



The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education • October 2015

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Recent months have brought many positive developments in the area of climate change.

Pope Francis wrote in May on the importance of combatting climate change, and reinforced his message before Congress and the UN in September.

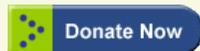
Amazon Watch and its allies have been urging the Brazilian environmental agency IBAMA to reject the dam-building consortium Norte Energia's request for Belo Monte dam's operational license. On Sept. 22, IBAMA issued a decision stopping construction of the dam. It would have meant clear-cutting more than 400 islands of rich forests. The consortium must now comply with obligations to mitigate the dam's disastrous potential impact or drop plans to build it.

Closer to home, in early September the Supreme Court of Canada ruled unanimously that Ecuadorian communities could pursue an enforcement action to seize Chevron's Canadian assets in order to cover Chevron's \$10 billion liability for polluting water while operating as Texaco in Ecuador.

Finally, the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, will—for the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations—aim to secure a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the goal of keeping global warming below 2°C. The conference opens Nov. 30th.

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis



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

Winter Field Trips Begin!

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

Now that our migratory birds are about to arrive in San Francisco, we are launching our winter programs at Crissy Field and the Chain of Lakes. Participating in these upcoming walks is a great opportunity for beginning and intermediate birders. Families are always welcome.

Megan Prelinger will lead the Saturday, November 14th walk at Crissy Field. Last year's field trip featured Elegant Terns, Brown Pelicans, Buffleheads, Eared and Western Grebes, and Red-throated Loon!

Alan Hopkins will lead the Chain of Lakes walk on Saturday, December 12th. Last year's trip featured the American Bittern at North Lake! It was just one among the 41 species spotted on the walk around the lakes. Cedar Waxwings, Acorn Woodpeckers, Hooded Mergansers,



Photo: Peter Massas



Photo: Peter Massas

Hermit Thrushes, and Townsend's Warblers were just a few of the birds seen during the trip. SFNE naturalists will assist Alan during this very popular trip.

I hope to see you for two great mornings of birding.



Photo: Bill Hummelwell

Clockwise from above: American Bittern at North Lake, Red-throated Loon and Hooded Merganser at Crissy Field.

On the pages ahead:

- 2 Birding for Everyone, Sept. 5th, with Megan Prelinger; Upcoming Events
- 3 Nesting Barn Swallows by Grace Ruth
- 4 Film Reviews: *The Birds* and *Racing Extinction*
- 5 Wood Ducks! Photographs by Sandi Wong

Birding for Everyone, September 5th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



When more than 16 people showed up for September's *Birding for Everyone*, I was especially glad to have assistant leader Sarah Barsness on hand. Sarah is joining the SF Nature leadership team.

The walk brought us into the middle of early fall migration. The vicinity of the main gate was crowded with **Yellow Warblers** and **Orange-crowned Warblers**, while the lawn was bustling with **Western Tanagers** in the cherry grove. Year-round residents like **Black Phoebes**, **Anna's Hummingbirds**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, and **Western Scrub Jays** were in their commonly found positions on low-hanging branches of lawn trees and around its perimeter. A flock of **Red-masked Parakeets** flew over.



Photo: Rick Lechte

Pine Siskin

In the wooded slopes between the lawn and the California Garden we observed the in-between plumage of hatching-year **Song Sparrows** and adults, and juvenile and adult **White-crowned Sparrows**.

The west end of the California Garden near

the reservoir was very rich. We found a flock of **Pine Siskins**, and nearby, **Lesser Goldfinches**. In contrast to the low perching of the Lesser Goldfinches, we craned our necks to spot **Western Tanagers**. In the branches overhanging the reservoir was a **Western Wood-Pewee**, whose identity was confirmed by its distinctive voice, a sharp "skip-it-up," followed by a slightly louder falling whistle.

In the Children's Garden we found a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, similar to the



Photo: Len Blumin

Western Wood-Pewee



Photo: Jamie Chavez

Pacific-slope Flycatcher

Western Wood-Pewee but smaller and plumper, with brighter olive-yellow color, sharper wing bars, and an eye-ring. We saw **Pygmy Nuthatches**, **California Towhees**, **House Finches**, and an **Acorn Woodpecker** flying through.

Another highlight was a **Warbling Vireo** near the Moon-viewing Garden. We identified this migrant vireo by its pale eyebrow, pale lores, compact build, solid wings (no wing bars), and pale underparts—whitish on the chest and upper belly, yellowish to bright yellow near the vent—and by its sweetly warbling song.

As we were rounding out the walk with a visit to the Waterfowl Pond, a **Great Blue Heron** arrived to browse the waters.



Photo: Doug Greenberg

Warbling Vireo



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

Western Tanager

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: Oct. 3, Nov. 7, and Dec. 5. 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.

Birding Crissy Field: Sat., Nov. 14, with Megan Prelinger. Meet outside Warming Hut cafe. Adults \$10, children free.

Chain of Lakes: Sat., Dec. 12, with Alan Hopkins. Meet at Middle Lake parking lot. Adults \$10, children free.

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



Instagram

SF Botanical Garden
09/05/2015

Compiled by: Megan Prelinger
Birds: 29 species

Great Blue Heron
Mallard
Cooper's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Rock Dove
Anna's Hummingbird
Acorn Woodpecker
Western Wood-Pewee
Pacific-slope Flycatcher
Black Phoebe
Warbling Vireo
Steller's Jay
Western Scrub Jay

American Crow
Common Raven
Chestnut-backed Chickadee
Pygmy Nuthatch
American Robin
Orange-crowned Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Western Tanager
California Towhee
Song Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
House Finch
Pine Siskin
Lesser Goldfinch
Red-faced Parakeet



Barn Swallows have been nesting on my block for years. About 20 years ago they were next door, but then the house changed hands and no one had a light fixture suitable for building a nest. So they went down the block to other houses. This year new renters encouraged nest building by putting materials on the gate at the front door. In past years the norm was three or four chicks. I thought there were four. On further review, I found five chicks!

After the babies fledged, they flew around the neighborhood. They came back a couple nights to stay in the nest before their migration south. All the families with nests feel it's good luck to have Barn Swallows nesting in their light wells. Guess you'd have to feel that way, because they certainly leave a mess on the porch!

—Grace Ruth



All photos: Grace Ruth

Film Reviews



The Birds — a Birder's Perspective

1963; directed by Alfred Hitchcock. 120 min. Based on a short story by Daphne du Maurier; screenplay by Evan Hunter.

Reviewed by Alan Hopkins

As fall migration is underway and Halloween is approaching, I think of one of my favorite birding spots, Bodega Bay, and of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

Now more than 50 years old, Hitchcock's horror classic has been reviewed innumerable times. I hope to give a birdwatcher's perspective. *The Birds* is not for everyone. Today, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals would have a big problem with it, and not just for Melanie Daniels' mink coat. The use of live birds in many scenes would be frowned upon, but the SPCA was present during filming.

Hitchcock's film was based on Daphne du Maurier's 1952 short story "The Birds," set in England's rural Cornish seaside. Du Maurier's alleged inspiration was witnessing gulls attacking a farmer as he plowed a field. In the story, birds are propelled by a strong cold wind from the east, and are attacking England. The Hitchcock version is set along the California coast in Bodega Bay.

Hitchcock's inspiration for the movie may have been an event on the night of August 18, 1961, when thousands of sooty shearwaters crashed into the town of Capitola. The *Santa Cruz Sentinel* reported that the dead birds—poisoned by the nerve-damaging marine toxin domoic acid—covered streets and rooftops of the small town.

Hitchcock hired Evan Hunter to adapt du Maurier's story for the screenplay. The Hunter/Hitchcock version adds romantic interest and other complications. I'll leave the psychology to other reviewers—I'll stick with the birds.

The Birds opens in San Francisco's Union Square. Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) crosses the street and notices hundreds of gulls swirling above the skyline before she enters Davidson's Pet Shop. Melanie inquires if the myna bird she ordered has arrived. It hasn't.

Melanie begins to jot down her address so that the bird can be delivered. Enter Mitch Brenner (Rod Taylor). Mitch

appears to assume that the woman with pencil and paper is an employee, and asks if she can help. Melanie responds, "Yes, what is it you're looking for, sir?"

"Lovebirds—for my eleven-year-old sister," Mitch replies. They stroll through the store. Pointing at strawberry finches, Mitch asks, "Are those lovebirds?"

Melanie says, "Those are red birds."

Mitch says, "I thought they were strawberry finches."

(I find this scene reminiscent of the grilling birders can get when reporting a rare bird.)

Melanie discovers that Mitch stays in Bodega Bay on weekends. We see her in a top-down Aston Martin speeding along the Coast Highway. On the passenger seat the lovebirds sway as the car speeds around curves. The arrival of the birds in Bodega (*spoiler alert!*) will have a devastatingly chaotic effect on the village's avian and human populations. Rounding out the talented cast are Suzanne Pleshette, Jessica Tandy, and Veronica Cartwright.



Author Daphne du Maurier, c. 1940

When I see *The Birds* today I can't help thinking that Hitchcock was something of a visionary. In the final scene we see gulls and ravens everywhere. We now have bird-count data going back many years. A look at the data shows that gull numbers have increased, and raven numbers have increased exponentially.

These birds are nest predators, and are not going to hurt humans. They are causing declines in threatened and endangered species like snowy plovers and marbled murrelets. I wonder what our bird life will look like in another fifty years!



Racing Extinction

2015; a documentary directed by Louie Psihoyos. 90 min. Screenplay by Mark Monroe. Balboa Theatre, SF, Sep. 25–Oct. 1. Discovery Channel, Dec. 2, 9 pm ET & PST.

Reviewed by Nancy DeStefanis

If you've been reading *The New York Times* or surfing the Web, you've probably seen the incredible images of endangered species projected onto the Empire State Building.

Filmmaker Louie Psihoyos, who also directed the Oscar-winning documentary *The*

Cove, has now set his sights on the illicit wildlife trade and species extinction.

Scientists predict we may lose half the species on the planet by the end of the century. They believe we have entered the sixth major extinction event in Earth's history. Number five took out the dinosaurs. Our era is being called the Anthropocene, or 'Age of Man,' because evidence shows that humanity has sparked this catastrophic loss.



Racing Extinction promotional image.

The team of photographers and filmmakers have amassed images of destruction and beauty so breathtaking as to shake us all out of our inertia and apathy and inspire us to do something to prevent species extinction.

Elon Musk (Tesla Motors CEO), Jane Goodall, and a host of other experts are featured.



**Wood Ducks
Liven Up the Water
Scene in the
Bay Area**

Photos by Sandi Wong

