



CARING FOR THE LAND, AND EACH OTHER

BY ANNE MORKILL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It goes without saying that the last few months have been a whirlwind of changes and challenges. From a global health crisis to a faltering economy to collective outrage about systemic racial inequities, times like these require reflection and understanding of what has passed and what lies ahead.

As you know from our periodic updates on social media and website, we adapted quickly to adjust to the new norms. While we have been able to continue some of our restoration field work following safety protocols, we closed our office and cancelled all in-person activities since mid-March. All of our operations have been performed remotely, working from our homes and engaging virtually through online platforms. Just as the Laguna meanders across the Santa Rosa Plain, there have been twists and turns, ups and downs, quiet moments

and times of chaos. There is so much uncertainty as to what lies ahead in the time of COVID-19.

But still, if there was one word to describe how I feel overall, it is gratitude. I have deep gratitude to the Laguna staff who have continued to work hard through this unprecedented time with unhindered passion and conviction in restoring native habitats, conserving imperiled species, and inspiring others to appreciate our watershed ecosystem. We remain committed to keeping all our staff on payroll and even welcomed new employees during the shelter in place and ensuing economic crisis. In this issue you'll read about just some of their creative efforts to adapt our long-standing education programs from hands-on to at-home learning, as well as the success story of vernal pool restoration along the

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A SPOTLIGHT ON NATURE: HUMMINGBIRDS OF SONOMA COUNTY

BY CAROLYN "CJ" JOHNSON, BOARD PRESIDENT

There are 328 recognized species, making hummingbirds one of the largest avian families in the New World! Hummingbirds only occur in the Western Hemisphere, ranging from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego at the southernmost tip of South America. They are truly a bird of the Americas. Here in Sonoma County we don't see very many hummingbird species because we live near the northern end of the range of this avian family. There are only three hummingbirds that one might find visiting the nectar feeders in Sonoma County.



Anna's hummer, nesting female

The **Anna's hummingbird** (*Calypte anna*) is a widespread, common, and year-round resident. The Anna's hummer begins nesting as early as January. Its courtship begins even earlier, sometimes as early as December. The courtship

display is quite dramatic. He slowly rises high above the female—maybe 40 feet—then suddenly dives straight down, wings beating at 200 miles per hour, swooping to form a modified J-shaped flight pattern, his tail feathers vibrating to make a buzzing sound. At the bottom of his plunge he makes a loud pop before he rises back up in the air. The pop is so loud it is difficult to believe it came from such a small creature. The male has a beautiful light-dependent, iridescent deep rose-red gorget (feathers on the throat) that extends above its beak to the top of its head. Its back is all bright green and underparts are grey washed with green. The outer-most tail feathers are tipped with white. There is no orange or rust color on the Anna's. The female is similar to the male but lacks the iridescent red feathers of the head and throat. Some red can be seen on the throat as she ages.

After spending their winters in central Mexico, the **Allen's Hummingbird** (*Selasphorus sasin*) find their way back to our gardens and feeders in western Sonoma County beginning in mid-February. Their breeding range extends from southern California to southern Oregon, with their

preferred nesting habitat along the fog belt of the coast in conifer trees. They do not venture even 20 miles inland from the coast.



Allen's hummer, male

Both *Selasphorus* species have a very similar appearance and are difficult to tell apart. Both birds have lovely orange coloration on their flank and tail with glossy green on the back and head, and a bright orange-red gorget. In the field, females and young birds of each species are indistinguishable from one another. Males are also tricky but if, perhaps at the feeder, you are lucky to get a good look at a male that has no green on its back and is mostly orange from head to tail, including flanks, you can safely say it is a Rufous. But not all

Rufous are so orange; some have green on the head and back. Scientists, with birds in hand, are able to distinguish the difference in these species through measuring the length of the bills and features of the tail feathers which are both difficult to see in the field.

The third hummingbird we see is the **Rufous hummingbird** (*Selasphorus rufus*). After spending the winter in southern Mexico, it arrives in Sonoma County slightly earlier than the Allen's. The Rufous makes use of our flowering plants and feeders to refuel before continuing its long migration north to its breeding grounds in Idaho, Washington, Alberta, British Columbia, or into SE Alaska. This remarkable little beauty is the northern-most breeding hummingbird in the world. By the end of April or early May all the Rufous hummers in our gardens will have moved on to points north.



Rufous hummer, male

Happy birding!

PRACTICING WHAT WE TEACH

BY CHRISTINE FONTAINE, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & ALLISON TITUS, COMMUNITY EDUCATION MANAGER



A young participant records the first blooms of spring in their nature journal during our partner bilingual Nature Journaling program with Marley Peifer and LandPaths. (Photo by Leilani Clark)

Biological adaptation is a concept taught in several of our Learning Laguna activities. For example, in the Bird Investigation Station, children learn that bird beaks have special adaptations that enable them to take advantage of different food resources. Some beaks are strong for cracking open seed coverings. Others are long and thin to probe the mud for an invertebrate meal. Bird feet have adaptations too. Long, skinny toes on the foot of an egret help it walk on mud without sinking down. Talons help raptors catch and hold on to prey. A simple definition of adaptation from National Geographic: *the adjustment of organisms to their environment in order to improve their chances at survival in that environment or to adjust to new ones.* Adaptation can happen over time through evolution like the above examples, and adaptation can also be behavioral. Think of birds nesting in colonies for safety, or animals clustering together for warmth.

In spring and summer 2020, we find ourselves adapting to a new environment: COVID-19 and the health orders that have been put in place. Adaptation as a noun became “adapt” as a verb for us. Our in-person programs, including Learning Laguna and Community Education talks and art classes in Heron Hall, and even

our field adventures could not go on as usual: adaptations became necessary... *quickly.*

Learning Laguna morphed into “Learning Laguna Magnified” when we adapted some of the activities for an at-home learning environment. And, it was clear that our Community Education program needed to adapt to an online environment. Like many of you, we had never heard of the company Zoom prior to March. All of a sudden, we needed to learn and professionally use the software, not to mention line up speakers also new to Zoom, update our website and registration pages, all while adjusting to working from home.

In a gargantuan team effort, four Zoom webinars and one video were completed by May 2, just a mere six weeks after the start of sheltering-in-place. By June 9, we had conducted a total of 8 online webinar programs. Four of these programs were partner events, incorporating 6 different organizations: “The Virtual Eco-Friendly Garden

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This [webinar] was above fantastic. I think this method should continue when this is all over.

Marcia Johnson, Laguna Volunteer

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Tour” (Sonoma Marin Saving Water Partnership, CNPS Milo Baker), “Wildscaping for Native Songbirds” (Native Songbird Care and Conservation), “Garden Conversations” (Daily Acts, Habitat Corridor Project, CNPS Milo Baker), and “Laguna de Santa Rosa: Past and Present” (Sonoma County Regional Parks). Working together with our colleagues is one element of our programs that did not need to change or adapt! Collaboration remains essential to achieving the Laguna Foundation mission.

We created a new *Educational Resources* page on our website where the Learning Laguna Magnified handouts can be viewed and where our webinar recordings can be watched. Learn about vernal pools, beginning botany,

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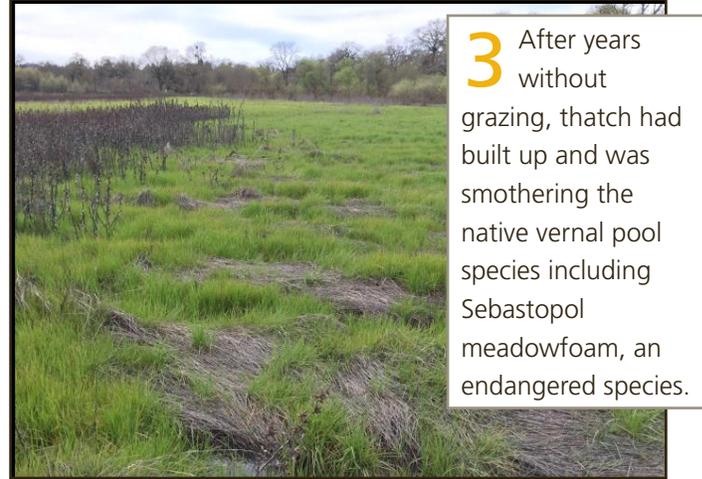
A STORY OF VERNAL POOL RESTORATION ALONG THE LAGUNA DE SANTA ROSA TRAIL

A collaboration with Sonoma County Regional Parks, Sonoma County Water Agency, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Sweetgrass Grazing, and Santa Rosa Junior College.



1 In 2017 the Laguna Foundation began an innovative vernal pool and wet meadow restoration project beside the Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail.

2 We collected 400 Sebastopol meadowfoam seeds and grew them out in our nursery to make 130,000 new seeds.



3 After years without grazing, thatch had built up and was smothering the native vernal pool species including Sebastopol meadowfoam, an endangered species.



4 300 sheep from Sweetgrass Grazing and...



20 botany students from SRJC removed the thatch.



5 Last fall we planted our seeds out into our carefully raked and prepared vernal pools and waited for the rain.



6 As the pools filled this winter, our seeds germinated and their leaves reached up above the surface.



7 This spring a whole community of flowers that we hadn't seen in years, including the rare white meadowfoam, returned to cover the pools in blooms.



WE MISS OUR VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY!

BY MAGGIE HART, OUTREACH MANAGER

We have not had the opportunity to work with our wonderful community of volunteers since we closed the LEC in mid-March, the longest time in our organization's history! Our nonprofit began 30 years ago by volunteers, and since then our volunteer community has contributed to the advancement of our mission on a daily basis, making all of our programs stronger and more effective. We couldn't be prouder of our close-knit community!

In the last fiscal year, 639 volunteers contributed more than 12,000 hours of service for the Laguna Foundation, many of whom participated with their school, club, or employee group on special projects. We also have a committed core of volunteers who work with us on a regular basis, from event greeters to education docents, and from gardening to handyman work. While we've

been unable to engage with our volunteers in person, we are staying in touch by hosting online meet-ups through Zoom, including a virtual introduction Anne Morkill, our new E.D., who started just 2 weeks before the shelter-in-place order. We also sent bookmarks decorated with artwork of our wild Laguna critters by Molly Eckler as a small gesture to stay connected and express our appreciation during this time apart.

We continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and are hoping to re-start volunteer projects that can be conducted outdoors in small groups with safe physical distancing. Please check our Volunteer webpage for updates. Thank you to all our volunteers who remain committed to the Laguna Foundation. We hope to see you soon!

HERON HALL GALLERY & GIFT SHOP

CURRENT EXHIBIT:

"Sonoma County Wild" Photography by Jerry Dodrill

On display through August 10, 2020



UPCOMING EXHIBIT:

"A Salute to the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation"

Watercolors by Julianne Sooley

On display September 1 – December 31, 2020

Opening reception: Saturday, September 12, 2020, 3:00–5:00pm

In this tribute to the Laguna Foundation, Julianne has captured the color, shape and texture of the Laguna environs. Her 25+ paintings and pyrography (wood burning) focus on architectural elements: a broken window, part of a tractor against the barn; a bird cut from the same metal used on the roof; the 2019 floodwaters. www.julieswatercolors.com

Our gallery is currently closed in accordance with CDC guidelines, but we expect to re-open in the coming weeks. For more information or to place a phone order and schedule a pick-up time, contact Maggie Hart: maggiehart@lagunafoundation.org.

WE ARE HUMBLY GRATEFUL

to have been selected by the trustees of the Albert G. Wilson Trust to receive a legacy gift in his honor. Mr. Wilson was an astronomer, mathematician, physicist, teacher, innovator, and discoverer of comets, galaxies and supernovae. He was also a prolific writer on a wide range of subjects from science to mysticism, philosophy to humanism as well as nature. His friends who served as his trustees said that his love of nature deepened during the 25 years that he lived in Sebastopol overlooking the Laguna.

One of his favorite daily routines was walking the trails and observing the wildlife during all seasons. The egret features prominently in many of his writings on nature, as "they were endlessly fascinating and deeply symbolic to him" according to his friends. We share one story about the egret here, titled *Being vs. Doing*. Mr. Wilson passed away in 2012 at the age of 94 years old. You can learn more about his life's work at: albertgwilson.com.



Photo by Kali Dukes

BEING VS. DOING

ALBERT G. WILSON

The White Egret who lives in the Laguna has become my guru. I watch her patience, standing on one leg for long hours on end, not asleep, but intensely alert, awake, and in the present. When the fish moves then the egret strikes. The lack of motion is not the sign of inactivity, rather it is the preparation for activity. In our world of ubiquitous noisy activity, most of it has little significance. The fish is either scared away or is caught at great expense of energy. We have much to learn from the white egret.

I sometimes speculate on whether the egret centuries ago observed the Buddha and adopted his wisdom, or the Buddha observed the egret and emulated her wisdom. Perhaps they both independently discovered the proper way to retrieve life's fish. And this perhaps was the source of the old adage:

*Don't give someone a fish,
Teach them how to fish.
Tell them to watch the egret.*

Your bequest or planned gift will help ensure the Laguna Foundation's longevity for this ongoing work to protect, restore, and to educate the public about the Laguna and its important role in our community's future. Please visit our website for more information on how to include the Laguna Foundation in your estate plans.

CARING

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Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail.

I am grateful to our Board of Directors who have invested many volunteer hours in supporting our staff by adopting new procedures and policies that both meet the urgent needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as strengthen the foundation of our operations. I am grateful to our loyal volunteers who have offered moral support and continue to wait patiently for the day we can safely bring them back to the Laguna Environmental Center to continue their selfless work in education, habitat stewardship, administration, and maintenance. I am also grateful to our many partners who checked in, stayed engaged, and shared ideas and common challenges dealing with COVID-19.

Above all, I am grateful to you and all our donors who have given generously through our spring membership renewal, donations for webinars, and many other unsolicited gifts. We highlight in this issue a special story by a former resident who shared his love for the Laguna through his writings and now through his legacy gift. We know that these past few months have been difficult for many families and businesses, yet our community continues to rise to the challenge and support each other. Your donations have been critical to sustaining our work through this hiatus. Please follow our website and social media for updates as we begin to re-open the LEC for safe activities as soon as feasible.

These are challenging times for us all, but we will get through it better, stronger, together. Thank you for sharing our commitment to restoring a healthy Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Wishing you all good health and happiness.

EDUCATION

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animal tracking, and much more on your own time, from the comfort of your home.

Success with the webinars and need for our newly-gained technological skills extended into the summer. In continuing to adapt to the current health orders, we found it necessary to pivot Camp Tule, our nature day camp for children based at the Laguna Environmental Center, into Laguna Explorers @ Home. As we write this article in June, we are developing Laguna watershed focused art and discovery activities, creating dynamic how-to and nature videos, and planning for interactive online engagement that together foster the budding naturalist in each child.

Initially it was difficult to imagine adapting nature-based, school-based, and community-based experiences into the virtual realm. We are pleased that there have been many surprises and silver linings to taking our programs online. They have become accessible to significantly more people. We reach and can accommodate larger audiences, and we have exponentially increased the Laguna's and the Laguna Foundation's visibility. Most of all, these creative pivots and adaptations have allowed us to stay connected

with all of you, our dedicated and enthusiastic Laguna community, while doing our part to flatten the curve.

While we have every finger crossed hoping that we are able to spend time with you and the children of our community out on the land in the near future, we are grateful to have new technological tools for engagement that help us foster wonder and learning about the Laguna in our back pocket. Our Education Department has indeed adapted to a new environment!

AS OF JUNE 1...

WEBINARS

1,063 registrations, 442 engaged attendees representing Sonoma County, the greater Bay Area, other states such as AK, NJ, OH, VA, MI, and finally, even France and Canada! We featured 10 different guest speakers, including members of the Laguna staff and advisory committee.

THE VIRTUAL ECO-FRIENDLY GARDEN TOUR

page had over 1,000 visitors on May 2.

LEARNING LAGUNA MAGNIFIED was viewed by more than 2,100 people through social media alone.

Founded in 1989, the Laguna Foundation is a place-based organization focused on the Laguna de Santa Rosa. We are a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with the mission to restore and conserve the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and to inspire public appreciation of this Wetland of International Importance. 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.



Photo by Marlene Smith

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900 Sanford Road | Santa Rosa, CA 95401 | Ph. (707) 527-9277 | LagunaFoundation.org

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