



Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

I am writing to wish you and yours a very happy Thanksgiving and holiday season.

We are now listing upcoming events with a three-month lead time so you can plan ahead. Our web calendar lists events for at least six months.

We have trips planned for December, January, and February at the SF Botanical Garden for adults and families, at Heron's Head Park, and Crissy Field. As you can see from the reports in this issue, winter migrants have arrived!

In April and May we will resume our six-week Heron Watch Interpretive Program at Stow Lake with interns and volunteers to monitor the nesting herons.

I now ask you to consider making a generous end-of-year donation. Memberships are \$35, but we would greatly appreciate donations of \$100, \$250, or \$500 to underwrite our programs.

These funds support our school program for underserved youth in K-3rd grades, paid internships for our high school interns at Heron Watch, and 27 Saturday programs for the public.

In return, you receive a monthly newsletter with the best photos of local birds by our photographer Sandi Wong and other photographers from the Bay Area. You have the knowledge that you are supporting and participating in valuable programs throughout the city.

Thank you so much for your continuing support, and very happy holidays from all of us at SF Nature Education.

Best regards,

Nancy

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Birding for Everyone in November Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



Saturday the 2nd of November was a cold, foggy day in the SF Botanical Garden. We were curious about whether the fog would cling or roll back, and which species would be out. The area was quiet as we were gathering. Once we started, though, we were

rewarded by the sight of two **Lesser Goldfinches** bathing in the rock fountain in the Library Garden.

Tracing a clockwise route we proceeded in the direction of the California Native Plant Garden, stopping along the way to get looks at **Anna's Hummingbirds** and **Townsend's Warblers**.

The woods were filled with wintering **Fox Sparrows**, many dozens of them. As we walked, **Pygmy Nuthatches** flew overhead between treetops, and we continued to see **Townsend's Warblers** past the Redwood Grove and into the California Garden. Dawn Redwoods are unusual deciduous coniferous trees, and their needles were autumn brown and gold tones.

In the California Garden there were **Scrub Jays**, **American Ravens**, and more **Pygmy Nuthatches**. We heard **Song Sparrows** calling. The busiest area in the first hour of our walk was the reservoir. There we had good views of **Black Phoebes**,



Anna's Hummingbird

Photo: Len Blumin

Yellow-rumped Warblers, and a pair of **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**. We observed their hummingbird-like hovering behavior as they fed on berries and arboreal insects.

Our next stop was in the Children's Garden, where we saw all of the regular sparrow varieties, both year-round and wintering: **White-crowned**, **Golden-crowned**, **Song**, and **Fox Sparrows**. This garden offered us a good look at a **Northern Flicker**, whose red shafts we saw in flight as it zoomed between trees. We discussed how the term "red-shafted" refers to the feather shafts of the primary flight feathers found in this species west of the Rocky Mountains, not to the red streak on its face.

Other birds in the Children's Garden included **California Towhees** and **Dark-eyed Juncos**. On our way out of the garden we had an eye-level encounter with a **Red-shouldered Hawk**. The bird was perched a few feet off the path, and we got close looks at its plumage, including the delicate rufous bars across its abdomen, as we listened to it calling and scolding for several minutes.

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Fox Sparrow

Photo: Rick Leche

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On our way toward the Moon-viewing Garden we met **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and flocks of **Bushtits**. Flying over from Stow Lake were **Western Gulls**, including one in full molt with extremely ragged feathers, **Canada Geese**, and a flock of **Mallards**.

Our last stop was at the Waterfowl Pond. We watched an **Eared Grebe** in winter plumage for a long time, as it was such an unusual sighting. This species winters in the Bay Area, but is typically found in salt-water environments such as the Bay itself or Bayside marshes. There were **American Coots** in the pond, a number of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** in the fronds nearby, and **Steller's Jays** and a **Red-tailed Hawk** overhead.



Photo: Len Blumin

Clockwise from left:
Eared Grebe;
Yellow-rumped Warbler;
Golden-crowned Sparrow



Photo: Matt Kroth



Photo: Rick Leche



Photo: Megan Prelinger

The *Birding for Everyone* group in the SF Botanical Garden, November 2nd.



Photo illustration: Jim Sullivan

Season's Greetings from San Francisco Nature Education

Upcoming Events*

Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month. Dec. 7 and Jan. 4 walks will be led by Megan Prelinger: 10 am-noon. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. nr. Lincoln.

Birding for Kids and Families: Saturdays, Dec. 7 & Jan. 4, led by Christine Malfatti: 10-11:30 am. Meet at the SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. Free field journals for kids.

SF Nature fees for all walks: Adults \$10, children free. Please bring binoculars if you can, and a pencil.

SF Botanical Garden Admission: FREE for all SF residents with proof of residency; nonresidents pay varying fees. See the [Garden's Web site](#) for details.

Birding Crissy Field: Saturday, Feb. 15, with Megan Prelinger. Meet at warming hut; 10 am-noon.

Heron's Head Park: Saturdays, Jan. 11 & Feb. 22: Tours led by Logan Kahle and volunteers leave at 10, 10:30, & 11 am. Meet at entrance to path.

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

Chain of Lakes, November 16

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist

Our field trip started at 10 am under clear skies. We began looking over South Lake, where six **Hooded Mergansers** put on a show while a **Belted Kingfisher** flew back and forth between trees. A male **Townsend's Warbler** gleamed in the sun, and a **Hutton's Vireo** fed on a small plant at lake's edge, giving us good looks at the bird's wingbars and bill.

After formal greetings we headed for Middle Lake. A eucalyptus tree on the small hill had **Yellow-rumped Warblers** flitting around at the top of the canopy making them frustratingly hard to see. We had better luck with a very cooperative **Hermit Thrush** that sat perfectly still on a branch in the sun



Orange-crowned Warbler

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Raccoon at North Lake

Photo: Judy Harter

along with two **Fox Sparrows** and a **California Towhee**.

Crossing Chain of Lakes Drive we made our way to North Lake. Following the path to the northwest we encountered seventeen raccoons



Gadwall

Photo: Bill Hummewell

looking for handouts. While some people may see these masked marauders as cute, it should be remembered that they are expert nest raiders, and it is little wonder that the **Mallards** on the lake have had little nesting success. Among the many Mallards we spotted a pair of **Gadwall** ducks that are easily overlooked when among **Mallards**.

Some other migratory waterfowl were present: a pair of **Bufflehead** and **Ruddy Ducks** and a few **Ring-necked Ducks** were on the lake as well. After seeing the Hutton's Vireo at South Lake it was nice to see **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** for comparison. We could see the kinglets' long more pointed bill and dark wing marking, and when one bird flashed its bright ruby crown there was no doubt about its identity.

From North Lake we headed east to the Bison Paddock. Walking around the north side of the paddock we heard **Northern Flicker** and **Nuttall's Woodpecker** but we could not locate them. A single **Red-tailed Hawk** soared above the paddock. We made our way to the west end of Spreckles Lake where



Red-tailed Hawk

Photo: Bill Hummewell

we worked on some basic gull identification. We managed to pick out two **Herring Gulls**, a **Glaucous-winged Gull**, and a single **California Gull**. The Spreckles Lake highlight was two **Eared Grebes** feeding near shore.

We returned to the Chain of Lakes along the southern edge of the Bison Paddock, where we would have good light on the **Killdeer** there. We encountered park supervisor Gloria Koch-Gonzalez leading a group of volunteers doing habitat restoration. They had just cleaned out the net boxes that are set out around the paddock for Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.

The nests, removed from the boxes, were set out in a line. The swallows' nests were lined with a variety of other birds' feathers: Great Horned Owl, Canada Goose, Red-tailed Hawk. Upon closer examination the nests held grim secrets—many had the remains of chicks. Gloria suggested it might be due to watering overspray and she would make sure the gardeners were more careful next year. Our spirits were lifted seeing nearly fifty **Killdeer** inside the paddock, and the trip was topped off by seeing two



Killdeer

Photo: Judy Harter

Say's Phoebes flycatching from small sticks inside the enclosure. In total the group spotted 42 species in Golden Gate Park.



Bushtit

Photo: Bill Hummewell



Proud as a Peacock Parent

Little peachick (right) and mother peahen (above) enjoy sunny weather at the San Francisco Zoo.

Photos by Sandi Wong