



### Executive Director's Corner Nancy DeStefanis

Dear Friends,

I'm delighted to report that students from E.R. Taylor, Bret Harte, Grattan, McCoppin, Miraloma, New Traditions, and Visitacion Valley Elementary Schools are participating in field trips to Stow Lake during April and May to see the majestic Great Blue Herons and their chicks. In addition, we have four Saturday programs left for the public to view these charismatic birds and their chicks. We now have two nests with three chicks each, and perhaps more on the way!

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis



Heron parents change places during nest relief.



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### Heron Watch Report

Sachi Jain, Naturalist

The Great Blue Heron breeding season is in full swing at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park. On Saturday, April 18th, crowds gathered at SF Nature Education's Heron Watch station near the boathouse to marvel at the four-foot-tall birds guarding their nests on Heron Island. Using our binoculars and spotting scopes we first spotted the adult herons perched atop the Monterey Cypress trees, preening their gray-blue feathers and stretching their long, white necks. Although we quickly scanned several nests, the chicks were harder to detect, although their fuzzy bodies were occasionally visible through the thick branches.

Great Blue Herons are colonial nesters, and the nests can measure up to four feet wide and several feet deep. When a pair of herons first builds a nest in late January or February the male initiates an elaborate courtship ritual that includes the so-called "stick presentation." The male flies some distance from the nest to collect suitable nest-building sticks, which the female then adds to the nest. Along with the male's distinctive courtship postures and behavior, the stick presentation serves to strengthen the pair bond as the birds get ready to raise young. As we saw on Saturday, once the chicks hatch and start to grow, the parents cease building the nest and focus exclusively on feeding their hungry brood. Both males and females take turns regurgitating fish, frogs, crustaceans, gophers, and other prey for their young.

We observed the herons from several vantage points, including Jenny's bench near the boathouse and a path near the Roman bridge. The herons were not the only new parents at Stow Lake; Canada Geese, trailed by



Photo: Jesse Krider

Ten-day-old chicks emerge from nest with solicitous parent behind them.

a line of fuzzy yellow chicks, were also spotted at the lake. From a higher vantage point we observed the elusive Great Horned Owl and two of her fledglings. The mother's mottled brown feathers were almost indistinguishable from the tree bark, while her offspring's feathers were a light gray. A final treat for the day was the surprise appearance of a Red-tailed Hawk on a branch, calling attention to itself with short screeches.

Heron Watch continues every Saturday until May 16th, and SFNE volunteers and visitors eagerly anticipate the development of young bird life at Stow Lake.

# Opening Day at Stow Lake Heron Watch



Photo: SFNE

Supervisor Eric Mar (Richmond District) celebrates opening day with SFNE director Nancy DeStefanis.



Photo: SFNE

The Great Blue Heron observation site is located fifty steps from the Stow Lake boathouse.



Photo: SFNE

Rachel Townsend leads family walks for budding birders.



Photo: SFNE

Zev, a senior intern, shows two young park visitors a Great Blue Heron in its nest.



Photo: Monte Travis

Great Horned Owl



Photo: SFNE

Participants in the nature walk view Great Blue Herons from Strawberry Island in Stow Lake.



Photo: Monte Travis

Owlets



Photo: SFNE

Naturalists point to Great Blue Heron flying in.

# E.R. Taylor Field Trip Report

Alyssa Babin, Naturalist

April 14, 2009, was another action-filled day at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park with third-graders from E.R. Taylor Elementary School. The smell of adventure was in the air as these groups of great students helped to spot lots of birds and other wildlife at Stow Lake. Some of the highlights included: Great Blue Herons in their nests, a Red-tailed Hawk, a Red-winged Blackbird, an American Robin, and Pied-billed Grebes swimming in the lake.

More third-grade students came to Stow Lake on April 21st. In all, 80 third-graders from E.R. Taylor Elementary visited Stow Lake in April!



Photo: SFNE



Photo: Judy Harter

Pied-billed Grebe in Stow Lake



Photo: SFNE

## Highlights of Field Trips to Stow Lake



Photo: SFNE

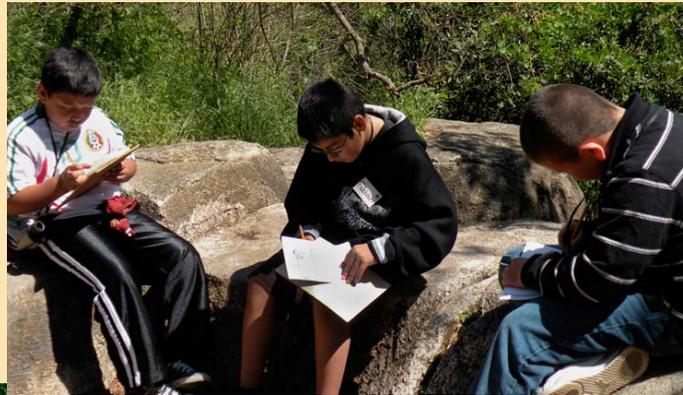


Photo: SFNE

Students from E.R. Taylor Elementary School observe Great Blue Herons, sketch local birds, and enjoy their time spent in the field.



Photo: SFNE



Photo: Judy Harter

American Robin



Photo: SFNE

## Birding for Everyone Report

Sachi Jain, Naturalist

On a bright, breezy Saturday in April expert birder Alan Hopkins led a group of 27 people on a *Birding for Everyone* tour through the Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park.



Photo: Judy Harter

Song Sparrow

We began the bird walk at the Demonstration Garden, where we spotted White-crowned Sparrows and Song Sparrows flitting among tree branches.

A rustling sound in the bushes alerted us to the presence of several California Quails. The males displayed large, teardrop-shaped plumes on their heads and had black faces, while the females had shorter plumes and mottled brown faces.

We then continued to the Wildfowl Pond, where we observed familiar characters such as American



Photo: Judy Harter

Female and male California Quails.

Coots, immature and mature Western Gulls, and Mallards wading in the water.



Photo: SFNE

Alan Hopkins (center, with scope) and most of the *Birding for Everyone* group at the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

As we traveled toward the Succulent Garden we saw a male Allen's Hummingbird perched atop a tree, gleaming like a golden jewel in the sunlight. Sightings of female Allen's Hummingbirds and Anna's Hummingbirds of both sexes followed suit. A pair of Common Ravens and a Red-tailed Hawk circled far in the distance.

Flashes of yellow in the bushy region of the California Garden revealed the presence of a male Townsend's Warbler, distinguishable from the female by his prominent black throat patch. A Dark-eyed Junco landed on a fence nearby. We also caught a glimpse of an American Goldfinch, which we suspected to be a breeding male due to his bright yellow body and black and white wing feathers.



Photo: Judy Harter

Red-tailed Hawk

Heading back toward the entrance we observed a Steller's Jay sporting the trademark black crest that is absent in its relative, the Western Scrub Jay. A male House Finch sang a melodious trill and showed us his brick-red throat as he flew from branch to branch. A well-camouflaged California Towhee eyed us from some bushes less than a foot away, occasionally twitching its long brown tail. Other birds of note seen during our trip included the Brown Creeper, American Robin, and Hutton's Vireo.

## San Francisco Nature Education Receives Award from SF Board of Supervisors

On April 21, 2009, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors honored San Francisco Nature Education with a Certificate of Appreciation. Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director, accepted the award from sponsoring Supervisor Eric Mar, who represents the Richmond District and Golden Gate Park. Supervisor Mar thanked San Francisco Nature Education for its outstanding record of providing environmental education to over 7000 students from the city's underserved public schools.



Photo: SFNE

Supervisor Eric Mar presents certificate of honor to Nancy DeStefanis at Board of Supervisors meeting.

## Birding for Everyone Author Visits San Francisco

John C. Robinson is an African-American ornithologist. When not advocating for encouraging people of color to become involved in conservation he is busy as a renowned natural history tour guide and author of five books on birds, nature, and the environment.

On March 31, 2009, Mr. Robinson gave a lecture called *Changing the Face of Conservation Through Birding* at the Crissy Field Center. Attendees included: Allen Fish (Golden Gate Raptor Observatory), Myla Ablog (Literacy for Environmental Justice), Jennifer Robinson (Golden Gate Audubon



John C. Robinson with prize-winning fifth-graders and E.R. Taylor principal Mrs. Gini Dold.

Photo: SFNE

Society), Rik Penn (National Park Service), Christy Rocca (Crissy Field Center), and Brent Plater (Center for Biological Diversity).

Earlier in the day Mr. Robinson had visited third- and fifth-grade students from E.R. Taylor Elementary School, and had talked with the children about his passion for birding. He also gave the students tips about how to be birdwatchers and listen for birdcalls.

The lecture event was made possible by the through the efforts of Christy Rocca, who provided the venue; Andy Kleinhesselink, for spearheading the lecture effort; and Nancy DeStefanis, for organizing the event and school visits for Mr. Robinson.



Photo: SFNE

From left: Christy Rocca, director, Crissy Field Center; John C. Robinson, author and ornithologist; Andrew Kleinhesselink, vice president, San Francisco Nature Education; Nancy DeStefanis, executive director, San Francisco Nature Education.



Photo: SFNE

John C. Robinson takes questions from E.R. Taylor Elementary students.

## Upcoming Events

**Heron Watch:** Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park. Saturdays, May 2, 9, and 16. Observation site open 10 am until 1 pm. Free.

Adult and family nature walks: 10:30 am to noon. Adults \$10; seniors & children free.

**Location:** Follow the sign at the Stow Lake boathouse to the observation site (about fifty steps).

**Birding for Everyone:** Saturday, May 2, 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 & children free.

**Note:** Birding has been *cancelled* for June 6 and July 4. Walks resume Saturday, August 1.

## Online Giving Made Easy

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Contact your employer's human resources office to determine whether your company matches employee contributions and to obtain a form. Some employers will match up to double the amount of your gift.

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



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