



Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Here's the latest on the nesting Great Blue Herons:

Nest no. 1 is visible in our [Heron Cam](#). The heron seen standing and stretching is usually a male whose tongue protrudes from the throat (see page 3). This heron has been seen for the past five years at Stow Lake and has bred successfully.

For the last several days he has been poking the bottom of the nest with his beak. We have not seen any chicks so far.

Nest no. 3 is to the left of nest no. 1 in the same tree. The other day I observed the heron sitting on the nest. Our Saturday tour groups walk to Strawberry Island for terrific views of this nest. We expect to see chicks soon.

Heron Watch, our Saturday interpretive program, continues through May 17th. Come to see the action—things are heating up! We thank Andronico's for providing fruit and snacks for our volunteers each week.

Please support our Heron Watch program and Heron Cam. Your donations keep these programs going. Many thanks.

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

Observing Stow Lake in Early Spring

Logan Kahle, Naturalist



On Saturday, April 12th, action was slowly but surely heating up in the Stow Lake heron colony. There was almost always at least one **Great Blue Heron** in attendance. We were able to show the many *Heron Watch* visitors these nesting birds in two nests. We are eagerly anticipating our first fledged young!

While watching the nesting colony, heron watchers were entertained by a female **Ring-necked Duck** diving right off the overlook. This small duck is an uncommon visitor to Stow Lake, and prefers the less trafficked waters of Lloyd Lake. However, this individual had set up shop at Stow in the past week, setting an interesting record for April.

Another bird that made its presence known from the observation area was the **Black-crowned Night-Heron**. These nocturnal creatures, a smaller version of their Great Blue cousins, are normally found in very low numbers around Stow Lake. On Saturday, however, there were many roosting in the willow thickets around the lake, and I counted eight different individuals.

On the tour, we went around to the east side of the lake. There had been some interesting waterfowl in the region recently, so we made a point to look for them. One of the lingering species was a pair of **Ruddy Ducks** in full rusty breeding garb loafing near the edge of the lake. This species formerly bred in Golden Gate Park, but presumably these birds were migrants.

Another interesting duck present on the east side of the lake was a group of three **Northern Shovelers**. With their huge, shovel-like bills, a wintering troop of

continued on next page



Viewing the nesting heron colony at Stow Lake on opening day of *Heron Watch*.

Photo: SFNE

On the pages ahead:

- 2 *Observing Stow Lake*, continued
- 3 *Heron Watch Nature Walk*, April 19th
- 4 *Birding for Everyone*, April 5th
- 5 At West Portal Elementary School
- 6 *Birds Being Birds*; Upcoming Events
- 7 *Goslings Have Arrived—It Must Be Spring!*

continued from previous page

shovelers had settled in the shallow water of eastern Stow Lake for the winter. This is a species that rarely frequents in Golden Gate Park, and is very rarely seen at Stow Lake.

We continued up the trail, where we were directed to a large nest in the top of a eucalyptus tree. Inside the nest was an adult **Red-tailed Hawk!** We watched this bird and a nearby soaring bird for a long while, a true treat at the end of a fun day.



Photos: SFNE



Photo: Jesse Krider; © 2014 SF Nature Education



Photo: Autumn Sartain

Bay Nature Magazine has published a news story about Heron Watch and our new Heron Cam.

Go now to the [live Heron Cam](#).

- Opening Day at Heron Watch**
- 1 Volunteer Lalla Carini introduces a Great Blue Heron to a visitor.
 - 2 Volunteer Christine Malfatti demonstrates use of a scope to East Bay visitors.
 - 3 Lalla Carini shows a nesting heron to her son Tomasso.
 - 4 Logan Kahle, at left, prepares to lead a tour around Stow Lake.
 - 5 Nancy DeStefanis arrives in her Heronmobile.
 - 6 Great Blue Heron with a visibly injured tongue.



Heron Watch Nature Walk, April 19th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



It was a bright and breezy morning on the second Saturday of *Heron Watch*. On our walk around the lake we observed three species of swallows busily feeding on the crop of aquatic insects that Stow Lake supports.

Barn Swallows are the easiest to differentiate from the other two, being rusty red below and indigo above. **Tree Swallows** and **Violet-green Swallows** each have a bright white belly that can make them more challenging to distinguish in bright morning light.

On our way to Strawberry Island we noted **American Coots**, **Mallards**, a **Western Gull**, and **Red-winged Blackbirds**. We also listened to the songs of a pair of **Pacific Wrens**, which populate the eucalyptus grove east of the lake.

On the island we walked the circumference path, noticing **Brewer's Blackbirds** in the bushes and **Pied-billed Grebes** in the water. From Huntington Falls we had a view of a second-year **Black-crowned Night-Heron** in the trees on the small island to the east that was densely populated with **Western Gulls** and **Double-crested Cormorants**.

Near the Pagoda, we—especially the young among us—were excited to see a family of **Canada Geese** with five new goslings.

Like ducklings, goslings are waterproof soon after hatching, and they can swim after their parents when only hours old. The goslings on the lake shore appeared to be about two days old. Other sightings on the island included **Steller's Jays**, **Scrub Jays**, **Bushtits**, overflying **Red-tailed Hawks** and **Turkey Vultures**, **Song** and **White-crowned Sparrows**.

We were rewarded by the arrival of a flock of **Cedar Waxwings**, nicely visible as they flitted about the high branches of surrounding cypress trees. Then **Pygmy Nuthatches** arrived, and we enjoyed views of these small resident members of the Sitta family.

Heading back we saw a **Great Blue Heron** adult fly across the lake and land in its treetop nest.

Clockwise from top right:
Mike Smylie, ERM volunteer coordinator, with three visitors;
Volunteer Ian Hull explains heron behavior;
Nancy D, second from left, with three visitors;
First goslings of the season;
Megan Prelinger and ERM volunteer Ariane Burwell (far right) with their group on Strawberry Island.



Photos: SFNE

Photo: Sandi Wong

Birding for Everyone, April 5th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



For our first spring walk of the year in the Botanical Garden we had terrific warm sunny weather. It is spring migration season, so we kept ears and eyes peeled for warblers and other travelers.

There was an effusion of **Pygmy Nuthatch** activity, with nuthatches regularly flying over and visible at the tops of the tallest cypresses throughout the Botanical Garden.

The resident garden birds were visible in abundance, with **American Robins** being the most populous. We had regular flyover sightings of **Scrub Jays** and **Steller's Jays**, **American Ravens**, **American Crows**, **House Finches**, and **Rock Pigeons**.



American Robin

Photo: Len Blumin

We enjoyed opportunities to compare the plumages of **Anna's Hummingbirds** and numerous **Allen's Hummingbirds**. Rufous Hummingbirds are similar to Allen's but lack green flecks or plumage on their backs (and they have not been seen in the garden yet this year).



Steller's Jay

Photo: Rick Leche

In the Temperate Asia area we found **House Finches** and **Purple Finches** clearly visible and singing, and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**. We saw the first of numerous **American Goldfinches**, and two **Downy Woodpeckers**. A bee colony generated a lot of flight traffic in and out of a Monterey Pine. More overflight species included **Western Gulls**, **Canada Geese**, and **Mallards**.



American Goldfinches

Photo: Doug Greenberg

At the reservoir we listened to several types of birdsong, and heard the call of a **Wilson's Warbler**.

As we traversed the Redwood Grove we could hear two **Pacific Wrens** calling back and forth. On the slope above the redwoods were two **Cooper's Hawks**: an adult male and a first-year female.



Downy Woodpecker

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

As we observed these two individuals coming and going from neighboring trees we speculated that they were engaging in courtship behavior.

In the Children's Garden we finally sighted migrating warblers—both

Townsend's and resident **Yellow-rumped**, which were in full breeding plumage.

Closing the loop around the garden we saw numerous **Black Phoebes**. Flying over the Andean Cloud

Forest was a **Glaucous-winged Gull**, identifiable by its very pale primaries with low-contrast whitish wing tips. In the trees around the Waterfowl Pond were a **Red-tailed Hawk** perched high,

more **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, a few **Bushtits**, and **Tree Swallows**, along with three resident **American Coots** in the water.



Tree Swallow

Photo: Rick Leche

In the grass around the fountain were **Starlings**. Our last sighting was a **California Towhee** that appeared near the library. Non-avian sightings included a **Western Tiger Swallowtail** butterfly.

We hope you will join us for our next birding walk on Saturday, May 3rd.



Western Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

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

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

**SF Nature Visits
West Portal Elementary
Christine Malfatti, Naturalist**

On Tuesday morning April 22nd, Nancy DeStefanis and I visited Ms. Sheila Harman's third-grade class. Ms. Harman has been teaching her students about birds all year long. The students were very excited to see what we had brought.

Students at the Draw-a-Bird Station had a choice of drawing either a **Canada Goose** or a **Great Blue Heron**. Ms. Mack encouraged the students to use light strokes, which resulted in more accurate portraits.

At the Wings & Bones Station Ms. Harman and Ms. Malfatti showed the wings of a **Barn Owl** and a **Red-tailed Hawk**. Students felt the wing of each bird and determined which was diurnal and which was nocturnal.

The students then compared the weight of a deer bone with that of a **Brown Pelican** bone (which is much lighter because it is hollow). They also examined a tail of a **Red-tailed Hawk**.

At the Nest Station Ms. Harman handed out a variety of nests for her students to examine: the sock nest of the **Bushtit**, the round straw nest of the **American Robin**, the tiny nest of the **Anna's Hummingbird**, the scrape nest of the **Mourning Dove**, and the mud nest of the **Black Phoebe**.

After drawing the nests students examined them with magnifiers and discovered a variety of materials: cotton, mud, feathers, leaves, cloth, and foil, to name a few.

We then talked about their upcoming field trip to Stow Lake in May, and the students were very excited to learn that they would all have the use of binoculars!

Students at each table sketch a Great Blue Heron or a Canada Goose.



Right: Ms. Mack admires the Great Blue Heron model while students draw it.

Ms. Harman holds up a bushtit nest.



Volunteer Chris Malfatti compares a pelican bone with a deer bone.



Ms. Harman displays a Red-tailed Hawk's tail.



Photos: SFNE

Birds Being Birds

Photos by Sandi Wong



Clockwise from below left: **White-crowned Sparrow** gathers dandelion fuzz for nest; face to face with a **Black-crowned Night-Heron**; **Great Horned Owllet** poses near the Buffalo Paddock; **Townsend's Warbler** and **Wilson's Warbler** bathing at Mallard Lake in Golden Gate Park.



Upcoming Events*

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

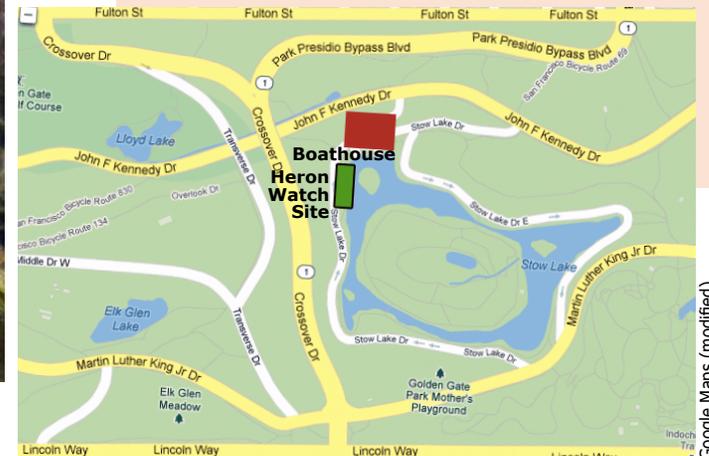
Heron Watch: Every Saturday through May 17, from 10 am to 1 pm. Follow sign at Stow Lake boathouse to nearby program site. Observation using spotting scopes: free. Interns and volunteers will be there to answer questions and explain heron behavior. Donations welcome.

Volunteer-led Nature Tours: 10:30 to noon on Saturdays 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 May 3 and June 7 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: Saturday, 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](#).



Heron Watch observation site at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park.

Google Maps (modified)



**Goslings Have Arrived—
It Must Be Spring!**

Photos by Sandi Wong

