



The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education ♦ Summer 2015

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Our six-week Heron Watch program at Stow Lake has just concluded. Over 1,500 adults and children visited our site and looked through our spotting scopes, asked questions of the volunteers and interns, and took tours of the heron colony.

Special thanks go to our wonderful interns and volunteers. I would also like to thank Dave Simpson and his terrific staff at the Stow Lake Boathouse for their help throughout Heron Watch.

Many visitors talked about their pleasure in viewing the colony on our Heron Cam. The Heron Cam will be up as long as the herons are in the nests.

It's always exciting to watch the chicks learn to fly. During June, visit Stow Lake and see their first awkward flights!

Our summer programs at the San Francisco Botanical Garden continue with two special family walks on June 27th and August 1st, in addition to the adult walks already scheduled.

I especially want to thank Bill Hunnewell, Grace Ruth, and Sandi Wong for their incredible photographs, many of which are featured in this issue.

Thank you for your donations to our Heron Watch program and Heron Cam. Please take this opportunity to support the continued operation of the Heron Cam and our summer programs.

Thanks so much, and have a lovely summer.

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis



e-mail: info@sfnature.org
telephone: 415-387-9160
www.sfnature.org
3450 Geary, Ste. 208
San Francisco, CA 94118

Nancy DeStefanis, at right, leads volunteers, interns, and visitors on a family walk on Heron Watch Closing Day.



Photo: SFNE

Heron Watch Wraps Up for Another Year Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

Our last Saturday program at Stow Lake was jam-packed with visitors at scopes and on tours of the heron colony. Naturalist Megan Prelinger led a large group of adults and children on a tour of the **Great Blue Heron** nests and pointed out other birds along the way.

I led the family walk with help from volunteer Chris Malfatti, interns Fiona, Chiara, and Zed, and junior intern Michael. We stopped at all the heron nests and then headed over the Roman Bridge and turned left to see the waterfall up close. Then we stopped in the Golden Gate Pavilion, a gift from our sister city Taipei in Taiwan, to check off birds we had spotted. The students on the tour sketched birds they had seen.

Then on to the Red-tailed Hawk nest, where we observed two chicks, and the parent standing guard on a limb next to the nest. A beautiful **Tree Swallow** posed for us nearby. Finally we crossed the Rustic Bridge, where I pointed out the 90-million-year-old chert stones.

The six-week program was a great success thanks to our wonderful corps of volunteers and interns. We especially thank volunteers from ERM: Ariane Burwell, Stephen Ferenz, Ian Hull, Jim Leist and daughter Jessica, Mark Levin, Ellen Niemann, Janel Schulenberg, and Andrew Sundling.

Our SFNE volunteers also gave their utmost: Christine Malfatti, Anne Galjour, Sharon Pretti, Megan Prelinger, Jacob Zollinger, Kevin Biggerstaff, Jaileez Jara Campos, Taylor Garcia, Isabelle Chow, and Greg Greenman. Mike Smylie volunteered on four Saturdays and did a great job training new volunteers.

The three chicks in nest #1 now are approaching eight weeks; nest #2 is still occupied, and nest #6 on the island by the waterfall appears to be incubating. Nests 3, 4, and 5 have been abandoned. The chicks in nest #1 should fledge at twelve weeks by the end of June.

To follow developments of the Stow Lake nests please check our Heron Cam and read my blog: www.sfnature.org.

On the pages ahead:

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Photos: Mike Smylie



Heron Watch Volunteers and Interns Working Hard on May 16th, Closing Day

Clockwise from above: Anne Galjour answers questions about herons; watching the nests; volunteer Mark Levin at the scope; Tree Swallow; Isabelle Chow at a scope; Chiara and Zed at the scopes; Ellen Niemann (center) with visitors; Fiona and Zed.



Tree Swallow: Bill Hunnewell



**New Heron Nest near
Stow Lake Waterfall**

Photos by Grace Ruth



Photos: © 2015 Grace Ruth



Photos: © 2015 Grace Ruth



Feeding Frenzy in a Heron Island Heron Nest

Photos by Grace Ruth

Read clockwise from top left: Heron dad (on right) returns with food for his three hungry, growing chicks.

Conservation History and Distribution of the Great Blue Heron

Ben, Intern



The Great Blue Heron is currently listed in the “least concern” category by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. That does not mean that they do not face any threats.

During the late 1800s it became popular for women to wear feathers on their hats. Herons, egrets, ostriches, pheasants, birds of paradise, and other birds with large plumes were heavily hunted. Although many bird populations were affected by the massive hunt for feathers for hats, wading birds were hit especially hard.

In California the population of herons drastically decreased from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. The egrets suffered more than herons, and they became almost extinct in many places, especially in the Florida Everglades.

In January of 1896, Mrs. Augustus Hemenway read a report about the slaughter of egrets in the Everglades. She was horrified, and arranged a meeting of the newly-formed Massachusetts Audubon Society to discuss the issue.

The meeting was attended by ornithologists and horticulturists, and even by some women who wore hats with feathers from endangered birds! The resultant organizing made the general public aware of the issue.

These efforts resulted in the 1918 Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which prohibited pursuing, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capturing, or collecting any migratory bird, nest, or eggs without a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Although the Great Blue Heron was hunted heavily for its plumes and some of its wetland habitats were drained or otherwise degraded, many populations have recovered. Nevertheless, breeding colonies remain vulnerable to disturbance and habitat loss, and climate change and increasing predator populations bring new challenges.



There are other threats to the Great Blue Heron. Although the overall population of herons has increased since 1966, the subspecies *Herodias occidentalis* in Florida is decreasing. Although the exact cause is unknown, scientists suspect high mercury levels in local wetlands.

Habitat loss is another threat to their survival. As wetlands continue to be developed, less habitat remains for wading birds. In the last 230 years, the continental U.S. has lost 53% of its wetlands. The success of the twentieth-century fight to save the Great Blue Heron should be remembered for future wildlife conservation attempts as we try to save the earth’s biodiversity.

The Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) lives throughout the Americas. There are populations in Alaska, Canada, the lower 48 states, Central America, and Northern South America, including the Galapagos Islands. There are five subspecies of the Great Blue Heron, each with a unique range. Some of these subspecies remain in a certain area year-round, while others migrate to a warmer climate in winter.

Great Blue Herons mostly live in marine habitats. They are always found near water, as their diet is mostly fish.

While it is known that some herons migrate every year, little about their migratory patterns are known. Mostly the northern populations (Alaska, Canada) migrate to Central and South America and the Caribbean during the winter months. The reason some herons living in northern populations migrate and some don’t is unknown. All heron populations living in the Central and

Southern United States (including our Stow Lake colony), Mexico, and Central America are non-migratory.

Bibliography:

Doughty, Robin W. *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A Study in Nature Protection*. University of California, Berkeley, 1975. Print.

“Great Blue Heron.” Allaboutbirds.com. Cornell, Apr. 27, 2015.



Photos: left, Sandi Wong; above, SFNE

Fiona and Chiara collecting data; Great Blue Heron with unfortunate gopher on the lawn at Log Cabin.

Great Blue Heron Observations, 5/2/2015

Chiara: This week’s assignment of quietly observing the Great Blue Heron nests and collecting data provided more excitement than usual as we began by watching two new nests in a Monterey Pine tree near the Stow Lake waterfall. The two new pairs were in full courtship mode and performed their displays during the 45 minutes that Fiona and I observed them. We witnessed the heron male from nest #6 perform a twig presentation to his partner, who was not in view until he arrived. The rest of the time the two females arranged the twigs of their nests.

Fiona: I was sitting and collecting data on the new nests near the waterfall when a lady behind me shouted. I looked to see a Red-tailed Hawk come down and take a baby gosling. The hawk took the gosling to a nearby tree to eat. Everyone around me was in shock. Chiara and I were saddened by these events, but it was a rare thing to see, and we understand that this is nature at work.

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Great Blue Heron Observations, 5/2/2015

Zed: We arrived at the island by the waterfall around 11:15. While watching nests #5 and #6 at the waterfall, two very interesting things happened. Nest #5 was most likely abandoned; we believe this because many sticks were taken from that nest and added to nest #6. The other thing was that the two herons in nest #6 mated; this happened after four stick presentations.

Ben: I collected data on the six heron nests. The most interesting behaviors I saw took place at nests #5 and #6, the new colony located near the waterfall. Nest #5 appeared to be inactive, although I was later informed that herons were seen there the previous day. The pair in nest #6 were busy with twig presentations. Instead of finding sticks on nearby trees, as herons typically do, the male would steal sticks from nest #5!

Interns Perform Habitat Restoration

Zed, Intern



May 9th was a typical San Francisco day. Clouds and fog blocked the sun, but because it was not windy, the climate was comfortable. The restoration project group slowly gathered at the picnic tables in front of the Stow Lake Boathouse. I was joined by my fellow intern Fiona, and we walked up Strawberry Island with the group.

As soon as we reached the top of Strawberry Hill, shovels and buckets were passed around, gloves were donned, and we split into groups. Mine was assigned to weed and plant. The project manager, Andy Stone, showed us which plants to remove, which plants to save, and which plants he didn't really care about.

Fiona found a small straw nest on the ground while she was weeding. The nest was intact with four perfect small eggs in it. She gave it to Andy Stone, who passed it on to Ms. D. for the school program. She identified the



The Brewer's Blackbird nest. A female typically lays 4-6 eggs that hatch all at once in 14-16 days.

Photo: SFNE

Brewer's Blackbird nest and showed it to the other interns and their families.

After about 45 minutes of weeding and planting, it was snack time. The snack was quite welcome and tasty. After eating, people just kind of sat down for a while and talked.

When I started to work again I pulled weeds that needed to be pulled. But after a while I started to notice that I was running out of weeds to pull, so I went to ask the project

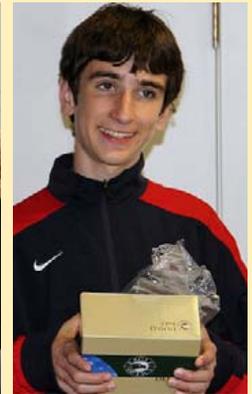
manager what to do next. He showed me a tree and said to prune all the lower short stubby branches. In no time that was done too, so I went to weed along the fence that surrounds the reservoir on top of Strawberry Hill.

Along the fence there were seemingly endless weeds. These weeds will never be gone. They grow from behind the fence

and try to envelope the plants in front of the fence. After about 45 minutes of weeding we went down to the picnic tables and departed for home.



Photos: Mike Smylie



Nancy presents the interns with new binoculars. Clockwise from top left: Nancy with Chiara; Zed; Fiona; Ben; interns and their families at the celebratory intern graduation luncheon.

San Francisco Nature Education Interns Graduate on May 16th Nancy DeStefanis

Ben, Chiara, Fiona, and Zed graduated from the Heron Watch intern program on May 16th at a luncheon ceremony in the Stow Lake boathouse, with families and volunteers on hand.

During their three-month internship the interns learned to identify local birds, wrote reports on Great Blue Heron breeding behavior, educated the public, and collected data on the heron colony. Using binoculars and spotting scopes, sketching the colony, and performing

habitat restoration were integral parts of the program.

The interns received new binoculars for their excellent work and diligence. Mike Smylie, president of SFNE, stated that "these interns were among the very best participants in the program." The interns have been invited to join our winter internship program at Crissy Field and Heron's Head Park in the fall.



**Red-tailed Hawk and Chicks
in Golden Gate Park**
Photos by Bill Hunnewell



Birding for Everyone, May 2nd

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist



April and May are a time of transition for birds in San Francisco. By May, many species we have known as common during the winter have left for their breeding grounds, and our year-round species are well into nesting. Spring brings a new cast of neotropical migrants to the city.

Weather permitting, it's possible to see brightly colored orioles, tanagers, grosbeaks, and warblers as they migrate from their southern wintering grounds to their northern nesting grounds. As we waited for the May 2nd group to assemble in the SF Botanical Garden, we carefully scrutinized the Hand Tree x Fremontia hybrid at the entrance gate. The tree has nectar in its flowers that are a great resource for migrant and local birds.

The Fremontia part of the tree is a California native, but the Hand Tree (*Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*) is native to Mexico and Guatemala. While the Hand Tree looks exotic to us, it would be familiar to orioles and tanagers that winter where the trees are native.

While we were looking at the Hand Tree a male **California Quail** was giving its *COW!* call inside the Demonstration Garden. The call is known as the bachelor call because it is made by males without a mate. The poor bird was calling in vain; he is one of only three quail left in the city—all males. We ventured into the Demonstration Garden to look for the quail, but he spotted us and dashed under a thick bush.

We continued, but no signs of migration were evident.

A **Double-crested Cormorant** and **Great Blue Heron** flew overhead. **Tree Swallows** zipped about. It seemed more like June than early May until we heard a **Western Tanager** calling high in a eucalyptus.



Downy Woodpecker



Pacific Wren

Bird photos: Bill Hummelwell

Unfortunately, the tanager stopped calling before we could lay binoculars on it.

At the Succulent Garden we delighted in seen **Downy Woodpeckers** and **Pygmy Nuthatches** visiting nest cavities in the tall agave stalks. At the John Muir Pond we finally found a neotropical migrant: a **Wilson's Warbler**. Bright yellow with a black cap, the Wilson's Warbler is our most common nesting warbler in San Francisco, but always a joy to see.

As we doubled back around the Children's Garden I took one last look at the trees at the pond. Aha! There at the top of the tallest alder was a gray bird with a peaked crest. A true neotropical migrant: an **Olive-sided Flycatcher**.

Differentiated from similar-looking Western Wood Peewees by their larger size, more coarsely streaked gray vest, and sometimes by a tuft of white feathers behind the wing, this bird—having just arrived from South America—showed all the proper field marks.

In the Redwood Grove we found the typically shy **Pacific Wren** singing boldly from a small stick for everyone to see. In the California Garden the male **Cooper's Hawk** was perched on its usual tree.

We wound up the trip sitting on stones by the entrance gate, where we began. As we counted down the day's birds, there in the Hand Tree was a beautiful yellow, black, and orange **Western Tanager**—the bird we'd all been looking for!



Wilson's Warbler



Olive-sided Flycatcher



Western Tanager



Cooper's Hawk

SF Botanical Garden
05/02/2015

Compiled by:

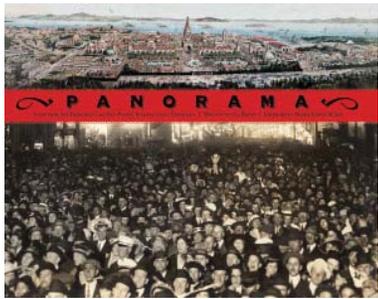
Alan Hopkins

Birds: 37 species

Canada Goose
Mallard
California Quail
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
American Coot
Western Gull
Rock Dove
Anna's Hummingbird
Allen's Hummingbird
Downy Woodpecker
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Black Phoebe

Steller's Jay
Western Scrub Jay
American Crow
Common Raven
Tree Swallow
Chestnut-backed Chickadee
Bushtit
Pygmy Nuthatch
Pacific Wren
American Robin
European Starling
Wilson's Warbler
Western Tanager
Spotted Towhee
Song Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Brewer's Blackbird
Purple Finch
House Finch

Book Review



Panorama *Tales from San Francisco's 1915 Pan-Pacific International Exposition*

By Lee Bruno;
Introduction by Mayor Edwin Lee. Cameron + Company, 2014; hardcover, \$22.

Reviewed by Nancy H. DeStefanis

Panorama is a 9 1/2 by 12-inch coffee-table book filled with large photos that depict the fair and the personages who visited: Buffalo Bill Cody, Helen Keller, Eddie Rickenbacker, the suffragists, Maria Montessori, Madame Tetrassini, Charlie Chaplin, Thomas Edison, Luther Burbank, Henry Ford, and many others.

The photos convey the fair's magnificence: Art Smith's flights over the exposition; the Scintillator, that showed off the fair nightly in a brilliant light show; the faces of Italian sculptors who executed most of the 1600 pieces; and the poets, artists, and performers who labored to make the fair a world-class exposition.

I was especially pleased to see a full-size color photograph of the long-forgotten sculpture *Wind and Spray* by Anna Coleman Watts for the Palace of Fine Arts lagoon. This beautiful sculpture depicts four cupids frolicking in the water stream around a fountain. It has been my favorite since I discovered a picture of it in the Artisans Frame Shop on Union Street over 15 years ago.

I have a few misgivings about the book. The type used to describe the photographs is so faint that it is extremely hard to read.

In the chapter on A. Stirling Calder, chief of sculpture at the exposition, the author mentions Laura Ingalls Wilder and her admiration for the sculpture *The Pioneer Mother* (permanently placed at the entrance to Stow Lake near the Log Cabin). But the author neglects to mention the sculptor who created it, Charles Grafly.

Another omission occurs with the photo of President Taft commencing the ground-breaking ceremony on October 14, 1911—at the Polo Fields in Golden Gate Park! Neither Bruno nor Laura Ackley, author of *San Francisco's Jewel City*, point out that the Fair Committee couldn't agree on the fair's ultimate location, so they had a ceremonial ground breaking at the Polo Fields!

In the chapter titled: *Suffragettes: A road trip for voting*, the author uses a term that was coined in Great Britain. The term "suffragette" was first used as a term of derision by the journalist Charles E. Hands in the *London Daily Mail* to describe activists in the women's suffrage movement. The objects of the intended ridicule gladly embraced the term, saying "suffraGETtes" (hardening the g) implied not only that they wanted the vote but they intended to get it. In the US, members of the suffrage movement called themselves "suffragists," disavowing a name they considered disparaging.

The author is the great-grandson of Reuben Hale, a merchant and civic leader who proposed the fair in 1904. The photographs are well-chosen, and most of the stories are well-written. I found it quite enjoyable and hope that future editions will correct the errors. For a list of events celebrating the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 go to: ppie100.org.

Film Review

The Island President

2011; 101 min. Directed by John Shenk; Netflix & other sources.

Reviewed by Michele Hunnewell

The Island President is a documentary featuring Mohamed Nasheed, president of the Maldives, and his efforts to bring countries together on the crisis that is global climate change. The film begins with world leaders gathering for the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit, then tells the backstory of President Nasheed's work and the events leading up to the summit.

The Maldives, an archipelago of 2000 islands in the Indian Ocean, lies 1.5 meters above sea level; if the oceans continue to warm due to global climate change that nation will be flooded and destroyed. The Copenhagen Summit brought together politicians from around the world, including China, India, and the United States, to develop strategies for reducing our carbon footprints and slowing climate change.

Nasheed states that the ocean rising is "impending disaster—everyone knows this." He goes so far as to hold one of his cabinet meetings underwater in the Indian Ocean to attract worldwide attention to the crisis. When asked by his staff how to approach the

subject during his summit speech, he wisely says it is easier to ask countries like India and China to "DO things rather than ask countries NOT to do things."

The Copenhagen Summit was a last-ditch attempt to achieve an agreement to reduce carbon emission from 400 parts per million to 350, rather than 370 ppm. Several countries did not agree.

President Nasheed is no longer president of the Maldives, having resigned in 2013. The former president and dictator, Maumoon Gayoom, is again in power. Mohamed Nasheed continues his quest to save island nations, and the rest of the world, from destruction due to global climate change.

I recommend this movie to those who would like to see a politician working for the good of the planet. One is reminded by this film that our planet is fragile, beautiful, diverse, and in need of our help and cooperation—nationally and internationally—if it is to survive.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SF Nature Walks: From 10 am to noon. 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: Jun. 6; also Jun. 27, and Aug. 1. **No walk on July 4.** Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. SFNE members FREE. \$10 per nonmember adult, children welcome (free).

SF Botanical Garden Family Walk: Jun. 27 and Aug. 1, 10–noon, led by Missi Hirt-Gavic. \$10 per nonmember adult, children free. At SF Botanical Garden bookstore.

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.

Winter applications for Intern Program now online.

Explore Crissy Field and Heron's Head Park and learn about local birds. Deadline: September 18, 2015. http://sfnature.org/get_involved/intern.html.

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



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



For updates and pictures, like or follow SF Nature Education!



**What's Good for
the Goose is Good for
the Goslings**

Photos by Sandi Wong
at Stow Lake

