

A misty, sepia-toned photograph of a lagoon. In the foreground, a large, gnarled tree with sparse foliage stands on the right, its trunk and branches reflected in the calm water. To the left, another tree is partially visible, also reflected. The background is a soft, hazy expanse of water and sky, with more trees faintly visible in the distance. The overall mood is serene and quiet.

ONE SQUARE MILE

THE LAGUNA DE SANTA ROSA

# ONE SQUARE MILE

The Laguna de Santa Rosa

Photographs by  
Charles Judson

Images from the Exhibit

July 26 through September 26, 2018

Balletto Vineyards

Sebastopol, CA



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## Foreward

Charlie Judson's sensitive photographs of the Laguna de Santa Rosa depict a wetland that is not only picturesque but a serene waterway just as nature intended. Forty years ago, the EPA had declared the water in the main channel of the Laguna as "devoid of life" and 90% of the oak forest was gone. Fortunately, a group of concerned citizens came together in 1989 to form a non-profit organization, The Laguna Foundation. This all-volunteer group's mission was to restore and conserve the Laguna and to inspire public appreciation of this wetland complex.

Like Charlie's early experiences with the Laguna, mine began 20 years ago. I knew nothing about the Laguna until I went with my daughter's third grade class on a field trip to plant trees on the edge of the waterway. Digging in the dirt, my daughter uncovered an old fashion egg beater and exclaimed, "What's this?!" After laughing about our archeological find, we learned of the Laguna's tragic past. We were planting in an area that had been the municipal dump! I began volunteering for the Laguna Foundation shortly thereafter.

As Charlie's beautiful photos reveal, the Laguna Foundation and citizens of Sonoma County have made extraordinary progress in undoing the sins of our ancestors. In partnership with cities and government agencies over 30,000 native plants have been planted on 300 acres. Awareness of this Wetland of International Importance

has increased and over the years thousands of school children have experienced the wonders of this wetland ecosystem. We have gone from trash dumps, no access, and sewage to beautiful trails, riparian habitats teeming with wildlife (river otter, mink and bald eagles are back!) and cleaner water flowing into the Russian River. The Laguna wetland is moving towards doing its job.

Although we have made progress, our work is not done. The Laguna continues to need our advocacy and attention. Challenges to this fragile eco-system are ever present. Charlie's photos provide a glimpse of what we all want for our community; a healthy and beautiful place to walk, a place for contemplation and a place to enrich our souls with what nature has to offer. As David Attenborough said of the natural world, "It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living."

Raini Sugg  
Board President  
Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation

## Introduction

The Laguna de Santa Rosa is a wetland on the western edge of the valley known as the Santa Rosa Plain. It accumulates water from the valley's entire watershed and delivers it to the Russian River, near Forestville. It skirts Sebastopol, where I live.

Forty years ago, crossing the Laguna in flood via Highway 12 on my way to work, there were large sprinklers sticking out of the flood water, still sprinkling. It was humorous, I thought, looking like someone waaay overwatered. It was, of course, the way Sebastopol apple canneries disposed of their processing wastewater in those days.

Fifteen years or so later I started making regular walks along the Laguna riparian area and it was obvious changes were in the works. I learned some local folks, recognizing what was ours to lose, had begun mobilizing public agencies, businesses and volunteers in a cooperative restoration of the area, slowly reversing damage and allowing the land and water to heal itself. This group was the beginning of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation and their efforts worked. Fabulously well, it appears to me. And herein is my evidence: visions through my camera lens on my walks there on mostly foggy mornings.

The images in this exhibit originated in a one square mile length along the main channel of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, about ½ mile wide, stretching from Sebastopol's hospital on the south to Occidental

Road on the north. My little square mile is less than one half of one percent of the total Laguna extent.

The proximity of this particular mile to the town of Sebastopol subjected it over the last 150 years to some of the uses to which "wasted" open land on town edges was often put.

In the 1920's, Sonoma County's first public airstrip was located here, just north of today's Chevron station which was formerly an auto wrecking yard, Airport Wreckers. A slaughterhouse was located a few hundred feet east of that. On the other side of the Laguna, to the west where the Community Center now sits on Morris Street near the water's edge, was the town dump until the 1960's. Adjacent to that were the town's three sewage ponds, one of them only about 50 feet from the water and all of them below flood level. All in this one square mile.

Part of this area is with the city limits. Given today's land ethic proximity to the town has worked in the Laguna's favor and the land uses mentioned above are long gone. Their traces have diminished due to time's passage, the vision and actions of individuals who saw the possibilities, and the self-healing nature of a wetland allowed and encouraged to just be itself.

I said earlier that my images are evidence that restoration efforts are working fabulously well here but



the word, evidence, carries a sense of factual documentation that is not my aim. The photographs here depict a small part of the Laguna whole and they don't necessarily represent the Laguna as it is today; they represent the Laguna as it exists in my mood and imagination today.

Photography is a powerful documentary tool as well as a medium for storytelling and art. Either can be used in the service of a more thoughtful approach

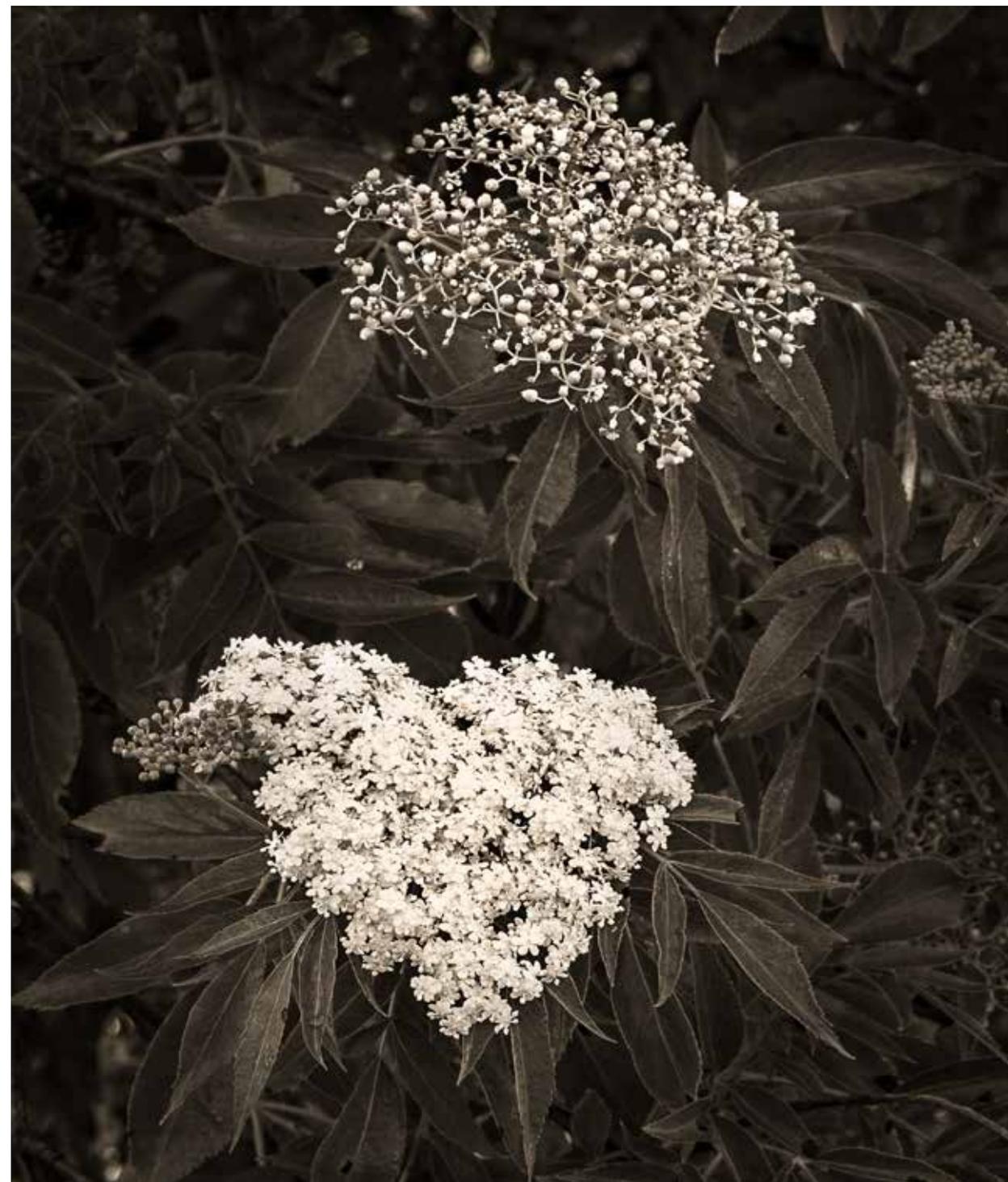
to our environment and our lives but it is the later I present here, a feeling of the place, my feeling of the place. To paraphrase the words of the late photographic artist Minor White, here is my metaphor of that feeling.

Charlie Judson

















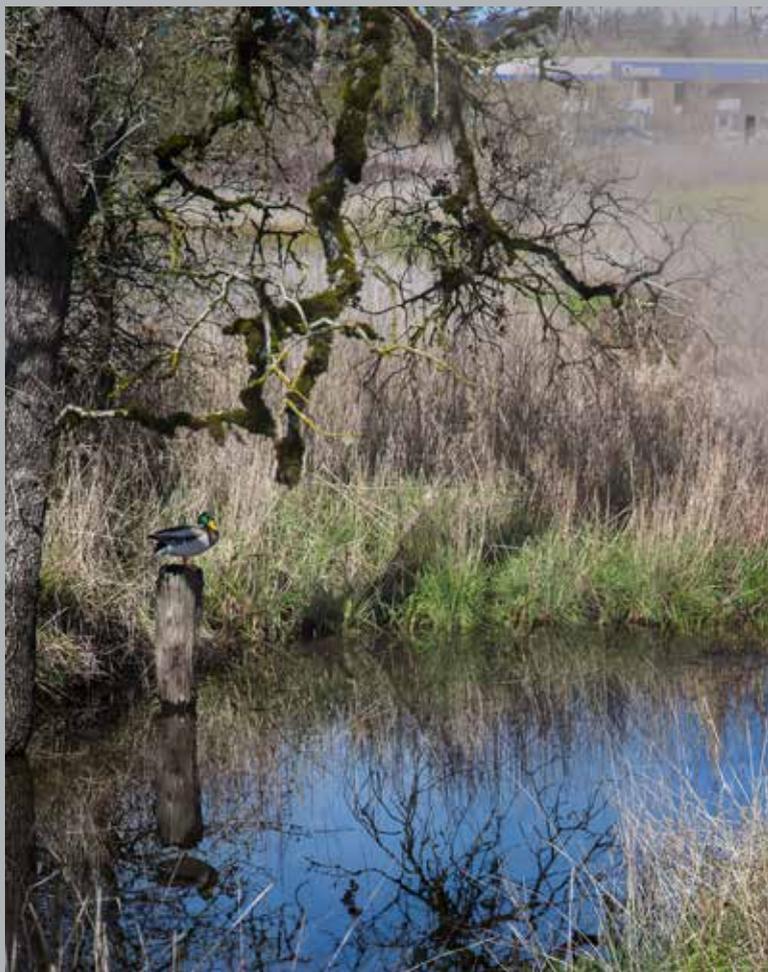
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