



Heading Back to School

Blue Heron Newsletter • September 2011

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends:

We are now scheduling classroom visits and field trips with students in underserved schools.

Information is available at <http://www.sfnature.org/programs/k-5.html>. We need your support to continue our programs and expand the number of schools we serve.

This *Blue Heron Newsletter* features the amazing photography of Paul Chan and Monte Travis.

Next month we commence training high school students for internships at Heron's Head Park in January, February, and March. 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.

As promised, we will commence our new series of Nature Walks this fall—in October, The Presidio; in November, Crissy Field. Details will be published at www.sfnature.org and in our next newsletter.

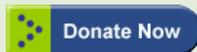
Also in the next issue will be a photo essay by Kate Ulrich about birds of the SF Botanical Garden.

Meanwhile, if you can, join us at **AnimalPalooza** on Saturday, Sept. 24th. San Francisco Nature Education will have a display table with lots of bird exhibits. See page 5 for more information.

Please remember that your donations are always welcome. Help support our school programs and Saturday field trips. Membership 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

Challenges Facing Outdoor Environmental Education

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

We started our outdoor education programs in 2000 because we knew that San Francisco elementary school students desperately needed in-depth exposure to our parks and open spaces. We focused on local birds so children could connect to nature during our two-hour walks. We also taught stewardship and conservation so students could become stewards in their own schools, homes, neighborhoods, and parks.



About the same time, author Richard Louv published *Last Child in the Woods* and *The Nature Principle*, which detailed the importance of getting children outdoors for exploration and play.

Louv also founded the Children & Nature Network so individuals and organizations could exchange ideas and information.

In the Network's latest blog, Louv writes: "September is back-to-school month, and the chanting begins: Drill, test, lengthen the school day, skip recess, cancel field trips, and by all means discourage free time for (gasp!) self-directed play.

Is that approach working, particularly in science learning? Not so well."

Here at San Francisco Nature Education we know the truth of these words. Preparing for testing starts almost immediately. Many teachers are discouraged from taking field trips until the school year is almost over, which means no time for trips until mid-May. School typically ends two or three weeks later.

San Francisco Nature Education has been fortunate in working with teachers and schools from the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) that still value and support outdoor environmental education.

We continue to provide field trips in fall and spring. We provide classroom visits in advance of each field trip. Students need to know that getting out in our parks is more than an afterthought and one-shot deal. On our field trips students are equipped with binoculars, magnifying glasses, and field journals.

Our naturalists bring enthusiasm for nature and their love of children to the small groups they lead—usually six or seven children to each naturalist.



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Golden-crowned Sparrow



Chestnut-backed Chickadee



Wilson's Warbler

Birds Seen Around and About Golden Gate Park

All photos: © Paul Chan



Brewer's Blackbird



Chestnut-backed Chickadee



Purple Finch



Steller's Jay



Caspian Tern



A Great Blue Heron at Crissy Field prepares its meal by drowning an unlucky gopher.



Black-crowned Night Heron swallowing insects.



Snowy Egret fishes in lagoon (note black beak).

Palace of Fine Arts Birds

Monte Travis, wildlife photographer, has been photographing birds in and around San Francisco for several years. In spring, 2011, at the Palace of Fine Arts, he saw a new Great Blue Heron nest with two chicks. This photo essay brings some of the beautiful birds of San Francisco to readers in striking close-up detail.

All photos: © Monte Travis



Great Blue Heron stretches at Palace of Fine Arts.



Adult great blue heron in new nest.

Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist



The *Birding for Everyone* walk on August 6th started out overcast and cool for our group of nine. We skirted the Gardening Club tables that had been set up inside the entrance of the SF Botanical Garden. We scanned the Great Meadow and were

happy to see two **American Robins** on the lawn. From there we headed south toward the California Garden. Along the way we noted quite a few **Anna's Hummingbirds** busily chasing one another.

Once we reached the California Garden we were rewarded by a sighting of a **Red-shouldered Hawk** gazing down from a Monterey Cypress tree. We could clearly see the rufous breast that indicates an adult bird. After a few moments it launched straight down in pursuit of some unseen (by us) prey. As we turned away, one of our party noticed an **Allen's Hummingbird** perched a little distance from us. It did not stay still for long but returned to its perch between short feeding forays.



Allen's Hummingbird

Photo: Len Blumin

We continued past the Redwood Grove when movement in a stand of trees caught our eye. We gathered in front of the group of pine trees. The first species we noted was a hatch-year **Black Phoebe**, as



Pygmy Nuthatch

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

indicated by its buff-colored wing bars. At least two other Black Phoebes were also making forays from our little stand of trees, possibly a family group. As we watched we realized that there was a nice mixed flock of birds darting among the

branches. The approximately twenty minutes we spent there rewarded us with the following sightings: **Pygmy Nuthatches, Chestnut-backed**

Chickadees, one male **Downy Woodpecker**, at least three **Wilson's Warblers**, a flock of about 16 **Bushtits**, and one **Western Flycatcher** (most likely a Pacific Slope). We all agreed that it had been a worthwhile stop.



Wilson's Warbler

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

As we headed toward the Succulent Garden one of our sharp-eyed group spotted a **Brown Creeper**

making its way up the trunk of a nearby Redwood tree. It was a nice treat to see the Creeper drop down twice more to try different pathways along the trunk. In the Succulent and Salvia Gardens we observed more Anna's Hummingbirds.

Another of our party noticed a Selasphorus Hummingbird perched a little distance from us that could have been a **Rufous** or **Allen's**. The Selasphorus genus of hummingbirds also includes the Broad-tailed, among other species. The Rufous and Allen's are notoriously difficult to tell apart, especially the immature and females. Both species can be found in the Bay Area, but only the Allen's breeds here. Allen's typically begin leaving for Mexico in July, and are mostly gone by August. The Rufous Hummingbird breeds much farther north, between Alaska and southern Washington, but passes through the Bay Area on its way to Mexico.



Rufous Hummingbird

Photo: Rick Leche

For most of the year the safest method of identifying Selasphorus hummers is by geography. The method does not work well in the Bay Area in August, when a bird could be a lingering Allen's or a migrating Rufous.

The male Anna's were particularly active, and we watched continuous dueling display flights. As soon as one bird finished his dive the second took off, then the first repeated, and this continued as we moved on.

Our next stop was the Children's Garden at the west end of the Botanical Garden. There we had views of a number **Song Sparrows** as well as a pair of **Scrub Jays**. Overhead, we had a fly-by **Double-crested Cormorant, Common Ravens, Rock Pigeons**, and many **Western Gulls**. We also saw **Red-masked Parakeets**, a first for our walk. These



Red-masked Parakeet

Photo: Matt Knott

noisy birds have become widespread throughout the city, and they will, no doubt, become regular sightings.



American Goldfinch

Photo: Rick Leche

We stopped at the Chilean Garden. There was a little tree in a field of flowers. Arranged among the bare branches were six **American Goldfinches**. The most interesting aspect of this sighting was the variation among these birds. They were clearly between plumages, and not one matched a picture in a field guide. The males still retained a few of their bright yellow feathers in odd patches, but the females had mostly molted into their basic plumage. It was quite an interesting comparison.

The Wildfowl Pond seemed empty as we passed, but then we spotted a pair of **Mallards** along the water's edge. The drake was in full eclipse—that is, it resembled the female, except for the yellow bill.

On our way toward the exit we passed through the Demonstration Garden. To our delight we spotted two male **California Quail** pecking along the pathway. They did not seem the least bit disturbed by our presence, so we watched them at our leisure. What a nice ending to another excellent morning of birding!

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: Sept. 3 & Oct. 1, 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: Sept. 3, 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

AnimalPalooza!

Saturday, Sept 24, 2011, 11 am–5 pm
Fort Mason, San Francisco

Journey to where the wild things are at AnimalPalooza! Get closer to nature with hands-on animal encounters, scientific exploration, and fun children's activities.

Engage with an ocelot, bats, serval, lemur, porcupine, hedgehog, fox, alligator, skink, walking sticks, snakes, bats frogs, turtles, rabbits, ducks, raptors, gopher, and many more.

Touch marine artifacts and fur pelts, dissect owl pellets, make wildlife origami, paint your face like an animal, and make insect masks.

Sponsors: Save Nature, San Francisco Nature Education, and others.

Adults: \$10; children \$8. \$2 off with code **sfnatured**

Tickets at Eventbrite at <http://animalpalooza.eventbrite.com> and at the door. \$2 off with code

Volunteers Needed for 2011-2012 School Program!

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



San Francisco
Nature
Education



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