



The Latest News from Stow Lake

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director



Among the highlights of our last tour at Heron Watch on May 17: One **Great Blue Heron** male with tongue injury spotted at nest no. 1 on Heron Island; **Red-tailed Hawk** with chick, and **Brown Creeper** nest, both on Strawberry Island. SFNE intern Logan Kahle led the season's last tour.

Logan has embarked on a quest to see 350 birds in California by the end of 2014. We look forward to publishing the results of his Big Year next January.

Unfortunately, nests number 1, 2, and 3 failed this year—only the second time since the Great Blue Herons began nesting here in 1993. On May 25, I observed two herons in nest no. 1—the same male with a tongue injury, and a female adding sticks to the nest. Even if the female laid eggs by June 1st, and the eggs hatched by July 1st, it would be very unlikely for the parents to stick around for the chicks to fledge in September.

In August 2000, late-nesting parents abandoned their two chicks. In 2005, two chicks fledged in August. Stay tuned for my report in the September newsletter.

On a happier note, the **Red-tailed Hawks** produced three chicks. Since these chicks will fledge in about six weeks, we expect them to leave in mid-June.

Our volunteers outdid themselves this year at Heron Watch. In all, twelve volunteers participated during the six weeks at Heron Watch and helped more than 1,000 adults and children to see a variety of birds on our tours.

Mike Smylie, ERM Regional Manager, again recruited volunteers from his company and worked four



Final tour of Heron Watch on the season's closing day, May 17.

Saturdays during Heron Watch. He was joined by Ian Hull, Ariane Burwell, and Jacob Zollinger, who each volunteered two Saturdays.

SFNE volunteers Lalla Carini, Anne Galjour, Marty Hackett, Logan Kahle, Trace Kannel, Christine Malfatti, fifth-grade junior intern Michael M., Megan Prelinger, and Sharon Pretti conducted tours and staffed the observation site.

We couldn't have asked for a nicer and more well-informed contingent for this year's Heron Watch. We celebrated the conclusion of Heron Watch with a party at the Stow Lake Boathouse, generously donated by Mike Smylie of ERM.

Our Saturday programs will continue during the summer, led by Megan Prelinger and Christine Malfatti. I hope to see you there. Thank you for your continuing support. Please donate now online or send a check to support our summer programs.



Great Blue Herons add sticks to their nest for the second time.

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We Thank Our Heron Watch Volunteers!

Below: Nancy DeStefanis reads *Alphabet Birds* to two children from her birding tour group.



Photo: Jairo A. Lopez



Chris Malfatti, Anne Galjour, Exec. Dir. Nancy DeStefanis, Ariane Burwell, Jacob Zollinger, Logan Kahle, Michael (intern), and Mike Smylie.



Volunteers Ariane Burwell, Jacob Zollinger, Logan Kahle, and Mike Smylie. Right: Ariane leaves with the heron decoy. Below: Visitors and volunteers at Stow Lake on May 17th.



Photos: SFNE

Photo: Mike Smylie



Above: Anne Galjour (center) enjoys watermelon with her Louisiana friends after the walking tour.

Photo: Mike Smylie

Walking Stow Lake

Logan Kahle, Naturalist



On Saturday, May 10th, we had great views of several nesting **Great Blue Herons** and an array of other avian species during our nature tour. As we walked onto the Roman Bridge migration was in evidence, with the presence of songbirds such as **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** and **Wilson's Warblers**.

These birds, just returned from their wintering grounds in western Mexico, will likely stay at Stow Lake all summer to breed. The shaded and undisturbed undergrowth at Strawberry Island and in the woods by the Log Cabin provide ideal breeding habitat for both species.

Just across the bridge we were greeted by two **Brown Creepers** actively calling and foraging. These small birds, named for their tendency to creep up trees, are well-adapted for their environment. They are streaked brown above—matching the color of coniferous trees—and white below, similar to the bright sky as seen when they are flying. The pair put on a show, creeping and singing with their thin, high-pitched calls.

We continued to hike up the island, searching for a **Red-tailed Hawk** nest. Although we could not locate it we saw an adult hawk circling overhead. This species, the most ubiquitous raptor in San Francisco, has less than a half dozen nests scattered around Golden Gate Park. So the birds at Stow Lake are a treasure.

We hiked all the way up to the reservoir, where we enjoyed panoramic views, along with the sight of conservation groups restoring valuable **Green Hairstreak** butterfly habitat.

We saw a **Band-tailed Pigeon** perched on a nearby tree, and we were treated with extended, up-close viewing of this gorgeous bird.

Band-tailed Pigeons, one of just two native pigeons and doves in San Francisco, is a welcome sight in the city's woodlands. They typically roost only in healthy, dense woods, and this bird sat contently atop one of the Monterey cypresses on the hill. While related to the ubiquitous **Rock Pigeon**, the **Band-tailed Pigeon** sports a pinkish wash to the breast and a thick ring around the neck.

We proceeded to the top of the hill. Here, among many **Pygmy Nuthatches**, was a lone **Townsend's Warbler**. This migrant species will get to British Columbia in the next three weeks, but now resides in the conifer forests of San Francisco.

We saw a bit of activity farther down the trail, and saw two **Pipevine Swallowtail** butterflies cavorting in the planted habitat. This goes to show that—even in a short time—habitat restoration can be effective.

On the way down we were entertained by a troupe of **Cedar Waxwings**. We watched as one flew up to catch a fly, and after it landed, another one would follow suit. These birds, likely breeding in the dense conifer woodlands of Oregon, stay late in San Francisco, and often form large groups before migrating north together. We saw several groups of these crested beauties fly over throughout the day.

It was a great, warm, sunny day to be out at Stow Lake.



Logan Kahle, far left, and Mike Smylie, center rear in brown cap, lead the walking tour group.

Photo: SFNE



Band-tailed Pigeon

Photo: Doug Greenberg



Cedar Waxwing

Photo: Rick Leche



Volunteer Marty Hackett shows the heron nests through the scope.

Photo: Mike Smylie



Canada Geese with eight goslings sit near our observation site.

Photo: SFNE

Heron Watch Nature Walk

Sharon Pretti, Naturalist

A wonderful group of children and adults took part in the Heron Watch walk on Saturday, May 3rd. We started off with everyone viewing the adult heron occupying one of the nests on Heron Island. We were able to get a good look at the heron's beautiful breeding plumage. We continued around the lake, where we watched a **Double-crested Cormorant** drying its wings, and we stopped to view a female **Canada Goose** sitting on her nest on Heron Island. Her mate was on guard nearby.

We concluded that the **Black Phoebe** nestlings under the Stow Lake Boathouse eaves had fledged in the

last few days. It was still a good opportunity to study what a mud nest looks like. A highlight was stopping to view a **Red-tailed Hawk** nest. We were able to see the female sitting in the nest and the male flying overhead. We will keep watching to determine if she is sitting on eggs or brooding very young nestlings.

We followed the path around Strawberry Island to the viewing spot. We arrived just in time to see a new adult heron fly into the colony, possibly upsetting the heron already there. The two herons took off and flew above the island, eventually going separate ways, with only one returning to the nesting site. All observers were able to witness

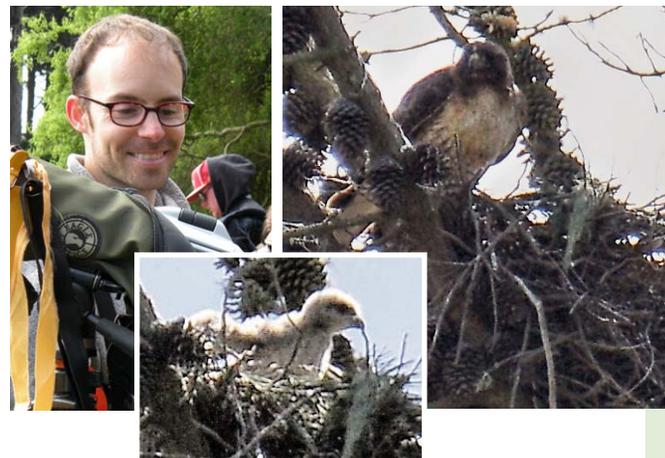
the beautiful flight and see for themselves the heron's magnificent six-foot wingspan.

Heading back, we were treated to a family of eight goslings and four adult **Canada Geese**. We discussed their feeding habits and the protective behavior of parents toward their young. As we continued our journey, our young birdwatchers did a great job pointing out both the **Soft-shelled Turtle** and the **Red-eared Slider Turtle**. They were the first to notice non-Mallards on the lake that turned out to be a pair of **Ring-necked Ducks**. It was a great day!

Top row from below: volunteers Chris Malfatti, Anne Galjour, and Sharon Pretti; Sharon (center) leads tour, with Lalla Carini and Ian Hull on scopes; Students pose with heron decoy.



Photos: SFNE



Hawk photos: Nghi Quan



Photo: John Topete

Bottom row from above: Nancy reads to students; parent Red-tailed Hawk guards chick; Ian Hull, ERM volunteer; Sharon leads children on tour.

Birding for Everyone, May 3rd

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



The weather on the third of May started out cool and foggy, even windy, but rapidly evolved into brilliant spring sunshine in the SF Botanical Garden. It was a day of wide-ranging variance in weather and bird sightings, which spanned the gamut from predictable to noteworthy.

A singing **Fox Sparrow** greeted us in the Fragrance Garden, where we started our walk, and where we spotted a hanging **Bushtit** nest. On the slope above the Waterfowl Pond a new planting of red European field poppies was in vibrant bloom, and while we admired the flowers on one side of the path we looked at lawn birds on the other:

Canada Geese, Brewer's Blackbirds, Robins, Starlings, and Lesser Goldfinches.

We had a noteworthy sighting of an adult **Great Blue Heron**, as well as views of a resident family of **Black Phoebes**. The heron was presumably visiting from the Stow Lake colony nearby; it was patiently stalking prey in the shallows.

There were other visitors from the Stow Lake vicinity: a **Double-crested Cormorant** made a flight loop around the Wildfowl Pond, and we had overflight



Allen's Hummingbird

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

views of **Western Gulls**, and three related species: **Tree, Violet-green, and Barn Swallows.**

In the Andean Cloud Forest we heard **California Quail** calling nearby, and we had views of both **Anna's and Allen's Hummingbirds.**



Lesser Goldfinch

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Purple Finch

Photo: Judy Harter

Tanagers, after which it was hard to pull ourselves away from that spot. When we moved on toward the Redwood Grove we were rewarded with a clear view of a singing **Pacific Wren**, a species more often heard than seen in those woods.

At the reservoir we spotted our first hawk of the day: a local **Cooper's Hawk**; in the California Native Plant Garden we saw a **Red-shouldered Hawk** and a **Red-tailed Hawk.**

Sightings of common species—**American Crow, American Raven, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Dark-eyed Junco, Scrub and Steller's Jays, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Rock Pigeon**—rounded out the day.

While oddly short on seasonal warblers, the observations of **heron, cormorant, wren, and swallow** species—and the **California Quail**—made this an especially rich trip to the SF Botanical Garden.



Western Tanager

Photo (detail): Matt Kroth

Below the Moon-viewing Garden we saw **Cedar Waxwings**, a species that seems abundant in the city this spring.

There were also **Purple and House Finches, Song Sparrows, and American Goldfinches, and Lesser Goldfinches.** We had a brief sighting of a pair of **Western**



Pacific Wren

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Upcoming Events*

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

Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month. The June 7 and July 5 walks will be led by Megan Prelinger. The August 2 walk will have a guest leader. Walks are from 10 am to noon. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. Adults \$10, children free.

Birding for Kids and Families: Saturdays, June 7, July 5, and Aug. 2, with leader Christine Malfatti. 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](#).

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Photo: Blenheim Films

TRASHED



A Movie Review Michael M., intern

Note: Michael M. is a fifth-grade intern at San Francisco Nature Education, which was invited to participate in the SF International Film Festival's Youth Education series. Interns Michael and Amber attended the screening.

Today I saw the movie *Trashed* with actor Jeremy Irons, who starred in the documentary and appeared in person to answer our questions. It was a very good movie although some parts were upsetting—even scary.

The movie could be described as a "World Tour of Trash." Jeremy Irons visits Lebanon, Indonesia, Vietnam, the United Kingdom, and the USA.

One thing I learned from this movie was that some people in Lebanon dump large amounts of trash on their beach. Another thing I learned was that people in Indonesia dump all their trash into one of their rivers which contaminates the water that they drink and bathe in.

During the Vietnam War, North Vietnam's soldiers were hiding in the forests, and the US soldiers wanted to drive them out, so they used this chemical (now known as Agent Orange) that burned down the leaves. But this was a bad idea

because years later babies were born with a variety of severe birth defects.

Later in the film, people boating saw a few pieces of trash floating in the water, so a water quality expert tested just how much trash is in the ocean. The test found that there are tons more tiny pieces of plastic than plankton in the water, which is bad for us and for the ocean. In the U.S., Jeremy Irons visited several incinerator sites in upstate New York that are unsafe.

This is a great film. I think you should all watch it.

Note from Nancy DeStefanis: The film concluded with ways we can all make a difference. Composting and recycling are extremely important, but we can all be proactive in NOT BUYING ITEMS THAT ARE EXCESSIVELY WRAPPED IN PLASTIC. Leave the plastic and take the item. Better yet, send an e-mail to the product manufacturer saying you will not purchase the item again until the packaging is less damaging to the environment. To watch *Trash* online, visit trashedfilm.com. The DVD can be purchased at amazon.com (\$20 + shipping).



At the screening: Nancy DeStefanis, Amber, her mom, Chris Malfatti, and Michael.

Fifth-grader Honored at Heron Watch Party

Michael M. has served as a junior intern at Heron Watch for the past two years. He has helped out on all the nature tours, and his interest in birds is palpable.

At the Heron Watch party on May 17th, Executive Director Nancy DeStefanis honored him for his two years of service with a new pair of Nikon 8x42 waterproof binoculars generously donated by Fireside Camera. Michael plans to rejoin the Heron Watch program next year as a full-fledged intern.



Photos: SFNE





Photos from a Nesting Season

Contributing photographer Sandi Wong recently visited San Rafael. Her sharp eye and patience resulted in some perfectly timed photos. Here are a few.



From upper left: California Quail, Oak Titmouse, Acorn Woodpecker.
From lower left: Western Bluebird (male), Black Phoebe,
Hooded Oriole (in SF), Western Bluebird (female).

Photos: Sandi Wong