



Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

I hope you enjoy the new features in our newsletter—film reviews of bird-themed movies and complete listings of all birds spotted on our field trips.

Beginning this month, our birding walks for adults and families at the San Francisco Botanical Garden will be free for all active members. Nonmembers will still need to pay \$10 for the walk, but children and teens are always free. That's a big savings for members. I encourage you to renew your membership soon to take advantage of this new benefit.

We will be sponsoring 26 birding walks throughout the city in 2015. In addition, we will be offering *nine* family walks (up from five announced last month): two at the SF Botanical Garden (March & July); two at Heron Watch (April 18 & May 9); three at Heron's Head Park; and two at Crissy Field. See Upcoming Events or the calendar on our home page for latest information.

We continue to offer birding walks led by seasoned naturalists and assisted by trained volunteers with spotting scopes. Our walks generally start at 10 am in order for everyone to have a little extra time to travel to our birding locations.

We expect to install our new Heron Cam at the end of February. Stay tuned for a special email when we go live. Two nests are already occupied!

If you would like to join or renew your membership, you can do so through the Donate Now button below, or send a check to: SF Nature Education, 3450 Geary, Ste. 208, San Francisco, CA 94118.

Regular membership: \$35, Seniors: \$30, Families (two adults) \$50. All members receive the e-newsletter. Thank you for your support.

Best regards,

Nancy

Nancy DeStefanis



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Winter Birding at Crissy Field

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



We had crystal blue skies and bright sun on our January 17th walk at Crissy Field. Winter is the best time to appreciate aquatic species in San Francisco Bay, as it is a winter migration destination for many boreal species. The trade-off for getting

to see those species at close range is that many of them winter over in drab plumage. The word *red* that appears in so many names of aquatic boreal species—like Red-throated Loon—is unsupported in their winter cloaks of gray and white.

Golden-crowned Sparrows, which may migrate as far as Common Loons, are an exception, appearing in bright golds and autumn browns even in winter. Many birds have less colorful plumage in winter to conserve strength for migration. The bright colors of spring and summer that serve birds during the reproductive seasons are often traded in during their winter rest period.

Near the Crissy Field Warming Hut we had good views of **Horned Grebes**, **Common Loons**, and **Western** and **Clark's Grebes** at the start of our walk. We had opportunities—in between the birds' long fishing dives—to observe the physiognomic differences between the stockier, shorter-necked **Horned Grebe** and the longer-necked, slenderer **Western** and **Clark's Grebes**.

One highlight of this walk was the opportunity to observe the differences between male and female plumages. **Surf Scoters** were sighted in clusters of females and males. Interspersed with the **Horned**

Grebes and female **Surf Scoters** were several **Red-throated Loons**. These smallest loons are identifiable by their slender shape and distinctive sharp and dark gray bills.

Greater Scaup are the other diving ducks that offered us views of the distinctive male and female plumages. We had good opportunities for studying the white face of the female in contrast to the iridescent green-black



Photo: SFNE

Scouting diving ducks, loons, scoters, and shorebirds at Crissy Field.

head of the male. Ultimately—at the end of the walk—we had the chance to see a male **Lesser Scaup** and contrast its smaller, triangular, wedge-shaped head, and iridescent purple-black color; characteristics that differentiate it from the **Greater Scaup**.

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In the sage and willow groves we stopped to appreciate the many terrestrial species that populate the supratidal zone (area just landward of the high-tide line). **White-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** were abundant, along with **Anna's Hummingbirds**, **Brewer's Blackbirds**, and **Black Phoebes**.

The last stops of the walk were at the lagoon. The shoreline had seen a high tide an hour before our walk began, so the lagoon was short on exposed mudflat and sandbar. Our shorebirds were less numerous than they might have been.

We saw **Willetts**, **Whimbrels**, **Long-billed Curlews**, **Western** and **California Gulls**, a **Great Blue Heron**,



Surf Scoters: female above and male below



Photo: Rick Lechte

Red-breasted Merganser (f)

pairs of **Red-breasted Mergansers**, along with the smaller diving ducks: **Ruddy Ducks** and **Buffleheads**, and the **Eared Grebe**. The **Red-breasted Mergansers** are the most salt-water loving of the three North American Merganser species, and it was a treat to have close views of both females and males of this beautiful bird.

A special thank you to our volunteers from ERM Corporation who staffed the spotting scopes: Kendra Carter, Travis Edwards, Andrew Sundling, and Jacob Zollinger. They did a terrific job!



Above: Red-breasted Merganser (m); Above right: Anna's Hummingbird



Photo to left: Peter Massas

Photos to left & below: Bill Hunnewell



Female Goldeneye

Great and Snowy Egrets, and **Spotted Sandpipers**.

In the water were some of our most exciting sightings of the day: Two

Crissy Field, SF
01/17/2015

Compiled by: Megan Prelinger

Birds: 38 species

Common Goldeneye

Greater Scaup

Lesser Scaup

Surf Scoter

Bufflehead

Red-breasted Merganser

Ruddy Duck

American Coot

Common Loon

Red-throated Loon

Western Grebe

Clark's Grebe

Eared Grebe

Horned Grebe

Brown Pelican

Double-crested Cormorant

Great Blue Heron

Great Egret

Snowy Egret

Red-tailed Hawk

Spotted Sandpiper

Willet

Whimbrel

Long-billed Curlew

Western Gull

California Gull

Anna's Hummingbird

Rock Pigeon

Black Phoebe

Scrub Jay

American Crow

American Robin

European Starling

Yellow-rumped Warbler

White-crowned Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

Brown-headed Cowbird

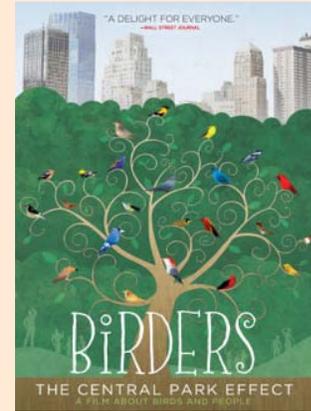
Brewer's Blackbird

Film Review

Birders—The Central Park Effect

Directed by Jeffrey Kimball. Other Noises, Music Box Films, 2012. 60 min. centralparkbirdfilm.com/birders/

Reviewed by Michele Hunnewell



This is a beautifully crafted homage to the birds that can be found in New York City's Central Park. The "effect" in the film's title refers to the stopovers made in the park by thousands of migrating birds on their journeys north or south every spring and fall.

More than 200 species of birds migrate through

Central Park during a calendar year. This film features dozens of them in vibrant close-up and panoramic cinematography.

In structuring the film, Mr. Kimball has broken the calendar year into the four seasons, beginning and ending with spring. On migrations from the tropics to the Canadian provinces and back, birds—including cardinals, orioles, warblers, mergansers, mallards, raptors, and many others—are the "stars" in this film's celebration of the variety of birds and birders alike.

The diversity of birders shown in the film is wide; several people interviewed—including writer Jonathan Franzen and veteran birder Starr Saphir—speak of the enjoyment of discovering birds, the pleasures of birding, and of the "unicorn effect," that moment when a seemingly mythological bird suddenly appears. Each birder interviewed in the film has respect and genuine affection for birds and wildlife in the midst of their city.

Birders—The Central Park Effect is a joyous and intelligent look at the birds, birders, and the real wonder of living in the great city of New York and enjoying an avian paradise in its midst.

The film is available to Netflix subscribers via streaming and DVD, and on iTunes and YouTube.

Heron's Head Park Walk

Missi Hirt-Gavic, Naturalist



It was a beautiful, crisp, sunny morning at Heron's Head Park on January 10th. I was accompanied by my father Bob Hirt, President of the Santa Clara Audubon Society. What an honor to have someone so knowledgeable and experienced guiding us.

Upon arriving we learned that a few early birds had spotted a **Palm Warbler**, which is a rare sight and a motivating start! We set out with a large and enthusiastic group, binoculars and bird books at the ready, and five spotting scopes.

Watching the underbrush and bushes we counted **White-crowned Sparrows**, **Black Phoebes**, **House Finches**, a **Western Meadowlark**, and a **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. This question arose: How to tell **American Crows** and **Common Ravens** apart? There's an easy way to distinguish them—American Crows are smaller, have a rounded tail, and have a high pitched, *caw caw*;

Below: American Avocets; Black-necked Stilt



Photo: Sarah Barsness



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Common Ravens are larger, have a diamond shaped tail, and have a deep, croaking voice.

We headed off the main path and out along the marsh. We saw a **Great Egret**, a **Willet**, a **Western Grebe**, and a **Horned Grebe**. Here we also got a good look at a female **Bufflehead** and a female **Ruddy Duck** (a nice opportunity to compare two birds with similar markings). On our return to the main path we had a good view of a **Greater Yellowlegs**.

In the water by the dilapidated pier were **Brown Pelicans** diving, and we got a good look at the bright red on the underside of their bills during breeding season—just beautiful. Here we also saw **American Wigeons**, **Double-crested Cormorants**, **Mew**, **Western**, and **Herring Gulls**. Throughout the day we saw several **Snowy Egrets**.

Along the path several **Bushtits** could be heard and seen flitting between two bushes. We saw a

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Photo: SFNE



Photo: Len Blumin



Photo: Sarah Barsness

Clockwise from top left: co-leader Bob Hirt; birders on the trail; Palm Warbler; Western Meadowlark; Black-bellied Plover; Brown Pelicans in breeding plumage.

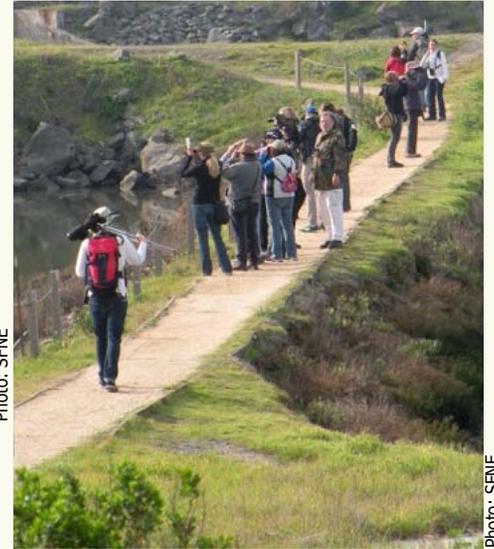


Photo: SFNE



Photo: Doug Greenberg



Photo: Matt Knoth



Birders at Heron's Head, with Missi Hirt-Gavic (center) and her father Bob Hirt (to her left).

Photo: SFNE

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few **Anna's Hummingbirds** (the Allen's may not appear for another month). We were treated to sightings of **Black-necked Stilts**, the delicate **American Avocets**, **Black Oystercatchers**, **Black-bellied Plovers**, and **Spotted Sandpipers**. We saw **Whimbrels** and heard their distinctive, rolling twitter and trill. Swimming off shore in large groups were **Greater Scaup**.

At the end of our walk Nancy DeStefanis spotted a **Long-billed Curlew**, the largest North American shorebird, walking quite a ways out in the underbrush of the marsh. This was a

life bird for a couple of folks on our walk, and soon the spotting scopes were up to get a closer look at that long, curved bill.

Other species seen along the way were **European Starling**, **Northern Mockingbird**, **American Robin**, **Rock Dove**, a **Eurasian Collared-Dove**, **Canada Goose**, **American Coot**, and a juvenile **Red-tailed Hawk**.

It is a real treat to come to an area with such a diverse array of wildlife. There are so few remaining wetlands on San Francisco's shoreline. Heron's Head Park is a true ecological treasure!



Anna's Hummingbird

Photo: Sarah Barsness



Upcoming Events in February & March

SF Nature Walks: All walks are from 10 am to noon. Please bring binoculars if you can, and a pencil. For directions please see our [online events calendar](#).

Birding for Everyone: first Saturday of every month, 10 am to noon. Next: Feb. 7, with Megan Prelinger; also Mar. 7. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. SFNE members free. \$10 per nonmember adult, children welcome (free).

Birding for Families: Mar. 7, 10 to noon. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. For children and their parents or guardians. SFNE members free. \$10 per nonmember adult, children free.

SF Botanical Garden Admission: FREE for all SF residents with proof of residency; non-residents pay a fee. See the [garden's website](#) for details.

Urban Nature Connections: Sat., Feb. 7. **Bird Language Leaders Workshop.** Join them for a free workshop presented by The Presidio Trust and Golden Gate Audubon Society. This event is for people looking to deepen their connection with the natural world. Workshop: 9:30-noon; lunch break: noon-1:30; keynote & discussion: 1:30-3:30.

Rob Hill Campground, 1475 Central Magazine Road, The Presidio. Park below the campground. Follow signs on event day. For info, email pjbergen@hotmail.com, or visit <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/urban-nature-connections-jon-young-bird-language-leaders-workshop-tickets-15195435958>

Heron's Head Park: Saturday, Feb. 21, 10 am-noon. FREE: adult walk and separate family walk. Naturalists: Megan Prelinger, Missi Hirt-Gavic, and Collin Adams. Park at Jennings & Cargo Way. Donations welcome.

Save the Date: March 21. Walk Lake Merced with Alan Hopkins, 10-noon. Details to come in our March newsletter.

Heron's Head Park, SF 01/10/2015

Compiled by:

Missi Hirt-Gavic

Birds: 43 species

Canada Goose, 8
American Wigeon, 10
Mallard, 2
Greater Scaup, 60
Bufflehead, 15
Ruddy Duck, 60
Horned Grebe, 1
Western Grebe, 20
Double-crested Cormorant, 2
Brown Pelican, 10
Great Egret, 1

Snowy Egret, 3
Red-tailed Hawk, 1
American Coot, 8
Black-necked Stilt, 5
American Avocet, 10
Black Oystercatcher, 2
Black-bellied Plover, 1
Spotted Sandpiper, 2
Greater Yellowlegs, 1
Willet, 1
Whimbrel, 1
Long-billed Curlew, 2
Least Sandpiper, 10
Mew Gull, 15
Western Gull, 150
Herring Gull, 1

Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon), 60
Eurasian Collared-Dove, 2
Anna's Hummingbird, 5
Black Phoebe, 2
American Crow, 20
Common Raven, 1
Bushtit, 10
American Robin, 8
Northern Mockingbird, 1
European Starling, 3
Palm Warbler, 1
Yellow-rumped Warbler, 10
Savannah Sparrow, 1
White-crowned Sparrow, 16
Western Meadowlark, 2
House Finch, 8

Save the Dates for Heron Watch

Heron Watch begins at Stow Lake on April 11, and runs for six Saturdays until May 16. The observation site near the Stow Lake Boathouse operates from 10 am until 12:30 pm each Saturday. Volunteers using spotting scopes will be available to show the herons and chicks to the public and answer questions. Observation is free.

At 10:15 am each Saturday we will offer a guided birding walk of Stow Lake and Strawberry Hill. Adults \$10, children & teens free.

Interns & Volunteers Needed

We accept six high school and college students as Heron Watch interns. Training begins in March. Download an application at: http://sfnature.org/get_involved/intern.html. Intern application deadline: **Feb. 26, 2015**.

Adult volunteers also are needed for Heron Watch Saturdays. Volunteers will be trained. We ask volunteers to sign up for two of six Saturdays of Heron Watch (4/11-5/16). New volunteers will be oriented at a Saturday morning session in March.

A volunteer application may be downloaded at http://sfnature.org/get_involved/volunteer.html. Return to: volunteer@sfnature.org by **Mar. 14**.

First Birding for Everyone of 2015

Trace Kannel, Naturalist



On January 3rd, we had our first bird walk of the new year. We enjoyed a sunny, brisk day at the SF Botanical Garden. Near the entry kiosk we spotted our first bird, a **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, flitting

among the yellow flowers of the Hybrid Monkey Hand Tree, aka *x Chiranthofremontia lenzii*.

At the Great Meadow we found a **Hermit Thrush** beneath the trees, and the usual gaggle of **Canada Geese** on the lawn. From there we noticed **Anna's Hummingbirds** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers** throughout our walk.

At the Waterfowl Pond a male **Bufflehead** was diving, and a juvenile **Black-crowned Night Heron** stalked fish from the island! The heron then flew to the bridge and nonchalantly crossed the planks before hopping down to the water's edge.

In the Andean Cloud Forest we found a **Varied Thrush** feasting on berries in a nearby tree. From below we could clearly see his dark breast-band. Beautiful bird! Near the Zellerbach Garden two **California Towhees** crossed our path, demonstrating the "buddy system."



Juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron

Photo: Sarah Barsness

As we approached the future site of the plant nursery many **White-crowned Sparrows** worked the dirt pile for insects. On the John Muir Nature Trail we saw a few **House Finches** in the bare treetops. We heard a **Northern Flicker** but could not spot it in the pines.

We headed back. Just past the vegetable beds we heard the familiar "peek" of a woodpecker. The black-and-white bird landed in a pine bough and pecked a cone. It was a female **Hairy Woodpecker** (large bill, little white spotting on wings, no red patch). In that same pine tree, a *jar* of **Pygmy Nuthatches** worked the branches over our heads.



Hairy Woodpecker

Photo: J.V. Higbee



Varied Thrush

Photo: Ernest Gaudreau

Birding for Families Walk

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director



Five adults and six children came along on the January 3rd Family Walk at the SF Botanical Garden. At the outset, the kids counted 18 Canada Geese on the lawn. Then they were thrilled to watch a young **Black-crowned Night Heron** at the Wildfowl Pond.

A few minutes later they spotted a male **Bufflehead** diving, and learned the difference between diving ducks and dabbling ducks, like the **Mallard**. A couple of **American Coots** showed up and we observed their red eyes.

As we walked through the Andean Cloud Forest we saw a tree with thousands of holes made by a Red-breasted Sapsucker. We found **American Robins** with orange breasts (*red-breast* applies to British robins), and **Anna's Hummingbirds** flitting from flower to flower. We spotted a few **Yellow-rumped Warblers** on the trails.

We took a break to review the birds we had seen, and the children drew a favorite bird in their SF Nature Education field journals. Budding artists, all!

At the Dawn Redwood Grove we talked about how these trees descend from the oldest redwood trees in China. We took a photo, and a moment later spotted a **Hermit Thrush** on the ground. As we said goodbye, a **Red-tailed Hawk** made circles in the sky and flashed his red tail for all to see!



Hermit Thrush

Photo: Peter Massas

SF Botanical Garden

01/3/2015

Leader: Trace Kannel

Birds: 27 species

Black-crowned Night Heron

Canada Goose

Mallard

Bufflehead

Red-tailed Hawk

American Coot

Western Gull

Rock Pigeon

Anna's Hummingbird

Hairy Woodpecker

Black Phoebe

Steller's Jay

Western Scrub Jay

Common Raven

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Pygmy Nuthatch

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Hermit Thrush

American Robin

Varied Thrush

Yellow-rumped Warbler

California Towhee

Song Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

House Finch



The Birding for Families group in the Dawn Redwood Grove.

Photo: Nancy DeStefanis



Photos to right above: Bill Hunnewell



Clockwise from above:
Great Horned Owl parent with two young chicks at the beginning of January. Chicks have been growing steadily in their Golden Gate Park nest.

Great Horned Owls, 2015

Cool facts: The Great Horned Owl is found only in the Americas. It lays two to three eggs at a time. Incubation: 30-37 days. One brood per year; eggs hatch asynchronously. Chicks climb out on nearby branches at five to six weeks, and do not fly well until about 10 weeks. Subsequent parental care lasts up to five months.

Photos by Bill Hunnewell, Kaushik Lakshminarayanan, and Sandi Wong.



Photos left, above, and top center: Sandi Wong

Photos to right: Kaushik Lakshminarayanan





Lloyd Lake Revisited

Photos by Sandi Wong
in Golden Gate Park

Clockwise from top left:
Bufflehead
Northern Pintail
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Hooded Merganser (m)
Hooded Merganser (f)

