



# The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education ♦ April 2014

## Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

It's April, and we're waiting with bated breath to see the first heron chicks at Stow Lake! Our exciting news is that a new San Francisco Nature Education Heron Cam will go live on Saturday, April 12th, the same day we start our six-week *Heron Watch* program in Golden Gate Park.

What can visitors and viewers expect in April? We should be seeing one- and two-week-old chicks with Tina Turner hairdos (black and spiky) peeking out from their deep nests. Parents will be taking turns feeding the chicks every two hours.

For the first four weeks one parent will be stationed at the nest to brood the chicks every night. Because chicks require a lot of food, parents will take turns foraging through the park and vicinity; koi ponds are particularly popular.

Adults rely on fish, gophers, and small birds to provide the sustenance needed by ever-hungry chicks. It's a very exciting time, because until they can fly, chicks are confined to the nest, where we will be able view them.

I hope to see you at Stow Lake for Heron Watch. Please follow the live webcam feed of the breeding heron colony at [www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org).

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## A Webcam Comes to Heron Watch

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director



Starting April 12th, the Great Blue Heron colony at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park will be easily viewed via a new webcam!

Visit the San Francisco Nature Education Heron Cam at our website [sfnature.org](http://sfnature.org) during daylight hours to observe nest

activity. The installation is a collaboration between San Francisco Nature Education, ERM and ERM Foundation, SF Recreation and Park Department, and the Stow Lake Boathouse. We thank Mike Smylie of ERM for webcam assistance, and Phil Ginsburg, general manager of SF Rec and Park, for permissions.

The addition of a webcam to our colony in Golden Gate Park will increase the number of people who can watch these amazing birds during their nesting period. So far we have seen three active nests with adult herons incubating eggs. The webcam will be focused on two active nests. We should also be able to see limited activity in the third nest.

The webcam will be on 24 hours a day, accompanied by my blog explaining observable nest activity. There will be lots of information on our website. We will welcome relevant questions and comments sent to [info@sfnature.org](mailto:info@sfnature.org).

We continue our 21st year of monitoring the herons at Stow Lake. Why not go to see them live? We will be available at our Stow Lake Observation Site every Saturday from April 12th through May 17th, from 10 to 1pm. Volunteers will staff spotting scopes and provide free information; donations will be welcome.

At 10:30 am on those Saturdays we will lead walking tours to vantage points from which to see the nesting herons and other wild birds. The fee for nature walks: adults \$10; children free. Children will receive nature journals of Golden Gate Park. No reservations are required. We look forward to seeing you there.

Also, San Francisco Nature Education will be reaching out to schools in SF to alert them to our webcam feed, and provide them with educational materials on our website's pages.

If you would like to help keep our webcam streaming and underwrite our work, please send a check or donate now on our website at [sfnature.org](http://sfnature.org).



Photo: Grace Ruth

The Great Blue Heron colony on Heron Island, Stow Lake, in Golden Gate Park.

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## Heron's Head Park, February 22nd

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist



Our February 22nd walk at Heron's Head Park began with a nice view of a **Red-tailed Hawk** perched on a nearby light pole. The day was sunny, warm, and windless—conditions appreciated by everyone.

The tide was out and the mud flats along the park's southern shore were well-exposed. When the tide is very low it can be difficult to see birds feeding along the flats from the main trail, so we took the trail south towards India Basin Park.

Crossing the bridge that leads to the former PG&E power plant site gave us excellent views of **Buffleheads** and **Horned Grebes**. From the trailside we could scope the shore looking back toward Heron's Head to see **Avocets** and **Black-bellied Plovers** not visible from Heron's Head's main trail.

Offshore with good light we found a single **Clark's Grebe** in the flocks of **Western Grebes** and **Ruddy Ducks**. In the small cove at India Basin Park we found more Avocets, and contrasting views of **Long-billed Curlew** and **Whimbrel**.

Returning to Heron's Head Park, we heard numerous **White-crowned Sparrows** singing from their coyote bush perches. The **Black Oystercatchers** were feeling the oncoming spring as two pairs began to set up their territories, chasing and whistling at each other around the shoreline. A single **Double-crested Cormorant** was showing off the newly acquired breeding plumes that give the species its name.

Most of the **American Avocets** were still in their basic, or winter, plumage. However, two birds feeding together showed their other heads. When another Avocet in dull plumage tried to join them, the brighter birds chased away the intruder.

A few **Forster's Terns**—more common in the summer—perched on offshore channel markers, and one of the many **Black-bellied Plovers** showed the beginnings of a black belly. On such a warm day, in the lengthening daylight hours it is easy to feel that migration and breeding season are almost here.



Photo: Bill Hummelwell

Clockwise from above: Black Oystercatchers; group including Western Gulls and American Avocets; Willet; American Avocet; American Wigeon on rock; Whimbrel; Willet in flight.



Photos: Grace Ruth



Heron's Head Park group on February 22; walk leader Alan Hopkins at right.

## Birding for Everyone, March 1st

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



It was an overcast day for our group of ten in the SF Botanical Garden on the first of March. It was a quiet day too, at first, with few birds around the Great Meadow. An **Anna's Hummingbird** was in a tree near the Fragrance Garden, and the first of several

**Red-tailed Hawks** of the day flew out of the cypress on the hill above the Waterfowl Pond. In the pond were **Mallards** and **American Coots**, with **American Robins** and **Scrub Jays** in the surrounding trees.

At Gondwana Circle we heard the songs of **Purple Finches** and **Song Sparrows**, and then had a view of a **Northern Flicker**, and we started seeing **Song Sparrows** as well. **Western Gulls** flew over from the direction of Stow Lake, and a flock of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** decorated the trees as we walked toward the Perennial Garden.



Anna's Hummingbird

Photo: Matt Knoth



Allen's Hummingbird

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Around the gate we saw our first **Orange-crowned Warblers** of the day, and a **Townsend's Warbler**. Then, our first **Allen's Hummingbird**—of the day, and of the year! In fact, a pair of them flew about. We had a good opportunity to compare their



Orange-crowned Warbler

Photo: Rick Leche



Birding for Everyone in the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

Photo: Grace Ruth

contrasting sizes and colors, and would see them a few more times.

Below the Succulent Garden we heard the call of a **Pacific Wren**, and in the garden we had a **Hutton's Vireo**, more **Allen's** and **Anna's Hummingbirds**, and a view of a **Purple Finch** high in a tree. At the reservoir we had our first sighting of the day of a **Black Phoebe**, and a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, and more **Orange-crowned Warblers**. In the California Native Plant Garden we found numerous **Golden-**



Pacific Wren

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

**crowned Sparrows**, and then an exciting Hawk display.

First a **Red-shouldered Hawk** flew low right through the clearing over our heads; then two **Red-tailed Hawks** appeared, dancing with each other in the sky before settling onto perches in a tall cypress. A few minutes later another scene: a **Cooper's Hawk** chasing a **Red-tailed Hawk**. High overhead flew a **Turkey Vulture**. At the east end of the garden we saw a male **American Goldfinch** in a tree.

As our walk was winding up we had final sightings: **Dark-eyed Juncos** near the Bamboo Pond, then **Bushtits** near the library, close enough to see the pale eye color of the female **Bushtit** in contrast to the dark eye of the male. Lastly, a **Black-and-white Warbler** zipped through the "sapsucker tree" near the library as we wrapped up the day. It was an exciting conclusion to this last walk of winter. Next month: spring!



Cooper's Hawk

Photo: Judy Harter



Photo: Jesse Krider; © 2013 SF Nature Education



Photo: Jesse Krider; © 2013 SF Nature Education



Photo: Jesse Krider; © 2013 SF Nature Education



Photo: Jesse Krider; © 2013 SF Nature Education

**Get ready for *Heron Watch 2014!***  
**Saturdays, April 12th through**  
**May 17th, near the Stow Lake**  
**Boathouse in Golden Gate Park**

Please see page 6 for details.



Photo: Jim Sullivan; © 2013 SF Nature Education



Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Jim Sullivan; © 2013 SF Nature Education



**Hérons of North America**  
Photos by Len Blumin



Contributing photographer Len Blumin has been taking pictures of birds on both coasts for many years. Here are herons as Len has seen them in the Bay Area or Florida.

Clockwise from left: **Green Heron**, **Great Blue Heron**, **Little Blue Heron**, **Tricolored Heron**, **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** (on stump), and **Great Blue** with a great catch.





## Watching the Wary Watchers

Photos by Sandi Wong

These are a few of the birds recently spotted in the Bay Area by contributing photographer Sandi Wong. Some of them appear to have seen her too.

Clockwise from directly above, in Golden Gate Park:

**Red-tailed Hawk** in its nest, **Bushtit**, **Northern Flicker**; in Vacaville: **Burrowing Owl**.

## Upcoming Events\*

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

**Heron Watch: Opening Day** Saturday, April 12, and every Saturday through May 17, from 10 am to 1 pm. Follow sign at Stow Lake boathouse to nearby program site. Observation using spotting scopes: free. Interns and volunteers will be there to answer questions and explain heron behavior. Donations welcome.

San Francisco Nature Education Heron Cam goes live on April 12.

**Volunteer-led Nature Tours:** 10:30 to noon on Saturdays, April 12 through May 17, around Stow Lake and Strawberry Island to observe nesting herons and other birds. Meet at Heron Watch site (see above). Adults \$10, children free.

**Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month.** The Apr. 5 and May 3 walks will be led by Megan Prelinger: 10 am–noon. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. Adults \$10, children free.

**Birding for Kids and Families:** Saturdays Apr. 5 and May 3, with Christine Malfatti in the SF Botanical Garden, 10–11:30 am. Meet at the Garden Bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. Adults \$10 each, children free.

**SF Botanical Garden Admission:** FREE for all SF residents with proof of residency; non-residents pay varying fees. See the [garden's website](#) for details. \*Please see our [online events calendar](#).

### Support San Francisco Nature Education:

Adult membership	\$35
Dual membership	\$50
Senior membership	\$30

Send your fee via Donate Now or by check to:



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