



San Francisco Nature Education is in its 11th year of delivering comprehensive environmental education programs to students from underserved schools in the San Francisco Unified School District.

Field Trips Wind Up

Blue Heron Newsletter • August 2011

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends:

Many thanks to all of you who contributed to our matching grant campaign. I am pleased to announce that with your donations we successfully met our goal of \$5,000!

Here are some highlights of the past year:

- We served more than 1,200 elementary school students from underserved schools.
- Our Saturday programs at Heron's Head Park, SF Botanical Garden, Stow Lake, and Lake Merritt served at least 1,600 adults and children.
- Two of our middle-school interns from Heron Watch will continue their nature education and service at Heron's Head Park in the fall.

In our September issue we will feature a new series of nature walks led by SF Nature naturalists, and an exciting photo essay on the Palace of Fine Arts and Crissy Field by local wildlife photographer Monte Travis.

Membership starts at \$30.

Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Please donate now, or mail a check to:

SF Nature Education, 3450 Geary, Ste. 208,
San Francisco, CA 94118

Best regards,
Nancy DeStefanis



Photo: SFNE

Nancy DeStefanis helps a Lakeshore student get a good look at a heron nest.



Photo: Linda Grant

Naturalist Linda Grant with third-graders on Strawberry Hill island.

End of Season Field Trips

Linda Grant, Naturalist

May was the perfect month to view **Great Blue Herons** and their young in treetop nests. On May 10th, students from Lakeshore Elementary School visited Stow Lake to see the pterodactyl-like birds. Nancy DeStefanis instructed each pupil how to look through the spotting scope to see the birds up close and personal.

A chaperone, Charity, and our third-grade class saw **Brewer's Blackbirds**, **Western Gulls**, and **Red-winged Blackbirds** on our walk. After crossing the Roman Bridge to Strawberry Hill we came upon the nest of a **Pygmy Nuthatch** in the hole of a pine tree. We were fortunate to view a parent going in and out of the nest.

While on a snack break near Huntington Falls we saw movement in the tree above. We were treated to the sight of **Cedar Waxwings**. Other species we saw were **Steller's Jay**, **Black Phoebe**, and **Tree Swallow**.

On our way back to the boathouse and lunch we had special views of **Canada Geese** with their goslings and **Mallards** with their ducklings. Spring had arrived!



Photo: Linda Grant

Little ducks in a row at Stow Lake.

On the pages ahead:

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- 5 More About Heron Watch
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Photo: Linda Grant

Canada Geese with their rapidly growing goslings at Stow Lake.



Photo: Linda Grant

Mallard pair enjoying the water.

Lakeshore School Field Trip

Zoë Unruh, Naturalist

On Tuesday, May 10th, SFNE rounded out its season with a field trip from Lakeshore Elementary. The kids were so excited to use their binoculars that I had to remind them not to look through them while walking!

We saw **Western Gulls** and **Mallards** as we departed from the boathouse. We quickly went to the spotting scope to view the **Great Blue Heron** nests, and saw that the chicks had grown so big! As we crossed the Roman Bridge to Strawberry Hill one of the students identified an **American Robin**. When we passed the waterfall we saw a **Double-crested Cormorant** in the lake, although the students seemed more intrigued by the flowing water.

Moscone School Field Trip

Zoë Unruh, Naturalist

On Tuesday, May 3rd, Mr. Lee's third-grade class from George Moscone Elementary School took a field trip with SF Nature at Stow Lake.

We had quite the exciting field trip. It began with plenty of **Western Gulls** and **Mallard** ducks by the boathouse. Through our binoculars we studied the **Red-eared Slider** turtles that love to sun themselves on the log near the boathouse, and we heard the faint quacks of ducklings!

Next we joined Nancy D. at the spotting scope, and peeked at the **Great Blue Heron** nests on Heron Island. We passed a few **Rock Doves** on our way to Strawberry Island, and spotted a **Steller's Jay**. As we made our way up to the reservoir we were stopped by some fellow birdwatchers who pointed us in the direction of a **Great Horned Owl** family on Strawberry Island. The children were thrilled to see the owlets and mother.

After a hike to the top of Strawberry Hill we shared a snack and sketched the heron nest we had spotted through the scope. On our way back we observed an example of the camouflage we had learned about during our classroom visit when we spotted a **Brown Creeper** making its way up a redwood! It was a day packed with sightings.



Photo: Zoë Unruh

Third graders from George Moscone Elementary School with naturalist Zoë Unruh.



Photo: Zoë Unruh

Naturalist Zoë Unruh with Lakeshore third-graders. Teacher Kathy Rose at right.

As we made our way up the hill, we saw two **Canada Goose** families—one with newly-hatched goslings and the other with goslings a few weeks old. It was awesome to be able to see the differences in size; the older ones were more than twice the size of the younger ones!

We continued up Strawberry Hill in silence, and were able to identify a **Song Sparrow** by its song. At the top of the hill we saw a **Dark-eyed Junco** interested in our snack. We boogied down the hill and saw a **Black-crowned Night Heron** swooping to land on the shore beneath the bridge! It was a good end to another successful school season.



Photo: Judy Harter

Dark-eyed Junco



Chaperones and students enjoy the view from Strawberry Hill.

Lakeshore Second-Graders Visit Stow Lake

Nancy DeStefanis, Exec. Director SFNE

Lakeshore second-graders visited Stow Lake on May 10th. Ms. Cathy Barry had prepared her students for the field trip. They had colored in pictures of local birds in their SFNE field journals and studied the life cycle of the Great Blue Heron.

Naturalist Ruby J. Austin and I each led groups of ten students. The students were absolutely delighted with the wildlife and wonders they observed. The class chaperones shared in their excitement, and a wonderful and educational adventure was had by all.

Photos: SFNE



Canada Goose keeps an eye on goslings at Stow Lake.



Student sketches a local bird in her SFNE field journal.



Second-graders are surprised to learn that the Rustic Bridge stones—chert—are more than 70 million years old.



Jim Thurmond and a second-grader at the spotting scope.



Heron photos: Jesse Krider

Great Blue Heron chicks are now almost grown. We'll return to our viewing spot near Heron Island at Stow Lake next spring to watch for the new crop of fledglings. See you there!

Heron Watch Wraps Up

Nancy DeStefanis

Despite building six nests in March and April, the Great Blue Herons ultimately settled in three nests. We were treated to clear views of the three chicks in each nest. There are still two heron chicks practicing branch hopping on top of a tree on Heron Island. The other seven chicks have already fledged.

The parent Great Horned Owls and their four owlets are still up on Strawberry Island in the trees near the reservoir. They move around from tree to tree, but sharp eyes can usually find at least one.

Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks continue to hunt at Stow Lake. It was a great season. We look forward to 2012!



Photo: SFNE

Volunteers for the last day celebrate a great season. From left: Joan Galjour, Nancy DeStefanis, Jim Thurmond, interns Mina and Logan, Mark Smylie, and Paul Weaver.



Photo: SFNE

ERM volunteer Mike Smylie guides children past the waterfall.



ERM volunteer Sara Selden left, trip leader Nancy DeStefanis, and intern Logan in blue cap, with folks on nature walk.



Great Horned Owl at Stow Lake.

Photo: Paul Chan



Red-tailed Hawk enjoys prey.

Photo: Paul Chan



Great Blue Heron chick stretches its wings.

Photo: Jesse Krider

Volunteers and visitors (including a horse) enjoy the last heron-watching weekend at Stow Lake.



Intern Logan with Officer Mike and his horse.

Photo: SFNE



Field trip leader Angie Geiger (third from left) and ERM volunteers Bailey Blossom (in red) and Mike Smylie (at right holding scope) lead a nature walk.

Photo: SFNE

Birding for Everyone Report

Megan Prelinger

I filled in for trip leader Angie Geiger on the July *Birding for Everyone* walk. Two women joined me for the nature walk.



Photo: Judy Harter

California Quail

We had a *great* time. We saw a family of **California Quail** right off the bat, and watched them for quite a while. We saw a first-year **Black-crowned Night Heron** in the Wildfowl Pond, and watched it feed on fish.

Moving on, we saw the bridge-dwelling community of **Black Phoebes**. By the Monkey Paw tree in the Succulent Garden we saw a **Lesser Goldfinch**.

In the Redwood Grove we saw the resident **Cooper's Hawk** and watched him for a while. A Botanical Garden tour group caught up with



Photo: Len Blumin

Black Phoebe

us and we were able to share our binoculars with them, so a half-dozen people got to see the Cooper's Hawk.

In addition to those marquee birds we saw many of the usual suspects: **Anna's** and **Allen's Hummingbirds**, including both adults and juveniles; **Western Scrub** and

Volunteers Needed for 2011-2012 School Program!

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



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Lesser Goldfinch

woodpecker tree and beehive, and some nests.

The walk lasted a full two hours— at the end the visitors stayed and observed the woodpecker tree and the beehive. They both said they had a great time and learned a lot. It was a very satisfying day!

Editor's note: Megan Prelinger is a longtime birder and president of the board of San Francisco Nature Education.

Steller's Jays, Mallards, Robins, Song Sparrows, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, and Nuthatches. We got good long looks at the juvenile hummingbirds and talked about plumage. I showed the visitors the



Photo: Judy Harter

Cooper's Hawk

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: August 6 & Sept. 3, 2011, 10 am-11 am. 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 Families

First Saturdays: August 6, Sept. 3, & Oct. 1, 2011, 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). Each family: \$10

Online Giving Made Easy

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