



Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Thank you to all who have contributed to our \$5,000 matching grant.

We are gearing up for Heron Watch at Stow Lake. We are thrilled to have four nests at the island near the waterfall. We expect chicks in early to mid-April. Please note that we have moved our Observation Site to a spot on the northern edge of the lake just opposite this island. See the map on page three for our new location.

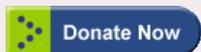
We will conduct nature walks to observe other local and nesting birds at the lake every Saturday during Heron Watch (April 16–May 21). In addition, we will sponsor special Family Walks on April 30 and May 21. Please meet at the new Observation Site for the walks.

Thank you for your continuing support. If you haven't already donated, you have until May 31st to help us reach and exceed our goal.

Best regards,

Nancy

Nancy DeStefanis



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Hérons Incubating at Stow Lake

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director



Three pairs of Great Blue Herons are now sitting on eggs at Stow Lake. Apparently the herons prefer the island by the waterfall, since that is where they have chosen to nest again this year.

Another pair of herons is also on the island but have not yet settled down. If you recall, one pair nested successfully on this island last year and raised two chicks.

If all goes well we should have chicks by mid-April, if not sooner. The incubation period is thirty days. We should certainly be able to observe the chicks by opening day of Heron Watch: Saturday, April 16th.

Please see the map on page three for the location of our Observation Site. On Heron Island, the original nesting area opposite the Stow Lake Boathouse, we have observed one heron standing in old nest no. 2



Photos: Bill Humnewell

just to the left of the old giant nest no.1. This heron has been performing repeated stretch displays, which probably means another heron is nearby. Once we observe two herons at the nest we will turn on the Heron Cam, so please stay tuned.

When the chicks hatch they will be fed about every two hours. While one parent broods the young, the other forages for fish and gophers to feed them. The adults

continued on next page



On the pages ahead:

- 2 Herons Incubating at Stow Lake, cont.
- 3 Drones in the Park; Upcoming Events
- 4 Las Gallinas Ponds, February 28th
- 5 Las Gallinas, cont.; Other birds recently seen
- 6 Long-eared Owl; Virginia Rail
- 7 Owls and Owlets in Golden Gate Park!
- 8 A Variety of Stow Lake Birds



continued from previous page

will then exchange places so that the parents can feed themselves.

This is a very exciting time to observe the herons because there is constant activity and flying in and out.

Our volunteers will be on duty with spotting scopes to view the adults and chicks. We will also be leading nature walks every Saturday. Please join us for a very special and unique experience. We think the chicks closely resemble dinosaurs — come out and see for yourself!

Photos top and right:
Bill Hunnewell

Photo at left: Kal Sinha



Drones in the Park: Prohibited

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

During March, I observed two drones at Stow Lake.

I called the chief of the Park Rangers and he informed me that drones are prohibited in all parks in San Francisco. He told me that Section 3.09 of the Park Regulations forbade their use.

A few days ago, I observed a man about to launch his drone in another part of the park. Unbeknownst to him there was a nest less than 50 feet away. I politely informed him of the regulation and he left.

If you see someone using a drone in a city park, please take a moment to call 311 and report the location in order to ensure safety, protect individual privacy, and prevent nest disturbances. The dispatcher will send a Ranger to the scene.



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 [events calendar](#).

Birding for Everyone: First Saturdays from 10 am to noon in the SF Botanical Garden. Next: April 2, with Sarah Barsness and Megan Prelinger. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. SFNE members FREE. \$10 per nonmember adult, children welcome (free). **SF Botanical Garden:** Free for SF residents with proof of residency; non-residents pay a fee.

Heron Watch: At Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park. Saturdays, April 16, 23, 30, and May 7, 14, 21, 2016. Observation at spotting scopes, 10 am-12:30 – free.

Nature Walks every Saturday, 10:15 to noon. We will lead special Family Walks on April 30 and May 21. All walks: Adults \$10, children free. *Walks meet at new site.* See map below.



Photos: Nancy DeStefanis

Clockwise from top: Great Blue Heron in nest no. 4; Great Egret hitching a ride; Great Blue Heron pair in nest no. 2.

Volunteers Needed

Adult volunteers are still needed for Heron Watch on Saturdays, April 30th, May 7th, and May 21st, from 9 am to 1 pm. **Choose one or more Saturdays. We will train you on the morning that you sign up for.**

A volunteer application may be downloaded at http://sfnature.org/get_involved/volunteer.html. Return to: volunteer@sfnature.org. Please return form by April 17.

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

e-mail: info@sfnature.org
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www.sfnature.org



Las Gallinas Ponds, February 28th

Sarah Barsness, Naturalist



The sun shone on the Las Gallinas ponds in Marin County, when just a week earlier heavy rain had cancelled the March Birding for Everyone trip. A group of eight regulars met at 9 am to see what was happening in late winter at this Marin hotspot. We were not disappointed! We spotted 49 species of birds, and only hunger and exhaustion persuaded us to stop for lunch.

Just 30 minutes north of San Francisco, the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District maintains water storage ponds and irrigation fields for water reclamation that double as habitat for resident and migrating birds. Four miles of public walking paths offer access for birders and other walkers.

The area is so dense with birds that we spent our first 20 minutes or so in the parking lot watching **Northern Shovelers**, **Northern Pintails**, and **Cinnamon- and Green-winged Teals** paddling in the nearby pond. **Red-winged Blackbirds** bathed in the shallows, **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **Song Sparrows**, and a **Northern Mockingbird** perched in the nearby trees, and in the sky we saw mini-murmurations of **European Starlings**.



We walked across the bridge to the reclamation ponds, stopping to admire a stunning male House Finch with a flame orange head and a golden rump. At Pond 1 we spotted a pair of **Mute Swans** preening on a bank. The origin of the resident **Mute Swans** at Las Gallinas is uncertain, but the species originates in Eurasia.

While some believe these birds migrated across the Bering Sea, it is more likely they are the descendants of escaped exotics. These elegant birds have been spotted in Marin County since the 1980s, and nesting at Las Gallinas for a number of years.

The loud chatter of the **Marsh Wrens** surrounded us, and we spotted them as they popped up to perch on the tops of the reeds, with their tail feathers angled



Clockwise from below left: Marsh Wren; American Bittern; Northern Harrier; Common Mergansers.

sharply over their backs and their mouths wide open. A pair of birders coming towards us let us know that an **American Bittern** had just been spotted, and pointed out a woman with binoculars gazing into the reeds just ahead. We slowly and quietly approached, and were rewarded with a wonderful view of the Bittern stalking prey in a flattened reed bed. Nearby, a female **Marsh Wren** was building a nest, and a **Common Gallinule** foraged in the mud.

On the north side of the ponds we spotted a flock of **Canada Geese** in the irrigation fields. We remembered never to assume that all the birds in a flock are the same, and we scanned this one slowly. In the midst of the large birds with dark brown beaks we saw two slightly smaller geese with fleshy pink bills: **Greater White-fronted Geese**.



Photos: Sarah Barsness

In Pond 2, we were thrilled to see at least a dozen **Common Mergansers**, the males in full breeding plumage. They kept us company for the remainder of our visit, swimming and diving in small groups, and posing in a line on an exposed pipeline. In Pond 4, we also saw a pair of **Gadwalls**, **American Wigeons** and **Buffleheads**.

As we headed back, a Savannah Sparrow posed on the rock embankment. This was a new bird for a few of our group and we stopped to consider how it differed from the **Song Sparrows** we had seen all along the paths. I usually look for a yellow brow and the finely streaked breast, but those seeing the bird for the first time noted the delicate pink of his beak and legs, which I realized was an even more telling field mark! We added this to our list of sparrows for this trip, which also included **White-crowned**, **Golden-crowned** and **Song**. In addition to sparrows, we had wonderful views of **Western Meadowlarks** and fleeting glimpses of **Say's Phoebes**.

Raptors played a very special part of this amazing day: we got familiar with the **Northern Harrier** as we watched a half-dozen birds, male and female, hunting in the pasture south of the ponds, noting that the male was smaller and much lighter than the female—but no less adept at hunting! We also spotted a **White-tailed Kite** perched in a tree on one of the islands, and an **American Kestrel** and a **Red-tailed Hawk**.



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Our stomachs growling, and our feet aching, we still had a hard time putting down our binoculars, especially as four male **Great-tailed Grackles** put on a show for us, gliding nearby with their dramatic tails behind, and posturing, heads up, at the top of a nearby transformer pole. But we finally bid adieu to Las Gallinas, happy and tired, and vowed to come back soon.



Photo: Sarah Barsness



Photo: Sandi Wong



Photo: Sandi Wong



Photo: Sarah Barsness

**Las Gallinas Sanitary Ponds
02/28/2016**

Compiled by Sarah Barsness

Birds: 49 species

- Greater White-fronted Goose – 2
- Canada Goose – 25
- Mute Swan – 6
- Gadwall – 1
- American Wigeon – 4
- Mallard – 15
- Cinnamon Teal – 6
- Northern Shoveler – 20
- Northern Pintail – 8
- Green-winged Teal – 2
- Canvasback – 5
- Bufflehead – 2
- Common Merganser – 14
- Ruddy Duck – 1
- Pied-billed Grebe – 3
- Double-crested Cormorant – 6
- American Bittern – 1
- Great Egret – 3
- Snowy Egret – 4
- Black-crowned Night Heron – 6
- Turkey Vulture – 8
- White-tailed Kite – 1
- Northern Harrier – 7

- Red-tailed Hawk – 1
- Common Gallinule – 2
- American Coot – 16
- Ring-billed Gull – 30
- Anna’s Hummingbird – 3
- Downy Woodpecker – 1
- American Kestrel – 2
- Black Phoebe – 3
- Say’s Phoebe – 1
- American Crow – 3
- Common Raven – 1
- Violet-green Swallow – 5
- Marsh Wren – 50
- American Robin – 1
- Northern Mockingbird – 1
- European Starling – 75
- Yellow-rumped Warbler – 4
- White-crowned Sparrow – 10
- Golden-crowned Sparrow – 8
- Savannah Sparrow – 1
- Song Sparrow – 3
- Red-winged Blackbird – 10
- Western Meadowlark – 15
- Brewer’s Blackbird 5
- Great-tailed Grackle – 4
- House Finch - 5

From top left: Ring-billed Gull; White-crowned Sparrow; Hermit Thrush; Savannah Sparrow.

Western Bluebirds at Las Gallinas in March



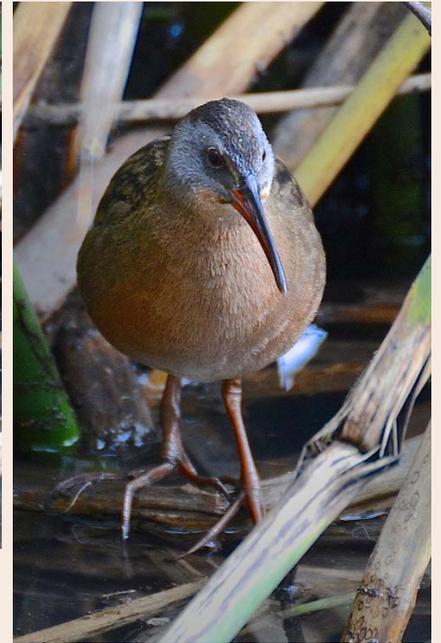
Photos: Sandi Wong



Great Blue Heron at the Palace of Fine Arts



Photo: Nancy DeStefanis



Virginia Rail at Elk Glen Lake
Photos by Grace Ruth



**Long-eared Owl
at San Francisco
Botanical Garden**
Photos by Sandi Wong



Owls and Owlets in Golden Gate Park!

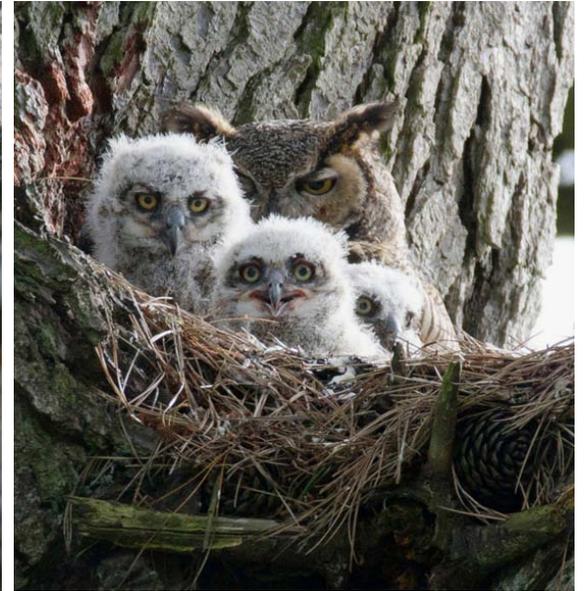
A nesting pair of Great Horned Owls
are back with a new generation
of fluffy white owlets.



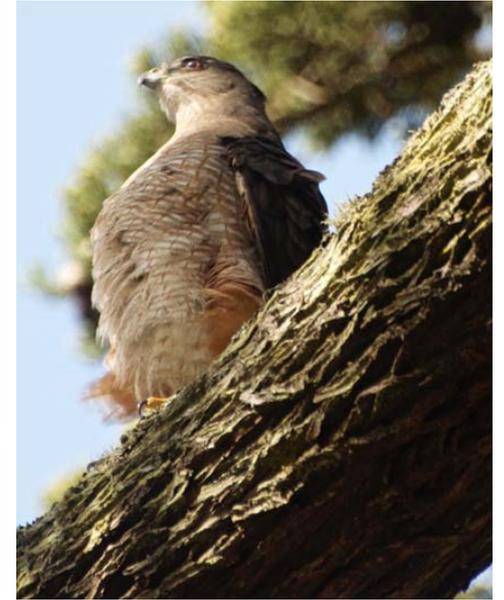
Photos top and above: Sandi Wong



Photos top and above: Kal Sinha



Photos top and above: Kal Sinha



A Variety of Stow Lake Birds

Photos by Sandi Wong

Clockwise from above: Double-crested Cormorant;
Great Egret; Red-tailed Hawk; Hooded Merganser;
Northern Shoveler; Great Egret.

