



## Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

As you read this column, the Climate Change talks will have just begun in Paris. Now more than ever, it's important for us to reach out to youth and introduce them to conservation.

Our field trips and classroom visits are designed to spark a sense of wonder and personal interest in the world outside. It's the up-close and personal engagement that inspires. You can't love what you don't know.

I am writing to ask for your support for our many programs in 2016. We offer 27 field trips each year with trained naturalists and small groups free to all members.

Members receive a monthly newsletter with stories on conservation, field trips, reviews of nature films and pertinent reading, and spectacular bird photos.

Your donation also funds our K-5 school programs for underserved students, intern programs that have recruited more than 100 students from city schools, and our Heron Cam.

Please consider a significant gift:

- \$1,000 funds one class for a year of classroom visits and field trips.
- \$500 funds one student for a winter or spring internship.
- \$100 funds one Saturday field trip for adults and families.
- \$35 for basic membership (\$30 for seniors).

Thank you so much.

Nancy DeStefanis



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## A Walk Along the Shore at Crissy Field, November 14th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



Crissy Field was warm and sunny when our group of about a dozen participants set out from the Warming Hut. Behind the Gulf of the Farallons office we set up scopes to observe **Double-crested** and **Brandt's Cormorants** perched on the offshore pier.

It was a good opportunity to observe the very pale, nearly white breast of the first-year Double-crested Cormorant, in contrast with the very dark adult phase of what we thought might be mature Double-crested. But their inky black narrower bill and more compact build revealed them to be nonbreeding adult Brandt's.

Our next stop overlooked the protected dune area that is good shorebird habitat. There we found small foraging flocks of **Least Sandpipers** and **Killdeers**, and one resting **Western Snowy Plover**. Foraging in the nearby grasses was an orange-morph adult male **House Finch**, quite brightly colored.

Over the dunes at the water's edge was a **Heermann's Gull**, and out in the water was a **Pacific Loon** in bright gray and white nonbreeding plumage featuring this species' distinctive chin strap. There were regular flyovers of **Brown Pelicans**, **Caspian Terns**, and **Elegant Terns**, these being the most numerous of the high-flying, large-bodied aquatic birds.

Our third and fourth stops were at the east and west ends of the lagoon. Between them we had views of **California Gulls**, **Ring-billed Gulls**, and a couple of **Western Gulls** in the water, totaling four gull species for the day. Of winter ducks and grebes we found **Ruddy Duck**, **Eared Grebe**, **Pied-billed Grebe**, and **American Coot**. Long-legged waders were represented by one **Great Egret** and three **Snowy Egrets**, while the lagoon's winter shorebirds included **Willet**, **Long-billed Curlew**, and several **Black-bellied Plovers**.

*continued on next page*



Double-crested and Brandt's Cormorants

Photos: Bill Hunnewell

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 On the mile-long walk back, the lawn, trees, and shrubs played host to an array of passerine species, including **Townsend's Warbler**, **Black Phoebe**, **Anna's Hummingbird**, one female **Red-winged Blackbird**, and a confusion of female **Brewer's Blackbirds**, male **Brewer's Blackbirds** (in separate groups) and **Brown-headed Cowbirds**.

<b>Crissy Field</b>	Least Sandpiper
<b>11/14/2015</b>	Ring-billed Gull
<b>Compiled by:</b>	Western Gull
<b>Megan Prelinger</b>	California Gull
<b>Birds: 39 species</b>	Heermann's Gull
Ruddy Duck	Caspian Tern
Pacific Loon	Elegant Tern
Pied-billed Grebe	Mourning Dove
Eared Grebe	Anna's Hummingbird
Brown Pelican	Black Phoebe
Brandt's Cormorant	American Crow
Double-crested Cormorant	Common Raven
Great Egret	Townsend's Warbler
Snowy Egret	Song Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	White-crowned Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	Golden-crowned Sparrow
American Coot	Red-winged Blackbird
Snowy Plover	Brewer's Blackbird
Killdeer	Brown-headed Cowbird
Black-bellied Plover	House Finch
Willet	Rock Pigeon
Long-billed Curlew	Starling

Clockwise from top left: Black Phoebe, Brown Pelicans, Elegant Tern, Willet, Killdeer and House Finch, Great Egret and Snowy Egret.

## Birding for Everyone, November 7th

### Sarah Barsness, Naturalist



It would be hard to imagine a more perfect autumn morning than the one we had for our walk in the Arboretum on November 7th. The air was crisp and cool; the sky was a luminous blue. We met at the main gate just before 10 AM (10 of us, including leaders) and spent some time watching the **Pygmy Nuthatches** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers** (Audubon) working the yellow blooms in the Fremontodendron tree at the entrance.

As we set out we heard and saw a **Belted Kingfisher** fly over the Wildfowl Pond to the northwest. We crossed the southern edge of the Great Meadow on our way to the California Native Plant Garden, and saw many more **Yellow-rumped Warblers** foraging on the lawn. Many were in drab fall plumage with no distinct yellow or black field marks, but they



Photo: Rick Leche

Belted Kingfisher

could still be identified by their bright yellow rumps. Sometimes it really pays to see a bird from behind!

We took a side path through a wooded area and saw a few **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** along the way — although none would show a gorgeous red crown. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are notoriously quick moving and hard to spot for more than a second. We were glad when a bird paused long enough for us to take close

looks. Also long enough for us to finally realize that this was not a Ruby-crowned Kinglet but a **Hutton's Vireo!**

It was a great opportunity to talk about the difficulty of distinguishing these two birds; even after a second look, they can seem almost identical. The Vireo has a distinct double wing bar, while the Kinglet has just one distinct bar, with a strong dark band below. The Vireo is a bit larger and less round, and its bill is a little thicker and blunter, with more white between eye and bill. What should have given it away was that it held still, which a Kinglet will never do.

In the California Native Plant Garden we were treated to simultaneous views of a **Hermit Thrush**, **Pine Siskins**,



Photo: Rick Leche

Ruby-crowned Kinglet



Photo: Doug Greenberg

White-crowned Sparrow

As we made our way to the Children's Garden we noted various raptors, including the usual **Red-tailed Hawk**, but also a single **Cooper's Hawk** and an **Osprey** diving behind the trees for prey.

In the Children's Garden we were happy to encounter a small flock of the notoriously social **Bushtit**. These tiny drab birds are dimorphic in their eye color — adult males have dark eyes while adult female eyes are a light cream color. We kept our eyes open in this part of the Arboretum for woodpeckers, and while we only heard one **Downy** or **Hairy Woodpecker**, we had close views of several **Northern Flickers**, resting on a fallen log and decorating a bare tree like a pair of ornaments.

As we walked back across the Great Meadow we watched four **Red-tailed Hawks** circling and courting by extending their legs and touching each other in flight. Back at the main gate, summarizing our sightings, we scanned for more species. We were not disappointed: just as we were saying our goodbyes, a gull flew over our heads, extraordinarily brilliant white against the blue sky — a **Glaucous-winged Gull!**

**Black Phoebes**, and a pair of **House Finches**. **White-crowned Sparrows** were plentiful there, and we were pleased to find a flock of **Golden-crowned Sparrows** foraging in the shade beneath a Buckeye tree. We noted that despite their golden crowns, these birds were well camouflaged against the fallen autumn leaves.

Throughout our trip we heard the distinctive calls and chip notes of the **California Towhee**, but they refused to make an appearance. Similarly, two or three **Pacific Wrens** called from high up in the redwoods, and we heard the plaintive call of a **Golden-crowned Kinglet** from a Monterey Pine.



Photo: Jon D. Anderson

Golden-crowned Sparrow

#### SF Botanical Garden

11/07/2015

Compiled by:

Sarah Barsness

Birds: 39 species

Turkey Vulture

Canada Goose

Mallard

Osprey

Cooper's Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

American Coot

Western Gull

Glaucous-winged Gull

Rock Dove

Mourning Dove

Anna's Hummingbird

Belted Kingfisher

Downy or Hairy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

Black Phoebe

Hutton's Vireo

Steller's Jay

Western Scrub Jay

Common Raven

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Bushtit

Pygmy Nuthatch

Pacific Wren

Golden-crowned Kinglet

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Hermit Thrush

American Robin

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Townsend's Warbler

California Towhee

Fox Sparrow

Song Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

White-crowned Sparrow

House Finch

Pine Siskin

Lesser Goldfinch



## Northern Flickers at Fort Mason Community Garden

Photos by Sandi Wong

Widely distributed across North America, the Northern Flicker favors open woodlands, savannas, and forest edges, but also breeds in urban, suburban, and rural areas. It eats mostly ants (also beetle larvae), and various berries in fall and winter. Unlike most other woodpeckers, Northern Flickers are mainly ground foragers.

The Red-shafted species is familiar to us in the West. Two subspecies are also found in North America: Yellow-shafted (Eastern), and Gilded (Southwestern), both with yellow-underwing feathers.

Data indicate declines in Northern Flicker numbers. Possible explanations include loss of habitat and competition with the European Starling for nest cavities. Flickers play a central role in the ecology of woodland communities by excavating cavities later used by other hole-nesting species.

Information courtesy of Cornell University. See <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/166a/articles/introduction>.



### Spring Internship Applications Now Online

*Middle, high school, and college students:* Apply for a spring internship and learn about Great Blue Herons, their chicks, and other local birds at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park. Deadline to apply: Feb. 19, 2016. Training will begin in March.

Interns will learn to use spotting scopes, field guides, and binoculars, and communication strategies for talking to the public. Community service hours are available upon request.

Dates, information, and applications are available at: [http://sfnature.org/get\\_involved/intern.html](http://sfnature.org/get_involved/intern.html). \$100 internship fee; scholarships available.

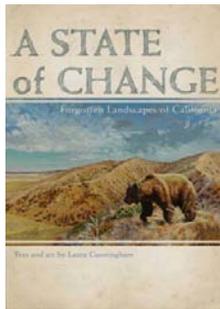
#### The Bird Has the Last Word: Rome Enlists American Falcons to Hunt Starlings Befouling Eternal City

Officials hope Texan birds of prey will scare off migratory flocks, as bird droppings make roads slippery and ruin landmarks. They have imported five to do the job. They are planning an alternative technique—to play recordings of starling distress calls, prompting them

to scatter and move to less busy parts of the city. But this scheme has been delayed until December while firms compete for the lucrative contract, worth €40,000 (£28,000) [US\$42,000] in previous years.

*The Guardian*, Nov. 22, 2015

## Book Reviews



### **A State of Change — Forgotten Landscapes of California**

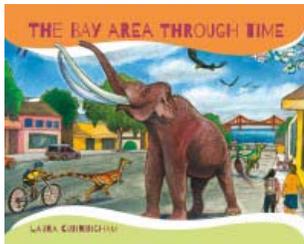
By **Laura Cunningham**; Heyday Books, first paper printing, 2015. 352 pp., \$35.

Reviewed by **Nancy DeStefanis**

Described as a California classic by the *SF Chronicle*, this reconstruction of prehistoric

California is an excellent *tour de force* of art and nature writing. This book is a must for anyone interested in California's natural history. The accounts of the Golden Bear, inland marshes, river world, grasslands, and the great herds illuminate our understanding of the place we live.

The drawings are beautifully rendered and fairly leap off the page. Cunningham is a very talented artist and writer. This is a great gift for yourself or a friend.



### **The Bay Area Through Time**

By **Laura Cunningham**; Heyday Books, hardcover, 2015. fully illustrated by the author, 32 pp., \$16. Ages 6-10.

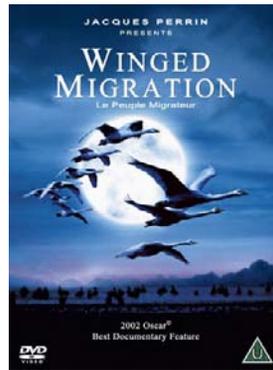
Reviewed by **Nancy DeStefanis**

This lovely book for children traces the history of the SF Bay Area from 450 million years ago to 300 years ago. Along the way, we meet the wonderful creatures that called the Bay Area their home.



Laura Cunningham, an artist and naturalist, studied paleontology and biology at the University of California, Berkeley, and has worked at various field biology jobs for the California Department of Fish and Game, the US Geological Survey, and other organizations. She has studied and painted California's historic and living wildlife, flora, and unique landscapes. She lives near Death Valley National Park.

## Film Review



### **Winged Migration**

A documentary film by **Jacques Perrin**. Sony Pictures, 2003 (in US). 89 minutes. Available on Netflix.

Reviewed by **Michele Hunnewell**

*Winged Migration* is not just a film documenting the flight miles of migrating birds, it is a cinematic work of art celebrating the beauty and grueling obstacles faced

during the birds' journey every year. The movie chronicles four years of filming the migratory patterns of birds from the Northern and Southern Hemispheres.

According to the narrator, the migration of birds is "a promise to return." To breed, raise chicks, eat, and grow in their original habitats is the impetus for their efforts. And what tough obstacles the birds encounter on their journey: freezing, snowy winds, roiling seas, hunters, trappers, pollution, and exhaustion to name a few. It is a miracle of nature that these beautiful creatures survive not just the flights but as species.

The fantastic cinematography includes very remote views of India, Canada, New Zealand, the US, Vietnam, Greenland, Holland, and many other countries — aerial views we would likely not see otherwise.

The birds are beautiful: Bald Eagles, Common Sage Grouse, Arctic Terns, and Eurasian Cranes, to name but a few. The birds are seen from the air and on land: feeding chicks, dancing, bathing, and in their natural environments — the promise to return is fulfilled.

This movie has probably been seen by most bird lovers by now, but a second viewing proved as enchanting an experience for us as the first time we saw it.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**SF Nature Walks:** From 10 am to noon; *rain cancels all walks*. Please bring binoculars if you can, and a pencil. For directions see our online [events calendar](#).

**Birding for Everyone:** First Saturdays from 10 am to noon in the SF Botanical Garden. Next: Dec. 5, also Jan. 2, with Megan Prelinger and Sarah Barsness. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. SFNE members FREE. \$10 per nonmember adult, children welcome (free).

**SF Botanical Garden Admission:** Free for SF residents with proof of residency; non-residents pay a fee.

**Lecture/Slide show/Film on the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915, by Nancy DeStefanis:**

Thursday, Dec. 10, 7 pm – 8:15 pm, Merced Branch, SF Public Library, 155 Winston Dr. Free. Entrance on Stonecrest at Winston (across from Stonestown Galleria, near 19th Ave. & Winston). Library phone: 415-355-2825

**Birding Chain of Lakes:**

Sat., Dec. 12, 10 am to noon, with Alan Hopkins. Meet 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.*

**Heron's Head Park:**

New: upcoming trips in January with Bob Hirt and Missi Hirt-Gavic, and in February, with Megan Prelinger. Adults \$10, children free.



**SF Nature Education membership: Adults, \$35; Seniors 65+, \$30; students 21 or under, \$20.**



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Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Nancy DeStefanis



Photo: Grace Ruth

### 2015: A Good Year for Herons at Stow Lake

Last spring and summer Great Blue Herons nested at Heron Island and produced three chicks. At an island by a nearby waterfall a different heron pair produced two chicks. Join us at Heron Watch next spring!



Photo: Nancy DeStefanis

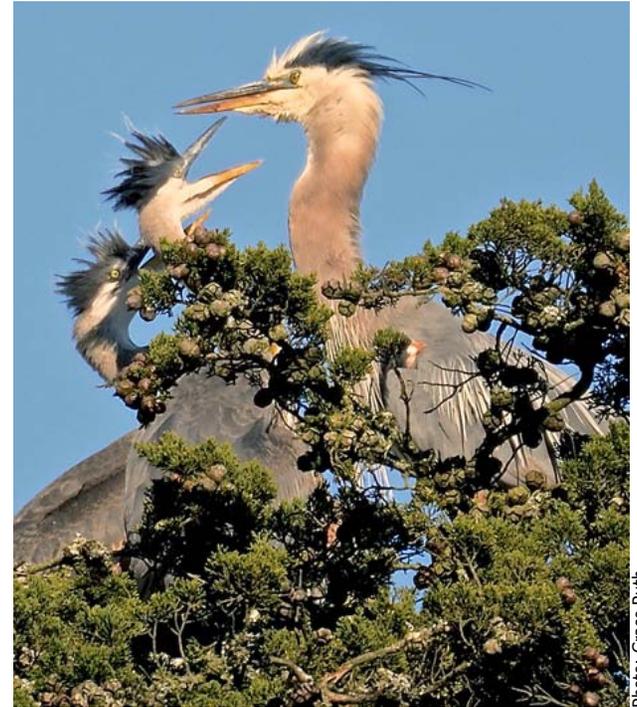


Photo: Grace Ruth

Photos by Grace Ruth and Nancy DeStefanis