



### Time to Check Out the Herons at Stow Lake!

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director, SFNE

This year, 2013, marks the 20th anniversary of the Great Blue Heron Colony at Stow Lake. I was fortunate to have observed the first nest with two chicks in 1993. Twenty years and 153 chicks later San Francisco Nature Education is still busy monitoring, protecting, and educating the public about these remarkable birds.

The herons are just arriving and beginning their courtship and mating rituals. February is an exciting month. There are frequent twig presentations, mutual greetings and preening, and many copulations.

Come out to Stow Lake and observe the herons in their nests on tiny Heron Island, just opposite the boathouse. Our Heron Watch tours start in mid-April and continue every Saturday for six weeks!

On Tuesday evening, April 30th, we will celebrate the anniversary at a special fundraiser. Please see page 4 for details. And now to our monthly walks:

**Birding for Everyone** continues on February 2nd with Megan Prelinger. Megan is an astute and friendly birder. Please join her for a walk in the SF Botanical Garden.

Our **Heron's Head Park** tours continue on February 9th. High-school interns Mina and Logan will lead tours starting at 10 am. These experienced interns really know their stuff, so treat yourself to a bird's-eye view through a high-powered spotting scope. In January, Mina was able to spot a Eurasian Wigeon and share the view with her group!

*Well, we finally made the front page of the SF Chronicle on January 10th—and, as a reader pointed out, "Above the fold!" See photo at right.*

Thanks so much for your support. I look forward to seeing you out on the trails!

Best regards,

*Nancy*  
Nancy DeStefanis



### Heron's Head Park Tours Begin

Mina, Heron's Head Park Intern



Saturday morning, January 12th, was chilly and clear. We set out to pre-field an hour before our 10 am tour so we could get an idea of birds we were likely to see, and to note spots that might be of particular interest to our group.

At ten, we set off with a group. We first stopped to observe a raft of **Ruddy Ducks**. The distinctive angle at which these birds hold their tails makes them easily identifiable. Soon after this sighting we spotted an **American Kestrel** perched on a post. Our group got great views of this raptor through our spotting scope. We noted the Kestrel's all reddish appearance and deduced that the bird was female. Males have blue-gray wings. After scanning other posts in the vicinity for more raptors, we moved on and spotted a **Say's Phoebe**.

We continued up the trail to a sight of the wetlands largely covered in water. The tide was quite high and still coming in. This was fortunate, as many shorebirds



Mina, with spotting scope, and Nancy DeStefanis preparing for public tours at Heron's Head Park.

were forced to cluster together on the higher patches of ground. We observed **Long-billed Curlews**, **Whimbrels**, **Killdeer**, and **Spotted Sandpipers**. Several **American Avocets** in their non-breeding black-and-white plumage were visible. Near them were some similarly long-legged birds, **Black-necked Stilts**. These birds are much blacker in appearance and have bright pink legs.

A small flock of **Least Sandpipers** huddled amidst the other birds. A few **Black-bellied Plovers** were in view, although at this time of year they lacked black bellies. A little farther on stood two **Black Oystercatchers**, which one of our group described as "chicken-like." Though initially the two birds had their bills tucked away, we were soon able to see their bright reddish-orange beaks, to the delight of our group. Overhead we spotted **Forster's Terns** and **Brown Pelicans**.

Further down the path we were alerted by a fellow birder to the presence of a rarity here, the **Eurasian Wigeon**. These ducks are similar to the American Wigeon but have a rusty red head. We stopped to try and find it among the **American Wigeons**; at first it was rather frustrating. However, we were rewarded for our patience and finally spotted the elusive bird next to a patch of high ground where a **Willet** and a **Whimbrel** were resting. We all got good views of



Eurasian Wigeon

Photo: Len Blumin

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Photo: SFNE

Mina, second from right, with a tour group and spotting scope.

## Heron's Head Park Tours Begin

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the duck's rusty red head and were able to observe a spot of green on its head. For many in our group, this was their first-ever view of the Eurasian Wigeon.

After that exceptional sighting we continued up the trail. We saw flocks of **Double-crested Cormorants** flying in V-formation over the bay; viewed both male and female **Buffleheads**; and observed **Horned, Clark's, and Western Grebes** before we headed back.

SFNE naturalist Megan Prelinger led the 10:30 and 11:30 tours.

It was a great day—32 species sighted!

Next tours: February 9th and March 9th. See our upcoming events listings on page 4 for details.



Photo: Len Blumin

American Kestrel



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Say's Phoebe



Photo: SFNE

Phil Ginsburg, director of SF Recreation & Park Department, with Nancy DeStefanis.



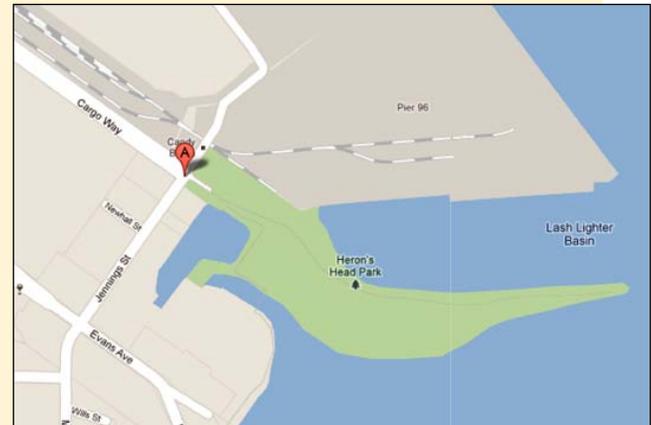
Photo: SFNE

Mina explains the natural history of the park.



Photo: SFNE

Goats from City Grazing stop traffic opposite Heron's Head Park.



Google Maps

For directions to Heron's Head Park search for **Jennings St. & Cargo Way, SF**, at [maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com).



Photo: Judy Harter

## Birding for Everyone January Report

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



Happy New Year! We had a large and jovial group for our first birding walk of the year in the SF Botanical Garden. While the group was gathering, two **Red-tailed Hawks** soared overhead, and as we began the walk we saw a **Scrub Jay** perched high. **Anna's Hummingbirds** were with us at nearly every turn throughout the morning.

Our first close-up was a pair of **California Towhees** perched in a bush just off the Great Meadow. Then in the California



Photo: Rick Leche

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Native Plant Garden we got a long look at a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** as it flitted around a manzanita. Near the reservoir we found a **Hermit Thrush** perched low in a bush.

Further on we heard the chip-chipping that promised the possibility of migrating

warblers. Sure enough, a male **Townsend's Warbler** came into view and stayed long enough for all of us to see. We had a briefer look at a **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. Just beyond the warblers a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** flew out of a sequoia and into deciduous trees, where it perched



Photo: Matt Knoth

Townsend's Warbler



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Red-breasted Sapsucker

ences between the males, with their dark hoods, and the paler females of our local subspecies, **Oregon Juncos**.

One lone **Pygmy Nuthatch** was briefly visible in a century plant. Then came the highlight of the day: a **Varied Thrush** flew between grass and trees on the slopes below the succulent garden.

Walking toward the Redwood Grove we heard and saw **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**. Past the Waterfowl Pond we stopped to examine **American Coots** that were pecking on the bank, and particularly to notice their scaly green feet. Two **Canada Geese** were in the grass near the fountain. We wrapped up our day getting another view of a **Townsend's Warbler** in the trees above the entry gate.

I look forward to seeing all of you at our next walk on Saturday, February 2nd—Groundhog Day!

and circled a while before disappearing.

**Song Sparrows** and **Fox Sparrows** were abundant throughout our walk. At the top of the succulent garden **Western Gulls** and **Common Ravens** were visible high in the sky. Scattered in the leaf litter of the eucalyptus was a flock of **Dark-eyed Juncos**.

We had an opportunity to examine the differ-



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Dark-eyed Junco



Photo: Andy Purviance

Varied Thrush



Photo: Rick Leche

American Coot

## Upcoming Events\*

**Birding for Everyone:** Led by Megan Prelinger on Saturdays Feb. 2 and Mar. 2, 10 am–noon. Meet in front of San Francisco Botanical Garden bookstore. SF Nature fees: Adults \$10, children free. See additional SF Botanical Garden fees below.

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.

**SF Botanical Garden Admission Fees:** FREE for children ages 4 and under; FREE for all San Francisco residents with proof of residency; nonresidents pay varying fees. See the [Garden's Web site](#) for details.

**Birding at Heron's Head Park:** Saturdays Feb. 9 and Mar. 9. High school interns lead four one-hour tours: at 10 am, 10:30, 11, and 11:30. Adults \$10, children free. Details [here](#).

**Egrets of Oakland & Great Blue Herons of San Francisco:** Thursday, Apr. 18, 12:30 pm, at the Oakland Museum. Museum admission: \$12 general; \$9 seniors & students with valid ID; \$6 youth, 9–17.

**Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Stow Lake Great Blue Heron Colony:** Thursday, April 18, 7:30 pm, at the Randall Museum, SF. Free program. Talk and slideshow presented by Nancy DeStefanis, SFNE Executive Director, who discovered the first nesting pair in 1993. She has monitored the heron colony and educated the public about it for twenty years.

**Save the Date!—Tuesday, April 30:** Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Stow Lake Great Blue Colony in Golden Gate Park. A fundraiser for San Francisco Nature Education.

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

## Volunteer Webmaster Needed for SFNE!

We are looking for a volunteer with HTML and CSS coding skills to upload our monthly pdf newsletter (provided) to our Web site, and to make site updates as needed, typically requiring one to two hours per month.

We will be happy to provide a recommendation letter for any volunteer who works with us for at least one academic year. Please call or e-mail us for information (see contact information at right).

## Students: Apply to Become a Heron Watch Intern

High school and undergraduate students may apply for SF Nature Education internships at Heron Watch through Feb. 28, 2013. All training will occur on Saturdays in March, from 10–1 pm. Interns in pairs will lead public birding tours of the Stow Lake area in Golden Gate Park during six Saturdays in April and May.

More information is available at our online [Heron Watch page](#). To download a volunteer application please visit [http://www.sfnature.org/get\\_involved/intern.html](http://www.sfnature.org/get_involved/intern.html).



To learn more about being an intern, see our video [San Francisco Nature Education—Internship Program](#).

**Use the button below to become a member, give a membership, or donate online. Or mail a check to us at the address below.**

**Thanks for your support!**



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Photo: by Jim Sullivan © SFNE

Heron courtship and mating occur in February.

## Save the Date!

### Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Stow Lake Great Blue Heron Colony.

Talk and slideshow by Nancy DeStefanis. With special guests and a silent auction.

Tuesday, April 30, 5–7:30 pm, at the San Francisco County Fair Building, Lincoln Way & 9th Avenue.

More details to come in March.

**School Volunteers Needed!** Please visit [www.sfnature.org/get\\_involved](http://www.sfnature.org/get_involved) for information. The link to a School Program volunteer application is at the bottom of that page, just above our contact information.

# City Wildlife on Display

All photos by Sandi Wong



Forster's Tern over Heron's Head Park.



Yellow-rumped Warbler flashes yellow in three places.



Brown Pelican flies by Heron's Head.



River otter Sutro Sam is back—and he's very hungry!



Great Blue Heron at Sutro Baths. Dark crown feathers indicate a juvenile.



Red-tailed Hawk in all its glory.



Burrowing Owl on the attack.



Sanderling at the beach.