



Clear Skies Ahead

Blue Heron Newsletter • September-October 2010

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

This year our San Francisco public school students returned to school earlier than ever, on August 16th. SF Nature Education will resume classroom enrichment visits in September and field trips in October.

This year we are working with kindergarten through fifth grades in these elementary schools: Sunnyside, E.R. Taylor, Frank McCoppin, and Bret Harte.

There are still some openings in our schedule for third-grade classes. Please let us know if you would like to be involved.

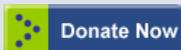
Consider volunteering with our school program. The young students are enthusiastic, and they treasure their time in the outdoors. We train our volunteers; birding experience is not necessary.

Training begins the first week of each month. 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.

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis

Your donations support
SF Nature Education. Please:



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Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

The dozen folks who assembled for the September 4th *Birding for Everyone* Walk at the SF Botanical Garden included a participant who broke the record for youngest birder ever included, three-month-old Callie. We were also delighted to have SF Nature Education founder, Nancy DeStefanis, along with us. With Callie safely strapped to her mother Camille's chest, and accompanied by her grandfather, we headed left on the path alongside the Great Meadow.



Callie Dungy with Mom.

Photo: SFNE



Western Tanager

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Lake. We headed further into the garden to look for resident birds and early migrants.

We hit a bonanza as we found a tall shrub covered in berries northeast of the California Garden. A flurry of movement revealed **American Robins** gorging on the berries, including two in spot-breasted juvenile plumage. A flash of yellow turned out to be our first migrant of the day, a **Western Tanager**. A highlight was the normally elusive **Hutton's Vireo**, which gave us all



Hutton's Vireo

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Townsend's Warbler

Photo: Doug Greenberg

good views as it perched in the open before disappearing into the foliage.

The California Garden held numerous **Song Sparrows**, **Anna's Hummingbirds**, and a **Steller's Jay**, with

only its head and crest visible at the top of a tree. Next stop was the Redwood Forest. We could hear, and occasionally see, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, often the lead birds in a gleaner flock that might include migrants. As if on cue someone called, "What's that pretty yellow bird?" There, straight above our heads, was a **Townsend's Warbler**. Most got good looks while learning the meaning of "birder's neck."

In the Redwood Forest we heard lots of birds high in the canopy, including **Pygmy Nuthatches**, **Brown Creepers**, and more **Chickadees**, but these were difficult to spot. Southwest of the Succulent Garden we saw a number of **Anna's Hummingbirds** chasing each other while loudly scolding. Occasionally were treated to their display flight: arcing high up in the air, diving downward, and making a loud popping noise at the bottom of the dive.

We next headed to the John Muir Pond. On the way there, we had excellent looks at a preening **California Towhee** that was giving its metallic single-note call. Taking a few steps closer to the pond, we noticed activity near the children's garden. The seeding plants were filled with **American** and **Lesser Goldfinches** and **House Finches**.

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Angie Geiger with some enthusiastic birders.

Photo: SFNE

Birding for Everyone Report continued from p. 1

In the surrounding trees and on the ground there were additional birds, including a very bold Western Scrub Jay hopping along the path, apparently hoping for a handout. In a tree above us, at very close range, we discovered a female **Purple Finch**, with its dark auricular patch a reliable field mark. Other sightings included adult and juvenile **Dark-eyed Juncos** and **White-crowned Sparrows**.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Hairy Woodpecker

Along the path above the Children's Garden we spotted a female **Hairy Woodpecker**. Nearby, but higher up, we found a male **Downy Woodpecker** for comparison. Then, to our delight, a large hawk flew by and landed in a



Photo: Judy Harter

Red-shouldered Hawk

Monterey Pine tree a short distance away. It proved to be a most cooperative bird, changing perches several times, each time affording us a better view. We easily identified it as a mature **Red-shouldered Hawk**. It largely ignored us as it stared at the grasses below, hoping, no doubt, for a meal.

It was time to head back to the main gate so we had to leave the hawk behind.

We had just enough time to stop at the Wildfowl Pond for a quick look. There, while we were looking at several **Mallards** sleeping on the island, we noticed a **Belted Kingfisher** in a tree just behind them. The rufous band on its chest revealed it to be a female. Seeing the kingfisher was a fine ending to another exciting day of birding with San Francisco Nature Education.



Photo: Judy Harter

Belted Kingfisher

Local Poets Join Birding for Everyone Walk

Camille T. Dungy is author of *Suck on the Marrow* (Red Hen Press, 2010) and *What to Eat, What to Drink, What to Leave for Poison* (Red Hen Press, 2006), a finalist for the PEN Center USA 2007 Literary Award and the Library of Virginia 2007 Literary Award. Her forthcoming collection, *Smith Blue* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2011), won the 2010 Crab Orchard Open Book Prize.

Dungy has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, Cave Canem, the Dana Award, and Bread Loaf. She is an associate professor in the Creative Writing Department at San Francisco State University. <http://www.camilledungy.com/>

Observation on the Return of Migratory Birds

by Camille T. Dungy

I record each arrival. Early and late
the birds are returning. The blue jay, March 1.
Pigeons and robins, the week before my birthday.

I am only here, in this last week of April, seeing chickadees

wing back and gather nesting. I need the eye I am
when I am witnessing this small and songful resolution,
feathered collations ledge-perched, tufted shadows

skimming our alley's cobbles and then gone

and then back again. When these flitters return
to my block of the black ward one morning and stay
on into the evening, always, I notice, I smile.

© 2010 Camille T. Dungy,
from *Suck on the Marrow*.
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of the author.



Photo: Clai Dungy

A night-flowering Cereus cactus in
the Succulent Garden.



Photo: SFNE

Poets Camille T. Dungy (right) and Barbara Berman with their families at the September *Birding for Everyone* walk.

Barbara Berman's essays, reviews and poetry have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Village Voice*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, *Asian Week*, and in many literary magazines. She lives near Golden Gate Park with her husband, Clifford Lee, an environmental lawyer.

Otter

by Barbara Berman

Sleekly he possesses current,
shimmering glad wet grace.
Silver brown, well muscled,
his whispers swift.

It would be a sacrament of delight
to guard him without words,
beside his river in each season,
grateful, without knowing all his ways.

From *The Generosity of Stars*, a chapbook by Barbara Berman, published in 2008 by Finishing Line Press, PO Box 1626, Georgetown KY 40324. Used with permission.

September Birding Kids Report

Linda Grant, Naturalist

Our Labor Day Weekend outing included a local family with two sons, ages 6 and 3¾. We spent a few moments talking about how to look for a bird. We also talked about birdcalls, songs, and the different reasons birds sing: to protect territory, to attract a mate, to warn of predators, to locate one another, and to teach their young the sounds of their species.



Photo: SFNE

Six is a good age to learn how to use binoculars.

Several flocks of **Canada Geese** were visible on the Great Meadow, and the family had close views of the birds. Strolling into the Fragrance Garden we sighted a **California Towhee** pair foraging on the ground but staying close to the protection of low shrubs.

We arrived at the Wildfowl Pond hoping to find **Mallards**; we were not disappointed. Moving on



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to the Australia garden we stopped to view the magnificent Lilly Pilly tree with its pink clusters of berries. Hearing a squeaky sound, we turned to see a male **Anna's Hummingbird** perched in the open. The boys could see its rose-red throat feathers (gorget) when the bird turned its head.



Photo: Judy Harter

American Robin

On the grass near the Zellerbach Garden we had glimpses of three **American Robins**. We spotted a **Black Phoebe**, the small black-and-white flycatcher.

Nearby we heard the raucous call of a **Western Scrub Jay** before we saw it hopping around the branches of a tree.

Our walk concluded with the entire family enjoying the "alone walk" in the bamboo forest. The kids liked it so much they walked through the bamboo forest three more times!



Photo: Just Chaos/Flickr

Western Scrub Jay



Photo: SFNE

Linda Grant (left) and a family are ready to start the *Birding for Kids* walk.

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: October 2 and November 6, 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.

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Please note: 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](#).

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

Donations to San Francisco Nature Education from September 1, 2009 to August 31, 2010

The generosity of these individuals, businesses, and foundations in the past year has made possible the special relationships between students and their SF Nature Education mentors, and has allowed us to continue our public programs. Thank you!

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