

Heron Watch kicks off with opening day Saturday, April 12

Great blue herons have returned to Golden Gate Park, kicking off the annual Heron Watch season.

The herons have occupied five nests on Heron Island in Stow Lake and chicks are expected any day now.



April heron activities: By mid to late April, the eggs have usually hatched. Both parents take turns feeding the chicks and staying with them at the nest. Great blue herons eat a variety of aquatic life - fish, frogs, and crustaceans - as well as insects and even small mammals, such as pocket gophers. The parent herons regurgitate partially digested food into the bottom of the nest for their chicks to eat.

At roughly four weeks, the chicks are left alone in the nest, and both parents can concentrate on gathering food for the rapidly growing chicks.

At approximately seven weeks, as their plumage be-

comes more complete, the chicks start flapping their wings vigorously and begin hopping from branch to branch.

At eight weeks, the chicks are usually ready to take their first flight.

At ten to twelve weeks, the chicks and their parents depart and go their separate ways.

Last year we enjoyed one of the most successful seasons for Heron Watch so far, with approximately 1,000 people joining San Francisco Nature Education volunteers to observe these remarkable and majestic birds in one of the nation's densest urban areas. 2007 was a successful year for the herons too, as they built or expanded on six nests.

This year marks the 15th year since San Francisco Nature Education Executive Director Nancy DeStefanis discovered nesting great blue herons at Stow Lake in 1993. Please join us on Opening Day, Saturday, April 12, for Heron Watch 2008. Every child who attends will receive a heron mobile.



Great blue heron courtship photographs courtesy Jim Sullivan.

This year, San Francisco Nature Education's Saturday Heron Watch program will be open to the public on April 12, 19 and 26, and May 3, 10 and 17. Come for the Nature Walk at 10:30 a.m. each Saturday.

For Heron Watch location and times, please visit www.sfnature.org.

ERM employees volunteer at Heron Watch

Peter Baty, Conor McDonough, Klaudia Toporowska and Chimi Yi, employees of environmental consulting group ERM, have volunteered to help with San Francisco Nature Education's Heron Watch program.

The ERM Foundation has generously granted \$5,000 to support San Francisco Nature Education programs. We greatly appreciate the assistance of the ERM Foundation, and the ERM volunteers' donation of their expertise at Heron Watch.



Allen's hummingbird

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Calling out for volunteers!

Do you love science and nature? Do you want other people to learn to know and love science and nature, too? San Francisco Nature Education needs volunteers like you! We have openings for adult volunteers as well as interns in middle school and high school.

For more information about our adult volunteer opportunities and an application form, please visit www.sfnature.org/get_involved/volunteer.html.

For more information about student internships and an application form, please visit www.sfnature.org/programs/intern.html.

Students complete owl-pellet program

San Francisco fourth-grade students tried their hands at real roll-up-your-sleeves science this winter and spring as part of San Francisco Nature Education's expanded school program. The findings? SFNE's new owl-pellet dissections are a big hit!

In an encouraging -- not to mention fun and fascinating -- example of the kind of hands-on science education that is urgently needed in many schools today, students participated in an owl-pellet lab over two mornings. Students dissected pellets and extracted craniums and mandibles in order to identify the small mammals on which the owls preyed. SFNE naturalist volunteers mentored students in dissecting owl pellets, and helped students catalog the pellets' contents and learn more about owls. The students' enthusiasm was unmistakable from the moment they spotted the first tiny bones of a mouse, vole, gopher or other animal. We look forward to continuing this successful component of our school programs in the next school year!



SFNE volunteer Tina Lui helps a student identify the bones he has discovered in an owl pellet.



SFNE's Nancy DeStefanis with a young scientist.

Birding for Everyone Family Nature Walk

The people who gathered April 5 for the Birding for Everyone walk at the San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum were greeted by a clear and sunny, but somewhat crisp day. About 50 people participated, half of them children.

We started in the Demonstration Garden and observed a small flock of white-crowned sparrows foraging on the lawn. On the way to the Wildfowl Pond, we observed a Black Phoebe flycatching from the lawn in the Great Meadow. In the pond were western gulls, American coots, mallards and two Canada geese. In the distance we heard California quail giving their "Chicago" call. Also at the pond was a very cooperative golden-crowned sparrow. We moved on to the Succulent Garden, and along the way observed a vibrantly blue pair of western scrub jays and a lone American robin searching for worms. In addition we encountered a very active pair of bushtits foraging for insects. At the Succulent Garden a red-shouldered hawk flew into a eucalyptus tree



An Anna's hummingbird was observed on the April 5 Birding for Everyone walk.

overhead, allowing great views of its orange chest. A second red-shouldered hawk soon joined it, while a red-tailed hawk soared high overhead. We saw both Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds, some doing display flights. An observant participant pointed out a small flock of cedar waxwings also perched overhead. They soon flew off, flashing their yellow-tipped tail feathers. On the way to the Redwood Forest we observed an empty hummingbird nest decorated with white lichen. Other birds we encountered that day: song sparrows, California towhees, common ravens and American crows, a flyover barn swallow and the ubiquitous rock pigeon.

Join us for our guided nature walks on the first Saturday of every month at the San Francisco Botanical Garden, 10 a.m. until noon. Visit our Web site for more details: <http://www.sfnature.org/programs/bfe.html>.

Upcoming Dates: May 3 and June 7 (rain cancels.)

Third-grade program continues in spring

Students in San Francisco Nature Education's school program for third-graders recently completed segments about bird calls using Birdsong Identifiers, and eggs and nests.

