personal login & password to access available documents, photos, databases and other electronic resources pertinent to the Laguna watershed. The knowledgebase is searchable, but will remain a 'work in progress' as we continue to add resources to it over the next year. Each user will also be able to contribute to the knowledgebase by sending resources to us after passing an initial screening. The Laguna Knowledgebase will be an extremely useful tool for all that work on Laguna-related projects and those that want to learn more about our beautiful watershed.

Calling for Science and Restoration Interns

We currently have four interns working with us half-time in the science and half-time in the restoration departments. This way we can give each intern a rounded experience of all the important and exciting things we do at the Foundation. Our interns assist with research data collection analysis and reporting, aid our field restoration work, help with data entry for our Laguna Knowledgebase, provide organizational support, as needed, with tasks related to administration and grants. Our current very productive interns are: Teri Macias (SSU graduate), Wendy Jones (SSU graduate), Kyle Folk (SSU ENSP student), Erika Inglis (SSU ENSP student), and Parsa Saffarinia (High School Senior).



Thank you to our generous supporters since our last Meanderings:

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The **Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation**, founded in 1989, works to preserve, restore, and inspire greater understanding and appreciation of the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetland complex, which is the largest tributary of the Russian River and Sonoma County's richest wildlife area. The Foundation conducts educational programs, implements preservation and restoration projects, conducts scientific research, works with landowners and public agencies to protect and improve Laguna resources, and advocates for appropriately managed opportunities for the public to enjoy the Laguna.

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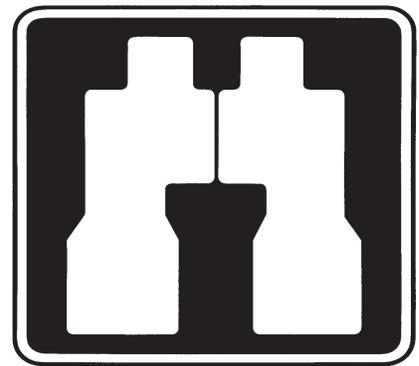
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Sebastopol's Laguna Wetlands Preserve Receives "Watchable Wildlife" Designation

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

Have you ever noticed those brown highway signs that have an iconic white silhouette of binoculars? Those signs are the symbol all over California and several other states for natural areas worthy of a visit. We are pleased to announce that, after a lengthy application process and review by a site assessor, Sebastopol's own Laguna Wetlands Preserve was deemed worthy of greater recognition and has joined the list of distinguished sites to receive the "Watchable Wildlife" designation.

The California Watchable Wildlife Committee celebrates the state's wildlife and diverse habitats by acknowledging and elevating the value of wildlife viewing to benefit individuals, families, communities, and industries while fostering awareness and support for wildlife and habitats. The Committee is comprised of representatives from government agencies, non-profits and private businesses. CWWC strives toward educating the public by coordinating and promoting ethical wildlife watching.



Those who frequent the Laguna Preserve know it is special and that the habitat provides myriad opportunities to view diverse species of birds throughout the year. It is now celebrated and shared so others can learn about the Laguna and come for a visit to experience the wonder of nature exploration and the value of wildlife habitat right in our own communities.

Be sure to take a look at the California Watchable Wildlife website and start planning your next wildlife experiences!
<http://www.cawatchablewildlife.org>