



Hérons in Condo Nests at Stow Lake!

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

During March we are gearing up for our annual Heron Watch program at Stow Lake. As of press time, the herons are occupying existing nests in one Monterey cyprus on Heron Island.

The herons are just settling down to incubate on Heron Island, opposite the Stow Lake boathouse. Because these herons will be sitting most of the time, we will see them only when their orange beaks peek out of the nest or when they trade places with their partners on the nest.

A few males are still looking for partners, so we may see them perform their beautiful neck-stretch displays to attract suitable females. Fights are always possible if unpaired herons try to invade occupied nests.

Our 20th Anniversary Celebration has been postponed to next fall. Stayed tuned for more details.

And now to our monthly walks and upcoming lecture/slide shows (see page 5 for more details):

Birding for Everyone is open to adults and children on March 2nd. Megan Prelinger, field trip leader, is an astute and friendly birder. Please join her for an exciting walk. April 6th will feature well-known birder Logan Kahle as field trip leader.

Our final **Heron's Head Park** tours occur on March 9th. High school interns will be leading tours that start at 10 am. Treat yourself to great views through high-powered spotting scopes. Last month the interns spotted 46 bird species!

Heron Watch starts April 13th for six Saturdays; be sure and come out to Stow Lake to see our favorite birds!

On April 18th, I will be speaking at the Oakland Museum in the afternoon and the Randall Museum in the evening. I will be showing the latest heron photos at both museums. Thanks so much for your support. I look forward to seeing you out on the trails and at my talks and slide shows!

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis



Heron's Head Park Report

Logan, Heron's Head Park Intern



On February 9th, lots of adults and children turned out on a sunny day for our hour-long birding tours of this magnificent wetlands. Mina and I, both interns, led tours that included several incredible sightings.

First we looked at the ducks on the north side of the park. We spotted **Greater Scaup** and a single male **Lesser Scaup**, a very uncommon bird in San Francisco. This elegant duck, normally found in slightly more inland areas, shows up only a few times each year in San Francisco, making it a highly sought-after bird in the city.

Next, we saw the graceful **Black-necked Stilt** foraging among hundreds of shorebirds in the marsh. This species, common and ubiquitous throughout most of California's marshes, moved into San Francisco in 2005, and is now present in very small but constant numbers. Their striking black-and-white coloration along with their bubblegum-pink legs makes them a favorite among birders and casual observers alike.

Nearby in the salt marsh an even rarer shorebird rested. Two **Short-billed Dowitchers**, rare in San Francisco in winter, were among a horde of **Willits**. All of a sudden a **Belted Kingfisher** darted overhead and swooped up onto a nearby fence. The lack of orange coloration on the breast suggested that the bird was male. This conspicuous dweller of San



An American Crow harasses an American Kestrel at Heron's Head Park.

Photos: Bill Hummwell

Francisco's marshes is only occasionally seen and is not reliably found at any particular location. It hovers in midair when it sees a fish, and dives in once it has

confirmed the fish's presence and honed in on its location.

Along the way we spotted **Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, Horned Grebes, Western Grebes, and Clark's Grebes**. A sighting of the **Black Oystercatcher** always delights visitors. We saw both the **Double-crested Cormorant** and **Pelagic Cormorant**. We also spotted the **Say's Phoebe** and **Savannah and Lincoln Sparrows**.

As our group was completing our checklist a brilliantly colored **American Kestrel** landed on a nearby lamppost. It was immediately harassed by a posse of **American Crows**. It was male, evident by blue coloration on its head. After a fierce fight in the air the kestrel landed on a light pole, followed by a crow. The

crow began harassing the kestrel by backing into it repeatedly until the kestrel finally flew off.

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Heron's Head Park Report

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American Kestrels are the smallest falcons in North America and prey almost exclusively on small mammals, mainly voles and gophers. They are not at all common in San Francisco, and frequent just a few regular territories. This exciting scene was a great way to wrap up an amazing morning of tours. We saw 46 species and had a great time!



Photo: SFNE

Tour leader Mina, second from left, and a group of birders are ready to walk in Heron's Head Park.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Short-billed Dowitcher



Photo: Bill Flunnewell

White-crowned Sparrow



Photo: Len Blumlin

Lincoln's Sparrow



Photo: Sandi Wong

Horned Grebe



Photo: SFNE

Logan, at left, leads an enthusiastic group of adults and children.

Folks relax after their tour with Mina in the newly renovated park.



Photo: SFNE

Heron's Head Park: Not Just for Birds

Photos by Bill Hunnewell



Recycling center next to Heron's Head Park.



A ship in San Francisco Bay passes by the park.



Port of San Francisco cranes nearby.



The salt marsh and some of its many avian visitors.

Birding for Everyone February Report

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



It was foggy and cool on Groundhog Day in the SF Botanical Garden. We got our start walking through the Exhibition Gardens and checked in with our resident regulars, the **Anna's Hummingbirds**. Members of that species dotted the trees around us throughout the morning.

There was a lot to see from the Great Meadow. American Robins were abundant, and we saw our first **Black Phoebe** flycatcher of the day. Then we were mesmerized by the sight of a **Brown Creeper** carefully climbing one of the tall conifers that anchors the lawn. Several times it fluttered down the trunk toward the ground before perching and climbing back up again. This characteristic behavior offered our entire group plenty of opportunity to observe the Creeper's distinctive curved beak and fan-shaped



Brown Creeper

Photo: Rick Leche

tail. Nearby, a **Yellow-rumped Warbler** foraged in pine boughs.

In the Garden of Fragrance we were treated to the sight of a large flock of **Cedar Waxwings**. We got a good look at these beautiful birds before they took to the air in a flock that circled and then perched high in the conifers on nearby Heidelberg Hill. We caught a glimpse of a pair of **House Finches**, and we could hear the chatter of a flock of **Bushtits** in nearby trees.



Cedar Waxwings

Photo: Matt Knoth

The Waterfowl Pond was populated with at least twenty **American Coots** and two pairs of **Mallards**. We had a brief view of a **Hutton's Vireo** in the trees of the Chilean Garden, then were surprised when a large raptor-like bird high overhead turned out to be a **Turkey Vulture**. We are accustomed to seeing hawks in and above the garden, and the Turkey Vulture was unusual.

Near the Succulent Garden we got a close look at a **California Towhee**, and at **Dark-eyed Juncos** and **Western Scrub Jays**. Then we heard chatter and caught a glimpse of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**. Near the Redwood Grove we saw **Western Gulls** wheeling overhead. **Common Ravens** were in flight. Scattered throughout the garden was a winter's abundance of sparrows. Over the course of the morning we saw four different species: **Fox, Golden-crowned, White-crowned, and Song Sparrows**. Thanks to everyone who came out for the lovely walk, and we'll see you next month!



Turkey Vulture

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Photo: SFNE

The Birding for Everyone group assembled for the February walk in the San Francisco Botanical Garden.



Incubation Begins at Heron Island Nancy DeStefanis, Exec. Director, SFNE

During February, volunteers spotted six herons in nests on Stow Lake's Heron Island in Golden Gate Park.

Some of the herons had already paired up and occupied existing nests. The pairs began gathering branches to renovate the nests, thereby strengthening their bond. Herons without partners perched in the trees looking for unattached females.

In March we expect to see the herons sitting on the nests incubating eggs. Both female and male herons undertake the task of keeping the eggs warm.

Usually the female lays two to six eggs (a clutch). At Stow Lake clutches have been large—usually four eggs. Incubation lasts about thirty days, and by early April we hope to see the first chicks!

Our Heron Watch program at Stow Lake begins on Saturday, April 13th, and continues until May 18th.

I look forward to seeing you at Stow Lake!



Breeding herons in their Stow Lake nests go about the business of nest building, mating displays, and keeping watch.



Heron Photos: Sandi Wong

Right: Ian dresses as his favorite hero, Super Heron, for preschool hero day.



Photo: SFNE

Upcoming Events*

Heron Watch at Stow Lake: Opening Day Saturday, April 13, and every Saturday through May 18, 10 am to 1 pm. 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.

Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month. Led by Megan Prelinger on Mar. 2; led by Logan Kahle on Apr. 6, 10 am–noon. Meet in front of San Francisco Botanical Garden bookstore. SF Nature fees: Adults \$10, children free. See additional Botanical Garden fees below. 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: Saturday Mar. 9, the last birding tours of the season. 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: In Oakland: Thursday, Apr. 18, 12:30 pm, at the Oakland Museum. Museum admission: \$12 general; \$9 seniors & students with valid ID; \$6 youth, 9–17.

In San Francisco: Thursday, April 18, 7:30 pm, at the Randall Museum, SF. FREE program.

Talk and slide show 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 20 years.

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

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Coyotes in the City

Coyotes breed all around San Francisco. Sandi Wong captured these photos at one of their dens. She uses a long-range lens that does not disturb the coyotes. —Ed.



Clockwise from directly above, in the order in which they were taken: alert mother coyote with pup; settling down; pup sleeping; father kissing pup; father keeping watch; yawning; one more yawn.



Osprey flying over the SF Botanical Garden.

Winter Sightings Around the Bay

All photos by Sandi Wong



Ruby-crowned Kinglet at SF Botanical Garden.



Male Common Goldeneye (compare with Male Barrow's Goldeneye, at right).



Western Scrub Jay taking off at the SF Botanical Garden.



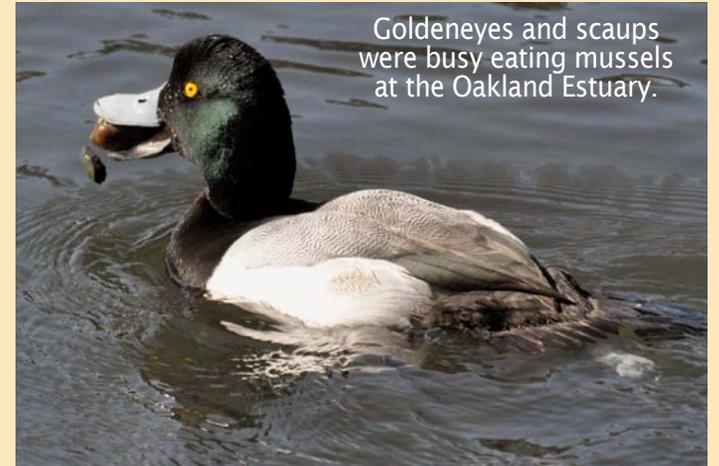
Male Barrow's Goldeneye.



Female Barrow's Goldeneye.



Anna's Hummingbird with nesting material.



Goldeneyes and scaups were busy eating mussels at the Oakland Estuary.

Male Lesser Scaup eating mussel after discarding shell.