



School Program Resumes

Blue Heron Newsletter • October 2011

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends:

Our training for high school interns at Heron's Head Park starts in October and ends in December. The interns then lead public tours in January, February, and March, 2012. If you know a student who might be interested, please forward the application on our web site at http://www.sfnature.org/get_involved/intern.html.

Thanks to all the people who made donations to SF Nature Education during the past fiscal year. In this difficult financial climate we appreciate your generosity more than ever. For a list of donors please see page 4.

We are happy to announce a new birding field trip on Saturday, November 12th: Angie Geiger will lead a walk around the Chain of Lakes in Golden Gate Park.

Coming in February: Birding in the Presidio with Megan Prelinger. Additional field trips will be announced as they are arranged.

Please donate now to support our school and Saturday programs. Remember that your support is always welcome. Membership in SF Nature Education is only \$30.

Best regards,



Nancy DeStefanis

Please donate now, or mail a check to:

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

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The Push to Get Kids Outside Is Growing

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

This month San Francisco Nature Education begins its program of winter classroom visits and field trips to the San Francisco Botanical Garden or Heron's Head Park.

Kindergarten through fifth-grade students will handle real bird wings, bones, and beaks, and draw local birds: Bufflehead ducks, California Quail, and Canada Goose. Students will compare a quail skeleton to the actual bird. They will color birds in their SFNE field journals so they can identify them when seen in the field. Naturalists will conduct a ten-minute slide show/lecture about local birds.

Naturalists will lead small groups of six or seven students on a two-hour hike (third, fourth and fifth grades) through our local parks. Equipped with excellent binoculars and spotting scopes, students are the best spotters on any field trip. Naturalists will focus on sensory experiences as they lead K through second-graders on a one-and-a-half-hour field trip.

This month we look at the impacts on children when they do not get out in nature. Children have continued to become outdoor "endangered species" as video games, cell phones, television, and Internet use have expanded and kept kids indoors.

"The child in nature is an endangered species, and the health of children and the health of the Earth are inseparable," wrote author Richard Louv in *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*.

"This generation may be the first without any direct connection to nature at all," said Dana DeBenham, director of the Howell Conference and Nature Center in Marion Township, Michigan.

While nature-deficit disorder isn't a medically recognized term, the mental and physical results of extensive time

spent indoors is very real, experts added—namely obesity, which has skyrocketed among children.

The Michigan No Child Left Inside Coalition was created in 2008. The program, through its partners, aims to ensure that all Michigan children have access to the state's vast nature offerings.

Kids don't have enough unstructured time outdoors, time where they are free to explore and use their imaginations to create activities, DeBenham said. Unstructured time spurs creativity, time to reflect, and a sense of curiosity in addition to physical benefits, she added.

She has learned that children ages 6-18 are "plugged-in" to digital media, including computer games and the Internet, an average 6.5 hours daily. DeBenham said students' indoor study time has also increased.

Here at San Francisco Nature Education we're doing our best to introduce San Francisco students to exciting outdoor time. This year we are serving five schools and approximately 1,200 students.

For more information, The children and nature network can be found at <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>.



Third-graders birding in the SF Botanical Garden.

Photo: SFNE



The shaded water makes a perfect mirror: a Great Egret in the Wildfowl Pond.



Black Phoebes are among the most commonly seen species.



Red-shouldered Hawk heading off to another spot.



White-throated Sparrows are rarely spotted in the Botanical Garden.

Birds of the San Francisco Botanical Garden

Longtime SFNE supporter Katherine Ulrich enjoys spending time in the San Francisco Botanical Garden (site of SFNE's monthly bird walks, *Birding for Everyone*). "No matter what time of year I go," she says, "there's always something interesting to see, whether it's familiar year-round locals, birds here just for the winter, or colorful migrants each fall and spring. I enjoy spending time observing the birds, trying to catch them in action whenever I can."

All photos: © Katherine Ulrich



Yellow-rumped Warbler catches breakfast.



Allen's Hummingbird with tail feathers on display.



Tree Swallow chicks in the cavity of an agave stalk in the Succulent Garden.



Great Blue Heron stretching out for a better look.



Anna's Hummingbirds can't seem to get enough of the cherry blossoms.

Stow Lake Boathouse News

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

I discovered the first pair of nesting Great Blue Herons at Stow Lake in 1993. In 1996, I started working with Jeff Fones, the longtime manager of the Stow Lake boathouse.

Jeff phoned me on New Year's Day in 1996 to tell me that one of the heron nests had dropped into a peddle boat, and he had saved it for me. I picked it up a few days later, and was excited to see that it was intact! The California Academy of Sciences borrowed the nest for an exhibition and built a custom case for it.

After the exhibition we donated the nest to Audubon Canyon Ranch for a permanent display. Over the years, Jeff and the boathouse staff helped us with our Heron Watch program any time we asked: by storing equipment at the boathouse, lending us rowboats so we could inspect the metal raccoon collars to make sure they were holding during the off season, and in so many other ways.

The boathouse closed after this past Labor Day weekend. On September 10th, the Save Stow Lake Coalition and the boathouse staff held a huge party to honor the boathouse crew for their contributions during 67 years of history with one managing family.

Now the boathouse is empty, but their court case proceeds. Sometime in March 2012, the Court of Appeals will hear their appeal of the decision to award the lease to the New Mexico group Ortega Enterprises.

Despite SF Nature Education's request for special language regarding protection of wildlife to be inserted into the lease, the SF Rec and Park Department and the SF Board of Supervisors did not respond.

In the meantime, our staff will monitor the Stow Lake's incoming vendor to make sure that construction does not negatively impact the Great Blue Heron colony. For now, thank you folks at Stow Lake!

Note: We will keep you posted as events take place.



Nancy DeStefanis and Jeff Fones, manager of the Stow Lake boathouse before it closed last month.

Robin Kincade Photography



The Stow Lake boathouse and its wheeled vehicles for rent.

Photo: Libby/dreamo



Grebes can often be seen near the dock at the Stow Lake boathouse.

Photo: © Katherine Ulrich

Volunteers Needed for 2011- 2012 School Program!

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



Children draw model birds while their parents look on.

Photo: savenature.org



Megan Prelinger talks to visitors at Fort Mason.

Photo: SFNE

AnimalPalooza!

On Saturday, September 24th, we hosted a table at *AnimalPalooza!* at Fort Mason in San Francisco. Sponsored by SaveNature, one thousand families came to learn more about nature and wildlife. At the SF Nature display curious children could choose to draw pictures from models of a Canada Goose, Bufflehead duck, or Great Blue Heron.

Nancy DeStefanis explains the bird models to a young visitor.



Photo: savenature.org

Donations to San Francisco Nature Education from September 1, 2010 to August 31, 2011

The generosity of these individuals 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 valuable public programs. Thank you!

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Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist



On the morning of Saturday, September 3rd, an enthusiastic group of birders—including two eager seven-year-old twin boys—gathered at the bookstore at the SF Botanical Garden. Suddenly the gray, overcast skies were pierced by the shrill shrieks of a mini-flock of **Red-masked Parakeets**, the stars of the hit book and movie, the Parrots of Telegraph Hill. Last month I predicted that these birds would become regulars on our First Saturday Walk, and indeed they were our first birds of the day.

Our first native bird was an immature male **Anna's Hummingbird**. Although his fuchsia-colored gorget consisted of only a few throat patches, this did not stop him from singing (or squeaking, as some might characterize it) with gusto. We then headed out to the freshly mowed Great Meadow. It was covered with dozens of **American Robins**, including many recently fledged birds with pale orange spotted breasts. Also flitting about was the first of several **Black Phoebes** we were to see this morning. Then our attention was attracted by persistent chirping sounds to a small tree just over the fence in the Demonstration Garden.



Photo: Rick Leche

American Goldfinch

In the middle of the tree, a group of young **American Goldfinches** were shaking their wings and begging for food as their parents flew in to feed them. Goldfinches are known to raise two or more broods in a season if conditions are favorable. High-pitched twittering drew our gaze upwards toward the canopy of the Monterey Pines. We noted a number of tiny birds, some hanging upside down as they foraged among the pine needles. This was a flock of **Pygmy Nuthatches**, and they soon flew en masse out of this stand of trees, their famously short tails invisible.

Closer to the ground we observed a **Song Sparrow** hopping about in a shrub. We observed its streaky back and chest, gray face and long tail, which it held

up. Our next stop was the Wildfowl Pond, which held three **Mallards**, all in an advanced stage of molt. The two drakes were beginning to develop their distinctive green heads, but their yellow bills made them easy to distinguish from the orange-and-black-billed female. We moved on to the Chilean Garden. In a stand of yellow flowers we found a flock of more **American Goldfinches** in their winter (or basic) plumage. Although they flushed when we rounded the corner, they did not go far, and we were able to observe them in a nearby tree.



Photo: Judy Harter

Song Sparrow

From there we followed the path past the Moon Viewing Pond to a stand of pine trees that often attracts migrant birds in the fall. As we watched for a few moments we noticed quite a bit of movement in the branches and found another flock of **Pygmy Nuthatches**. These were just above eye level and in better light than the flock we had seen earlier, so everyone in the group got good looks at these lively little birds. We spotted another larger black and white bird with a bright



Photo: Rick Leche

Downy Woodpecker

red patch at the back of the head: a male **Downy Woodpecker**. A female was also in view.

Next we made a stop at the Succulent Garden and saw an abandoned sock-like **Bushtit** nest along the way. We continued to the Salvia Garden with its many vivid tubular flowers. Here we paused to watch the **Anna's Hummingbirds** feeding, singing, and chasing one another. We decided to have a look in the Children's Garden.

There we spotted a few more species, such as a **Western Scrub Jay** that decided to bury a peanut a few feet from where we stood, a pair of **California**

Towhees, and several drab female **House Finches**. More twittering revealed another group of begging fledglings, **Lesser Goldfinches**, this time, being fed by two attentive parents. The arrival of a pair of **Common Ravens** triggered a discussion of the differences between ravens and crows. As interesting



Photo: Len Blumrin

Common Raven

as that was, time was running out, so we turned around for a stroll through the Redwood Grove and California Garden. Aside from a lively flock of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, these areas held more of the species we had seen earlier. Our last stop was the Demonstration Garden, where we found a juvenile **Dark-eyed Junco**, an immature **Cowbird**, and more **Song Sparrows** and **Robins**. The highlight of the day was the variety and number of young birds we saw, not least of which were the two families of goldfinches. A good time was had by all.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

American Crow

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: Oct. 1, Nov 5, Dec 3, 2011, 10 am-12 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, children free, no one turned away due to lack of funds.

Chain of Lakes Birding Walk

Led by Angie Geiger. Nov. 12, 10 am-12 noon. Meet at Middle Lake parking lot in Golden Gate Park. Adults \$10, children free, no one turned away due to lack of funds.