



# Spring Has Sprung!

*Blue Heron Newsletter* · April 2012

## Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to announce that our annual Heron Watch program at Stow Lake is about to begin. Our observation site opens April 14th for six Saturdays through May 19th. Observation through our high-powered spotting scopes is free, though we very much appreciate donations to support our Saturday programs. We will be selling our heron greeting cards and postcards as well.

Two different nature walks leave from the observation site every Saturday at 10:30 am. The adult walk returns at noon after stopping at different spots to observe various nests. Adults \$10, children free.

The family walk begins at 10:30 am and returns at 11:30. We focus on learning about local birds. Each family: \$10. Our high school interns will lead both adult walks and family walks. All children will be given a Stow Lake field journal to color at home.

Great Blue Herons have been nesting at Stow Lake since 1993. Since we began counting, 149 chicks have learned to fly there. In our 20th year of monitoring the colony we continue to show the nesting birds at Stow Lake to locals and visitors.

As we announced last month, we have a \$10,000 matching grant that expires April 30th. If you haven't given already, please donate now online or send a check. This grant will support our award-winning school and internship programs.

Thanks so much for your continuing support. I look forward to seeing you at Heron Watch!

**Nancy DeStefanis**



## Bret Harte Third-Graders Learn About Nesting Birds

**Anastasia Marin, School Program Coordinator**

On March 20th, SF Nature Education naturalists visited Ms. Hackett's third-grade class at Bret Harte Elementary School. The theme was *Nesting Birds of Stow Lake*.

We began with a slideshow of local birds, and many of the students immediately recognized birds from their winter trip to the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

Our classroom presentation content is aligned with state standards, so we focused on the lifecycle of the Great Blue Heron. Then, with Ms. Hackett, we staffed three stations: draw a Red-tailed Hawk or Great Blue Heron; draw a



School Program Coordinator Anastasia Marin holds the Anna's Hummingbird nest.

local bird's nest and its contents: Anna's Hummingbird (cup nest), Black Phoebe (mud nest), American Robin (platform nest), Bushtit (sock nest), Mourning Dove (scrape nest); and touch and feel real eggs, including: Ostrich, Anna's Hummingbird, Canada Goose, Great Blue Heron, Mallard Duck, and Mourning Dove eggs.

The students were so engaged you could have heard a pin drop! In conclusion, we discussed how to prepare for the next field trip: recycle, compost, and dispose of minimal trash.

We look forward to seeing these students again at Stow Lake on May 10th.



Student shows off a Canada Goose egg.

Photos: SFNE

### On the pages ahead:

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Students draw the Red-tailed Hawk.



Ms. Hackett oversees the "Draw a Bird" station as a Great Blue Heron model looks on.



Third-grader tests the weight of a real Ostrich egg.

### SF Nature brings birds inside the classroom.



Some eggs are smaller than others.



Student contrasts a Magellanic Penguin egg with other eggs on the table.



Students examine the mud nest of the Black Phoebe.



Students sketch an American Robin nest and its contents (left) and a Common Bushtit sock nest.

Photos: SFNE



Coordinator Anastasia Marin shows how the Great Horned Owl can rotate his head.



Students sketch the Canada Goose.

Photos: SFNE

## Kindergarten Students Prepare for Stow Lake Field Trip

Anastasia Marin, School Program Coordinator

SFNE naturalists visited Ms. Amber Cooper's bilingual Spanish kindergarten class at Bret Harte Elementary School on March 20th.

We started with a brief slideshow of local birds. The children remembered many of the birds from their winter field trip to the SF Botanical Garden.

Next, students learned about local nests from Ms. Cooper, who demonstrated the **Anna's Hummingbird** nest and **American Robin** and **Black Phoebe** nests. The children were thrilled as they identified cloth, leaves, cotton, lichen, sticks, and mud in the various nests.

Students drew either a **Canada Goose** or **Great Blue Heron**. In preparation for the field trip in May the students will color their San Francisco Nature Education field journal *Sixteen Birds of Stow Lake*.



Students draw the Great Blue Heron.



Teacher Amber Cooper shows the Anna's Hummingbird cup nest to her students.

## PLEASE HELP US REACH OUR MATCHING GRANT GOAL!

San Francisco Nature Education has received **\$10,000** as a matching grant for through **April 30th, 2012**. Please donate now so we can meet our goal!

Donors who send **\$30** or more will receive a membership in San Francisco Nature Education.

Donors of **\$250** or more will receive five Great Blue Heron greeting cards.

Donors of **\$500** or more will receive a signed Great Blue Heron photo (5x7 or 8x10, donor's choice).

Donors of **\$1,000** or more will receive **either** a guided tour of the Great Blue Herons and chicks at Stow Lake, for up to ten people, **or** two photos of Great Blue Herons at Stow Lake signed by the photographer.



Or send a check to: SF Nature Education  
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San Francisco, CA 94118

e-mail: [info@sfnature.org](mailto:info@sfnature.org)  
telephone: 415-387-9160  
[www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org)



Photo: James Sullivan

## Upcoming Events

**Birding for Everyone:** First Saturdays: Apr. 7, May 5, and Jun. 2, 10 am to 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 for lack of funds.

**Heron Watch:** Opening Day Saturday, April 14, and the following six Saturdays: April 21, 28, May 5, 12, and 19, from 10 am to 1 pm. Come and see Great Blue Herons and their chicks! Follow sign at Stow Lake boathouse to program site. Observation using spotting scopes: free. Interns and volunteers will be there to answer questions and explain heron behavior. Donations welcome.

**Stow Lake Field Trips from Heron Watch Site:** Six Saturdays: April 14, 21, 28, May 5, 12, and 19. **Adult walk:** 10:30 to noon. Adults: \$10. All walks will be led by volunteers or interns. **Family walk:** 10:30 am to 11:30. Each family: \$10. Children will be given a Stow Lake field journal to color at home. For more information see **Heron Watch** online or call 415 387-9160.

### Birdhouse Workshops at Contemporary Jewish Museum

Sunday, April 15th, 2-4 pm. Workshops free with museum adult entry fee. In conjunction with an exhibit, *Do Not Destroy: Trees, Art, and Jewish Thought*, the museum is offering two free family art studios in which children and parents will construct birdhouses. Second workshop is Sunday, June 17th, same time. Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director of SFNE, will talk about nesting birds of Stow Lake. For more information: e-mail [info@thecjm.org](mailto:info@thecjm.org).

## Heron Watch Begins April 14th! Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

Volunteers and interns, joined by SFNE's executive director (who has been monitoring this heron colony since 1993) will be at Stow Lake for six Saturdays beginning on April 14th, from 10 am to 1 pm.

As we go to press, there are at least two nests with eggs. We hope to show the chicks on Opening Day. Another nest (see photo below) is under construction by a pair of herons. The male has made numerous twig presentations to the female.



Photo: Jesse Krider



Photo: Judy Harter

Four high school interns have signed up to lead trips and explain the behavior of these magnificent birds, best viewed through our high-powered spotting scopes. Free assistance will be provided by our volunteers and interns. Donations to SF Nature Education will be appreciated.

In addition, nature walks will leave every Saturday at 10:30 am from the observation site. See *Stow Lake Field Trips* in *Upcoming Events*, above, for details.

For more information visit [www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org)

We look forward to seeing you at the 20th breeding season of the Great Blue Herons at Stow Lake!



# Heron's Head Intern Report

Mina C., Intern

It was a windy Saturday morning when we began pre-fielding at nine. We saw a **Red-throated Loon** which was of particular interest to us as they are relatively rare. The light was good and many of the birds were close to shore.



Photo: Len Blumin

Ruddy Duck

At the start of the tour we saw a few **Ruddy Ducks**. While resting on the water, rafts of Ruddy Ducks are easily identifiable, as their stiff tails stick up from the water at a sharp angle. We saw several **Buffleheads**, males and females. The males have more white on the head and body than the females, which are mainly grey and black with some white near the eye. There were also many **American Wigeons** along the coast. Interestingly, the iridescent patch on the male American Wigeon's head can appear green or purple depending on the light.

As we traveled along the path we saw some **Black Oystercatchers**. These were fascinating, with their shockingly bright red-orange bills and dull pink legs. The eyes are irregularly shaped. They are yellow and surrounded by a red ring of skin. We walked on to observe some **Double-crested Cormorants** drying their wings on the pier. We were lucky to see some **American Avocets**, some in breeding plumage. Those, with their cinnamon-colored heads and necks, were a nice contrast to the others in black and white plumage. We spotted some



Photo: Rick Leche

Belted Kingfisher



Photo: Len Blumin

Surf Scoter

**Black-necked Stilts** among the avocets.

Another highlight of the day was a **Belted Kingfisher** fishing for food. Many people on our tour were quite taken with a

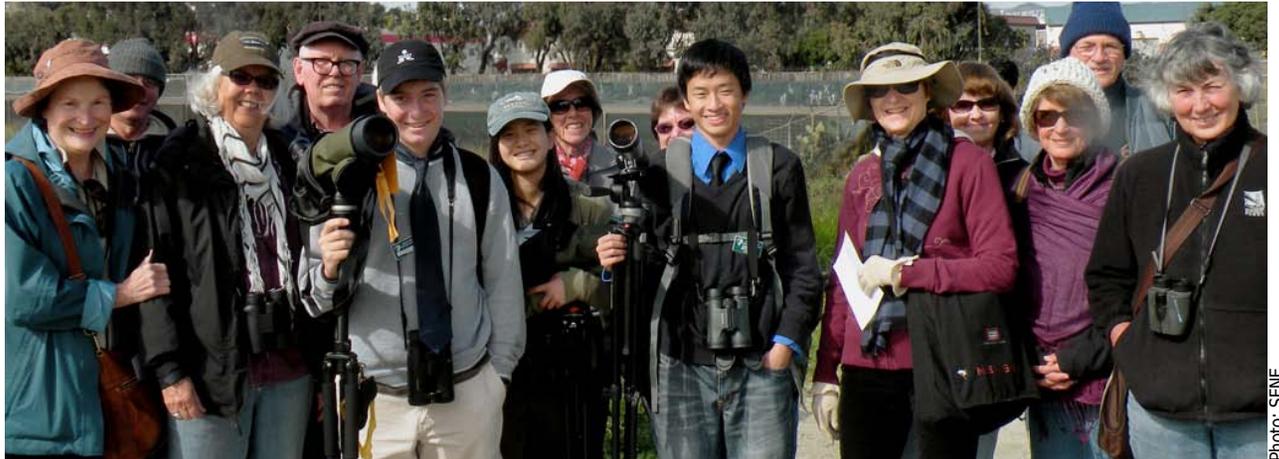


Photo: SFNE

Interns Logan (in black cap), Mina, and Eddy (center) with their first tour group of the day.

**Surf Scoter** which was swimming near the coast. It kept diving just as we got a good view of it. A good percentage of the Surf Scoter population in the San Francisco Bay was wiped out in an oil spill, so it was reassuring to see one.

We also saw four species of grebes: **Western, Clark's, Eared**, and a few **Horned Grebes**. We saw five species of gulls: **Mew Gulls, Western Gulls, California Gulls, a Herring Gull**, and a **Glaucous-winged Gull**.

On the way back we saw a **Snowy Egret**. These were once hunted for their plumes (used for ladies' hats) to the point of near extinction. The species has rebounded well, and the birds are now fairly common. There were also a pair of **Canada Geese** quite close to the path.



Photo: Len Blumin

Snowy Egret

In addition to the birds mentioned, we saw the following species: **Mallard, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Brown Pelican, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, Spotted Sandpiper, Willet, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Least Sandpiper, Rock Pigeon, Anna's Hummingbird, Common Raven, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Savannah Sparrow**, and **White-crowned Sparrow**. In total, we saw an amazing total of 40 species in Heron's Head Park!



## Graduating from Heron's Head Park Mina C.

This internship at Heron's Head Park has been a great experience. I've had a lot of fun while learning. I especially enjoyed learning about the birds of Heron's Head Park, since I've never had the opportunity to learn in depth about shorebirds and diving ducks. I am happy now to be able to recognize all the common birds of Heron's Head!

Leading the tours was something I'd never done before. I found I really enjoyed talking to people. I learned how to deal with questions I couldn't answer, time limitations, and other problems. I got to hone my people skills. I enjoyed observing birds, leading groups, and the company of my fellow interns.

It was an eye-opening experience to learn the history of Heron's Head Park. I never knew anything about the place, and hearing how the community succeeded in reclaiming it meant a lot to me. It made me appreciate the power of ordinary people. Understanding how much the San Francisco Bay Area has changed—from a grassy place to the city it is now—helped me think about the way humans change their environments.

# Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist



The 15 people who gathered for the March 5th Birding for Everyone walk at the SF Botanical Garden included Anastasia Marin, SF Nature Education School Program Coordinator. We were pleased to have Executive Director Nancy DeStefanis join us to tell us about other programs SF Nature Education offers to the public. Soon we headed out into the garden in glorious sunshine.

The day proved to be a good one in which to keep looking up. Our first sighting of the day was two **Canada Geese** flying over the Great Meadow. We next spotted a group of black birds soaring above us. Their wedge-shaped tails and croaking calls showed them to be **Common Ravens**. Soon we heard the “caw, caw, caw” of an **American Crow** for direct comparison.

We noticed two **Red-tailed Hawks** wheeling through the air in unison, possibly as part of a courtship ritual. Our progress was interrupted by a sighting of an **Allen’s Hummingbird** perched at the top of a small tree. We had an opportunity to study him as he scanned for potential competitors.

When we arrived at the Wildfowl Pond we found two very different gulls. A small **Mew Gull** in sub-adult plumage was easily identified by its petite, almost pigeon-like bill. The large **Western Gull**, with gleaming white head and grey mantle (back), had a large bill that bulged at the point marked by a red dot.



Mew Gull

Photo: Judy Harter



Anna's Hummingbird

Photo: Judy Harter

The Western Gull, which resides in the Bay Area year-round, is the only winter gull species with an unstreaked head. On the pond there were at least ten **American Coots** chasing one another while making their strange loud calls. Across the pond a **Western Scrub Jay** made a brief appearance in plumage of brilliant blue.

As we continued, the group was tempted to stop for Hummingbird sightings, both **Allen’s and Anna’s Hummingbirds**. On the path above the Moon-viewing Pond a quick movement caught my eye. As I focused my binoculars I was surprised to see a **Red-breasted Sapsucker**. It made but a brief appearance before dropping down.



Cedar Waxwing

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Red-shouldered Hawk

Photo: Judy Harter

as it soared overhead. In the Succulent Garden a sharp-eyed participant spotted a **Pygmy Nuthatch** moving head-first down the “nest stalk,” the dried Century Plant spike that provided nesting holes for three species in 2011. A feather sticking out of the top hole made us wonder if nesting was already underway.



Pygmy Nuthatch

Photo: Len Blumrin



Dark-eyed Junco

Photo: Judy Harter

We continued to the Children’s Garden. A pair of **Dark-eyed Juncos** made an appearance before flying off flashing their white outer tail feathers. Near the John Muir Pond we paused to get a pair of **House**

**Finches**, atop a nearby tree, into scope view. We were rewarded by sightings of a number of species, including **Bushtits, Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, and a noisy **Steller’s Jay**.



House Finch

Photo: Doug Greenberg

As we retraced our steps we saw a **Townsend’s Warbler** and a number of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and Chickadees. All the birds were busy foraging, but it was starting to get late, so we headed back through the Redwood Grove. We were delighted to see two



Cooper's Hawk

Photo: Rick Leche

**Cooper’s Hawks** weave their way through the trees, surprising us by their speed as they made an arc around us.

When we exited the Redwood Grove we spotted a **Black Phoebe** hawking for insects high overhead, easily identifiable by its tuxedo-like plumage. In the tiny pond at the eastern entrance to the California Garden we spotted **Mallards**, two males and a

female. We enjoyed excellent views of a female **Anna’s Hummingbird** that chose that moment to forage in purple flowers above the pond.



Lesser Goldfinch

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Including the many **Rock Pigeons**, and the heard-only **Lesser Goldfinches, Purple Finches, and Song Sparrows**, we counted a respectable 30+ species for the morning.

### Dates to Remember:

See page 4 for details.

- Apr. 7 **Birding for Everyone (SF Botanical Garden)**
- Apr. 14 **Heron Watch (Stow Lake)**
- Apr. 14 **SF Nature Stow Lake Field Trip**
- May 5 **Birding for Everyone**