



Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

The Great Blue Herons continued to arrive at Stow Lake for nesting season. So far there are two couples and a few single unattached birds. This month the topic is incubation.

In March the females will lay from two to five eggs per nest. Eggs are laid asynchronously, every other day, so the first chicks to hatch have an advantage over the younger ones. In cases of food shortages the older will prevail over the younger. Thankfully, this event—called siblicide—has never occurred at the Stow Lake heron colony.

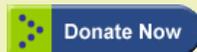
Males and females alternate in turning the eggs every two hours. While one adult stays at the nest incubating the eggs, the other forages for fish, gophers, and small birds. Except for nest reliefs we see little of an adult heron's head, since the bird typically sits low in the nest.

After about thirty days we will see an adult standing most of the time. This is a signal that the chicks have hatched. The parents will take turns brooding them at night to keep them warm. Next month: the chicks hatch.

Please join or renew now!

Best regards,

Nancy H. DeStefanis



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

e-mail: info@sfnature.org
telephone: 415-387-9160
www.sfnature.org

Birding Crissy Field, February 15th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



Nine of us enjoyed a warm and mild Saturday at Crissy Field. It was a rare windless day, and the sky was overcast, but the high cloud layer made for excellent viewing conditions. We first used the spotting scope to explore the area underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, which was populated by a wintering flock of several hundred **Western** and **Clark's Grebes**. There were also long flight lines of fast-moving **Brandt's Cormorants** under the bridge.



Western Grebe

Near the pier were **California Sea Lions** and **Harbor Seals**. Offshore a small handful of **Common Loons** were dispersed up and down the shoreline, each of them swimming and diving for fish in the glassy water. They were spaced about 100 yards apart for as far as we could see. All of them were in drab winter plumage. At one point an **Eared Grebe** surfaced in the bay near a **Common Loon** and we could see the dramatic difference in size between these two diving birds.

On land we had excellent views of a Say's Phoebe in the dunes. **Black Phoebes**, **White-crowned Sparrows**, **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **Song Sparrows**, **Anna's**



Common Loon

Hummingbirds, and one **Red-winged Blackbird** were in the brush and trees around the buildings.

A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** cruised over the meadow looking for food, and a courting pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** displayed high above the meadow, circling one another with talons extended.

In the marsh we saw more diving birds: **Buffleheads**, a raft of **Ruddy Ducks**, **Eared Grebes**, and a fourth Grebe species of the day, the **Pied-billed American Coots** were in abundance.

The gull population on the sand bar gave us opportunities to study the differences between first, second, and third year **Western Gulls**, **Mew Gulls**, and **California Gulls**. Shorebirds included **Willet**, **Long-billed Curlew**, and **Snowy Egret**. There were more large grebes in the marsh: **Western** and **Clark's**.

As we gathered to turn around back we saw two **Great Blue Herons**: one in the back of the marsh and a second one on the proximal shoreline near the path.

continued on next page

On the pages ahead:

- 2 More about *Birding Crissy Field*
- 3 *Birding for Everyone* February Report
- 4 Great Blue Herons; Heron Watch internships available
- 5 *Recently Seen Around Town*; Upcoming Events



Long-billed Curlew and Snowy Egret

We stopped to appreciate and photograph this bird, which was in full breeding plumage, with a bright white crown and long tassel-like feathers hanging from its neck.

On the walk back **Starlings** were abundant on the grass, and a **Turkey Vulture** flew high above the field. The big excitement was in the water: **Bottlenose Dolphins** put on a long display of fancy hops and turns in the waters just a few yards from shore.

We were among the first to stop to watch them, but after a few minutes most of the other pedestrians in the vicinity also had gathered. On our last glance at the bay we had a good view of a **Pelagic Cormorant** and a line of fast-flying **Surf Scoters**.



Group leader Megan Prelinger, left, and some birders at Crissy Field

Photos on this page: Grace Ruth



Birders at work



Red-winged Blackbird, female



White-crowned Sparrow



Long-billed Curlew



Bottlenose Dolphin

Birding for Everyone in February

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist

February 1 was brilliantly sunny and clear in the SF Botanical Garden. Our group of nine with two leaders (Chris Malfatti joined me) found many birds foraging, flying, and preening. On the lawn at the beginning of the walk was our first **Hermit Thrush** of the day, along with our first **Black Phoebe** and **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. We would see many other individuals of these three species throughout the morning.

In a tree near the Fragrance Garden was a **Hutton's Vireo**. We could pick out the bill shape and wing bar pattern that differentiate this species from the **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**. Near the cypresses on the hill above the Waterfowl Pond we had good views of a flock of **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **Song**, and **Fox Sparrows**. In a nearby tree was an **American Goldfinch**.

The Waterfowl Pond was quiet, with **Mallards** and **American Coots** in residence. **Red-eared Slider turtles** sunbathed on the rocks. **Anna's Hummingbirds**, **Black Phoebes**, and **Yellow-rumped Warblers** graced the branches of the trees around the pond.

When we approached the edge of the garden near Stow Lake we had good views of overflying **Western Gulls**, **Rock Doves**, and two **Turkey Vultures**. On the hill leading toward the Children's Garden we encountered flocks of **American Robins**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, and **Dark-eyed Juncos**.

From the hill above the Succulent Garden we saw a pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** "dancing" overhead in a spiral-shaped spring courtship display with talons extended. In the Children's Garden we had good views of pairs of **Purple Finches** and **House Finches**.

We had the opportunity to compare and contrast the differing colors and



Hutton's Vireo

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



The Birding for Everyone group in the SF Botanical Garden on February 1st.

Photo: Deborah Maybry

patterns of the males of these two species. There were a pair of **Orange-crowned Warblers** in the trees.

American Crows and **Common Ravens** could be heard and seen in the vicinity, and **Canada Geese** flew overhead. It was hard to leave the Children's Garden, as every time we turned to follow the path another sighting drew our attention.

A flock of **Pygmy Nuthatches** displayed high in a cypress tree. There was a **Scrub Jay**, and a **Downy Woodpecker** foraged on a nearby branch. A **Northern Flicker** flew into an adjacent tree. Finally, we saw a **Cooper's Hawk** circling high above.



Purple Finch (above) and House Finch.



Both photos: Rick Leche



Orange-crowned Warbler

Photo: Doug Greenberg

In the Redwood Grove we had a calling **Pacific Wren** in clear view. At the reservoir a flock of **Bushtits** crowded a tree. From there we headed to the California Garden, where we found **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** and **California Towhees**.

As we gathered near the library courtyard to review the day, we were distracted by another courtship pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** perched in a cypress tree.

It was an exciting, beautiful day. The unseasonable weather invited the



Gulf Fritillary

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

blooming of magnolias and rhododendrons. Towards the end of our walk we had a good look at a perching butterfly, a **Gulf Fritillary** (thanks to Chris for identifying this species). Until next month!



Photos: Grace Ruth



San Francisco Nature Education Heron Watch Internships Available

Every spring San Francisco Nature Education volunteers show the public the nesting Great Blue Herons and their chicks at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park. This year we have eight openings for high school students to train as interns for our Heron Watch program.

Interns will receive two Saturday training sessions in March and April. During April and May, interns and adult volunteers will use spotting scopes to show the nesting herons to the public, answer questions, and team up to lead short walking tours of other nesting birds at Stow Lake.

Students will receive community service hours, training in the life cycle of the Great Blue Heron, and will be taught identification skills for observing local birds.

In addition to the two Saturdays of training, each student must participate in five of the six Saturdays of our Heron Watch public program between April 12th and May 17th. Each intern who satisfactorily completes the program will receive a pair of good binoculars and documentation of their participation from SF Nature Education.

For an application and more information please visit us at www.sfnature.org.

Please join now or renew:

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

Send your fee via Donate Now or by check to:



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

e-mail: info@sfnature.org
telephone: 415-387-9160
www.sfnature.org



Great Blue Herons display typical behaviors at Crissy Field (above and right), and in a Stow Lake nest (below).





Male Ring-necked Duck

Recently Seen Around Town

Photos by Sandi Wong



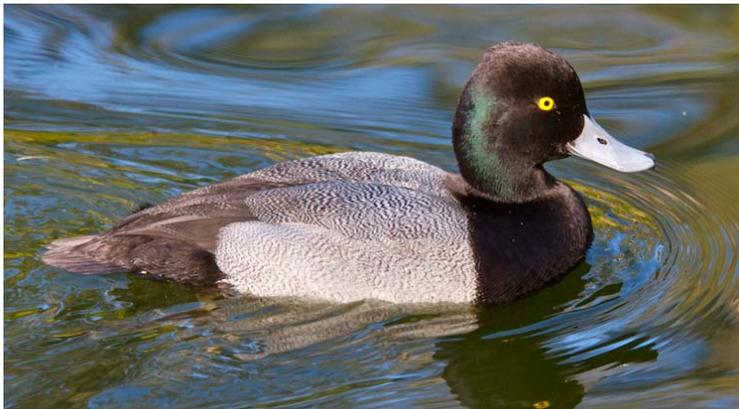
Female Ring-necked Duck



Black-and-white Warbler



Female Ring-necked Duck



Lesser Scaup



American Wigeons

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.

Volunteer-led Nature Tours: 10:30 to noon every Saturday around Stow Lake and on Strawberry Island to observe nesting herons and other local birds. Meet at Heron Watch observation site (see above). Adults \$10, children free.

Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month. The Mar. 1 and Apr. 5 walks will be led by Megan Prelinger: 10 am-noon. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln.

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 for Kids and Families: Saturday, Mar. 1 and Apr. 5, 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.

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