



Heron Nesting Season Is Here

Blue Heron Newsletter • April 2010

Executive Director's Corner

We are excited to inform you that we have received a challenge grant of \$5,000 from two of our generous donors. Although we operate on a lean and mean budget of only \$120,000, the recession has reduced donation amounts and foundation grants.

From May 1st to June 15th, each donation we receive will be matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Our goal is to raise at least \$5,000 to match the challenge grant and to help us continue our work in school programs and Saturday public programs.

During the past year:

- Our Saturday birding programs for youths and adults have served well over 1,500 visitors in San Francisco and Oakland.
- We completed our second year at Heron's Head Park.
- We incorporated middle school students into our Heron Watch intern program and
- High school students into leading tours at Heron's Head Park, Heron Watch, and Birding for Kids.

Please take advantage of this wonderful challenge grant so that SF Nature Education can continue our award-winning programs into 2011.

Support SF Nature Education



Donations by check can be sent to: San Francisco Nature Education, 3450 Geary Blvd. Suite 208, SF, CA 94118. All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Thank you for your support!

Nancy DeStefanis

Hérons Everywhere!

Nancy DeStefanis, Director, SF Nature Education

This year is the best ever for our Stow Lake colony of Great Blue Herons—seven nests! We have observed four chicks in one nest, three in another, and three in a third.

We believe, based on the behavior of adult herons, that there are three additional nests with chicks. We haven't observed activity at a seventh nest these past two weeks, so we're not clear about what's happening there.

Meanwhile, people of all ages have stopped by our Heron Watch observation site (west of the Stow Lake boathouse) to see the heron chicks squawking for their food.

There are only three more Saturdays left to look through our spotting scopes and participate in our nature walks. Please come by to experience this yearly San Francisco phenomenon with us!



Three young heron chicks.



Parent heron with injured tongue stands guard over chick.

Photo: © Monte Travis



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Heron chicks (above) in their treetop nest at Stow Lake.

Photo: Ernest Gaudreau

Heron Watching and Nature Walks at Stow Lake



Zev, our intern of three years, lines up a scope to show herons to visitors Bob Liner and Judith Bishop.

Photo: © Monte Travis



Interns: Rafael, in fifth grade; Rosanna, a senior at Lowell HS; and Logan, in sixth grade.

Photo: Judy Harter



Sharon Pretti leads a group for the nature walk at 10:30 am on Saturdays.

Photo: Judy Harter



Nancy DeStefanis answers questions on a nature walk.

Photo: © Monte Travis

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: May 1 and June 5, 10 am—noon.
Meet us near the bookstore inside the main gate of the SF Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park (MLK Drive near 9th Ave. at Lincoln). Adults \$10; no one turned away due to lack of funds.

Birding Classes for Kids

First Saturdays: May 1 and June 5, 10 am—noon.
Meet us near the bookstore inside the main gate of the SF Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park (MLK Drive near 9th Ave. at Lincoln). Adults \$10; no one turned away due to lack of funds.

Great Blue Heron Watch

Saturdays, May 1—May 15th. At Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park; follow sign at boathouse. Observation through spotting scopes free from 10 am until 1 pm. Naturalist-led walks at 10:30 each Saturday: adults \$10, children free.

Nesting Birds of Lake Merritt

Saturdays from 10 am—noon: May 1, and May 8.
Note: *rain cancels*. Meet outside Rotary Nature Center, 600 Bellevue Avenue (in Lakeside Park) at Lake Merritt, Oakland. This event is free.



Contact SFNE:
e-mail: info@sfnature.org
telephone: 415-387-9160
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Birding Safari

Andy Kleinhesselink, Board of Directors

Sunny skies graced our March 27th *Birding Safari* in San Francisco. Between our two groups we spotted 122 bird species! Groups visited Lake Merced, the Presidio, Golden Gate Park, Heron's Head Park, and other likely viewing spots.

Our thanks to all the leaders: Angie Geiger, Alan Hopkins, Andy Kleinhesselink, Dom Mozur, and Josiah Clark. And a special thank you to all the folks who signed up to support our education programs.



Anna's Hummingbird



Wild Parrot

Birding Safari Photos: Mary K. Austin



Wood Duck—the highlight of the day



Ruddy Duck in breeding plumage



Hooded Oriole

Bret Harte Field Trip

Linda Grant, Naturalist

The morning of April 20th began with showers that tapered off just as fifty kindergartners from Bret Harte Elementary School arrived at Stow Lake. Each teacher was paired with a naturalist. I led Ms. Amber Cooper's bilingual Spanish class; Alan Hopkins accompanied Ms. Debbie Fergin's class; and Nancy DeStefanis led Ms. Pat Scott's class.

We began our trip by encountering Mallards and Western Gulls on the pier at the boathouse. Red-eared Slider turtles could be seen on a nearby log.

Next came the sighting of Great Blue Heron "condos" high up in the trees, with some of the adults visible on their nests. On our way to the Roman bridge we saw Brewer's Blackbirds and an American Robin.

Huntington waterfall was beautiful as the kids tip-toed across the stones on their way to the Golden Pavilion, a gift from the people of Taipei. The students enjoyed a snack under the brightly-painted gazebo, then watched a Rock Pigeon in its rooftop nest.



Photo: SFNE

Students and chaperone watch a Red-eared Slider turtle.

Circling the lake we encountered California Towhees, Anna's Hummingbirds, Song Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos and we got a good look at a Steller's Jay hopping on the ground. We also saw Chestnut-backed Chickadees and heard the chattering of Bushtits.

We crossed the Rustic Bridge on our way back to the boathouse and saw an American Coot on the
(continued on next page)



Photo: SFNE

Ms. Cooper, at far right, with her class and their chaperones at Stow Lake. Linda Grant (naturalist) is next to her.

Bret Harte Field Trip (continued from previous page)

water. An up-close highlight of the day was a group of Canada Geese with eight goslings. Our young students were very quiet and allowed the family to pass by without any disturbance.

At the Heron Watch site Alan Hopkins set up his spotting scope and showed students the Great Blue Heron chicks in their treetop nests. Each student said "Wow!"



Photo: SFNE

Ms. Fergin, far right, with Alan Hopkins (naturalist) students, and a chaperone.



Photo: Judy Harter

Canada Goslings enjoy the sun. Adult geese were nearby.



Photo: © Monte Travis

What's going on here? A Double-crested Cormorant swallows a trout!



Photo: SFNE

Ms. Pat Scott (far right) with chaperone and students.



Photo: SFNE

Students check off the birds that they observed. Ms. Fergin is at right.

Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

An enthusiastic group of birders showed up at the SF Botanical Garden for the Birding for Everyone walk on the sunny, cool first Saturday in April. We started in the Demonstration Garden with a special treat—



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Red-shouldered Hawk

Thanks to two in our group who were willing to share their Swarovski spotting scope, everyone got great views.

As we exited the Demonstration Garden there was a large area of dirt edged by thick shrubs. A number of sparrows were foraging there. We had side-by-side views of **White-crowned Sparrows**, **Golden-crowned Sparrows**,



Photo: Ernest Gaudreau

Fox Sparrow

and **Fox Sparrows**, most of which will have left for their summer northern territories by next month.

We continued past the Fragrance Garden and spotted a fourth species of sparrow, the **Song Sparrow**. In a small leafless sapling the bird serenaded us. Below him were a number of American Robins, males and females. At the Wildfowl Pond we saw the usual **Mallards** and American Coots. We noticed a **Black Phoebe** disappearing under the bridge across the

two pairs of **California Quail**. Most quail have moved out of the garden into other areas of Golden Gate Park, so we were pleasantly surprised.

Then a **Red-shouldered Hawk** soared overhead and landed in a not-too-distant Monterey cypress.

pond. On closer inspection we saw something in its bill, either food or mud; a clear sign that this favored location was once again the site of a future Phoebe family.



Photo: Judy Harter

Mourning Dove

but for the first time since December, we had no luck.

A movement on the ground drew our attention to a **Mourning Dove** calmly walking around. Next we spent some time in the Succulent Garden hoping for a glimpse of the **Orchard Oriole** that has been reported there.

While searching for it we were treated to a male **Downy Woodpecker** exploring cavities in the



Photo: Rick Leche

Downy Woodpecker



Photo: Rick Leche

Cedar Waxwing

tall spikes of a century plant for a possible nest site. Other birds of note were **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Bushtits**, and a bright male **Allen's Hummingbird**. Alas, no **Orchard Oriole!**

As we were leaving we spotted a single **Cedar Waxwing** perched in a tree. With the help of the

spotting scope many in the group got great looks at this beautiful bird.



Photo: Ernest Gaudreau

Western Scrub Jay

an **American Goldfinch**, and a **House Finch**. We also spotted a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, probably the last one until those wintering birds return in late fall.

Finally, as we were walking through the California Garden, we had great views of two **Pygmy Nuthatches**. They were perched at eye level instead of moving around at hyper-speed in the tops of the tallest trees. They seemed almost as interested in watching us as we were in watching them. That was the conclusion of a great day of spring birding.



Photo: Len Blumin

Pygmy Nuthatch

We continued to the western part of the garden near the John Muir Pond. Along the way we spotted a number of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** in bright breeding plumage, and the always popular Townsend's Warbler. At the John Muir Pond we found some other birds, including a **Western Scrub Jay**, **Steller's Jay**,



Photo: Len Blumin

American Goldfinch

Please join us in the SF Botanical Garden on Saturday, May 1, for the next *Birding for Everyone* walk!