



San Francisco Nature Education is in its tenth year of delivering comprehensive environmental education programs to students from underserved schools in the San Francisco Unified School District.

Migration to Heron's Head

Blue Heron Newsletter • December 2010

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

In this season of giving, I am asking you to help us share the joy of wild birds and other wildlife with our underserved students in elementary schools as well as with our middle and high school interns, their families, and nature enthusiasts throughout the Bay Area. Connecting with nature in a personal way is the first step toward environmental stewardship.

Many of you have enjoyed our Saturday programs, which have served thousands of adults and children since we began them in 2000. Some of the highlights include: observing white-tailed kites and harlequin ducks at Heron's Head Park, watching great blue herons feeding their chicks at Stow Lake, spotting warblers, kinglets, quail, and sometimes even osprey at the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

We have a goal at San Francisco Nature Education. Our goal is to provide up-close and personal experiences for as many students and members of the public as we have the capacity to provide.

During the past ten years we have provided 8,000 students with field trips to Golden Gate Park, Heron's Head Park, Land's End, and Crissy Field. We also provide 33 Saturday events for the general public throughout the year. More than 6,000 people have participated to date.

Please give generously. San Francisco Nature Education is unique in teaching San Franciscans about wild birds and the rewards of stewardship.

Thanks for your support.

Best regards,
Nancy DeStefanis



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Third-Grade Birders Visit SF's Heron's Head Park

Connie Armitage, Naturalist

On November 4th, a class of third graders from ER Taylor Elementary School visited San Francisco's Heron's Head Park in the Bayview District for a fall field trip. It was a beautiful sunny day, and perfect for an autumn outing.

Ms. Deirdre Elmansouri's class was excited and eager to spot birds in this restored wetlands. Equipped with binoculars, the students

followed their naturalists on a trail walk in search of waders, shorebirds, and sea ducks.

They were delighted to spot a **Snowy Egret** with its golden slippers on the shore. Next, a **Brown Pelican** flew by. With practice, the students became more adept at using their binoculars. **Ruddy Ducks** abounded, and several **Buffleheads** were spotted between their diving stints.

The students also observed numerous Double-crested Cormorants on lightposts in the bay with their wings spread for drying.

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Naturalist Connie Armitage, at right, leads her third-grade group out to the point at Heron's Head Park.

Photo: SFNE

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As we walked along the path near the marshes we spotted beehives among the native plants. The students noticed that California poppies and other wildflowers were in bloom.

Before leaving, the students sat on large stones while they checked off birds in their journals and sketched their favorites from the day's trip.



Photo: Just Chaos

Snowy Egret



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Brown Pelican



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Bufflehead



Photo: SFNE

Ms. Elmansouri and her group check for ducks and wading birds.

Third Graders at Heron's Head Park



Photo: SFNE

Chaperone Ms. Dottie, far right, and her group enjoy a snack break.



Photo: Len Blumin

Ruddy Duck

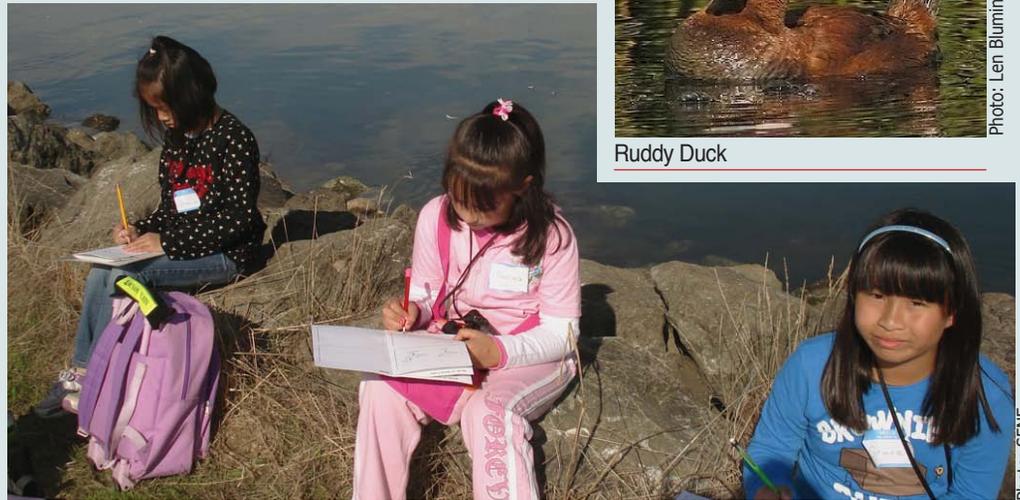


Photo: SFNE

Students sketch favorite birds in their field journals.

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Heron's Head Park Intern Report

Arty, Bayview Birders Intern



On October 30th, at Heron's Head Park, we interns showed up dressed in our waterproof hats and hoodies, but the rain held off until the end of the tour. We were joined by ornithology instructor Allan Ridley and SF Nature Education executive director Nancy DeStefanis.

We were greeted by a small flock of **White-crowned Sparrows** flying across the pathways, a common sight in the restored habitat. **Double-crested Cormorants** were sunning themselves in the small inlet along the southern edge of the park, resting on large yellow tubing that hearkened back to the park's industrial past. When you walk into Heron's Head Park you are reminded of the native beauty of the wetlands and the transformative nature of modern day; the park is located in between a large shipping port and buildings along the far shore.

We soon saw a sight frequently encountered in Golden Gate Park: **Mallards**. We set up our spotting scopes. Mallards are dabbling ducks, which means they partially submerge, head-down, in order to find food. It is a sight to see them, bottoms up and feet waving in the air! We saw **American Wigeons**, which you don't see every day, and **Ruddy Ducks**, far out in the bay with their signature pointed tails. Among them was a single **Bufflehead**.



Pelagic Cormorant

Photo: Mike Baird



Kelly, a Bayview Birders intern, locates birds through the spotting scope.

Photo: SFNE



Allan Ridley looks up an answer for Yvonne.

Photo: SFNE

We looked among the **European Starlings** and **Western Meadowlarks** for shorebirds, but instead we were pleasantly surprised to find two Cormorants sunning themselves on a rock. We spent a while admiring them and realized they did not have the orange throat of the Double-crested Cormorant. After looking them up we were shocked to find that they were **Pelagic Cormorants!** It pays to take a second look at birds.

Following Mr. Ridley's guidance, we had a theme for the day: recognizing flying birds. Early on the walk we saw a retreating **Red-tailed Hawk**. We saw several **Brown Pelicans** searching for fish flying low above us. On more than one occasion we saw a **Snowy Egret** taking off or landing. On the other side of the bay, above the shipping port, was a huge flock of birds—many of them **Western Gulls**—making a loud outcry as they flew to and fro. We found the cause of the panic: they were being harried by a passing **American Kestrel**.

With the restored wetlands teeming with life, we saw a couple of **Greater Yellowlegs** lifting their legs high as they walked. On the way back we spotted **Black Oystercatchers**, pitch black except for striking orange beaks and eyes.

It was a great day for birding, with over 35 species of birds sighted! These highlights are just a small portion of what we saw and enjoyed in the Bayview Birders program at Heron's Head Park. We hope that in the winter of 2011, we'll see you there too!

Upcoming Events

Heron's Head Park Tours

Selected Saturdays: January 15, February 5, March 5, 2011.

Tours: 10, 10:30, 11, last tour at 11:30 am. Allow at least one hour for the tour.

Location: Jennings Street & Cargo Way, two blocks south of Pier 96.

Donation: Free, donations welcome.

Free Parking: Available near entrance. Please visit www.sfnature.org for more information, or plan your trip via public transit at [MUNI's web site](#).

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: December 4 and February 5, 2011, 10 am–noon. *No tour January 1.* 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. See note below re: garden entry fee.

Birding for Kids

First Saturdays: December 4 and February 5, 2011, 10 am–noon. *No tour on January 1.* 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. See note below re: garden entry fee.

For nonresidents of San Francisco there is now an entry fee to the SF Botanical Garden, with discounts for children, families, seniors, and students. You can see their fee schedule [here](#).

Volunteers Needed for School Program!

Please visit www.sfnature.org for information about how to apply.



Black Oystercatcher

Photo: Judy Harter

High School Interns Train at Heron's Head Alex, Bayview Birders Intern



November 13th was a very sunny and warm Saturday. I knew I would see a lot of birds at Heron's Head Park. Lowell and Lincoln High interns met up at the parking lot to begin training with our instructors: Allan Ridley, Nancy DeStefanis, and Angela Tremolada.

We broke into four groups to learn how to use the spotting scopes. After everyone got comfortable with the scopes we made quick introductions, and soon after were led by Mr. Ridley on our tour. We could spot **Snowy Egrets** soaking up the shining rays of sun on the rocks, and **Double-crested Cormorants** resting on yellow floaters, outstretching their magnificent wings to dry. We then saw many **Black-bellied Plovers** and **Willetts** sifting through rocks and mud looking for food. We practiced using the scopes on our way.

We saw 19 species of native and migratory birds. While sketching birds we had seen earlier in the day, Ms. D. introduced Anthony Khalil, stewardship coordinator for Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ), and his volunteers, who planted 50 native species of plants throughout the park that day. It's amazing that not only are students from SF coming to Heron's Head to learn about the many species of birds here, but many people come to make Heron's Head Park more beautiful than it already is!

Thanks to Mr. Ridley, not only did we learn about and observe birds at Heron's Head, but we also learned about vegetation in the park, such as salty pickleweed. Lincoln High's AP environmental teacher, Mr. Jeffrey Kim, who helped recruit the Lincoln interns, came to enjoy Mr. Ridley's very interesting lecture on bird anatomy. Mr. Ridley, with the help of his niece, brought an abundance of bones, skulls, and feathers of birds such as the **Rock Dove** and **Albatross**, and they even brought preserved wings of **Red-tailed Hawks** and **Great Barn Owls** so we could touch and observe them.

I feel confident that with the help of many wonderful instructors, including Ms. D. and Mr. Ridley, we interns will lead public tours very successfully in 2011.



Interns record birds spotted with Allan Ridley, far right.



Heron's Head photos: SFNE

Lisa, Jenny, and Kelly look up from sketching birds.



Calvin uses the scope to observe shorebirds.

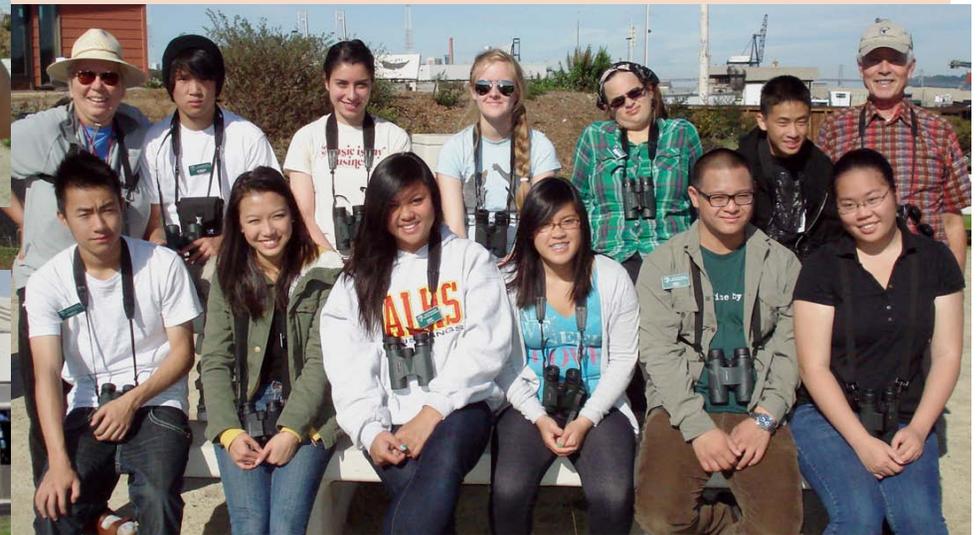
Heron's Head Interns Get Ready for Public Tours



Teacher Jeffrey Kim displays a Pelican beak (left) and Albatross skull.



Naturalist Allan Ridley holds a Rock Dove skeleton.



Intern class of 2011 — Top row from left: SF Nature's Nancy DeStefanis with Calvin, Alex, Kat, Sivan, Eddy, and naturalist Allan Ridley. Front row: Kenneth, Kelly, Jenny, Lisa, Arty, and Yvonne.



Black-bellied Plover

Photo: Doug Greenberg

Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

Saturday, November 6th was a fine day for birdwatching at the SF Botanical Garden. The sun was shining, and we hoped the birds would be out in force to make up for the past few days of rain. The strident calls of **Red-shouldered Hawks** greeted the “early birds.”

We were delighted that Nancy DeStefanis, executive director, arrived to tell the newbies about San Francisco Nature Education. A number of people immediately signed up to become members. Then we were off to see what birds we could discover.

Our first stop of the day was the Demonstration Garden. We enjoyed viewing **White-crowned Sparrows** in juvenile and mature plumages and the ever-present **Song Sparrows**. As we were trying to see a **Fox Sparrow** skulking in the shadows, a bright yellow bird flew in and landed on a flower stalk. The black crown, grey-green back, and yellow breast indicated that it was a **Lesser Goldfinch**. A big blue bird flew in as we were leaving and boldly



Fox Sparrow

Photo: Judy Harter



Lesser Goldfinch

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

the lawn in search of flying insects, always returning to the same fence post. We had our first glimpses of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** on our right, high up in the Monterey pines. As they darted away from us we saw that they were aptly named. In the pond we found **American Coots** and a single **Western Gull**. A pair of **Mallards** swam by, triggering a discussion of the differing molt strategies of various species of birds—in this case eclipse plumage, during which period most ducks cannot fly. We observed the many differences between the male and female **Mallards**.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Photo: Rick Leche

scolded us, our first **Western Scrub Jay** of the day.

From there we slowly made our way towards the Wildfowl Pond. To our left we watched a **Black Phoebe** make numerous forays over

In the Chilean Garden we looked for sapsuckers to no avail, but did find other birds of interest, such as the **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and several **Anna's Hummingbirds**. We watched a male hummer defend its tree by giving fierce chase to a passing interloper. Then a flash of yellow caught our attention. We were delighted to see a bright yellow and black **Townsend's Warbler** overhead.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Photo: Rick Leche

Next we headed to the path along the north side of the garden. On the asphalt we were able to get excellent looks at a pair of **California Towhees**. Nearby we also saw our first **Golden-crowned Sparrows** of the day, and a single red **House Finch**. At eye level we watched a flock of chattering **Bushtits** intermingled with equally enchanting **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**.



Pygmy Nuthatch

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

As we neared the Succulent Garden some raucous calls drew our attention to a **Steller's Jay** and its striking black crest. The redwood grove was quiet, with the exception of the high-pitched calls of **Pygmy Nuthatches** overhead.

We made our way back to the Great Meadow, and the show was far from over. Two **Red-tailed Hawks** appeared, doing an aerial dance. They took turns drawing in their wings to start a steep swoop, to admiring gasps from our group. It might have been a parent-offspring pair, as one had the red tail of an adult and the other the barred tail of an immature hawk. They put on a long show, and while our attention was directed upward we were able to add two more flying birds to our day's list: **American Robins** and **Common Ravens**. It was an exciting ending to another excellent day of birding in Golden Gate Park.



Photo: SFNE

The eager group of birdwatchers at November 6th's *Birding for Everyone* walk in the SF Botanical Garden. Leader Angie Geiger is in black.