



## Why We Give by Megan Prelinger



Back in the late 1990s, a vagrant South American Ringed Teal lived for a while at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park, and this is how my husband and I met Nancy DeStefanis. Nancy was monitoring the Great Blue Heron colony and helping everyone on the lakeshore to understand the ecology of the lake, including that unusual tenant.

Visiting Heron Watch I was impressed with how the volunteers and Nancy reached out to everyone: children and their grown-ups, people from the community, and people from all over the world. The openness of the mood was exciting—not every natural history series is so animated and inclusive! I later learned that Heron Watch was one piece of a larger puzzle.

During my years on the SFNE board I was deeply impressed by the school programs, which reach the people whose values and interests will shape future decisions about the environment. SFNE has such a wide vision of environmental education across its programs that it can be a challenge to view them at once: Heron Watch; monthly walks in the Botanical Garden; waterfront programs in winter; and most importantly, the school programs. SFNE programs reinvent birding—they make it an everyday, exciting, kid-friendly, and accessible activity.

Every young person exposed to nature through an SFNE program has been reached by activities that cost money. When you're on the receiving end, it seems like the programs just flow to the benefit of all—and they do.

But behind that is a hive of activity, and while much of it is done by volunteers, all the programs—especially the school programs—require resources that only financial donors provide. Please be generous with your support to SFNE so that SFNE can be generous to everyone.



## Showtime at Heron's Head Park

Eric Tamm, Intern



On the beautiful morning of Saturday, November 8th, my fellow intern and friend Jaileez Campos and I pulled up to Heron's Head Park, super excited. Today was finally the day that we would get to lead our first family bird walk, and we couldn't wait. Everything was shaping up to be a perfect day, and it didn't disappoint.

Jaileez and I got there an hour early to "pre-field," or go out to get an idea of what to expect on the tour. I didn't see a ton of birds during our pre-field, and I was worried there wouldn't be enough birds to keep the public entertained!

However, by 10 a.m. we were at the trailhead, and I felt confident, comfortable, and ready to lead the tour. The families and others on our part of the walk were great. There were five children with their parents and grandparents, and they had a blast!

They loved seeing the birds in our powerful scopes, and the kids helped us spot some great birds. It was a joy to see their faces light up when they saw the birds and learned some cool facts about them. I loved interacting with the people who joined our walk.

At the beginning we saw something interesting: a **Red-tailed Hawk** being mobbed by a murder of **American Crows**! What a sight!

During the tour, 36 birds came out to show off and play. Among these were some species I saw for the

first time: **Bufflehead**, **Pelagic Cormorant**, **Horned and Eared Grebes**. We saw some favorites from other trips: **Black-necked Stilt**, **Long-billed Curlew**, **Killdeer**, **Spotted and Least Sandpipers**, **Black Oystercatcher**, **Elegant Tern**, and **Snowy Egret**.

I was especially excited to see the **Bufflehead**, because the beautiful iridescence on its neck was glimmering in the sun. If you haven't seen one of these beautiful birds, join us next time we're in Heron's Head Park and help us look for some, because they are a treat.

Alan Hopkins, who was a leader on the adult tour, had mentioned that he had seen an **Elegant Tern**. I put my scope on an **Elegant Tern** sitting right next

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Heron's Head Park family birding walk on November 8th.

Photo: SFNE

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Photo: Doug Greenberg

Bufflehead



Photo: SFNE

Volunteers and interns at Heron's Head Park. From right: Jaileez, Eric, Alan Hopkins.

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to a **Black Oystercatcher** on some rocks, like two old friends gossiping about the group of people walking on the trail.

The coolest thing about the day was being able to see so many beautiful birds, and sharing what I've learned about them. The people on the tour were great, the volunteers were very helpful, and I was proud of the progress that Jaileez and I had made in two months.

Knowing birds and being able to identify and provide facts about them made our tour so enjoyable. We saw 36 species—our all-time best at Heron's Head Park!



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Black Oystercatcher



Photo: SFNE

Setting out on a Saturday morning birding tour of Heron's Head Park.

## Support San Francisco Nature Education—Your Donations Make a Difference!

Since our inception in 2000, SFNE has served more than 12,000 students in our school program and 15,000 adults and children in our Saturday programs. With your help, we look forward to doing even more in 2015.

Your support makes all the difference:

- \$35 basic membership (\$30 for seniors)
- \$100 provides 10 copies of *Birds of San Francisco* for classroom use
- \$250 covers the cost of two classroom visits
- \$500 covers the cost of two field trips (winter and spring)
- \$1,000 covers the full program, two classroom visits, two field trips, field guides, and all supplies
- \$2,500 covers the cost of all 27 Saturday field trips throughout the city

As 2014 draws to a close, you can help the youngest members of our community explore their connections to the natural world, awaken their curiosity, and encourage their concern for the environment. Our engaging public and school programs couldn't exist without your support. All donations are tax-deductible.

Please make a generous year-end donation. You may donate online or by mail. Thank you so much.

Warmest regards,

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director



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## Heron's Head Walk Report

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist



I arrived at Heron's Head Park on November 8th to find the parking lot full and a group of birders and guides eager to start on a stunningly beautiful day. As I strolled across the lovely landscaping to the group it occurred to me how much the area had changed since I began visiting what was then Pier 98 in the early 1980s.

Back then there were no picnic tables, barbecues, native plantings, dog runs, or bathrooms. There was nothing but an asphalt parking lot used by truckers to get some shuteye. Occasionally you'd see a fisherman, but never anyone else.

The excitement started early: a **Red-tailed Hawk** streaked across the sky doing its best to escape the flock of a dozen of **American Crows** doing their best to chase the raptor from the area. A brief moment, but the kind that keeps us returning to Heron's Head Park.

SF Nature Education wasn't the only group visiting Heron's Head that day: there was a group participating in a BioBlitz, a relatively new activity where a group of people document all the biodiversity in an area at one time. The blitzers were beginning to spread out with binoculars, butterfly nets, lenses, and cameras. We decided to blitz to the tidal area of the park before they chased off all the birds.

Clearly the seasons were changing. Fair numbers of **Bufflehead**, **Ruddy Ducks** and **Greater Scaup** had moved in since the week before. A large group of **Mew Gulls** was back at their winter roost. While the **Mew Gulls** had arrived from their northern breeding



What a dump! Heron's Head in the 1980s.

Port of San Francisco/Don Maskell Photography

grounds, a few **Elegant Terns** lingered before heading south to their wintering grounds.

**Elegant Terns** arrive along our coast in the early summer after breeding in Mexico, in what is known as post-breeding dispersal—they fly north after breeding instead of south, as most birds do. After

leaving here they may winter as far south as Chile.

Five tern species have been recorded at Heron's Head: Forster's Terns year-round; **Caspian Terns** in spring and summer; and **Elegant Terns** in summer and fall. **Least Terns** are summer nesters on the Alameda Naval Air Station, and you're lucky when you get a sighting from Heron's Head.

**Common Terns** are no longer common in our area; they tend to migrate far offshore, well beyond the range of spotting scopes.



Eared Grebe



Horned Grebe

Photos: Len Blumin

At the end of the peninsula we had wonderful looks at **Least Sandpipers**. Far out in the bay were **Surf Scoter**, **Horned Grebe**, and a **Harbor Seal**. As we worked our way back an **Elegant Tern** posed right next to a **Black Oystercatcher**, allowing full-frame views of both magnificent birds. We had some great birds to watch—and a great group of birders!



Caspian Tern



Elegant Tern

Photos: Len Blumin



Equipped to watch birds at Heron's Head. Alan Hopkins (third from left) with volunteers and visitors.

Photo: SFNE

## Birding for Everyone, November 1st

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



Our November walk took place on a crisp day under unsettled skies. We experienced a continuing abundance of fall warblers, even though we did not see as many warbler species as in October.

In the Fragrance Garden we had clear views of a visiting **Palm Warbler**, and throughout the walk we enjoyed sightings of **Yellow-rumped** and **Townsend's Warblers** in nearly every corner of the Arboretum.

At the Waterfowl Pond we appreciated the growing numbers of **American Coots**, and paused to observe a **Snowy Egret** foraging in the shallow water.

Overflying species included **California** and **Western Gulls**, **Common Ravens** and **American Crows**, **Canada Geese**, one **Turkey Vulture**, and a flock of **Band-tailed Pigeons**. Throughout the walk we saw **Scrub** and **Steller's Jays**, and abundant **Anna's Hummingbirds** and **Black Phoebes**.

The north slope of the Children's Garden was a rich spot that day. We were able to observe both **Townsend's** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers** in close conjunction with a **Hermit Thrush**, **Lesser Goldfinches**, **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, and **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**—an excellent opportunity for exploring contrasting features of these species.



Hermit Thrush

Elsewhere in the Children's Garden we were able to complete our roster of four species of sparrows seen: **White-crowned**, **Song**, and **Fox Sparrow**, in addition to the fall-arriving **Golden-crowned Sparrow**.

Sightings of **Red-tailed Hawks**, a **Cooper's Hawk**, a **California Towhee**, a **Purple Finch**, and a **Northern Flicker** rounded out our day.



Golden-crowned Sparrow



Townsend's Warbler



Snowy Egret



Snowy Egret



Yellow-rumped Warbler

### Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

We've had a great year: installing the first heron cam in California at Stow Lake, expanding our regular corps of volunteers to 25 to cover our 27 programs, extending this year's Heron Watch through August (so the public could observe three late chicks), providing internships to five young people, and continuing our school program for underserved youth.

As we move into 2015, I am excited to announce that SF Recreation and Parks General Manager Phil Ginsburg has approved the plan to reinstall our Heron Cam at Stow Lake in February for three seasons, through August 2017. We will let you know when it's up and running. SFNE will be seeking sponsors and major donors to underwrite the installation.

We are grateful to the upbeat and knowledgeable volunteers who make our programs effective and fun.

I would like to thank the volunteers who donated their time and expertise from August through December of this year: Bob Hirt, Missi Hirt-Gavic, Marty Hackett, Alan Hopkins, Trace Kannell, Christine Malfatti, Megan Prelinger, Anthony Saponara, Mike Smylie, Andrew Sundling, Jacob Zollinger, and our interns Jaileez Campos and Eric Tamm.

I would like to especially thank our dedicated volunteers Judy Harter, newsletter editor, and Peter Shen, webmaster, for their generous expenditures of time in making our programs come to life online. Thanks also to everyone who contributed writing or photographs to the *Blue Heron* newsletter.

Wishing you and yours a very happy holiday and new year.

*Nancy*  
Best regards,  
Nancy H. DeStefanis

## November Bird Action at Crissy Field

### Jaileez Campos, Intern



On November 15, Eric Tamm and I led our first birding walk at Crissy Field. The weather was perfect for birding—sunny and clear skies. We were fortunate to be joined by two volunteers from ERM Corporation—Andrew Sundling and Jacob Zollinger. We started at the Warming Hut and headed toward the restored wetland. Our group included families with young children, folks from San Francisco Nature Education, walkers, joggers, and bicyclists.

Upon our arrival we saw a harbor seal next to the dock. As we began our walk, I thought I saw another harbor seal. It was a diver in a black wetsuit doing the backstroke! We saw a **Western Grebe** floating behind a sailboat and an **Elegant Tern**. Overhead we saw three **Brown Pelicans** flying together.

When we reached the marsh we saw a flotilla of **Ruddy Ducks** with their tails jutting up. A **Snowy Egret** nearby hunted for fish. We observed the **Eared Grebe** and the iridescent **Bufflehead** between its frequent dives. We spotted a sole male **Hooded Merganser** with his crest on display! It was quite a thrill. The **Brown Pelicans** were crashing into the water, scooping up fish.

When we were walking back to the Warming Hut I spotted a bird floating in the waves. I put a scope on the bird. To my surprise, it was a **Red-throated Loon**.



Nancy DeStefanis advises Jaileez.

Field photos: Jacob Zollinger for SFNE



Eric, left, shows a young visitor how to use a scope.

This species is on the yellow watch list in the *Audubon State of the Birds Report*. These are species that are range-restricted or declining in numbers, and experiencing a high level of threats. Seeing the Red-Throated Loon gave me hope that this species may rebound from their population decline and come off the list.

If you had told me three months ago that I would be birding, I would not have believed you. I am now able to identify over 40 bird species! On our first birding walk in September the only species I could identify were the Canada Goose and Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon. It feels good that the time I have invested in studying birds has started paying off.



Interns Eric and Jaileez with new SFNE Board Member Andrew Sundling.

Our recent intern training at Heron's Head Park contributed to our success at Crissy Field. Some birds found at both parks, such as **Snowy Egrets** and **Double-crested Cormorants**, I have encountered several times. During our November walk, we saw 19 different bird species!

Below, left to right:  
Western Grebe, Hooded Merganser, Red-throated Loon in winter plumage.



Western Grebe: Len Blumin;  
Merganser and Loon: Peter Massas

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#### Eagle Optics

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The experts at Eagle Optics can advise you on the best binoculars and spotting scopes. EO offers excellent prices on all equipment. Each year, they generously donate high-quality spotting scopes and binoculars for our volunteers and interns to use in the field.

#### Fireside Camera

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The specialists at Fireside Camera advise us on all binocular, camera and tripod purchases. They help us maintain all of our camera and field equipment, and each year they generously donate a pair of binoculars for use by our interns. Their prices are excellent and the service is exceptional.

## Birds & Climate Change: New Data from the Recent Audubon Report

Eric Tamm, Intern

The Audubon Birds and Climate Report was released in September, 2014. This extensive study aims to predict how the ranges of 588 birds in North America might be affected by climate change. Audubon used data collected by citizens, scientists, and birders, including the Audubon Christmas Bird Count and the North American Breeding Bird Survey. The report predicts a climatic sustainability for each bird species: the range of temperatures, precipitation, and seasonal changes each depends on to live.

Audubon mapped the birds' potential future ranges. They ran simulations based on internationally recognized greenhouse gas scenarios: where species might be in 2020, 2050, and 2080.

The results of this report showed that birds are in trouble. More than half of North American species—314 of the 588—are predicted to lose 50% or more of their current range by 2080. Worse, 126 of the 314 are already classified as endangered, and are predicted to lose more than 50% of their range by 2050.

### Climate Strongholds for North American Birds

Audubon has used a method called *spatial prioritization* to rank locations based on where conservation efforts will be the most effective for birds in the future.

From these spatial prioritizations Audubon then built a climatic sustainability model for each bird. Audubon used these approaches to find *climate strongholds*. These areas are valuable for perpetuating one or more bird species while taking future climate change distribution into account. Ultimately, these are ways to create a long-term conservation plan, one that will be the most effective and save the most birds for the longest time.



Golden Eagle

Photo: David H. Webster

### Climate Priority Species

Audubon identified which species are most likely to be affected by future climate changes, classified as



Burrowing Owl

Photo: Geoff Gallice

climate priority species. They have split this group into two parts, *climate-endangered* or *climate-threatened* species. Climate-endangered species need help right now, where they are, and climate-threatened species need help not

only where they are now, but also with relocating to new sites in the future. Sadly, a local favorite, the Black Oystercatcher, is classified as a climate priority species.

### Important Birding Areas

An *important birding area* is one of 2,600 areas with significant bird populations. When combined with climate prioritizations these areas can be ranked by their potential usefulness in conservation projects. Studying these areas can inform efforts in policy, conservation planning, and volunteer engagement.

Some Northern California birds adversely affected by climate change are:

- Golden Eagle
- Bald Eagle
- Marbled Godwit
- Rufous Hummingbird
- California Least Tern
- Ridgway's Rail
- Brown Pelican
- Swainson's Hawk
- Northern Harrier
- Burrowing Owl

### What Citizens Can Do

**Create a bird-friendly yard:** Use fewer pesticides, let dead trees stand, make bird baths, and convert lawns to native plants to create safe places for birds.

### Get involved with your local important bird area:

Help protect the places that birds frequent by pitching in with San Francisco Nature Education and Audubon restoration, cleanup, citizen science, and field trips.

**Put birds on your community's agenda:** Get the word out about your favorite birds, and why it's important to protect birds in the community. Reach more people by writing letters to your newspaper, speaking at community events, or visiting local schools.

**Meet with local decision-makers:** Share this science with groups that manage our natural resources, and ask decision-makers how they plan to address global warming. For more information on how to help decision-makers use and integrate Audubon's science, or to contribute ideas, email [climate-science@audubon.org](mailto:climate-science@audubon.org).



Rufous Hummingbird

Photo: Walter Nussbaumer

### Support policies that lower emissions:

Urge local, state, and national leaders to enact policies that lower greenhouse gas emissions and support clean energy. Renewable portfolio standards, energy-efficiency targets, and other proactive measures can limit the damaging effects of global warming on birds. Put these policies on your leaders' agendas, and publicly support them.

### Summing Up

There are data-driven ways to predict climate change and its effects on biodiversity. Audubon is heading in the right direction towards planning for climate change in order to save as many birds as possible. For more about the report go to: <http://climate.audubon.org/>

**SF Nature Needs Volunteers for 2015 Saturday Programs**

Send an e-mail to [volunteer@sfnature.org](mailto:volunteer@sfnature.org)

## Book Reviews

### *Secrets of the Oak Woodlands: Plants & Animals Among California's Oaks*

by Kate Marianchild; 36 illustrations by Ann Meyer Maglinte; Heyday Books, 2014. 224 pages/paper; \$18. [heydaybooks.com](http://heydaybooks.com)

Reviewed by Jeff Harter

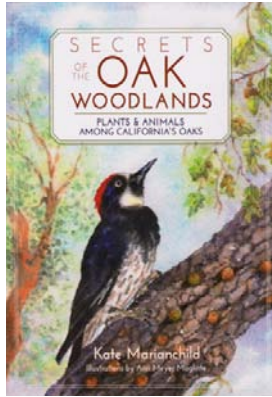
Though categorized as a “nature/guidebook” by the publisher, this rich volume covers far more ground. It addresses its guidebook responsibilities with etymological breakdowns of Latin names and “ecology reference guides” at the end of most chapters, and masterfully lives up to being a nature book by presenting a wide-ranging survey of the flora and fauna (and fungi) found in California’s oak woodlands.

But each chapter is unabashedly composed as a personal essay, allowing the reader to encounter squirrels, coyotes, lizards, butterflies, and nearly a score of other woodland denizens through the eyes of an author who makes her explorations part of the story. Ann Meyer Maglinte’s detailed illustrations are interspersed throughout.

The coyote chapter—which begins with the winning phrase “The first time I slept in my yurt”—contains a clearly-written explanation of why trying to control coyotes by killing them leads to more coyotes. Pragmatism is on display, too, when she advises that controlling California ground squirrel populations “to protect plants and structures” is best done without the use of poison.

The California newt chapter contains a startling anecdote on the inadvisability of including a newt in your morning coffee, as well as a deft disquisition on how toxicological “arms races” can occur between predator and prey.

Marianchild’s enthusiasm is infectious because she grounds it so well in precise observation, skilled prose, and careful research. Each essay is packed with fascinating and marvelously concise assemblages of facts gleaned from scientific studies. The result is both educational and entertaining. Like the best entertainment, it leaves the reader wishing for more.



### *Legendary Locals of San Francisco's Richmond, Sunset, and Golden Gate Park*

by Lorri Ungaretti; illustrated with 200 photos; Arcadia Publishing, 2014. 128 pages/paper; \$21.99. [www.arcadiapublishing.com](http://www.arcadiapublishing.com)

Reviewed by Andrew Sundling

Hundreds of books have been written about San Francisco’s illustrious history, its tourist destinations, eateries, architecture, neighborhoods, and fog.

What you won’t often find is a book that uncovers the legends and lore of the districts that fall outside the city’s downtown core. *Legendary Locals of San Francisco's Richmond, Sunset, and Golden Gate Park California* does just that.

Author Lorri Ungaretti takes three areas: Golden Gate Park and the Richmond and Sunset Districts, originally called “Outside Lands.” She captures a rich history of what was once heralded as the “western desert of San Francisco.” Ungaretti rediscovers the stories of the heroes, famous (Barbara Eden, Johnny Mathis, and Robin Williams) and infamous (Anton LaVey), who turned a bleak section of San Francisco into a vibrant, colorful, and thriving multicultural community.

#### Golden Gate Park

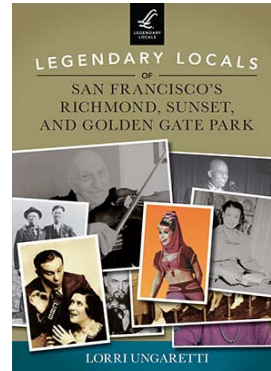
Frederick Law Olmsted, creator of Central Park in New York, famously declined to design Golden Gate Park because it was too unpromising. Instead, in 1870, the job went to engineer William Hammond Hall, who saw tremendous potential in the dunes. The result of his tireless efforts, with later contributions from park superintendent John McLaren, is today’s Golden Gate Park.

#### The Heron Lady

Nancy DeStefanis, founder of San Francisco Nature Education, is better known by locals as “The Heron Lady” of Golden Gate Park since she discovered a pair of nesting Great Blue Herons at Stow Lake more than 20 years ago. Along with staff and dedicated volunteers, Nancy continues to educate the city’s youth and adults about our wild birds and local habitats.

#### Another Bird Advocate

Nancy isn’t the only bird advocate in the Outer Lands. Sunset District resident, birder, and artist Alan Hopkins



## Upcoming Events in December

**SF Nature Walks:** Please bring binoculars if you can, and a pencil. All walks are from 10 am to noon.

**Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month.** Walks are from 10 am to noon, Dec. 6. Meet Megan Prelinger at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. Adults \$10, 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.

**Birding Chain of Lakes:** Saturday, Dec. 13. Meet Alan Hopkins in the parking lot just north of Middle Lake in Golden Gate Park at 10 am. Adults \$10, children free. No bike racks. See map at right.

**Save the Dates:** Jan. 10: Heron’s Head Park field trip led by Bob Hirt and Missi Hirt-Gavic; Jan. 17: Crissy Field walk led by Megan Prelinger.

**Please see our online events calendar.**



has been cataloging birds since 1978. Data collected by him and countless volunteers is used by naturalists and biologists around the world.

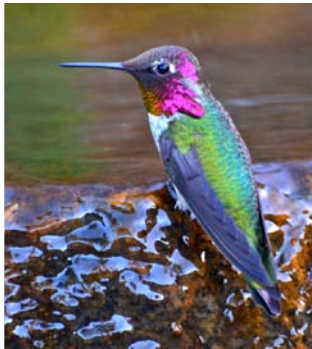
#### Keepers of History

Rick Prelinger founded the Prelinger Archives in New York in 1983. Now Rick and Megan Prelinger run the archive, which collects, preserves, and makes available film of historic significance. Rick and Megan also run the Prelinger Library, a public collection of books about US history. Megan is a longtime volunteer for SFNE.

#### Sharing Internet Information

Brewster Kahle moved to San Francisco’s Presidio in 1996, and founded the Internet Archive. Its website, <https://archive.org/>, has the tagline “Universal access to all knowledge,” which sums up Brewster’s desire to build a free and open Internet library. Kahle and the nonprofit Internet Archive moved to the Richmond district in 2009.

This book will quench your appetite for local San Francisco knowledge. These unsung heroes are testament to what is possible with a little vision and a lot of passion.



Clockwise from top left:  
Lesser Goldfinch  
Prothonotary Warbler  
Townsend's Warbler  
Snowy Egret chicks  
Anna's Hummingbird  
Barn Owl  
Snowy Egret  
with pink lores (center)

## Some Bay Area Birds Big and Small

Photos by contributing photographer Sandi Wong