

Dear Friends,

As we start a new school year, I want to thank all the volunteers for our school program: Jim Elliot, Linda Grant, Beth Kamieniecki, Andy Kleinhesselink, Tina Lui, Ken Moy, Rachel Townsend, and Matt Zlatunich.

Thanks go also to our volunteers on the Saturday *Birding for Everyone* walks: Brian Fitch, Angie Geiger, Alan Hopkins, Beth Kamieniecki, and Sharon Pretti.

Thanks to Judy Harter, the designer of this newsletter, and to all the talented photographers who make their pictures available to us for publication.

Volunteer Peter Shen keeps our web site up to date.

If you are interested in volunteering please contact us. We train our volunteers—no birding experience is necessary—just an interest in nature and working with children. Please complete the application on our web site: www.sfnature.org.

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis

Executive Director
San Francisco Nature Education



Western Scrub Jay



Black Phoebe fledglings

Photos: Judy Harter

Birding for Everyone

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

On Saturday, August 1st, an enthusiastic group of bird-watchers gathered at Strybing Arboretum under overcast skies for the monthly *Birding for Everyone* walk. We negotiated our way around the busy gardening fair and found the north side of the garden to be much quieter.



Photo: Judy Harter

Anna's Hummingbird

Our first bird of the day was a singing male **Anna's Hummingbird**, the first of at least twenty we observed that day. We made our way to the California Garden, where we encountered quite a lot of birds. A bright male adult **American Robin** was sunning himself on the ground while a whole family of young robins was perched in a bare tree. It was a great opportunity to observe the spotted breasts and pale backs of these recently fledged young.

Suddenly a bright flash of yellow attracted our attention. We all got glimpses of a **Wilson's Warbler** foraging low in the underbrush next to us as a second warbler appeared above the robin family.



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Wilson's Warbler

Next we moved across a wooden bridge and came upon an entire family of **Song Sparrows** perched quietly in a shrub. We noted the scruffy appearance of the young molting into their first coat of adult feathers. Also perched next to the sparrow family was a **California Towhee**.

As we moved further into the California section a movement in a tree caught our eye. We were delighted to see a juvenile **Sharp-shinned Hawk** perched only a few feet away. The hawk seemed not at all perturbed by our close



Photo: Truk71

Sharp-shinned Hawk

inspection as he hopped from branch to branch scanning for a meal. We took full advantage of the opportunity of having such a good look at a fairly uncommon bird.

As we were watching "our" hawk, a pair of **Common Ravens** flew overhead, and a **Western Scrub Jay** emerged along the path. We were next attracted by a small flock of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** in a tree near the greenhouses. They

were uncommonly difficult to spot, as they were preening instead of foraging and moving about.

We decided to see what birds we might find near John Muir pond. As we crested a hill we were treated to a large flock of **American Goldfinches** feeding among the thistle. We were amazed to see birds in every possible plumage, from bright yellow and black males to birds in basic dull brown, to begging fledglings bearing signs of downy nestling feathers, to comical birds that were between plumages.

Here we had good sightings of other birds, including a **Black Phoebe** that we recognized as a hatch-year bird by



Photo: Judy Harter

Dark-eyed Junco

the rufous-colored wing-bars, and a family of **Dark-eyed Juncos**, some still in juvenile plumage. Above us, high in the Monterey pines, was a flock of **Pygmy Nuthatches**.

We reluctantly headed back to our starting point, pausing between the Succulent Garden and Redwood Forest among salvias populated by dozens of hummingbirds. They put on quite a show, chasing each other aggressively and noisily. Both Anna's and **Allen's Hummingbirds** were in abundance. We'll be back on September 5th to see what's new.



Photo: Judy Harter

Allen's Hummingbird

Why I Volunteer

Angie Geiger



Photo: SFNE

My involvement with San Francisco Nature Education began one evening in March of 2002. I was standing by Stow Lake with my binoculars trained on a Great Blue Heron perched high in a tree across from the boathouse. A woman approached and asked, "What are you looking at?" It was Nancy DeStefanis, executive director of SFNE, and within

minutes she had convinced me to help with the program she had started for third- and fourth-graders in San Francisco's most disadvantaged elementary schools.

For about 18 months I spent time in classrooms and Golden Gate Park teaching kids about the natural wonders around us that often go unnoticed. During that time I was privileged to watch the kids' excitement and fascination as they learned about many types of birds in their city, and learned to use binoculars to see birds in their natural habitats. Even the kids who spoke little English, or had special needs, or started out misbehaving were caught up in the adventure of experiencing nature in person on field trips. Their eyes sparkled as they shared sightings of their favorite birds.

Unfortunately, the eventual demands of work meant I could no longer participate in SFNE's school program. By that time Nancy had thought of a way to bring her bird program to the general public. On the first Saturday of every month SFNE offers a birding walk to families and individuals at the San Francisco Botanical Garden (Strybing Arboretum) in Golden Gate Park.

I started leading *Birding for Everyone* in the fall of 2003. It took a little while for word to get out. During the first few months of the program sometimes only a handful of people turned up. But as word spread, more and more people came, including many locals and also visitors from other states and overseas. Some people were experienced birders, but more often they were just beginning to learn about birds. It was inspiring to introduce people to the wonders of nature in our urban environment.

There are several hundred species of birds that live in or pass through San Francisco in any given year. Each month the birds we observe during the walk differ.

The sights we have seen rival the Discovery Channel in any month. For example, one Saturday we saw a Red-shouldered Hawk that was perched only a few feet away swoop down and land on a gopher hole. It spread out its wings to cover its prey. Soon it flew up into the tree with a fat gopher in its talons.



Photo: Judy Harter

Red-shouldered Hawk

Regularly we witness dramatic chases between hummingbirds, or display flights, or parent birds feeding recent fledglings. Every month there is something new. For beginning birders we focus on field marks that help with bird identification, how to spot birds, and which birds to



Photo: Judy Harter

Steller's Jay

expect at different times of year. For more experienced birders we focus on identifying birds by call notes or songs, and by subtle differences in plumage based on age or time of year. What we talk about depends on participants' questions and interests. Sometimes someone—especially a visitor from the east coast—will want to see a particular bird, so it is always gratifying to find a west-coast native such as the Steller's Jay.

We picked the SF Botanical Garden for the *Birding for Everyone* walk because its diverse microhabitats attract many different species. Some, such as the Song Sparrow or Anna's Hummingbird, live there all year round and raise young. In fact, the botanical garden is the last remaining breeding area for California Quail in the city of San Francisco.

There are also quite a few species that appear only during the winter, such as Fox Sparrows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Red-breasted Sapsuckers. During spring and fall migrations many more species turn up. We occasionally see Western Tanager, migrating Forster's Terns, or a Sharp-shinned Hawk. The *Birding for*

Everyone walk is about more than simply counting species. We are able to study bird behavior in a natural setting. Each walk is an entirely new adventure, and nothing pleases me more than to share this experience with people who are just beginning to see all the wonders of nature around us, even in the middle of the city of San Francisco. Please join us on a first Saturday *Birding for Everyone* walk.

Birding for Everyone with Angie Geiger:

Saturdays, September 5th & October 3rd, at 10 am near the bookstore inside the main gate of the SF Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park (MLK Drive near 9th Ave. at Lincoln Way). Adults \$10; seniors and children free.

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Donations by check can be sent to: SF Nature Education, 3450 Geary Blvd. Suite 208, SF, CA 94118. All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Go Online! You can see many birds and plants of the SF Botanical Garden at a new web site: SFInBloom.com. Birds are featured first on its [photo galleries](#) page.

Wish List: Used or new binoculars, backpacks, and microscopes for our programs.



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