



Urban Birding West to East

Blue Heron Newsletter • February 2012

Letter from the Board President



Dear Friends and Supporters,

As the newly elected president of SFNE I'd like to thank you for your warm welcome and support. Your contributions enabled SFNE to accomplish a full 2011 agenda—bravo and thanks!

SFNE is planning an expanded outreach in 2012 to include additional student programs focused on our city schools underserved students from K-5.

SFNE partners with inner city public schools to give students an interesting and interactive outdoor learning experience. Our programs connect San Francisco's youth to the environment and the wildlife that lives in and migrates through our city.

With the current funding cuts to schools we rely on your generous donations more than ever.

Our Summer Birding Program for kids ages 5-10 runs this June, July, August, and September. Watch our newsletter and calendar for specific events. Our Saturday programs are held throughout the city for adults and children. Families can enjoy a guided field trip and learn firsthand about the wildlife that shares our city.

We are currently in the midst of our winter program, Migratory Birds at Heron's Head Park. We had an excellent turnout on Saturday, January 14th; it was a pleasure to meet our hardworking high school student interns and watch them in action.

We promise to bring you an exciting and expanded program for 2012; your continued support and consideration makes it all possible.

Best regards,

Paul J Weaver

President, SFNE Board
of Directors



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Third-Graders' Field Trip

Jeanne Crawford, Naturalist

We had a wonderful field trip on Tuesday, January 10, with Ms. Hackett's third-grade class from Bret Harte Elementary School. Seven enthusiastic bird observers and I explored the San Francisco Botanical Garden. Two naturalists led other student groups.

The Wildfowl Pond was a highlight of the trip. There we got close-up views of **American Coots**. We saw how stunning they looked with their black feathers, red eyes, white bills, and greenish legs. We watched a **Black-crowned Night Heron** across the pond as it preened on a low branch over the water.

A pair of **Mallards** swam by, and we discussed why they looked different from each other and why the male had such dramatic iridescent colors.

The children learned that the female needs camouflage for protection when sitting on eggs



Students enjoy their walk through the Bamboo Forest.

by the bank of the water. During a rest stop the children drew pictures of birds they had seen in their field journals.

This group had such good eyes for spotting birds that they saw many before their leader saw them!



Mr. Tony, a naturalist, points out a bird.

Field Trip Photos: SFNE

Some, like **gulls** and a **raven**, were flying high in the sky. Others, like the **White-crowned Sparrow**, were hopping on the ground. The students kept silent as we passed close to several **Canada Geese**.

In the Fragrance Garden we tested our reactions to different smells—some were pleasant but others stinky. We saw the statue of Saint Francis (in Spanish "San Francisco"). Our city is named after this lover of all birds and animals.

We could have kept on hiking, as we were having such a good time. The children knew there were a lot of things they did not see, and they would like to come back again. Next spring: on to Stow Lake!



Third-grader enjoys a good view of a nearby bird.

On the pages ahead:

- 2 Third-Grade Trip Photos
- 3 Heron's Head Park; Upcoming Events
- 4 *Birding for Everyone*
- 5 Photo Essay: Winter Birds of Golden Gate Park

Coming Up:

See page 3 for details.

- Feb. 4 [Birding for Everyone](#)
- Feb. 11 [Heron's Head Park](#)
- Feb. 25 [Birding Crissy Field](#)
- March 3 [Birding for Everyone](#)
- March 10 [Heron's Head Park](#)



Photo: Jeanne Crawford

Naturalist Jeanne Crawford and her group.



Photo: SFNE

Drawing a bird seen on the walk.



Photo: SFNE

Ms. Paulette, chaperone, and students next to a dawn redwood.

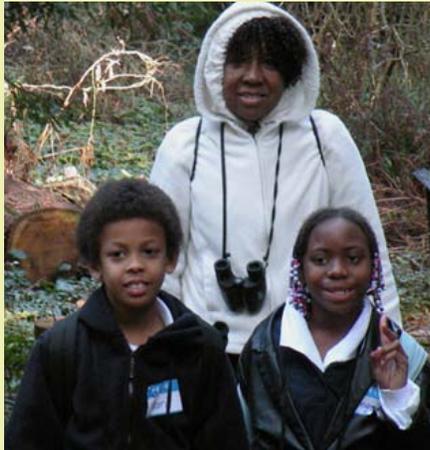


Photo: SFNE

Ms. Paulette and students on a narrow trail near the Redwood Grove.



Photo: SFNE

Students draw birds in their nature journals.



Photo: Jeanne Crawford

Ms. Hackett and a student study pictures of local birds.



Photo: Judy Harter

Black-crowned Night Heron

Third-Grade Trip to the San Francisco Botanical Garden



Photo: Judy Harter

A female and two male Mallards with American Coots



Photo: Judy Harter

White-crowned Sparrow

Heron's Head Intern Report

Eddy Z., Intern



January 14th was the day of the first public tour of the 2012 season. Luckily for us, the sun slipped out of the clouds and warmed the air. So we were hoping for a terrific turnout for the early afternoon tours!

At 9 a.m. interns Mina and Logan, Kristina Kifer (a naturalist), and I headed into the park to get a glimpse of what we might see later that day. As we entered, we were overwhelmed by the sight of ducks and shorebirds. First we spotted a **Black-crowned Night Heron** standing on the boom of the lagoon. Then we began scoping out the **Ruddy Ducks** and **American Wigeons** in the waters.

Shortly after, we made our way further down the road and found a dozen **Western Grebes**. We enjoyed the sight of a **Pelagic Cormorant**. At 10 a.m. we made our way back to the entrance to begin our tours. Logan and Mina led the first group out while Kris and I led the second group. We began the tour with brief introductions and a history of the park then and now.

The tour was off to a good start when we saw **Black-bellied Plovers** and a **Snowy Egret** by the shore. As we walked down the path we noted the **American Avocet**, **Great Egret**, and several other birds that were all together in one spot in the wetlands. By 11:30 our tour had ended, and we headed back for the next group. Kris and I teamed up again

but this time we were joined by Paul Weaver, president of the SFNE board of directors, and seven visitors.

Again we made our trip across the park. We made long stops near the **Ruddy Ducks** and **Buffleheads**, but ultimately we traveled further down. We continued until we spotted **Black Oystercatchers**, and I aimed our spotting scope on the birds for our visitors. Before we reached the entrance a few of us spotted an **Anna's Hummingbird**. It was a great way to end the last tour of the day! During the four tours we spotted a total of 43 birds.

Forty adults and children participated in our four tours. We debriefed and talked about our tours. Mina and Logan had spotted the **Common Goldeneye** and **Horned Grebe** on their tours. Then we sketched our favorite birds and discussed the day's experience. All in all, it was a terrific kick-off to the birding season!

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone: First Saturdays, Feb. 4, Mar. 3, Apr. 7, 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, children free, no one turned away due to lack of funds.

Heron's Head Park: Saturdays, Feb. 11 and March 10. Tours start at 10 am, 10:30, 11:00, final tour at 11:30. Guided tours last about one hour. Free!

Birding Crissy Field: Saturday, Feb. 25, 10 am-noon. Adults \$10, children free. Megan Prelinger and Logan K. (with spotting scope) will co-lead the walk. Meet in front of warming hut. See abundant migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and passerines!

Volunteers Needed for 2012 School Program!

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

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Intern Logan tracks a shore bird through the scope.



Logan and Mina, fourth and fifth from left, lead a second tour.

All photos: SFNE



Getting a great view through the scope.



Interns Mina and Logan (wearing badges) lead the first public tour of the day with SFNE board president Paul Weaver (back row, hatless).



Intern Eddy Zheng (far right) and naturalist Kristina Kifer (in purple hat) lead their first group of the day.

Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist



Judging by the number of people who showed up for the January 7th *Birding for Everyone* walk at the San Francisco Botanical Garden, "Take up birdwatching" seems to have been a popular New Year's resolution this year. The weather was glorious, especially for January. Everyone

was very enthusiastic, even young Michael, an avid birder and the only child in the group of about twenty adults. We were joined by Taji, a new SF Nature Education volunteer, and his friend Viri. Taji was kind enough to carry the spotting scope for entire two-hour walk!

We headed out to the Great Meadow, when movement in the distance caught our attention. It was a **Yellow-rumped Warbler** looking for insects. He was joined by others that flew in from surrounding trees. A flash of blue revealed a **Western Scrub Jay** popping up behind the trunk of the same tree.



Photo: Rick Leche

Yellow-rumped Warbler

We moved on, but hadn't gotten very far when someone called out "Hawk!" There, perched regally at the top of a nearby Monterey cypress, was a **Red-tailed Hawk**. Everyone marveled at the great spotting scope views.



Photo: Rick Leche

Red-tailed Hawk

We continued to the Wildfowl Pond. Seen in the scope, a grayish shape on the far side of the pond transformed into a **Black-crowned Night Heron**, fast asleep. Every once in a while one very red eye would open lazily to peer at us.

To our delight, we discovered a female **Hooded Merganser** preening on a rock on the island in the center of the pond. Then we spotted the drake lolling under some overhanging branches. Other birds on the pond included a single **Mew Gull**, an adult and a juvenile **Western Gull**, and about twenty **American Coots**.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Male (left) and female Hooded Merganser

Our next stop was the Chilean Garden, where our winter tradition is to look for the **Red-breasted Sapsucker**. It took only a few seconds before someone called out, "There he is!" A mid-sized red-headed woodpecker was working his way up one branch and then another. We all got great looks at this winter visitor.



Photo: Katherine Ulrich

Red-breasted Sapsucker

We followed the path above the Moon-viewing Pond and spotted an **American Robin** picking black berries from a shrub. A few meters further we came upon a tree that was covered in orange berries. There the thrush activity picked up as Robins flew in from every direction. A smaller bird in the berries turned out to be a **Hermit Thrush**. That bird disappeared into the undergrowth, and when we tried to find it we discovered a **Fox Sparrow**.



Photo: Matt Kroth

Hermit Thrush

We saw silhouetted against the sun a bird that sallied out and back to the same perch. The black back and hood, contrasting with a white belly, were not easy to see, but the

Black Phoebe was identified by her behavior and shape. Just then someone discovered a second **Red-breasted Sapsucker** in a nearby pine tree! This one was a darker shade of red than the first Sapsucker. As we were leaving it flew into the dwarf Redwood that droops over the path.

From there we went to the Succulent Garden, where we enjoyed sunshine and warmth, but not many birds. Every once in a while, an **Anna's Hummingbird** would whiz by, but none lingered—perhaps too busy building nests this time of year. We moved on to the California Garden when the sound of high-pitched chirping stopped us. Its source was a flock of tiny **Bushtits** working the foliage. Interspersed in the flock were a few **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**. We could hear high overhead—but not see—a flock of **Pygmy Nuthatches** in their habitat in the Monterey pines.

We had good luck in the California Garden; one of our first sightings was of a **Song Sparrow** that serenaded us from a small tree. Then we noticed a small shape zoom by: an **Anna's Hummingbird** arcing overhead in a display flight. We could barely follow as it dove toward the ground, its tail making a loud screech at the bottom of the dive. Then the tiny bird hovered motionless above us for a few moments before launching into a repeat performance.



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Song Sparrow

A few steps later we spotted another **Red-Tailed Hawk** perched atop a small tree in the middle of the garden. We enjoyed fine scope views of a bird that was significantly paler than the hawk seen earlier. Garden volunteer Rob Cullison, who happened to be passing by, pointed out that this was the "nail gun" bird that had been rescued last October and released in the Botanical Garden in early November. She appeared to be fully recovered and healthy.

Cheered by the sighting, we headed back toward the front entrance, as the walk was drawing to a close. In the Dwarf Conifer Pond we spotted our only **Mallard** of the day, a fine male with a gleaming green head. Before departing, we peeked into the Exhibition Garden, where we were rewarded by side-by-side sightings of **White-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows**. Including flyovers by **Common Ravens**, **Rock Pigeons**, and **House Finches**, we counted 26 species for the day. We were quite pleased with our two-hawk, two Sapsucker, two Merganser, and four-sparrow-species morning!



Hooded Merganser

Wintering Birds of Golden Gate Park

A number of migratory birds make the Bay Area their winter home. Though their arrival and departure times vary, most of the wintering species remain here throughout December and January. Golden Gate Park provides good habitat—with food, water, and shelter—that attracts many of them. These are a few common visitors you’re likely to find in the park this winter.

All photos: © Katherine Ulrich



Golden-crowned Sparrow



Wood Duck



Ruby-crowned Kinglet



American Coot



Townsend's Warbler



Fox Sparrow



Northern Pintail