

Success Story: Helping Endangered Vernal Pool Plants Survive

Hattie Brown, Conservation Science Program Manager

Since 2006, through our Adopt a Vernal Pool program, the Laguna Foundation has documented the persistence of three endangered plants on the Santa Rosa Plain. Sonoma sunshine (*Blennosperma bakeri*), Sebastopol meadowfoam (*Limnanthes vinculans*), and Burke's Goldfields (*Lasthenia burkei*) grow almost exclusively on the Santa Rosa Plain in seasonal vernal pools. For the last 8 years, volunteers with the program have counted populations of wildflowers and documented the threats to their survival – namely invasive weeds. Pennyroyal mint (*Mentha pulegium*) quickly sorted to the top of the list of problematic weed species. With evidence collected by nearly 100 volunteers, we started trying to figure out what to do about the infestation.

Vernal pools, which fill with water in the winter and slowly drain over the spring and summer, are relatively immune to invasion of non-native species. They are regarded as a refuge for native plants in California. Pennyroyal, however, has a tenacious ability to germinate and thrive in standing water making it a significant threat to endangered plants competing with them directly for basic resources such as space, nutrients, and light.

Although there is very little information available on the management of Pennyroyal, it is believed that the plant is too hardy and prolific to be



Pennyroyal (Mentha pulegium) is a perennial mint that is toxic to humans and animals and is known to displace native plants within vernal pool communities. Very little scientific information on the management of Pennyroyal is available. Small scale studies like ours help create better awareness and control methods of the species.



*The endangered Sebastopol meadowfoam (*Limnanthes vinculans*), shown on the right, is threatened by human activity and other invasive plant species including Pennyroyal (left). The Sebastopol meadowfoam is only found in the Laguna de Santa Rosa.*

controlled through hand pulling and spraying with herbicide. In 2010, we conducted a small study and determined that contrary to this belief, these two methods were both equally and wildly (99%) effective options for controlling Pennyroyal mint.

Over the last two years, we expanded Pennyroyal control to over 100 vernal pools, focusing our efforts on the largest natural vernal pool preserve on the Santa Rosa Plain. Expanding the scale of the project reduced the effects of spraying to 50%. While not as effective as our small-scale study, reducing the amount of Pennyroyal by half in just one year of control is still a success.

What we do not yet know is how rapidly Pennyroyal will regrow. Weed control is an ongoing component of land management, and in disturbed or threatened ecosystems, likely to become more necessary and frequent in the face of climate change. Unfortunately, ongoing, long-term weed control is typically very difficult to fund, even on protected lands.

Armed with data collected by intrepid volunteers, we documented a problem. Starting small, we tested and refined methodology to confront that problem. Expanding to a larger scale, we improved habitat conditions for endangered plants. With this project, the Laguna Foundation expands our important vernal pool work beyond monitoring into restoration and management.

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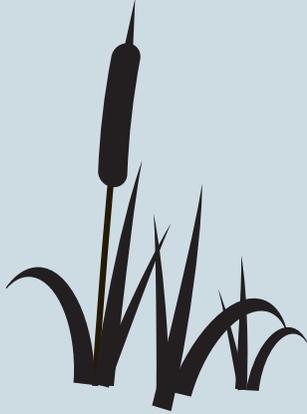
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Executive Director Report

In the Fall issue of this publication, I was enthusiastic about how all of us "Laguna lovers" look forward to the winter rains, the ecosystem changes that accompany them, and the opportunity to kayak the Laguna and see these changes up close. Unfortunately, as you read this in early March, little rain has fallen. You've all read about how the drought is affecting agriculture and water supplies for residential and commercial users but it also affects the ecosystems of the Laguna. What is a wetland without water?

Consider the impact to the seasonal vernal pools. Seeds of endangered plants that have sat dormant in these seasonal pools for one or more years swell with water to germinate, bloom, produce seeds that fall to the ground, and start this cycle again. The plants that do this are uniquely adapted to this very wet followed by very dry cycle. Three of them are endangered and occur almost exclusively in the Laguna Watershed. With little rainfall in 2013, and this year so far, to fill the pools, what is the fate of those endangered plants? Can the seed bank in the soil survive two dry winters? How about three or five? These cycles affect animals as well. The endangered California Tiger Salamander relies on vernal pools for breeding. What will be the impact of lost breeding cycles on its viability? Unfortunately, we have more questions than answers. Here's another one: Is this drought an effect of global climate change and therefore likely to persist? We don't have a concrete answer to this either. What we do know is that we should *all* be thinking about these questions.

Four years ago, the Laguna Foundation, with partners at the Sonoma County Water Agency, Pepperwood Preserve, Sonoma Ecology Center, Climate Protection Campaign, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District, Audubon Canyon Ranch, and Global Genesis, held a conference that introduced the concept of climate adaptation and the question of how can we effectively incorporate climate induced changes into our land and agricultural management, conservation planning and restoration efforts. That conference spawned a collaborative group called the North Bay Climate Adaptation Initiative (NBCAI). Since then, and with financial support from the Community Foundation Sonoma County, this group has been working on these and other questions related to adapting to climate change. For more information about the work of this important collaborative, visit northbayclimate.org. The group continues to take the work further by working on a county wide vulnerability assessment and working with the County on its Climate Plan 2020.

Hoping for rain for the Laguna,

David Bannister
Executive Director



3 Easy Ways to Earn for Our Group

1. Sign Up/Add Cards
2. eScrip Online Mall
3. eScrip Dining by Rewards Network

Sign up for eScrip and Support the Foundation!

Many local and online stores now participate in **eScrip**, a program that allows you to contribute up to 7% of your purchase to the Laguna Foundation. In 2013, community members shopped and raised \$3,600.26 in contributions! If you shop at Oliver's Market, pick up a Community Card and register us as your non-profit of choice (**Group ID# 500025034**). Or, visit escrip.com and register your debit and credit cards. Every time you shop at other participating restaurants, grocery stores, retail shops, and even online travel companies, 3-7% of your purchase will be donated to the Laguna Foundation. Visit escrip.com for a complete listing of local and online participants and start your easy contributions today!

The Laguna Foundation Welcomes New Officers and Board Members



Raini Sugg and her husband, Steve Vallarino, have lived in Sebastopol for 37 years and raised two daughters. Raini has a background in education with degrees from SF State University and SSU. She became a Laguna Docent in 1999, the Foundation's first year of operating an all-volunteer education program. She was instrumental in developing the Learning Laguna school program by

creating curriculum, interfacing with teachers and training docents. As an avid birder and advocate for the environment, she has spent the last 14 years increasing the public's awareness of the beauty and importance of the Laguna. Raini was elected President of the Board in November 2013.

Dr. Dianne Smith holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from UC Riverside, is an experienced field ethnographer, and is the recipient of numerous academic teaching awards. Her 35 year teaching career includes UC Riverside, CSU Los Angeles, SRJC, and she currently teaches in the Osher Life Long Learning Program at SSU. She has completed three years of fieldwork in the Colombian Andes and shorter field projects in



Asia. At the SRJC, she served as Academic Senate President, three terms as an academic Department Chair, and was the District's Policy Coordinator. Her love of hiking, bird watching, wildlife, and environmental studies shapes her personal desire to share her varied organizational and educational skills at the Laguna Foundation. Dianne was elected Vice President of the Board in November 2013.

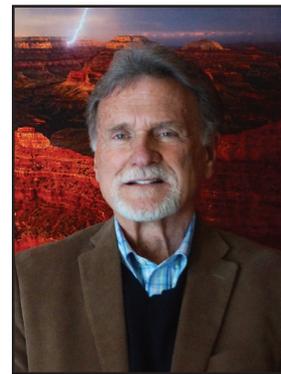
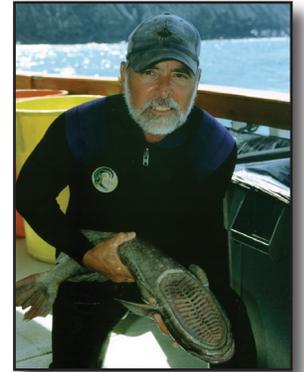
Julie Solomon Atwood has produced events generating over \$2.5 million dollars for North Bay charities. Prior to her career in event planning, Julie maintained interior design ateliers in Marin and San Francisco. Julie has had the opportunity to turn



these two career skill sets into an equally satisfying, community-based business called Julie Atwood Events. Julie has served, or is currently on the Board of, several regional non-profits, including Sonoma Valley Vintner's & Grower's Alliance, Valley of the Moon Children's Home Foundation, and Slow Food Sonoma Valley. Her interests range from riding, birding, and photography.

Julie lives on a historic ranch in Glen Ellen with her husband and varied cats, dogs, horses and waterfowl. Julie was elected to the Board in January 2013.

Dr. Robert "Bob" Rubin holds a Ph.D. in physiological ecology from the UC Irvine. He has served as program developer for the National Science Foundation Office of Public Understanding of Sciences, and the US Dept of Energy office of University Programs. Bob serves on the scientific advisory boards of the Save our Seas Foundation, The Sea Watch Foundation and The Manta Trust, and is the Director of the Pacific Manta Research Group. His work in the field of marine biology has resulted in documentaries produced by The Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, National Geographic and the BBC. As a member of the biology faculty at Santa Rosa Junior College he served as Chairman of the Life Sciences Department, President of the Academic Senate, and on the board of directors of the college Foundation. Dr. Rubin has been acknowledged for Teaching Excellence by the State of California, Santa Rosa Junior College, The University of California, and the Congress of the United States. In 1996 The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching selected him as the California College and University Professor of the year. Bob was elected to the Board of the Foundation in June of 2013.



Now retired, **Dr. Curt Groninga** served as the Vice President/Asst. Superintendent of the SRJC for 27 years with responsibilities for institutional planning and research, campus facilities planning, environmental health and safety, and administrative computing operations. Among his accomplishments are the preservation of the portion of Capri Creek which flows through the SRJC

Petaluma Campus, protection of several landmark valley oak trees at the Santa Rosa Campus, generation of new oaks established at the Petaluma Campus, and several "green" projects throughout the district. Curt received degrees from CSU Long Beach and the University of Southern California with advanced graduate study at UCLA. His doctorate is in public policy and political economics. He previously served as a board member for Family Services Agency and the SRJC Foundation. Curt is also serving on the Board of the Santa Rosa Planning Commission and previously served on the Cultural Heritage Board. Curt was elected to our Board in January 2014.

Delta Pond Rookery Walk

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs



Come see the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) nesting on Saturday, May 3. Photo: Don Jackson.

Join the fun of this annual trek to the Great Blue Heron, Great Egret and Double-crested Cormorant nesting site on the banks of the Laguna. By May 3 we will likely see everything from courtship displays, nest building, egg-sitting, and maybe even peek in on chicks while watching parents hustle to keep up with hungry mouths to feed. Other possible treats include sightings of American White Pelicans and maybe even a Bald Eagle. There are 5 Docent-led walk times to choose from: 8:00am, 8:15, 8:30, 8:45 & 9:00. We ask for a \$15 per person donation. Registration required at www.lagunafoundation.org. Bring friends and family out for a joyful morning and get children outside to experience the wonders of the Laguna for themselves. **This event benefiting the Learning Laguna bus scholarship program is always a sell-out so register early!** Approximately 3-mile walk over flat, uneven terrain. Full details emailed upon registration.

LEC Habitat Landscape

John Guardino, Director of Restoration and Conservation Science

In the fall of 2011, the implementation of the Laguna Environmental Center's Native Habitat Landscape was launched. Its roughly 84,000 sq. ft. of space is designed to introduce visitors to a wide range of habitat types and associated native plants found in the Laguna watershed. It also contains a 19th century historical component immediately around the farmhouse with heritage flower and vegetable gardens and a small heirloom apple orchard. The natural areas also provide wildlife habitat in the heart of the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetland complex.

Over the past two-and-a-half years, the landscape has come a long, long way thanks to the hard work and efforts of dedicated Laguna Foundation supporters, volunteers, interns, board members and staff. We have turned a barren landscape into a thriving ecosystem that provides lush outdoor spaces for visitors, a living classroom, and an attraction for many species of birds, mammals, and insects.



The Laguna Environmental Center's landscape incorporates several habitat types for visitors to explore. Photo: Owen Scott Shirwo

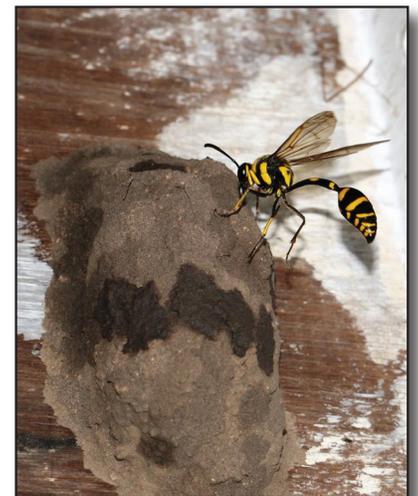
Natural History Corner: Meet Your Friend, the Mud Dauber!

Brent Reed, Restoration Projects Supervisor

Old, open barns like the one we have here at the LEC are great places for spiders to build webs and thrive. Perhaps if you have an old barn or building you know how often you need to clear cobwebs, check for spiders when you pick things up, or get a sticky, stretchy spider web across the face. Yuck! Surprisingly, we have few spiders in our barn! How could this be? Luckily, we have mud daubers!

Like their wasp cousins, mud daubers can look intimidating. But unlike other wasps, they are solitary and not aggressive, even when their nests are disturbed. They are native pollinators and avid spider hunters - preferring the black widow. Adult mud daubers paralyze spiders and seal them into the cavities of the nest where they will later be food for their young. There are three species common to the Laguna area: black and yellow mud dauber, Oregon pipe dauber, and the blue mud dauber.

You may have seen their nests made of mud around your house or barn and quickly cleaned them off. Now that you know a little more about these friendly wasps, think twice before you clean off those mud dauber nests!



The black and yellow mud dauber (*Sceliphron caementarium*) is just a misunderstood friend!

Building a Living Playground

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

Have you visited the Laguna Environmental Center lately and noticed the work underway on the south side of Great Blue Heron Hall? The exciting vision and plan for this space is a nature playground – a playscape – just for children!



Young visitors will have opportunities to look under rocks, explore native plants using their senses, make animal tracks, watch birds flying into houses and feeders, crawl through a living willow tunnel, hide-out in a willow hut, investigate a dry stream bed, and climb over logs

Photo: Julie Mikos.

and rocks in an area bordered by a lovely native shrubs “fence.” A pathway and the dry stream bed were installed over the winter. This spring keep an eye on the site as we work with Rotary Club volunteers to install the hedgerow, make stepping stones, and plant the discovery garden to craft the space into a unique and engaging play environment where children can connect to nature.



The dry creek bed is taking shape! When the playscape is complete, our young visitors will be able to learn about the Laguna in a hands-on, outdoor classroom!

Learning Laguna: Celebrating 15 Years of Classroom and Field Education

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

“Thank you so much for your hard work and dedication to bringing science back to our schools. My students have participated in Learning Laguna for the last 7 years and each year I feel so grateful for the centers, the field experience and the (bus) reimbursement. Thank you again.”

Risa Bowman, 4th Grade teacher,
Roseland Creek Elementary School

For 15 years, our volunteer docents have been teaching school children about the Laguna. It is the docents we have to thank for the long-term success and popularity of Learning Laguna. This spring they will be visiting 26 classrooms with the *Bird Migration Game*, the *Wetland Model*, the *Who Am I?* activity, the *Bird Investigation Station*, and the *Laguna Animal Tracks*.



During the field trip to the Laguna, children get a chance to examine pelts from a variety of animals from the Laguna, including this pelt of a mink.

The docent day leader gets the exciting classroom visit underway with an introductory PowerPoint that often has those 2nd-4th graders jumping out of their seats! Learning Laguna would not be complete without

an actual visit to the Laguna, so those 26 classes will also enjoy a 2.75 hour field trip where they weave with tule, use spotting scopes to spy on birds (and sometimes Western Pond Turtles), examine critters on the ground and in the water, and engage their senses in nature.

Learning Laguna is financially supported by membership, end of year donations, donors at our Annual Garden Art Gala, and approximately \$35,000 in annual grant funding. This year we are pleased to announce a new funder, the Jiji Foundation who just awarded the program \$9,000.

Additionally, each year docents host walks to the Delta Pond Rookery as a fundraiser for the Learning Laguna bus scholarship fund. Join the fun this year on Saturday, May 3rd. For details on the Rookery Tour, see page 4.



A student gets up close to a coyote pelt during a field trip to the Laguna. Without our docents and the financial support for our Laguna Bus Fund, many schools would not be able to afford to attend these field trips.

Laguna Re-Leaf Day: Will You Help Us Plant the Future?

Dr. Dianne Smith, Board of Directors Vice President



"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second best time is now."

-Chinese Proverb

Our 5th Annual Laguna Re-Leaf Day, is on April 5th this year! Its like a walk-a-thon except we plant trees instead of walk miles! This is a FUN and REWARDING way to enjoy time outdoors with a terrific group of people in a project that will benefit the

community for generations to come. And, the funds YOU raise support our ongoing mission to preserve and restore the Laguna.

Fundraising starts NOW!

Planting trees along the Laguna helps to restore lost wildlife habitat and natural beauty, improves water quality, and helps mitigate climate change. This year we will be working on Irwin Creek again, just north of Stone Farm where the Laguna Environmental Center sits. We anticipate more than 100 participants – all ages and abilities are welcome! Together, we will plant over 600 oak trees and other native plants.

Support the event by choosing whichever method suits you best:

 **Sign Up to be a Volunteer Fundraiser.** We supply the forms and a customized online donation site. All you have to do is ask friends, co-workers, family, etc., to sponsor you. All

fundraisers are invited to help plant the trees on the day of the event.

 **Become a Sponsor.** Sponsor the event at one of several different levels. Sponsorship comes with many benefits. If you are an organization, consider making it a team event and match funds raised by team members.

 **Donate to a Re-Leaf Fundraiser.** Send in a general donation today in the enclosed remit envelope or sponsor one of our volunteer fundraisers.

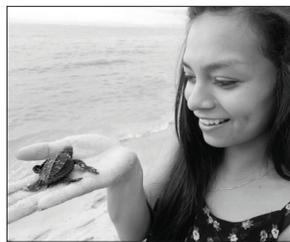
 **Ready, set, GO!** Visit our website for more information on how to become a sponsor or a fundraiser at www.lagunafoundation.org/donate_treathon.

For more information or questions about signing up contact Nancy at nancy@lagunafoundation.org. For questions about sponsorship opportunities, contact David at david@lagunafoundation.org

A Special Thank You to Our Interns

Anita Smith, Public Education Coordinator

The Laguna Foundation is fortunate to have a great relationship with Sonoma State University and the Santa Rosa Junior College internship programs. Student interns are invaluable in our education and restoration efforts. In return, students learn real-world skills that enhance their studies and prepare them for working in their fields of study after graduation.



Ruby Acosta



Chloe Madison

Over the winter, several students worked with our Education Department, performing a range of public relations duties. Each came to the Laguna Foundation for different reasons, but they all share our love of this special

place. SSU student **Chloe Madison**, a Water Quality major, enjoys spending time running along the Laguna trails. Also from SSU, **Ruby Acosta** is a double major in Spanish and Environmental Studies and a strong advocate for the Laguna's wildlife and habitat. And **Karen Price**, an Outdoor Education major, loves being able to spend her days promoting such a beautiful treasure. **Jess Kauffman** is beginning her internship with us from the



Karen Price

SRJC, majoring in Environmental Studies and Economics.



Jess Kauffman

Please join us in applauding and appreciating the tremendous contributions made by these interns.

Thank you to our generous supporters since our last *Meanderings*...

In Honor of Mike Shepherd's 80th Birthday

Florence Aquilina and Richard Cox, Charlotte Ellis, David and Kathleen Faris, Laurano Flor, Tetyana Goodhart, Walter and Julie Harvest, Aaron Rosen, Rick and Margaret Row.

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The **Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation**, founded in 1989, works to conserve, restore and inspire greater understanding and appreciation of the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetland complex - The largest tributary of the Russian River and one of Sonoma County's richest wildlife areas. The Foundation conducts educational programs, implements conservation science and restoration projects, 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.

Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation
900 Sanford Road
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(707) 527-9277
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"It was fabulous, and everyone was so impressed with the venue. The scenery was just perfect. Thank you so much for your part in making my party the best!"

"Everything went perfectly for our wedding at Heron Hall."

"Our guests all said it was a great place to have a party, so spacious. The musicians enjoyed it as well – they had plenty of room to play and the sound carried so well."

Hold your special event in a very special place! **Great Blue Heron Hall** is a terrific setting for your next retreat, workshop, seminar, in-service training, conference, professional meeting, volunteer or staff recognition event, art exhibit, lecture, book signing, film event, party, wedding, or rehearsal dinner. All proceeds benefit the Laguna Foundation!

For more information, visit www.lagunafoundation.org, call Anita at (707) 527-9277 x 110, or email HeronHall@lagunafoundation.org.

Photo: Gretchen Gause

