



Letter from the Board President

Spring has hatched good news! San Francisco Nature Education (SFNE) has received a challenge grant of \$10,000 from two generous and longtime supporters.

From now until April 30th, each donation we receive will be matched dollar for dollar. Our goal is to raise the minimum \$10,000 to enable SFNE to expand our school and Saturday programs for the public.

SFNE is proud to report the following success stories:

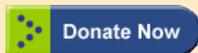
- Eddy, an intern at Heron's Head Park for the past two years and a senior at Lowell, has applied for college. He plans to major in environmental sciences and work someday for the EPA. Eddy is our second Heron's Head Park intern to pursue a career in environmental sciences. In view of Eddy's hard work SFNE was delighted to write a letter of reference in his support.
- Logan, a third-year SFNE intern now conducting tours at Heron's Head Park, also co-leads birding tours for San Francisco Nature Education.
- Cedric, a high-school junior in SF, has joined the Heron Watch intern program. An experienced birder, he will co-lead public tours at Stow Lake this spring, collect data for the Colonial Waterbird Survey of Great Blue Herons, and conduct a special research project for SFNE. He is a welcome addition to our internship program.

SFNE has added three more Saturday field trips to our existing list of 25: Birding Crissy Field, Birding Chain of Lakes, and Birding Suto Park. Suggestions are welcome for other trips.

Thanks so much for your support. Please contribute to our matching grant and watch your dollars at work! See details on page 2.

Best regards,

Paul J Weaver



Bret Harte Third-Grade Field Trip

Linda Grant, Naturalist

A sunny winter day welcomed Mr. Klein and his third-grade class from Bret Harte Elementary to the SF Botanical Garden. Naturalists Tony and Erich joined me in leading groups of about six students each on January 10th. At the beginning of the walk students focused their binoculars on a group of **Canada Geese** foraging in the Great Meadow. The geese allowed the students to get very close, and everyone was enthralled by those large birds.

A **Black-crowned Night Heron** was sitting in the open when we arrived at the Wildfowl Pond. Also observed were **American Coot** and a pair of **Mallard** ducks. A **Western Scrub Jay** flashed his bright blue colors as he flew across the trees.

As we made our way around the garden we encountered other species: **Anna's Humming-**

bird, American Robin, Western Gull, Dark-eyed Junco, and the bird of the day—a **Hermit Thrush**. When alarmed, this bird flicks its wings and raises and lowers its red-brown tail. The thrush sat on a branch for enough time that our eager learners got good views.

In the California Garden we noticed movement that turned out to be a hyperactive **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** in a tree. This tiny bird sports a white eye-ring, and like the Hermit Thrush opens and closes its wings when excited.

Last but not least was the always popular "alone walk" in the bamboo grove. The students had never done anything like it before and enjoyed it as much as running past the water sprinklers in the garden! Our last bird, a flying-over **Turkey Vulture**, marked the end of an exhilarating day.



Taji Allen, naturalist, and a chaperone (center) point out a bird to his group.



Canada Goose

Photo: Judy Harter

On the pages ahead:

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- 5 New! Birding Crissy Field
- 6 Winter Birds in SF; Upcoming Events

Photo: SFNE



Photo: Linda Grant

Anastasia Marin, naturalist, at the Wildfowl Pond with a student.



Photo: SFNE

Teacher Mr. Klein and Linda Grant, naturalist, with a group of students before the walk.



Photo: SFNE

Linda Grant points out a bird to the group.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Hermit Thrush



Photo: Judy Harter

American Coot

Third-Grade Field Trip to the San Francisco Botanical Garden



Heron Photos: James Sullivan © 2012 SFNE

PLEASE HELP US REACHING OUR MATCHING GRANT GOAL!

San Francisco Nature Education has received **\$10,000** as a matching grant for **March 1** 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
3450 Geary, Ste. 208
San Francisco, CA 94118

e-mail: info@sfnature.org
telephone: 415-387-9160
www.sfnature.org



Heron's Head Intern Report

Logan K., Intern



We started the morning with a round of pre-fielding. We pre-field before every public tour to get an idea of what birds are present that day. We found two very interesting birds: a **Pacific Loon** and a **Pelagic Cormorant**. These species are very scarce in the bay, and caused a great deal of excitement among us.

When we started our tour we found a female **Common Goldeneye**. As with most ducks, the female are brownish, and the males are striking and often iridescent.



Pacific Loon

Photo: Len Blumin



Photo: Rick Leche

Common Goldeneye, female

In San Francisco, the Goldeneye is typically found in the southeastern side of the city, though several have recently been sighted at Lloyd's Lake in Golden Gate Park. Heron's Head Park is one habitat supporting this species.

We spotted a pair of **Black Oystercatchers**.

This Pacific shorebird, typically only found on rocky coasts, has found a home at Heron's Head Park. Like most shorebirds, male and female look alike, but the sex of a Black Oystercatcher can be told from its shape. Females are longer-billed and heavier than males.



Black Oystercatchers

Photo: Len Blumin



Long-billed Curlew

Photo: Matt Knoth

on some mudflats. This wader is the largest shorebird in North America. By contrast, we also saw the smallest shorebird in North America, the **Least Sandpiper**, about one-fifth the length of the Curlew.

As we were turning back we found a **Spotted Sandpiper** on the rocks nearby. This Sandpiper is one of few in its family that show sexual dimorphism in the breeding season. Males become spotted below and have an orange bill. The females mate with multiple males, and each male tends its young. Heron's Head Park is one of only a few refuges for this species in San Francisco.



Least Sandpiper

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Third-grader observes a bird through the spotting scope.



A School of the Arts freshman and her parrot prepare to observe birds on tour with Logan.

Tour photos: SFNE

As we headed back we spotted a **Northern Mockingbird**, which, depending on the season, can have two different personalities. During the winter months Mockingbirds lie, not moving, deep inside bushes. During the breeding season they are vocal and showy. Mockingbirds are excellent mimics of other birds. They have been known to sing over 200 different songs.

By the end of the day we had spotted 38 species! It had been a fine day for teaching the public about the incredible birds of Heron's Head Park.



Interns Eddy (right) and Mina (in black) on the tour with participants.

Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist



By 10 am, a group of twelve enthusiastic birders had gathered by the bookstore at the SF Botanical Garden for the February 4th *Birding for Everyone* walk. To our delight the weather was unseasonably warm and sunny. As we

approached the Great Meadow we spotted our first birds of the day, a pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** soaring far in the distance, but unmistakable as the sun reflected off their distinctive tails.

We headed off left, past the library garden. As we rounded the corner near the parking lot, we saw a small bird on a grassy path to our left. It was a **Hermit Thrush**.

After a few seconds it was chased off by a **Song Sparrow**. The two bickered for dominance of the path for a few moments before heading off in separate directions. We followed the path and came out on the paved road that parallels Lincoln Way.

The Bamboo Pond was our first stop. Loud screeching alerted us to the presence of a **Steller's Jay** that soon emerged and landed on a branch in full view. It is a handsome bird. A couple of small flocks of



Band-tailed Pigeon

Photo: Doug Greenberg

Band-tailed Pigeons flew overhead. While we were looking up we saw an accipiter overhead. We identified it as a **Cooper's Hawk** since the head projected significantly past the wings, distinguishing it from the similar Sharp-shinned Hawk.

We continued on to the Wildfowl Pond, which seemed to hold



Red-tailed Hawk

Photo: Matt Knoth

only a number of **American Coots** and a pair of **Mallards**. But there were some shapes in the distance that begged further investigation. We focused the scope and found that a pair of male **Hooded Mergansers** was sleeping under the bushes, recognizable by the lovely white plumes cascading down their backs. Even with the scope they were difficult to see, so we tried the opposite side of the pond. There we got marginally better views, enough to see one golden eye peering at us.

On the lawn were a number of **American Robins** pecking through the grass. Someone spotted a **Black Phoebe** perched atop a nearby post and a single **Yellow-rumped Warbler** made a quick appearance. Our eyes were then attracted by movement in the underbrush, and as we focused our binoculars they revealed two **Varied Thrushes** under some distant trees. We quickly got them in view in the scope. For some in the group, it was their first ever look at this secretive bird. As we turned to leave this enjoyable spot we saw that two gulls had landed on rocks at the edge of the pond: a **Mew Gull** and a **Western Gull**.

Our normal path to the Chilean Garden was flooded by some misdirected sprinklers, so we took an alternate route. We encountered a small flock of **Bushtits** working their way through the bushes. We continued along the northern fence. Flocks of **Rock Pigeons** rose up above Stow Lake, perhaps disturbed by the five **Red-tailed Hawks** performing aerial



Turkey Vulture

Photo: Matt Knoth



Varied Thrush

Photo: Andy Purviance

maneuvers above them. Occasionally one of the hawks would let its legs trail in a courtship display. The hawks were in evidence throughout the walk. We were watching them as we rounded a turn into the Succulent Garden, when we noticed that one of the birds was a **Turkey Vulture**.

We paused in the Succulent Garden to watch the **Anna's Hummingbirds** as they sipped nectar from the many tubular flowers. Next we visited the John Muir Pond at the back of the arboretum. On the way we noticed two birds high in a tree above the pond. When we focused our binoculars we found two **Northern Flickers**, one of which had a red spot at the back of the head, indicating the crescent found on the yellow-shafted race. A quick-acting participant captured a photo that clearly showed that field mark.

Once we reached the pond we found a bonanza of finches, probably attracted by the willows that were full of seed pods. We were able to view **American** and **Lesser Goldfinches**, a number of **House Finches**, and a pair of **Purple Finches**. It was a great opportunity to observe these



Purple Finch

Photo: Rick Leche

birds and make comparisons. In some cases it proved especially challenging as the noon sun reflected off the bellies of some of the birds that were high in the tree, making even the

House Finches appear yellow. However, scope views confirmed the identification.

Too soon it was time to head back. There was one last surprise in store. As we were all dispersing a small movement above the entrance kiosk drew our attention. There, in a small gap in the leaves, was a bright beautiful **Red-breasted Sapsucker!**



Northern Flicker

Photo: Len Blumin



Photo: Megan Prelinger

Birders watch shore birds at Crissy Field.



Photo: Len Blumin

Greater Scaup



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Herring Gull



Photo: Rick Leche

Common Loon



Photo: Megan Prelinger

The group of enthusiastic birdwatchers spanned a wide age range.

Birding Crissy Field

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



On Saturday, February 25, a group of nine adult birders and two avid seven-year-olds joined trip leaders Megan Prelinger and Logan, an SF Nature Education intern, for a two-hour birding tour of Crissy Field. It was a spectacularly clear, bright day. We gathered at the Warming Hut, then started our scope-viewing a few yards west, where a **Willet** caught our attention on the rocks below us. There we had a good vantage point for viewing a large floating flock of **Western** and **Clark's Grebes**.

In the distance, on the pilings of the Golden Gate Bridge, were perched a handful of **Brant's Cormorants**. A **Red-tailed Hawk** kited above the hill behind us. A **Pelagic Cormorant** then flew past while we were headed east for the rest of our walk.

At the picnic lawn, Logan pointed out that a **Brown-headed Cowbird** was hanging out with a loose flock of **Brewer's Blackbirds**. We stopped when another Red-tailed Hawk caught our attention in the distance; a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was flying high too.

As we walked toward Crissy Lagoon, we stopped at different points next to the chaparral between the path and the beach to observe and compare **White-crowned Sparrows**, **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, and **Song Sparrows**.

We had the opportunity to hear the different voices of these species, and to compare the juvenile White-crowned Sparrows with the adults of other species.

At a beach overlook we had a good view of a **Common Loon** floating calmly in the bay. Nearby a juvenile **Brown Pelican** perched on a pier with another Brant's Cormorant. An **Anna's Hummingbird** perched on a bush long enough that we were able to view it through the scope, and then it performed a swooping flight that culminated in the "chirp" of tail feathers at the bottom of the downward swing. An adult Brown Pelican flew overhead, and we noted that the population of this species is currently thinning out as these birds migrate to Southern California and Mexico for the spring breeding season.

At Crissy Lagoon we made several stops to get perspectives on the species in different corners of this rich habitat. A small flock of **Greater Scaup** floated on the west side of the lagoon; nearby **American Coots** swam while **Snowy Egrets** swished for food in the mud. In the middle of the lagoon was a flock of **Ruddy Ducks** and a few **Bufflehead**, though the Bufflehead hardly stayed above water long enough for us to see them.

At the east side of the lagoon was a large mixed flock of gulls. We were delighted (and challenged) by the diversity of species. We counted **Western**, **California**, **Ring-Billed**, **Glaucous-Winged**, and **Herring Gulls** all together. Next we were delighted by the sight of a **Long-Billed Curlew**.

We then turned around and at a leisurely pace returned to the Warming Hut, and our group slowly dispersed. We had spotted 38 species.



Owls, Owlets, and Other Winter Birds

In early February a **Great Horned Owl** nest with two chicks was found by a sharp-eyed local in northwestern Golden Gate Park.

Also recently seen in the park (clockwise from top right) are: **American Robin**, **Townsend's Warbler**, **Allen's Hummingbird**, **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, and **Common Goldeneye**.

Photos by Sandi Wong.



Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone: First Saturdays, Mar. 3, Apr. 7, May 5, 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.

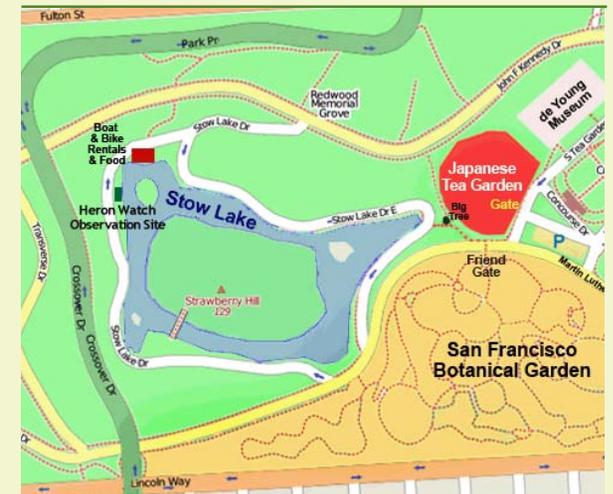
Heron's Head Park: The season's last public tour will be Saturday, March 10. Tours start at 10 am, 10:30, 11, and final tour at 11:30. Guided tours last about one hour. Free!

Note: Beginning February 21st, access to Heron's Head Park will be through a temporary walkway from Jennings Street along the southern portion of an improvement project. Parking for visitors will be along Jennings Street. Signage directing visitors will be posted.

Heron Watch: Opening Day Saturday, April 14, 10 am-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.

SF Nature Education Field Trips: Six Saturdays: April 14, 21, 28; May 5, 12, and 19, between 10:30 and noon. Adults \$10, children free. For more information see [Heron Watch](#) online.

Heron Watch: Getting There



On April 14th, follow signs from the Stow Lake boathouse to our Heron Watch site to observe the nests on Heron Island.

For more information visit www.sfnature.org or call 415 387-9160.