



## Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

San Francisco Nature Education will be sponsoring field trips to four different locations during November and December: San Francisco Botanical Garden with Megan Prelinger; Heron's Head Park with Alan Hopkins (plus a family walk led by our college interns); a Crissy Field family walk led by college interns; and finally a Chain of Lakes walk led by Alan Hopkins. Please take this opportunity to join us.

Our college interns, Jaileez Campos and Eric Tamm, are seniors majoring in biology at the University of San Francisco. As part of their course work in conservation biology they have interned with us for three months, participating in field trips to Heron's Head Park and Crissy Field, and preparing to lead trips in November. I hope you get to meet them—their enthusiasm is contagious!

As part of our expanded newsletter we have added coverage of the *State of the Birds 2014* report. We also include book reviews of two John Muir Laws pocket guides: *Birds of the Sacramento Valley* and *San Francisco Bay Area* (habitats and their wildlife), and his *Laws Guide to Drawing Birds*.

Please renew your support for our programs by donating online or by check.

Best regards,

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## Heron's Head Park: A Goldmine for Bay Birds and Birders

Eric Tamm, Intern



By the end of August, my classes at the University of San Francisco had just started. As the workload continued to pile up, my Conservation Biology class had a special homework assignment: to choose an organization with which I would work closely to fulfill my service learning.

The organization's mission had to align with the mission of conservation biology: to educate the public, especially the young, about the beauty of nature and why it should be conserved. There is no organization with a more perfect fit than San Francisco Nature Education. It was as if my class had been based on San Francisco Nature Education's mission, or vice versa.

Once I chose this gem of a non-profit, my trusty partner Jaileez and I met Nancy DeStefanis, and right away we felt extremely comfortable and welcome—as if we had been there for years. Nancy showered us with field guides (*National Geographic's Birds of North America* and *100 Birds of Heron's Head*) and reading materials. Before we knew it, we were learning about birds at Heron's Head Park. The *Laws' Pocket Guide to Beach and Bay* proved invaluable.

As interns we have a broad array of tasks to do, from office to field trips in parks. Working one-on-one with Nancy in the office has been a real treat, as I've gotten to know and understand her passion for birds, especially the Great Blue Heron. Everything from her duck-call ringtone to her spiked kingfisher helmet fit her well, and she's been really fun to be around.

Our other tasks include birding walks and training for the ultimate prize—a chance to lead our own bird walks

with adults and children. By visiting multiple habitats (San Francisco Botanical Garden, Heron's Head Park, and Crissy Field), Jaileez and I have become adept at using our binoculars and scopes to identify birds and learn some cool facts about them.

By September 27th, on our second field trip to Heron's Head Park, we had become comfortable using our scopes and binoculars, and how to show people the birds we had spotted. Heron's Head Park is a unique restored wetland near Hunter's Point.

On that day we saw 16 different birds, including the **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Great Blue Heron**, **Black-bellied Plover**, **Killdeer**, **Willet**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Whimbrel**, **White-tailed Kite**, **Caspian Tern**, and **Brown Pelican**. Seeing the **Belted Kingfisher** and **Black Oystercatcher** again was a real thrill. The **Great Blue Heron** is hard not to love, not only because it's big, beautiful, and majestic, but also because Nancy's enthusiasm and love for this bird are so darn infectious. She talks about it like a beloved child, and after seeing it in person it's easy to see why.

*continued on next page*

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Killdeer

Photo: Mike Smylie

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What I loved about the **Killdeer** is what we learned upon seeing it. It uses a “broken wing strategy” to protect its young. When there are predators near, a parent Killdeer will distract the predator by pretending it has a broken wing, guiding the predator away from the nest. When it’s far enough it will fly away, saving itself and its young. While saving your young sounds normal, when an animal does it, it’s beautiful and tugs at the heartstrings.

Finally, the **Belted Kingfisher** is very popular due to its rebellious, rocker mohawk, which brings me back to the days when I sported one (or tried to).

I’ve been having a blast working with Nancy and the volunteers at San Francisco Nature Education, and am looking forward to the future, especially our guided tours in November. I hope to see some of you readers on walks!



**Belted Kingfisher**

Photo: Rick Leche



**White-tailed Kite**

Photo: Mike Smylie



### Why We Give

**Mike Smylie**  
President, Board of Directors  
San Francisco Nature Education

Prior to getting to know Nancy DeStefanis, I wasn’t particularly interested in birding. Sure it was nice to watch birds in my backyard, and it’s always exciting to see egrets and other large birds, but I wouldn’t have thought much of spending weekends with binoculars and a bird book.

Now, after six years of Saturday volunteering at Stow Lake, I still can’t say I’m an avid birder. I’m appreciative and aware of birds around me, and the herons, cormorants, plovers, willets, avocets, oystercatchers, killdeers, and white-tailed kite (unbelievable!) that we’ve seen over the last month at Heron Head’s Park have been amazing.

What has drawn me to San Francisco Nature Education has been the opportunity to connect with kids through birding. It is wonderful to point out Great Blue Heron nests at Stow Lake and watch how astonished kids are when they see these birds for the first time. It’s very rewarding to point out to adults the nature around them that goes unnoticed every day. I think that’s the gift SFNE gives to the community—opportunities to experience things that we take for granted or watch only on a screen.

Those who support SFNE have a wide range of interests. Some are among the best birders in the city and freely share their expertise. Some enjoy the nature walks or stopping by Stow Lake to talk to Nancy and check up on the herons. Others, like me, enjoy the opportunity to talk to people.

It takes the volunteer effort and financial support of many to keep SFNE going, allowing it to touch the lives of so many in San Francisco. By giving people permission to slow down, observe, and enjoy the things around them, SFNE continues to influence how we see nature, for the benefit of all.

Please consider the effect SFNE has had on the lives of you or your family, and generously support these programs through a donation. Thank you.



**Black Oystercatcher: yellow watch list**

Photo: Len Blumin

## Upcoming Events

**SF Nature Walks:** Please bring binoculars if you can, and a pencil.

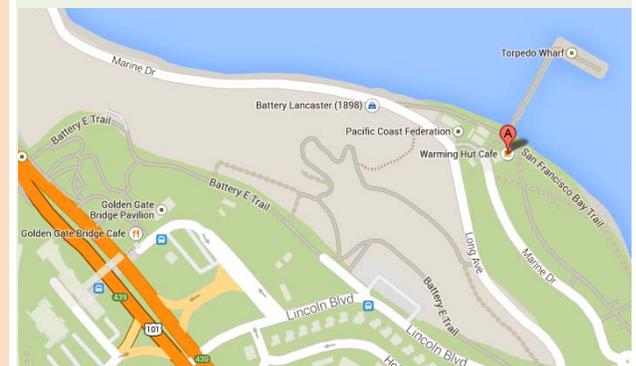
**Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month.** Walks are from 10 am to noon. Nov. 1, and Dec. 6: Meet Megan Prelinger at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. Adults \$10, children free.

**SF Botanical Garden Admission:** FREE for SF residents with proof of residency; non-residents pay varying fees. See the [garden’s website](#) for details.

**Heron’s Head Park:** Saturday, Nov. 8. Meet at trailhead inside park. Free parking at Jennings St. & Cargo Way. Adult walk led by Alan Hopkins, 10 am to noon. FREE; donations welcome.

Also: FREE family walk led by college interns—for children accompanied by parent or guardian, 10–11:30 am. Donations welcome. To be followed by *Show and Tell* with bird artifacts from 11:30–12.

**Family Walk at Crissy Field:** Saturday, Nov. 15, 10 to 11:30 am. College interns lead walk. For children with accompanying parent(s) or guardian(s) only. Adults \$10, children free. Meet at entrance to Warming Hut. Interns have spotting scopes. Crissy Field parking lot charges a small fee for three hours on weekends.



**Save the Date:** Chain of Lakes Walk led by Alan Hopkins, Saturday, Dec. 13. Adults \$10. **Please see our online events calendar.**

# State of the Birds 2014 Report

Jaileez Campos, Intern



The *State of the Birds 2014* report was released on September 9th, at the Smithsonian Institution. It is the result of a collaborative effort led by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

NABCI is a forum of 23 US state and federal government agencies, private organizations, and initiatives that work in partnership. The current report is the fifth on the state of wild birds in the US that has been published annually since 2009.

Its publication was inspired by the extinction of the passenger pigeon in 1914, whose population once numbered in the billions. In 1918, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was passed; it made it illegal for anyone to possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, or barter any migratory bird or bird parts.



Passenger Pigeon: extinct

Photo: Wikipedia Commons

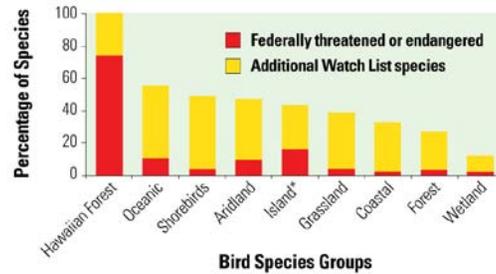
## Conservation Works

Birds are indicators of environmental health. To conserve bird populations is to conserve ecosystems: aridlands, grasslands, forests, and wetlands. Some key policies that have helped protect US birds include the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels Treaty, the Wetlands Conservation Act, Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Endangered Species Act, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Farm Bill has had the largest impact by conserving about 30 million acres through federal easements of farm, grasslands, and wetlands.

## 228 Species on the Watch List

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects 228 species of birds on the watch list. Its goal is to promote conservation of endangered species and to bring attention to species in danger of extinction.

## 2014 STATE OF THE BIRDS WATCH LIST



The red watch list includes species that are extremely vulnerable due to small populations, small range, high level of threats, and range wide declines. The yellow watch list includes species that are range-restricted or more widespread, and that are declining in numbers and experiencing high levels of threats. There are 42 bird species in the continental US on the red list; 91 species on the yellow list. The other 95 species on the watch list are in Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Hawaiian and Pacific Islands.

## Birds of the Bay Area on Watch Lists

Several watch list species can be found on the shores of San Francisco: **Snowy Plover**, **Red Knot** (a sandpiper), **Clark's Grebe**, **Black Oystercatcher**, **Willet**, **Long-billed Curlew**, **Whimbrel**, **Marbled Godwit**, **Short-billed Dowitcher**, **Black Turnstone**, **Dunlin**, **Yellow-billed Magpie**, and **Red-throated Loon**.



Band-Tailed Pigeon: yellow watch list

Photo: Doug Greenberg

Some can be found in Golden Gate Park: **Band-tailed Pigeon** and **Allen's Hummingbird**. The **Wrentit** is another.

## Common Birds

Keeping common birds common is as important as preventing extinction.

There are 33 common bird species that are steeply declining and do not currently meet watch list criteria.

These species have lost more than half of their global population.

Eight species on this list can be found in the San Francisco Bay Area: **Northern Pintail**, **American Wigeon**, **Cinnamon Teal**, **Greater Scaup**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Bank Swallow**, **Pine Siskin**, **Varied Thrush**, and **Brewer's Blackbird**.



Allen's Hummingbird: yellow watch list

Photo: Len Blumin

## Threats to Birds

The number-one cause of declining populations is habitat loss. Other causes include cats, collisions, chemicals, energy development, recreation in sensitive habitats, introduction of invasive species, and climate change. The decline of Florida's ecosystems is crucial because they are home to migratory, endangered, and common bird species.

## Trouble in the Southwest

The predominant ecosystem in the Southwest region of the US are the aridlands. The aridlands have experienced a 49% decline since 1968 due to habitat loss and fragmentation. Remaining habitats have been degraded by invasive grasses. Some threatened species of the aridlands include Bendire's and Le Conte's Thrashers, and the Greater Sage-Grouse.

## The Data is Priceless

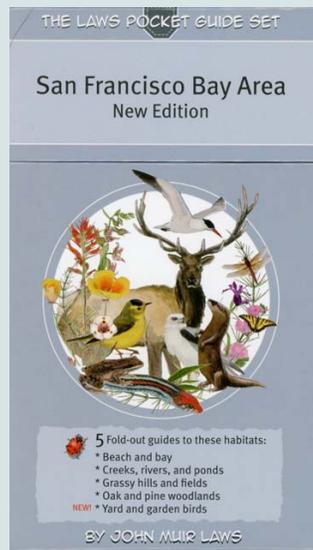
The State of the Birds analyzed data from the Christmas Bird Count to the Breeding Bird Survey. Cornell's eBird project contributed to the report. The eBird project allows volunteer birders to contribute data acquired through direct observation.

## The Bright Side

Some birds have increased in population size. Due to wetland conservation and restoration efforts, wetland birds that were once endangered are now doing better. Species include **Wood Ducks** and **Ibis**. Most ducks remain abundant. Learn more at: <http://www.stateofthebirds.org>

## Book Reviews: Laws Guides

Megan Prelinger, Reviewer



### **The Laws Pocket Guide Set: San Francisco Bay Area**

A boxed set of five folding guides; second edition  
Written and illustrated  
by John Muir Laws  
Heyday Books, 2014; \$22

This nicely-packaged boxed set of folding guides will be a delight to local birders and explorers. Its five habitat guides are a good reminder that in spite of dense urbanization the Bay Area is still home to

thousands of species of wildlife and different habitats.

The guides are arranged thematically by ecological zone: *Beach and Bay*; *Creeks, Rivers, and Ponds*; *Grassy Hills and Fields*; *Oak and Pine Woodlands*; and *Yard and Garden Birds*. The boxed set may prompt explorations to some of the area's more remote environments, and enhance your understanding of the particular environment you live in.

Each guide offers thumbnail portraits of the birds in each habitat, and offers Laws' artwork of butterflies, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and common plants and wildflowers.

The strengths of this set are design, breadth, and the enduring appeal of Laws' distinctive art. It is sized to be kept in a backpack or glove compartment, where it will be ever-handly, and the box will keep the tear-resistant but lightweight folding guides safe from bruising.

Heyday books are available through major distributors; by calling Heyday directly at 510 549-3564, ext. 304; by e-mail [atorders@heydaybooks.com](mailto:atorders@heydaybooks.com); by fax at 510 549-1889; or at [www.heydaybooks.com](http://www.heydaybooks.com).

### **The Laws Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Sacramento Valley**

A folding guide and map  
Written and illustrated  
by John Muir Laws  
Heyday Books, 2014; \$5

This is an essential pocket guide that has the potential to benefit every birder who picks it up.

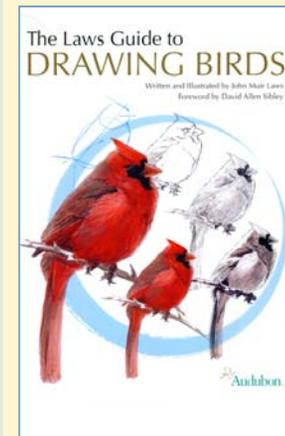
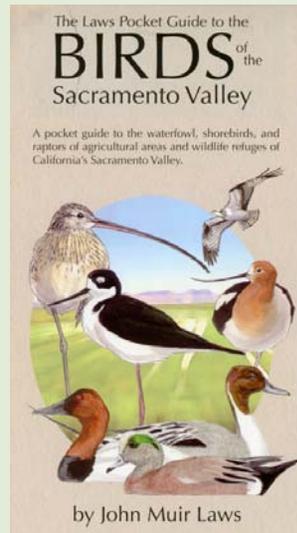
For anyone who has not taken a winter trip to the Sacramento Valley, this small guide may be the prompt that gets you there. The new *Laws Guide* is a very helpful collection of information with thumbnail portraits of all the species found there.

The Sacramento Valley is a winter home for dozens of freshwater and woodland species, many of which migrate from the Arctic. Some rarely venture near the Bay Area.

A visit to the Valley between November and February can offer sightings of hundreds of Tundra Swan, thousands of Snow Geese and Great White-fronted Geese, and flocks of a dozen or more species of dabbling and diving ducks all feeding in vast flooded fields and managed ponds. Or go for the numbers of hawks and eagles, including the inland Swainson's Hawk.

Most helpful is the map at the center of the guide. There is a cluster of six National Wildlife Refuges and Wildlife Areas within about a 30-mile range between Woodland and Willows east of the I-5 corridor.

This new *Laws Guide* shows how all six areas relate to one another geographically, and shows the agricultural lands between them (the place to see Sandhill Cranes). These attributes make it an indispensable tool in planning a trip.



### **The Laws Guide to Drawing Birds**

Written and illustrated  
by John Muir Laws  
Heyday Books, 2012; \$24.95

This marvelous book brought to mind a recent article\* in which birding was characterized as approaching an "identity crisis" with the use of technology in the field. There is an emerging protocol being field-tested in some competitive events

that a bird sighting isn't verifiable unless accompanied by a photograph.

*The Laws Guide to Drawing Birds* makes an important contribution to this moment in the craft of birding. The key term here is "craft," as Laws' book offers techniques to turn any birder into a crafter: someone who makes something new and tangible that goes beyond simple observation.

This book is a drawing class with birds as its subject. It offers instructions on how to sketch an animal in steps that begin with outlines and conclude with details and color. Each page shows a series in which every sketch highlights a step. There are lessons covering different perspectives on birds' body types, including birds in flight. Laws includes information about art supplies and media, and even includes art class digressions on color theory.

Laws' book succeeds in teaching a pair of lessons: first, drawing is not about generating pretty pictures—it's about using your hands and simple tools to help you see better. Second, drawing is a skill that can be learned, not an innate talent. Anyone who can coordinate eyes, mind, and hands for everyday tasks can learn to sketch animals.

Any level of skill in drawing birds will help you learn to identify them. Just being prompted to focus on what is unique will help you differentiate a bird from other species.

\**It's Gadgets vs. Eyeballs as Two Species of Bird Watchers Clash*, by Corey Kilgannon and Emily S. Rueb (*The New York Times*, May 10, 2014).

## Training at Crissy Field

### Jaileez Campos, Intern

Crissy Field is one of San Francisco's most iconic tourist destinations. It was the military's first Air Coast Defense Station on the Pacific Coast. Aviation research was conducted there until 1937. After 1974, Crissy Field ceased operation as an air field for fixed-wing aircraft. In 1996, Congress passed the Presidio Act, which created a new national park unit to be managed by the Presidio Trust in cooperation with the National Park Service. In 2001, the Crissy Field Center opened to the public for recreational activities.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Intern Jaileez scans the bay for birds.

October 4th was a beautiful Saturday in San Francisco. It was at least 85 degrees and sunny, with clear skies. I practiced using the scopes again, and Nancy lent me a pair of her high-powered binoculars.



Photo: Len Blumin

Black Phoebe

We saw 16 different bird species. The first was a **Western Gull** in the water. On the posts along the beach was a **Black Phoebe** waiting for prey. We spotted three **Elegant Terns** on a cement buoy. Along the walk we encountered a man intricately painting an image of an Italian museum on a saw.



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Elegant Tern

As we were taking a break in the shade we saw **European Starlings** and **Brewer's Blackbirds** on a patch of grass. We continued to the marsh and stopped at the Farallones Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center. It is a hidden treasure at Crissy Field. We learned about some of the birds found at the Farallones, such as **Common Murres** and **Tufted Puffins**. It was nice to learn about bird species that I hope to encounter some day.

When we finally reached the marsh we saw the **Double-Crested Cormorant**, **Great Blue Heron**, **American Coot**, **Killdeer**, and **Snowy Egret**. The cormorants were gathered in one of the sand inlets in the middle of the marsh; most of them had spread their wings to dry. We watched the Great Blue Heron hunt for fish.

As I was viewing the birds through the scopes some people came up to me in curiosity. I was glad to educate them about birds we were watching. My training at Heron Head's Park was paying off; I am finally starting to understand the tips and tricks of bird watching.

Prior to my training on October 4th, I had visited Crissy Field several times. I would hang out on the beach to



Photo: Mike Smylie

Great Blue Heron

relax. This time was different from my past experiences. While I was bird watching at Crissy Field I cultivated a greater appreciation for the place. Bird watching has connected me to nature.

I was able to explore new areas of Crissy Field. I learned about conservation and restoration efforts in the area. By the end of the day I had newfound respect and appreciation for the place.



Photo: Eric Tamm

A painter with his Italian museum on a saw.



Photo: Mike Smylie

Intern Eric scopes out the marsh at Crissy Field.

**Volunteers Needed for  
2014–2015 Saturday Programs**  
Send an e-mail to [volunteer@sfnature.org](mailto:volunteer@sfnature.org)

## Birding for Everyone, October 4th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



The very hot day we spent exploring the Botanical Garden on the 4th of October will be long remembered by our group as “Warbler Day.” We had stunning birding all around, but seeing seven species of warblers was the most memorable part of the day. The two stars were the vagrant **Prothonotary Warbler** and **Tennessee Warbler**, each of which had been hanging out in the monkey-hand tree at the main gate for a few days.

News about these visitors had traveled far and wide, and as our group gathered that morning we had to find each other amid a crowd of thirty or forty birders who had come from all around the region to see these two visitors. We saw them too, and most memorably saw the Prothonotary take a bath in the library courtyard fountain.

Before we left the main gate we heard the calling of nearby **Conures**, and spotted a **Western Tanager** at the top of a cypress tree near the main lawn.

As exciting as the two visiting warbler species at the main gate, we were equally struck by the beauty of a pair of **Black-throated Gray Warblers** that we later encountered in the California Native Plant Garden. One of the Black-throated Grays gave us a view of this bird’s small supraloral (above the beak) yellow spot.

In both locations we saw **Yellow** and **Yellow-rumped** (Audubon’s) **Warblers**, and in the Native Plant garden there were **Orange-crowned** and **Townsend’s Warblers**.



Prothonotary Warbler

Photo: Sandi Wong



Tennessee Warbler

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Black-throated Gray Warbler

Photo: Matt Knoth

Other sightings around the garden were pairs of birds, and pairs of similar species: two **Downy Woodpeckers** together in a tree; two species of jays, **Scrub** and **Steller’s**; two kinds of gulls, **Western** and **California**; two corvids—**American Crows** and **Common Ravens**; **Red-tailed** and **Cooper’s Hawks**; and two **Northern Flickers**.

Other surprises of the day included three **Turkey Vultures** circling overhead, an extremely common species in California, but less commonly seen in the city.

Large flocks of **Pygmy Nuthatches** in the southern side of the garden, and **Cedar Waxwings** in the northern side kept our necks exercised looking at these high-perching species. In the Waterfowl Pond was the first **American Coot** of the fall, and a **Mallard** pair.

Our species total for the day was 35, and included such local regulars as **Dark-eyed Juncos**, **Black Phoebes**, **Anna’s Hummingbirds**, **American Robins**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Canada Geese**, a flyover **Double-crested Cormorant**, **American Goldfinch**, and **Song Sparrow**.

Please join our next walk: Saturday, November 1st, in the SF Botanical Garden. See Upcoming Events for details.



Orange-crowned Warbler

Photo: Rick Leche



Townsend’s Warbler

Photo: Matt Knoth

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## Feathered Creatures Debut at the Zoo

Chilean Flamingos hatched in late summer to a warm welcome from parent flamingos at the SF Zoo.

Photos by contributing photographer Sandi Wong



Four Chilean flamingo chicks have hatched, and more are on the way at the San Francisco Zoo. It has been four years since the flamingos have added to their flock. The current chicks hatched on Aug. 30, Sept. 6, 14, and 19. There are several more eggs on nests that have yet to hatch.

Chilean flamingos in the wild live in large flocks and require crowded conditions to stimulate breeding. During breeding season males and females display a variety of behaviors to attract mates, including head flagging—swiveling their heads from side to side in tandem. The female lays one egg on a mud nest with a depression at the top.

About 28 days later, the egg hatches.

