

# Light Fog in August

*Blue Heron Newsletter • August 2010*

## Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Please consider volunteering with us. On August 16th, students from elementary school will begin their school year. We will enroll our new classes by the end of August and begin classroom visits in September and field trips in October.

If you have a passion for nature and enjoy working with children (primarily grades K-3), please consider volunteering with our school program. The students are wonderful, and they treasure their time with us in the outdoors. We train our volunteers; birding experience is not necessary. We depend on volunteers in the classroom as well as on our field trips.

We will conduct interviews and orientation on Thursday, September 16th, at the SF Nature Education office. Come and learn more about our school programs. Training (four morning sessions) begins the week of September 20th. You can download a school program application from our [web site](#) and e-mail us, or mail it to SF Nature Education, 3450 Geary Blvd., Ste. 208, San Francisco, CA 94121.

We will contact you within a day or so of receiving it. I hope to meet you very soon.

Best regards,  
Nancy DeStefanis

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## Birding for Kids Report

Linda Grant and Nancy DeStefanis

From Linda Grant: Our *Birding for Kids* walk began on a typical SF summer day, overcast and foggy, but the smiles from a group of kids visiting from the Bayview/Hunter's Point neighborhood brought the sun out. Saturday, August 7th, was the first visit to the SF Botanical Garden by Sister Stephanie and five neighborhood youths.

We began our outing at the Great Meadow, where several flocks of **Canada Geese** were foraging in the grass. We also saw two **American Robins**, one adult and one immature, identified by its spotted breast.

In the Fragrance Garden we discussed where to look for birds—in the sky, in trees, on the ground, or in water. We also talked about using a tree like a clock to describe the specific location of a bird. A quick movement drew our attention to a **Dark-eyed Junco**. We caught sight of its white outer tail feathers as the bird quickly disappeared into the shrubbery. We also saw, and heard, a **Song Sparrow** singing there.



Photo: Judy Harter

Dark-eyed Junco

On our way to the Wildfowl Pond a **Black Phoebe** was busy catching insects. It perched on a nearby post long enough for everyone to get a close-up look at this flycatcher. We froze as an obliging **Western Scrub Jay** landed right in front of us on the lawn.

We took a break in the Zellerbach Garden, where the kids checked off the birds they had seen in a nature journal. They also picked a favorite bird to draw.

Continuing to the Succulent Garden, we spotted an **Allen's Hummingbird** feeding on a purple, tubular flower. Flying overhead were a few **Rock Pigeons**.

Before ending our walk, the kids took an "alone walk" through the bamboo forest near the Great Meadow, where we heard the *chick-a-dee, dee, dee* of a **Chestnut-backed Chickadee**.



Photo: Len Blumin

Allen's Hummingbird



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

Back at the Library Terrace, Sister Stephanie said, "We loved the trip. I never knew there was so much beauty in Golden Gate Park. The nature tour/bird watch was wonderful, and I hope to bring many of my community youth here to learn." *Continued on next page.*



Photo: SFNE

Sister Stephanie with a group of students from her community. Linda Grant is center rear, in cap.

Continued from previous page.

From Nancy DeStefanis: My group of three children—4, 6, and 10—and their father and grandmother thoroughly enjoyed the nature walk.

On our way to the Bamboo Forest, we stopped to admire a flock of **Canada Geese**. Pretty soon, four-year-old Miles was honking just like the geese. Miles loves birds and came armed with his Mickey Mouse binoculars. The children loved the alone walk through the Bamboo Forest. Next we stopped at the Dawn Redwood Grove. These trees come directly from seeds from the oldest redwood trees in China.

Soon the children spotted **Western Scrub Jays** and **Steller's Jays**, and the differences between them were obvious to their young eyes. **Dark-eyed Juncos** and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** delighted everyone.

Towards the end of our two-hour walk we embarked on a tiny trail off the beaten track. There for all to see were three **California Quail**! It was a great morning.



Photo: SFNE

Young Miles with his Mickey Mouse binoculars and a few geese.



Photo: SFNE

A California Quail in the garden.



Photo: SFNE

In the SF Botanical Garden, *Birding for Kids* attendees wait near the Library Terrace, ready to spot birds on their nature walk.

## SF Nature Meets with a Russian Education Delegation

Linda Grant, SFNE Board Member

San Francisco Nature Education (SFNE) was recently contacted by the Institute of International Education, a global organization committed to increasing intercultural educational idea exchange. A delegation from Russia wanted to discuss our environmental education programs for students and adults. The group is on a 21-day tour of U.S. nature and environmental education centers.

Nancy DeStefanis, executive director; Linda Grant, board secretary; and Angela Tremolada, administrator and naturalist, represented SFNE. Five Russian participants and two interpreters met with us on August 5th in downtown San Francisco.

Our Russian visitors included a researcher at the Center for Wild Animals of the Republic of Kalmykia who focuses on the genetics of the Saiga antelope; the head of an arboretum; an environmental education program director; a deputy director of ecology education; and the chairperson of Living Nature of the Steppe, a non-governmental organization.

Some of their questions: Do we contact teachers or do they contact us? (both); How do we receive money? (grants, donors, corporate contributors); How do we measure the success of field trips? (teachers' evaluations); Is there a national organization for bird preservation? (National Audubon Society).

The participants told us that in Russia, environmental education clubs celebrate April 1st as the Day of the Bird. Each year a specific bird is

selected, typically an endangered or threatened species, and activities that feature it are planned.

We presented each delegate with SFNE teaching materials and a Great Blue Heron greeting card. In turn, we were presented with lapel pins from their reserves, and with a Saiga antelope sew-on emblem. We were invited to visit them in Russia, a gesture of friendship we warmly welcomed.



Photo: SFNE

Two of the Russian delegates in SF.



Photo: Frank Wouters

Saiga antelope at a zoo in Germany.

## Fundraiser for SF Nature Education

Megan Prelinger, SFNE Treasurer

We were honored to have been asked by SF Green Drinks to be the beneficiary of a fundraising gala called Green Generations. The social event, held at 111 Minna Gallery in San Francisco on August 3rd, was dedicated to benefiting environmental education for underserved children. SF Nature Education was one of three environmental educational organizations featured.

SF Green Drinks is a volunteer-run nonprofit that promotes green networking, education, and volunteer events in the San Francisco Bay Area. Each SF Green Drinks-sponsored event provides lively nightlife networking to eco-conscious urban revelers. All moneys raised are donated to the featured beneficiary organizations. SF Nature Education was represented on August 3rd by executive director Nancy DeStefanis and board members Linda Grant, Alan Hopkins, and myself.

We had thought we were ready when the information table was set up, but the intense interest in our cause surprised us. We had to quickly consolidate our efforts to respond to every one of the many guests who stopped by to learn about our work or to pick up literature.

Attendees we talked to were typically employed or invested in the environmental sector. At least two information seekers were new arrivals to San Francisco on the hunt for jobs; others were writers, printers, attorneys, teachers, gardeners, or chefs. A great number of them expressed interest in volunteering as docents, and signed up for our monthly newsletter. It was a great opportunity to reach out to a community of people who are well positioned to become supporters.

Thank you, SF Green Drinks, 111 Minna, guests, Blue Cross of California, and all the other generous sponsors and donors!

green  
generations



Nancy DeStefanis takes a guest's name for SF Nature's mailing list.

All photos: SFNE



Guests talk to SFNE's Megan Prelinger (right).



SFNE's executive director Nancy DeStefanis and Missi Hirt of SF Green Drinks at the August 3rd fundraiser.



Naturalists Linda Grant and Alan Hopkins near some gallery artworks.

## June Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

Participants of the June *Birding for Everyone* walk were greeted by glorious sunshine, blue skies, and



Photo: Len Blumin

Brewer's Blackbird

lots of birdsong. The first sighting in the SF Botanical Garden was the ubiquitous **American Robin** foraging in the Demonstration Garden. That was followed by a sighting of a **Red-shouldered Hawk** in a nearby Monterey cypress.

As we emerged from the Demonstration Garden we were treated to the sight of a **Western Scrub Jay** hopping on the lawn, affording everyone good views. On the Great Meadow we paused to look at a large group of **Canada Geese** and

a smaller flock of **Brewer's Blackbirds**, all males, in the distance. Suddenly a **Red-tailed Hawk** flew into view. It landed high in a tree across from us. As we were getting it into focus it



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Red-tailed Hawk

swooped all the way to the ground, where it snatched a hapless rodent, and then flew away to another branch to enjoy its snack. As we looked on in amazement, the hawk finished its meal quickly, while a nearby robin scolded loudly. Amazingly, the episode lasted only about five minutes from start to finish.

At the Wildfowl Pond we observed a lone male **Mallard** and a **Black Phoebe**—oddly seeming to lack wing bars—flying from bench to bench. This lack can be caused by misarranged feathers, and



Photo: Judy Harter

Black Phoebe

can lead to identification challenges for beginners. We continued along the path that cuts through the center of the Arboretum, south of the Moon-Viewing Pond. There we encountered a couple who were seated on a bench distributing peanuts. In addition to the expected squirrels, they had also attracted a family of six **Steller's Jays**.

We were soon distracted by a pair of **California Quail** that emerged from the underbrush. They marched onto the asphalt path alongside of us, to the delight of the group. A movement above caught my eye, and it turned out to be a beautiful male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, a most unexpected bird for the West Coast. It was high up in the tree, but out in the open, where most of the group was able to get excellent views of this lovely bird. It did not stay long, and we followed it in the direction of the Succulent Garden.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Rose-breasted Grosbeak



Photo: Bob Lewis

Steller's Jay

The Succulent Garden held its own wonders. We heard insistent peeping and the laughing calls of a **Downy Woodpecker**. These two sounds were soon linked as both the male



Photo: Rick Leche

Tree Swallow

and female woodpeckers took turns flying in with insects to feed the large chick poking its head out of a hole in the spike of a century plant. Atop the neighboring spike, a **Tree Swallow** rested and preened. On the same spike, but further below, two **Pygmy Nuthatches** were climbing about and disappearing, leading us to suspect that they also had an active nest they were tending.

As we were leaving the Succulent Garden we were serenaded by **House Finches** who eventually came into view. Another bird flew into the bushes next to us—a **Purple Finch**, which began singing, giving us a great opportunity to compare these two commonly heard, but often confused, songs. It is a special treat to see the Purple Finch, which is typically more secretive than the gregarious House Finch.



Photo: Rick Leche

Purple Finch

Other birds that we spotted in various locations were many **Anna's** and **Allen's Hummingbirds**, **Song Sparrows**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Common Ravens** and **American Crows**, along with several more Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, **Western Gulls**, **Rock Pigeons** and even **Double-crested Cormorants** flying overhead. It was another exciting day of birding at the San Francisco Botanical Garden.



Photo: Judy Harter

Anna's Hummingbird

## August Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

Strybing Arboretum was buzzing with activity when we assembled for the *Birding for Everyone Walk* on August 7th. We quickly left the gardening fair and gemstone show behind and entered the Great Meadow. There we were greeted by a large flock of about fifty **Canada Geese**. Also scattered on the lawn were a number of **American Robins** looking for worms. We noticed some smaller birds and went to investigate. A flock of adult and juvenile **Dark-eyed Juncos** was flitting about. Many were recent fledglings whose dull plumage and striped breasts did not at all resemble the adults, with the exception of the tell-tale white outer tail feathers.



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Song Sparrow

Joining the juncos were a number of other birds: **California Towhees**, **Song Sparrows**, and a **Western Scrub Jay**. Suddenly someone called out "**Brown Creeper**," and we all had a chance to see and hear this usually elusive bird as it made its way up a branch overhead. As we turned toward the Wildfowl Pond we spotted a glimpse of red, and we were delighted to see a **Purple Finch** below eye level, for a change, foraging on some thistle that had gone to seed. It paid no attention to us whatsoever.



Photo: Rick Leche

Brown Creeper

Our next stop was in front of a flowering red eucalyptus tree that hosted a mixed flock consisting primarily of **Pygmy Nuthatches**, but which also included **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and a single **Hutton's Vireo**. The Wildfowl Pond held

only a single female **Mallard**. We had seen a number of hummingbirds but wanted better views, so we headed for the Succulent Garden. Along the way we stopped to observe a **Black Phoebe** chasing insects. The rufous wingbars



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Hutton's Vireo

indicated that it was a hatch-year bird. The Succulent Garden had a number of **Anna's Hummingbirds** but was otherwise quiet. We continued toward the John Muir Pond and were rewarded by a **Red-tailed Hawk** soaring overhead. We discovered a large flock of **Bushtits** busily looking for insects in a bottle-brush tree, and had excellent views of these tiny birds. We also observed two **Lesser Goldfinches** perched on some bare branches high overhead, birds whose plaintive calls we had been hearing on our walk.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Lesser Goldfinch

The Salvia Garden proved quite productive for hummingbird sightings, with both **Anna's** and **Allen's** putting on a good show. A male **Downy Woodpecker** that flew in almost at eye level was an added treat. In the California Garden one of the participants discovered a **White-crowned Sparrow**, the first of the day. All in all, we saw two dozen species, a satisfying number for early August.



Photo: Bob Lewis

Downy Woodpecker

## Upcoming Events

### Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: September 4 and October 2, 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 for Kids

First Saturdays: September 4 and October 2, 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.

## Saturday Programs: Volunteers Needed!

San Francisco Nature Education needs volunteers for the following programs:

**Birding for Kids** (ages 6-12): first Saturdays at the SF Botanical Garden, 9:30 a.m.—noon. Rain cancels.

**Heron Watch** (for adults and children): six Saturdays in April and May at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park, 9:30 am—1:30 pm. Rain cancels.

We provide training on local birds, including Great Blue Herons; how to use spotting scopes; and lots of support for nature enrichment field trips. If you are interested, please e-mail a short message that states in the subject line which program you are interested in. E-mail to: [info@sfnature.org](mailto:info@sfnature.org)

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