



## A Matching Grant for SF Nature Education

Dear Friends,

Thank you to all who have contributed so far to our matching grant for \$10,000. We need your help to meet our goal—the matching grant expires May 31st.

The grant and matching funds will support our 27 Saturday programs for the public: *Heron Watch*, *Birding for Everyone*, *Birding for Kids and their Families*, Heron's Head Park birding tours and internships for middle- and high-school students.

Please help us reach our goal by donating now online or sending a check.

Donors of \$50 or more will receive a set of Great Blue Heron postcards that show their courtship behaviors, and a parent and newly hatched chick.

Donors of \$250 or more will receive five different Great Blue Heron greeting cards suitable for framing.

Donors of \$500 or more will receive a framed 8x10 Great Blue Heron photograph.

Donors of \$1,000 or more may choose a private guided tour of the Great Blue Heron colony at Stow Lake for six people, complete with picnic lunch: sandwiches, cheese, and drinks OR two framed photos of a Great Blue Heron. All photos of the herons are by Jim Sullivan for San Francisco Nature Education.

Thanks for your support.

Best regards,

*Nancy*

Nancy DeStefanis

SF Nature Education  
3450 Geary, Ste. 208  
San Francisco, CA 94118

e-mail: [info@sfnature.org](mailto:info@sfnature.org)  
telephone: 415-387-9160  
[www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org)



## Opening Day at Heron Watch

Sharon Pretti, Naturalist and Tour Leader

We had a great opening day at Stow Lake on April 13th—sunny weather and new hatchlings! An enthusiastic group joined the nature walk, and we headed out under clear skies at 10:30 am. Mike Smylie, a volunteer from ERM Corporation, carried the spotting scope. We stopped at various vantage points around Stow Lake to enjoy views of the four heron nests.

We saw adult herons keeping watch over a nest containing two chicks. The chicks popped up, and we were treated to their awkward but always enjoyable wing flapping. We saw other incubating adults take breaks to stand, stretch, and turn their eggs. So far two nests have two chicks each.



Photo: Jack Shim

Adult and chick make their first appearance for Heron Watch on April 13th.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Sharon Pretti, in red cap, with her group as they watch the nesting herons from Strawberry Island.

We talked about the life cycle of the herons (breeding season from January to June), their diet (fish, gophers, small birds), their size (four feet, four inches tall), their ability to strike prey at 90 miles an hour (because of their S-shaped necks) and many other fascinating heron facts.

### On the pages ahead:

- 2 *Heron Watch*, continued;
- 3 *Heron Watch* Report for April 20th
- 4 *Birding for Kids* Resumes; Upcoming Events
- 5 *Birding for Everyone* Report and photos
- 6 The Great Egret Hunts a Vole
- 7 A Mother Goose and Many Goslings

*Continued on next page*



Photo: SFNE

Nancy DeStefanis, SFNE executive director (left), greets four visitors from Italy. They loved the great blues; in Italy they see grey herons.

*Continued from previous page*

We also viewed a female Black Phoebe sitting on her nest; we expect nestlings in the coming weeks. Also spotted were Canada Geese sitting on their nests. We saw Red-tailed Hawks flying high above us, and were treated several times to the bright red epaulets of the Red-winged Blackbird. It was a great day, and we look forward to watching more heron chicks hatch and grow.



Photo: SFNE

ERM volunteer Mike Smylie shows Emily one of the nests. Mike serves as chief of operations for Heron Watch each year.



Photo: Jesse Krider

Red-winged Blackbird shows off an epaulet on Strawberry Hill.



Photo: Sandi Wong

Black Phoebe prepares to feed two hungry chicks.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Child is delighted by sight of heron chicks.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Heron and sign draw people in.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Cherry blossoms in bloom.



Photo: Jesse Krider

Growing chicks in nest facing Strawberry Hill.



Photo: Jesse Krider

Chicks are growing fast.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Volunteer Trace Cannell, right, explains the life cycle of herons.



Photo: SFNE

Anne Galjour (center) answers questions from the public.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Folks look up to see the Great-horned Owl nest.

Bay Nature magazine interviewed Nancy DeStefanis of SF Nature Education about its Saturday *Heron Watch* program at Stow Lake. Read the online [story](http://baynature.org/articles/back-again-great-blue-herons-nest-at-stow-lake/) from April 17th, or go to this address: <http://baynature.org/articles/back-again-great-blue-herons-nest-at-stow-lake/>



Photo: Sandi Wong

All four Great-horned Owllets are visible in nest on Strawberry Island.

## Heron Watch Report for April 20th

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

Saturday was warm and sunny and lots of folks flocked to Stow Lake and the Heron Watch site. A steady flow of people kept the volunteers busy at the spotting scopes. There were parent herons flying in and out to feed chicks at nest #2 (center of tree) and nest #4, facing Strawberry Island. The familiar *kak-kak* of the hungry chicks reverberated around Stow Lake.

Meanwhile at nest #1 (far left facing the observation site) an adult stood up for about a minute and then sat down to incubate eggs. At nest #3 (upper right facing the observation site) it was very quiet; the adult that stands up regularly was not to be seen. We hope to see chicks soon but one can never be certain.

At 10:30 am, a group collected for the weekly nature walk around the lake and Strawberry Island. We set out promptly and stopped to observe the Black Phoebe chicks. Then we were off to check on nest #2, where we could clearly observe two chicks alone (perhaps already three weeks old). When the chicks are reach three weeks both parents must forage to feed them.

We crossed the Roman Bridge and turned right. Halfway down the path we turned and looked back. A Great-horned Owl nest loomed large. We observed the runt inside the nest; the other three owlets are now branch hopping.

We headed up the path to get the best view of the two chicks in nest #4. We were rewarded with a magnificent view and lots of *oohs* and *ahs* from our group. The two chicks were standing, and again no parents were present.

As we headed back we observed another Black Phoebe nest with the adult sitting on eggs. We crossed the Rustic Bridge and observed a huge Spiny Softshell turtle on a log with Red-eared Sliders. We ended back at our observation site, and the group expressed their thanks for a lovely walk.



Photo: Mike Smylie

ERM volunteer, Ariane Burwell (in gray), shows off the herons.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Spiny Softshell Turtle



Birding for Kids families at the SF Botanical Garden last October.

Photo: Megan Prelinger

### **Birding for Kids returns to SF Botanical Garden: June through September 2013**

Starting on the first Saturday in June, we will resume our popular birding program for families. Kids ages four to ten, along with their parents or guardians, will walk through the Botanical Garden with an SF Nature naturalist—spotting birds and checking them off in a free field journal. Highlights of past trips include sightings of California Quail, Great Blue Herons, Lesser Goldfinches, Red-tailed and Red-Shouldered Hawks.

The naturalist for each month will meet families at the Garden bookstore at the entrance near 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way (just past the County Fair Building). Each walk starts at 10 am and ends at 11:30 am sharp.

Binoculars are useful, and a pencil for drawing in the field journal. Adults \$10, children free.

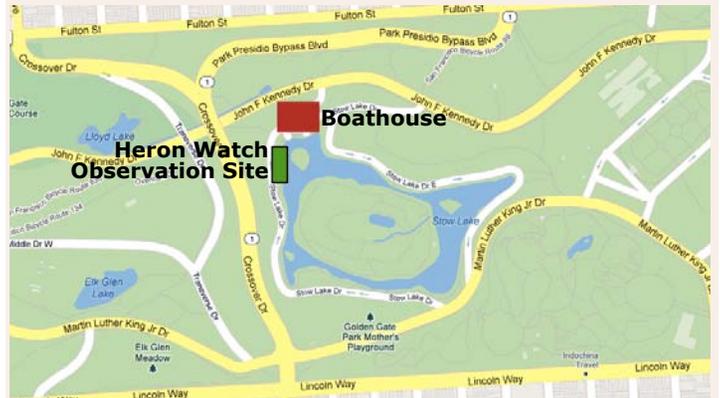


Nancy DeStefanis (back to camera) shows visitors two heron chicks through a spotting scope from Strawberry Hill.

Photo: Mike Smylie

**Heron Watch at Stow Lake:** Every Saturday now through May 18, 10 am to 1 pm. Follow sign at boathouse to program site. Observation using spotting scopes: free. Interns and volunteers will answer questions and explain heron behavior. Donations welcome.

Naturalist-led walk every Saturday at 10:30 am for adults and children to observe the nesting birds that arrive every spring at Stow Lake. Adults \$10, children free.



### **Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month.**

Led by Megan Prelinger on May 4 and June 1: 10 am–noon; no walks scheduled for July or August. 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.

### **Birding for Kids and their Families: first Saturday as follows:**

**June 1, July 6, Aug. 3, Sept. 7**, from 10 to 11:30 am. Naturalist Melissa Hirt will lead the June 1 walk; Linda Grant will lead the July 6 walk. Adults \$10 each, children free.

**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.

**Visit Lake Merritt in Oakland\*** to observe nesting birds. Volunteers with spotting scopes will be there to help visitors spot the birds and to answer questions. **\*A partnership of San Francisco Nature Education & Golden Gate Audubon Society**

**Meet near the Rotary Center on these Saturdays: May 11, May 25, June 8 between 10 am and noon. FREE.**

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

## Birding for Everyone Report

Logan, SFNE Intern



On Saturday, April 6th, six people joined us for a drizzly walk in the San Francisco Botanical Garden. Despite the weather, we had a fantastic day scouring one of the city's botanical treasures. We started at the entrance, where we heard and saw

the first of many **Song Sparrows** of the morning. This small, streaky, brown bird has adapted to San Francisco's expansive plantings, and does well in moist areas with low cover.

As we continued to the pond we found several **American Coots** and a **Mallard**, typical water birds for this location. A **Black Phoebe** flew underneath the bridge over the pond, likely indicating nesting at that spot. In past years this has been a common nesting location for this species, and it is great to see the site in use for another year. This energetic black and white bird is our only common wintering tyrant flycatcher, a family that enters the region primarily for the summer.

We walked on to the Succulent Garden. Here we were delighted to see a pair of **Pygmy Nuthatches** on a dead agave stalk. Then one of them entered a hole in the stalk! After a little while the nuthatch poked its



Photo: Len Blumin

Pygmy Nuthatch

head out of its nest and flew off.

At the nearby John Muir Pond we heard the quickening chatter of a **Wilson's Warbler**. After a little patience on our



Photo: Rick Leche

Song Sparrow



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Wilson's Warbler

birds, the **Pacific Wren**. Initially it was part of a very diverse species—**Winter Wren**—that inhabited most of North America and Eurasia. In 2010, the species was split into three: **Eurasian Wren**, **Winter Wren**, and **Pacific Wren**.

The first is found throughout Eurasia; the Winter Wren in eastern North America; the Pacific Wren only on the Pacific slope of North America, making it a highly prized sighting for many visitors. As we entered the grove we immediately heard the rich, varied jumble of our target bird.

Soon one bird popped into view, and we took good looks as it perched in a tree. Its appearance is not as impressive as its song: mostly brown with a little bit of barring on the flanks.



Photo (detail): Matt Knoth

Lesser Goldfinch

parts the bird revealed itself, and we were able to view it briefly.

Next we went to the Redwood Grove. This spot is home to one of the Golden Gate Park's special



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Pacific Wren



Photo: Len Blumin

Northern Mockingbird

number of bird songs it can imitate.

Other birds came into this habitat, including the **Western Scrub Jay**. This loud bird is one of the country's largest passerines, or song birds. Its bright blue back makes it striking to behold.

It was great to be out, despite the foggy weather, walking in one of San Francisco's greatest gems. Our group spotted forty species.



Photo: SFNE

At left: Nancy DeStefanis; center: Logan, tour leader, with first arrivals.

*Please join our next walk on Saturday, May 4th, at the SF Botanical Garden!*



6

1

2

## The Great Egret Hunts a Vole

Many folks are surprised to learn that Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons eat gophers and voles. Here's how they do it, using the stab-and-grab method.

Photos taken in Berkeley by Sandi Wong



3



5

4





Canada Goose keeps her goslings warm

Oh, to be young!



Six goslings, looking unsure, stand by the water.

# A Mother Goose and Many Goslings

All photos by Sandi Wong



A beautiful trio.



One gosling goes its own way.->

Insulating the goslings with goose down.



A tender moment with the goslings.



Two goslings whistling.



A gosling gets a free ride.