



Autumn Programs Resume

Blue Heron Newsletter • October 2012

Dear Friends,

We have started our winter programs at SFUSD underserved schools. We have already enrolled four elementary schools.

This September marks the fifth year we have conducted outdoor environmental education programs at Bret Harte Elementary School in the Bayview/Hunters Point neighborhood of San Francisco.

We have plans to work with kindergarten through third grades at Bret Harte, and we are fortunate to be working with children who were enrolled last year. This month we will be leading field trips for first graders to the San Francisco Botanical Garden to observe fall migratory birds and other wildlife—Eastern Gray Squirrels, Red-eared Slider Turtles, and perhaps Spiny Softshell and Western Pond Turtles.

Special thanks to Megan Prelinger for leading the October 6th *Birding for Everyone* walk. In November Bill Milestone and I will lead the Saturday walk, and in December renowned birder Alan Hopkins will be onboard for this popular walk.

Our *Birding for Kids* walks during the summer were a huge hit. More than 100 children and adults attended the four monthly walks led by Anastasia Marin, our school program coordinator, and me.

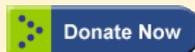
We look forward to adding two more walks in the coming year: one in February, to observe the migratory birds, and another in April, to observe the waterfowl of Crissy Field.

We hope you enjoy the incredible photos on page six by Sandi Wong. We appreciate her dedication and generosity.

We need your support to reach our goal of reaching 1,000 students during this school year. Help support our school programs, internships, and Saturday field trips. Membership is only \$30 for one year. A gift of \$500 sponsors a full year of four classroom visits and field trips. Your generosity is appreciated.

Best regards,
Nancy DeStefanis
Executive Director

Please donate now, or mail a check to:
SF Nature Education, 3450 Geary, Ste. 208
San Francisco, CA 94118



SFNE Kicks Off School Program at Bret Harte Elementary School

Anastasia Marin, School Program Coordinator

On September 26th, San Francisco Nature Education visited two first-grade classes at Bret Harte Elementary School: Ms. Cooper's and Ms. Medina's. The theme of the class visit was "How Birds Fly," and focused on wings and feathers of different Bay Area birds.

In Ms. Cooper's class—Spanish bilingual—the students had met SFNE naturalists last year while in kindergarten, and some of them rushed towards Executive Director Nancy DeStefanis to give her a big group hug. After the students were seated on the rug, a naturalist showed them wings of a Red-tailed Hawk and a Western Gull. She discussed how birds fly. Two first-graders volunteered to assist a fellow student in the center in holding up the wings.

Ms. D. conducted a slideshow with pictures of 16 birds that the students could expect to encounter on their upcoming field trip to the SF Botanical Garden. Because the students had participated last year in kindergarten, many of them passed with flying colors by naming the birds correctly!

But the most fun part of the class was still ahead. SFNE set up three drawing stations with model birds for the students to look at and draw: Great Blue Heron, flying Mallard (female), and Canada Goose. The Mallard station was led by one of our new volunteers, Bill Milestone, new president of SFNE Board of Directors. A retired science teacher, he explained to the students how birds fly, and they listened with utmost attention.

The students enjoyed drawing the birds and using colored pencils to draw their feathers and beaks. The drawings turned out beautifully, and Ms. Cooper promised to hang them on the bulletin board.

At the end of the visit the students were told that in two weeks they would be going on a field trip to the

San Francisco Botanical Garden. The naturalists then reviewed what to bring and what to wear on the field trip. The class wrapped up with a big goodbye and another group hug.

We proceeded to Ms. Medina's first-grade class, where the students were equally engaged. One said that she is really hoping to see a Great Blue Heron and a California Quail on the field trip.

What a wonderful day it was! Now everyone is looking forward to the field trip in two weeks, and to absorbing what nature has to offer in our own wonderful city.



Bill Milestone talks to a first-grader about how birds fly.

Photo: SFNE

On the pages ahead:

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- 3 Classroom visits, continued
- 4 September *Birding for Everyone* report
- 5 Last *Birding for Kids* report of the season; Upcoming Events
- 6 Observed Lately: A Photo Essay



A parent staffs the Great Blue Heron drawing table.



Ms. Cooper and her first-graders prepare for their October Field Trip.

First graders demonstrate how birds fly.



Bill Milestone holds female Mallard, with students and their drawings.



Above: Amber Cooper, teacher, and her group draw the Canada Goose.



Anastasia Marin and her group draw the Great Blue Heron.



Below: Demonstrating types of feathers on the Mallard.

Photos: SFNE



Bill Milestone demonstrates how to draw a female Mallard flying.



Ms. Medina's first-graders learn how birds fly.



Ms. Medina and her first-graders draw the Canada Goose.



Ms. D. demonstrates her bear binoculars.

Birding for Everyone in September

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



The Labor Day Weekend walk in the SF Botanical Garden offered a rich reward for our group. As we entered the garden, a noisy flock of **Conures** (parrots) flew high overhead. We were treated to a treeful of **Pygmy Nuthatches** closer to earth in the Exhibition Garden, and to our first **Black Phoebes** of the day. The Great Meadow was dotted with **American Robins** and **Phoebes**, and **Scrub Jays** were in the trees.

Near the library, a juvenile **Anna's Hummingbird** was perched on a low branch, giving us the opportunity to compare its gray-and-white plumage with the vivid greens and reds of the adults. There was an early **Fox Sparrow** at the Dwarf Conifer pond, along with year-round residents **Song Sparrows** and **White-crowned Sparrows**.



Photo: Rick Leche

Fox Sparrow

In the California Native Garden we saw **California Towhees** and a late summer **Allen's Hummingbird**, and another fall arrival, the **Golden-crowned Sparrow**. There was a juvenile **Red-shouldered Hawk** perched above the path. It offered us a good view of the streaking and barring



Photo: Rick Leche

Black-headed Grosbeak

on its chest that differentiates it from the adult. In the trees above the reservoir we observed a female **Black-headed Grosbeak**, clearly identifiable by the white stripe above her eye that differentiates her from the male.



Photo: Len Blumin

Red-necked Phalarope (juvenile)

The reservoir offered a real surprise: one **Red-necked Phalarope** swimming and feeding. This species inhabits the open ocean, seaside wetlands and inland lakes. It is very rarely seen in forested or urban environments. A small group of **Orange-crowned Warblers** occupied branches overhanging the reservoir, where **Mallards** were swimming in the water.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Orange-crowned Warbler

On our walk toward the nursery and the Children's Garden, we got a fleeting glimpse of a **Lesser Goldfinch**. From the Children's Garden we saw high-flying **Red-tailed Hawks**, **Common Ravens**, **Mourning Doves**, and **Western Gulls**, all headed in the direction of Stow Lake. Closer to us were **Towhees** and **Dark-eyed Juncos**, and at the pond we heard above us in the trees the distinctive call of the **Hutton's Vireo**.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Hutton's Vireo



Photo: Len Blumin

Pacific Slope Flycatcher

nearby abundant **Anna's Hummingbirds** and **Pygmy Nuthatches** fed at the blooming century plants.



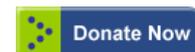
Photo: Matt Knoth

Anna's Hummingbird

A flock of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** was above the Succulent Garden, mixed with chattering **Bushtits**.

A **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** looped through the garden and perched briefly;

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**Volunteers Needed
for 2012-2013
School Program!**

Please visit www.sfnature.org/get_involved for information.

September Birding for Kids

Anastasia Marin, School Program Coordinator



On September 1st, San Francisco Nature Education conducted its last *Birding for Kids* nature walk of the season in the SF Botanical Garden. It wrapped up a wonderful summer of birdwatching for many local kids and their families.

Four local families and an SFNE naturalist were greeted with light fog at the garden. Right away the students saw a large group of **Canada Geese** grazing on grass in the meadow in front of them. Everyone observed these beautiful birds for a while and then continued further into the garden. There it must have been a hummingbird picnic—the students counted more than six **Anna's Hummingbirds** flying back and forth between the trees!



Canada Goose

Photo: Judy Harter



Red-eared Slider turtles

Photo: Judy Harter

A lonely male **Mallard** duck was spotted at the Wildfowl Pond, along with many **Red-eared Slider** turtles in the water. The group continued and came across a meadow full of **American Robins**. They were digging worms out of the ground, and the students enjoyed watching them.

Accompanied by beautiful songs of multiple **Song Sparrows**, the group entered into the Succulent Garden. Sitting down for a break to sketch in their field journals, the students were treated to a close-up view



The Birding for Kids families at the SF Botanical Garden.

Photo: Megan Prelinger



American Robin

Photo: Judy Harter

As the group headed back, the Steller's Jay kept flying above our heads making loud noises. It looked like the students had made a new friend!



Allen's Hummingbird

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

of an **Allen's Hummingbird** on a nearby cactus. Then everyone heard a loud squawk: a **Steller's Jay** entered the scene.



Steller's Jay

Photo: Rick Leche

At the end of the walk everyone promised one another to continue watching and learning about birds all year round!

Upcoming Events*

Birding for Everyone: Led by Nancy DeStefanis and Bill Milestone, Saturday, Nov. 3, 10 am–noon; on Dec. 1, led by Alan Hopkins. Meet in front of San Francisco Botanical Garden bookstore. SF Nature fees: Adults \$10. Also see SF Botanical Garden fees below.

SF Botanical Garden Admission Fees: FREE for children ages 4 and under; FREE for all San Francisco residents with proof of residency; \$7 for adults; \$5 for youth 12-17, seniors 65 & over, and college students with ID \$2 for children 5-11; \$15 for families (2 adults and one or more children)

Leave from SF Botanical Garden bookstore. Take a leisurely walk through the microhabitats of the Botanical Garden. Free field journal provided to children. Please bring binoculars, if you have them, and a pencil for recording bird sightings.

Birding Crissy Field: With Megan Prelinger, Saturday, Nov. 10. Meet at warming hut. Tour: 10-12. Adults \$10, children free. This trip is very popular—come to see winter waterfowl and shore birds!

*Please see our new online [events calendar](#).

Wish List:

One good microscope for our classroom visits, backpacks, binoculars.



Observed Lately: Some Wild SF Residents
Photographs by Sandi Wong



Clockwise from upper left: male Wood Duck at Stow Lake; raccoons at North Lake; Blanche and Blue Boy with their six cygnets at Palace of Fine Arts; Turkey Vulture; juvenile Hooded Merganser at North Lake (center); Double-crested Cormorant feeds young at Lake Merced; juvenile Pied-billed Grebe with crayfish.