



## Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Thank you to all who have given so far to our end-of-year campaign. If you haven't donated, please take a moment to give by using our online program Donate Now (see link below).

We depend on your generosity to provide our environmental education programs to kindergarten through fourth-grade students, and for our 24 Saturday programs for adults and children.

Saturday walks coming up: Chain of Lakes, lead by Alan Hopkins on Dec. 10th; Heron's Head Park on Jan. 14th and Feb. 18th, led by Megan Prelinger; and a Crissy Field walk lead by Ileana Betancourt, Mar. 11th. Birding for Everyone continues on the first Saturday of each month at the SF Botanical Garden.

On April 15th, our six-week Heron Watch program will begin. A family walk at Stow Lake is scheduled for April 29th. We have a lot planned, and your contributions in December will help to make all these upcoming events possible.

Best regards,

*Nancy*

Nancy DeStefanis

### New address and phone:

San Francisco Nature Education  
PO Box 210303  
San Francisco, CA 94121

e-mail: info@sfnature.org  
telephone: 415-205-0776

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



[www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org)

## Fourth-graders in the Botanical Garden

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist



Wednesday, November 2nd was a beautiful clear morning. With my team of students and chaperone from St. Thomas the Apostle school

assembled, we passed out binoculars and reviewed their use. Almost before the kids could put the binoculars around their necks a **Song Sparrow** rose to the top of a bush and burst into song. We're off to a good start!

Looking east through the gate we found a mixed flock of **Golden-crowned** and **White-crowned Sparrows** feeding in the dewy grass. Someone called out "**Steller's Jay!**" Hey, looks like we have a sharp crew.

At the Fragrance Garden we watched three **Anna's Hummingbirds** battling, and a **Lesser Goldfinch** fed on rosemary at our feet. At the fountain we got close enough to a **Black Phoebe** to see its whiskers. Near the Wildfowl Pond we were surprised to find two **White-fronted Geese**. After spotting a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** we headed for the John Muir trail.

Some of us spotted a sparrow showing more rusty tones on the back than White-crowned or Golden-crowned sparrows. The bird turned just long enough for us to see that it was a **White-throated Sparrow**. No sooner had we identified the sparrow than the whole flock dashed into the brush as an adult **Cooper's Hawk** strafed the birds. At the pond we were working on journals and the bird list when someone

spotted a bird soaring in the distance. The bird was mostly white and looked like a gull, but the strongly bowed wings and black and white pattern on the wings and tail were those of an **Osprey!** Our final bird was a **Pacific Wren** that gave its signature double chip calls.



Alan Hopkins with fourth-graders and a chaperone. Below: White-fronted Goose.



Above: SFNE; left: Jon. D. Anderson

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Photo: Peter Massas

Clockwise from above: Binoculars deployed; studying a captured spider; Osprey; students with chaperones and naturalist Missi Gavic (in green); at a redwood tree in the Redwood Grove; Red-throated Sapsucker.



Photo: Len Blumin



Trip photos: SFNE



## Fourth-Graders' Field Trip

### Missi Gavic, Naturalist



It was a gorgeous morning for a field trip through the Botanical Garden. My group consisted of six students, their teacher, Ms. Letourneau, and parent chaperones. This group was enthusiastic and prepared for our bird walk. As we approached the Great Meadow we spotted **Song Sparrows** and **White-crowned Sparrows**. As we crossed a footbridge we saw a **Dark-eyed Junco** busy foraging on the ground. We also saw many **Anna's Hummingbirds** diving and chirping, a **Northern Flicker**, and a few **California Scrub Jays**.

Next, we headed through the Redwood Grove to the Succulent Garden. On the way we saw a **Fox Sparrow** and a **Townsend's Warbler**. A student spotted an **Orb Spider** (Shamrock Spider) wrapping a bug it had just caught in its web. Other sightings included **Western Gulls**, **American Crows**, and **Common Ravens**. The highlight of the day was a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** drilling holes. We saw **Gray Squirrels**, **Mallards**, **Canada Geese**, and a **Black Phoebe**. There were two **Red-eared Slider** turtles sunning themselves on rocks. What an exciting and educational day!

SF Botanical Garden  
11/02/2016

Compiled by Alan Hopkins  
Birds: 24 species

White-fronted Goose  
Mallard  
Osprey  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Rock Pigeon  
Anna's Hummingbird  
Red-breasted Sapsucker  
Northern Flicker  
Black Phoebe

Steller's Jay  
California Jay  
Common Raven  
Pygmy Nuthatch  
Pacific Wren  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
American Robin  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
California Towhee  
Song Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
Golden-crowned Sparrow  
House Finch  
Lesser Goldfinch

## Third-graders' Field Trip

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist

November 17th was another clear day with a definite feel of fall on the breeze that blew through the Arboretum. With our third-graders assembled we reviewed the use of binoculars: eye cups up, unless you wear glasses; the strap around your neck at all times; use the knob in the middle to focus; use the tree like a clock.

With our parent chaperones, Mr. Aguayo and Ms. Chan, we headed southwest through the Temperate Asia Garden and dwarf conifers. There were few birds to see; due to the season's long shadows there was no direct sunlight, and the birds were somewhere else.

We crossed the Mesoamerican Cloud Forest to get to the Wildfowl Pond. An **American Coot** had the whole pond to itself. Back-tracking to the California Native Garden we saw a nice flock of birds high in a pine. With a little coaxing some of the birds—**Pygmy Nuthatches**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, **Anna's Hummingbirds**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Townsend's Warblers**, and **Golden-crowned Sparrows**—came down to eye level.

At the John Muir Pond we worked on our journals and had a snack. The smell of fresh Doritos and children brought in two **California Scrub Jays**, but the jays didn't get any of our food.

Heading back, there was a fine flock of birds around the outdoor plant nursery. I called out "there's a Butter-butt!" (a vernacular name for a **Yellow-rumped Warbler**) which seemed to delight the kids. High overhead we saw courting **Red-tailed Hawks**, while a **House Wren** called but remained out of sight.

A second check of the Wildfowl Pond paid off with a **Great Egret** and 23 **Canada Geese**. The final addition to our list came after we'd already put the binoculars away: a flock of **Bushtits** streaming through the courtyard.

SF Botanical Garden

11/17/2016

Compiled by Alan Hopkins

Birds: 28 species

Canada Goose

Great Egret

Cooper's Hawk

Red-shouldered Hawk (heard only)

Red-tailed Hawk

Mew Gull

Western Gull

Rock Pigeon

Anna's Hummingbird

Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker (heard only)

Black Phoebe

California Scrub Jay

Common Raven

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Bushtit

Pygmy Nuthatch

House Wren (heard only)

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

American Robin

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Townsend's Warbler

California Towhee

Song Sparrow

Fox Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco



Photo: Matt Knoth



Left and below: SFNE



Clockwise from top left: Red-tailed Hawk; walking through the Bamboo Forest; Alan Hopkins and third-graders spot a Red-tailed Hawk; a Great Egret at the Wildfowl Pond.



Photo: Judy Harter



Jeanne Crawford, in plaid shirt, with teacher, Mrs. Powers, parent chaperones, and third-graders in the Botanical Garden; learning about plant propagation at the Botanical Garden nursery.



## Exploring the SF Botanical Garden

Jeanne Crawford, Naturalist



On a beautiful recent fall day a group of third-grade students set off to explore the SF Botanical Garden, accompanied by their science teacher and two parents. Their sharp eyes immediately spotted a **Black Phoebe** making repeated forays from a branch to catch insects.

In the Fragrance Garden everyone loved gently rubbing the leaves and sniffing. One scented geranium was especially nice to touch and feel because its leaves were soft and fuzzy, and it had a mint scent. The children recognized Saint Francis in the statue above a little pond, and saw many minnows in the water.

But much bigger than minnows were what the group saw from the bridge over the Wildfowl Pond. There they spotted large **catfish** and saw the whiskers (barbells) that give the catfish its name. These whiskers are very useful to the catfish because they are sensitive to smells and help them find food. Catfish like to eat a variety of foods, often decaying plants and leaves or dead fish at the bottom of ponds, but they also eat bugs and larva in the water, and minnows. We saw them coming to the surface and opening their large round sucking mouths—and we were all very impressed!

The group spotted some **Anna's Hummingbirds**, and noticed quite a few flowers that hummingbirds like. These were often red or orange flowers with a tube shape or neck. The hummingbird's beak is perfect for sticking into the tube to reach the sweet nectar at the bottom.

This was a great group to be outdoors, because they were interested in fish, flowers, trees, birds—everything! They loved taking detours on small paths and would have taken every tiny path we passed, but we didn't have time. Let's hope they will come back and explore the Botanical Garden again and take every path!

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Photos: SFNE

## Heron Head's Park, November 12th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist, with Ileana Bettancourt



It was a very warm and bright day, windless and with some high scattered clouds. We observed a **Pied-billed Grebe** in the pond closest to the road. As we set off from the meeting point near the EcoCenter, the male **Anna's Hummingbird** who holds territory in the shrub just beyond the building was in position watching the path. Other shrubs that line the path were alive with other small birds: a flock of **Bushtits** was in one, while others held **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **White-crowned Sparrows**, and **House Finches**, including one bright male with a distinctive red head and throat.

The **Golden-crowned Sparrows** are among the many seasonal visitors that we found. On a patch of open ground near the water, a flock of eight **Western Meadowlarks** foraged in the grass. The ubiquitous **Western Gull** community based on a nearby rooftop was present; we saw about 20 circling the park or perched on rocks during our walk.

When we rounded the curve to face the bay we had a view of the southern marsh and the open waters beyond. A 6.4' tide had peaked at 8:30 AM, and the water was still very high in the marsh, with birds just beginning to venture into the exposed perimeter as the waters receded. Many shorebirds were clustered on narrow dry islands and peninsulas to evade the high tide at the southern edge of the marsh.



We found one **Long-billed Curlew** in flight, a large flock of **Willetts**, and **American Avocets** and **Black-necked Stilts**. The Avocets were in winter white basic plumage. Two **Greater Yellowlegs** foraged close to the path where we could study them, while near the shore a couple of **Whimbrels** stood still. Three **Black Oystercatchers** were vocalizing loudly over the water; from the begging behavior we supposed these were two juveniles and one parent bird.



Photos by Sarah Barsness

In the open water a raft of mixed species floated in and out of range of our spotting scope. Among this group we found many **Buffleheads** and **Ruddy Ducks**, one confirmed **Eared Grebe**, and **Western** and/or **Clark's Grebes** in the bright reflected sunlight.



Further east, a brief spotting of a **Savannah Sparrow** was abruptly interrupted by a bright male **American Kestrel** that swooped down from the sky with outstretched talons and predated the sparrow right in front of our eyes. It briefly perched with its prey on a nearby post, then took off with it across the water, chased by a vocal flock of **Least Sandpipers** for part of the way.

After that natural drama, our sightings of an arriving flock of **European Starlings** and even a pair of **Elegant Terns** were more quotidian.

We did get a good look at the flock of **Least Sandpipers** after they re-ighted and perched quietly on the rocky shore of the eastern tip of the park.

On our way back we found **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, and had good opportunities for studying the differences between **Brandt's** and **Double-crested Cormorants**, between **California Gulls** and a large flock of **Ring-billed Gulls**, and between **Eared** and **Horned Grebes**. We also found a lone bobbing **Spotted Sandpiper**. Our last few minutes were entertained by watching a lazy **Harbor Seal** coast the surface of the shallows.



Clockwise from top left: Anna's Hummingbird; Black Oystercatcher; Least Sandpipers; Harbor Seal; Fly in bee disguise; Spotted Sandpiper.

### Heron's Head Park 11/12/2016

Compiled by  
Megan Prelinger  
Birds: 42 species

Canada Goose – 4  
American Wigeon – 2  
Bufflehead – 18  
Pied-billed Grebe – 1  
Horned Grebe – 4  
Eared Grebe – 1  
Western/Clark's Grebe – 3  
Brandt's Cormorant – 2  
Double-crested Cormorant – 15  
Brown Pelican – 4  
Great Blue Heron – 2  
Great Egret – 1  
Snowy Egret – 2  
Turkey Vulture – 1  
American Coot – 6  
Black-necked Stilt – 7  
American Avocet – 10  
Black Oystercatcher – 4  
Whimbrel – 3  
Long-billed Curlew – 1  
Least Sandpiper – 28

Spotted Sandpiper – 1  
Greater Yellowlegs – 2  
Willet – 6  
Ring-billed Gull – 18  
Western Gull – 20  
California Gull – 9  
Elegant Tern – 2  
Rock Pigeon – 40  
Anna's Hummingbird – 2  
American Kestrel – 1  
Black Phoebe – 1  
American Crow – 2  
Common Raven – 2  
Bushtit – 5  
European Starling – 15  
Yellow-rumped Warbler – 2  
White-crowned Sparrow – 13  
Golden-crowned Sparrow – 7  
Savannah Sparrow – 1\*  
Western Meadowlark – 8  
House Finch – 4  
Bonus: Harbor Seal  
\**media vita in morte sumus*  
(death can be found in the midst of life)

## Birding for Everyone, November 5th

Sarah Barsness, Naturalist



Another lovely, sunny morning greeted the group gathered for the November Birding for Everyone walk in the Botanical Garden. We had a nice balance between BFE regular and new participants, eleven of us in all.

We started our day by spending some time at the Monkey Hand tree, which was filled with the movements and sounds of birds. Among them were many **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, a couple of **Townsend's Warblers**, a pair of female **Purple Finches**, **Pygmy Nuthatches**, and a single **White-crowned Sparrow** at the very top of the tree.

Sparrows were surprisingly scarce as we passed through the Fragrance Garden, but **American Robins** were in good supply.

(A few times, one of our group optimistically mistook one of these for a Varied Thrush, which we usually see by this time of year. But none have yet been spotted—we hold out hope for December!) Looking up, we saw a single **Red-tailed Hawk** swoop close overhead and head west. He was soon joined by two more, and the three circled each other for a several minutes.



Passing near the Moon-viewing Garden we spotted an **Orange-crowned Warbler** in the bare branches of a deciduous tree, which is always a boon to good viewing! Another soon joined the first. The new birders noted that they did not see an orange crown, and we discussed how misleading bird names can be, particularly for identification purposes. Both **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** and **Orange-crowned Warblers** are relatively drab yellow-green birds whose crowns appear briefly when they are excited or agitated.

Just a bit further along we heard the rat-a-tat-tat of a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, and were able to catch glimpses of it darting rapidly from branch to branch. As if on cue, it turned at one point and flashed its ruby

crown for a split second, which made those of us who were lucky enough to see it laugh with delight.

As we arrived in the Children's Garden, fog descended on us and the air turned chilly. The birds were quieter and more challenging to see against the sky. But low to the ground **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, which had been singing their mournful songs throughout our walk, finally made an appearance, foraging for insects among the tree stumps.

We had not yet seen a single woodpecker, which I remarked on as we headed toward the main gate. Again, as though they had heard me, a pair of **Downy Woodpeckers** drew our attention in the top of a Monterey Pine. In the Redwood Grove, we heard a

**Hermit Thrush** call, but, true to his name, he refused to emerge. We had better luck with a **Pacific Wren**, which popped up for a quick view, scolding us with a sharp chip-chip!

In the California Native Plant Garden we were stopped in our tracks by a clear, ringing, two-noted song from above us in a tree. Despite our proximity it took several minutes to even catch a glimpse of the singer. But finally, after getting partial views from various angles, I confirmed it as a **Warbling Vireo**—a pale green bird with no wing bars and dark spectacles.



Clockwise from above:  
Hermit Thrush;  
Anna's Hummingbird;  
Pacific Wren.  
Photos by Sarah Barsness

**Anna's Hummingbirds** were plentiful, and we paused to admire a handsome male with an especially striking gorget. The flash of red never fails to make me catch my breath, and I am always baffled when a nearby non-birder fails to notice. I suspect this is a common experience for a birder—we walk through the world with a keen awareness of an alternate world that most people don't see. I am so grateful every day that this world has opened up to me, and glad for the chance to share the birds with anyone who is ready to look!



### SF Botanical Garden

11/05/2016

Compiled by Sarah Barsness

Birds: 32 species

Canada Goose – 5

Mallard – 2

Turkey Vulture – 3

Red-shouldered Hawk – 1

Red-tailed Hawk – 3

American Coot – 2

California Gull – 2

Anna's Hummingbird – 12

Nuttall's Woodpecker – 1

Downy Woodpecker – 2

Black Phoebe – 2

Warbling Vireo – 1

Steller's Jay – 1

California Scrub Jay – 4

American Crow – 2

Common Raven – 3

Chestnut-backed Chickadee – 2

Bushtit – 4

Pygmy Nuthatch – 10

Pacific Wren – 1

Ruby Crowned Kinglet – 3

Hermit Thrush – 1

American Robin – 3

Townsend's Warbler – 2

Fox Sparrow – 1

Dark-eyed Junco – 2

White-crowned Sparrow – 1

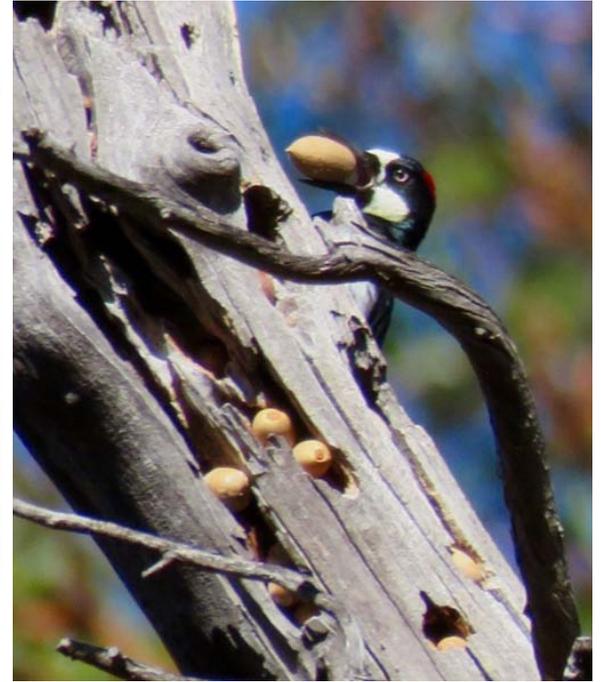
Golden-crowned Sparrow – 3

Song Sparrow – 2

California Towhee – 2

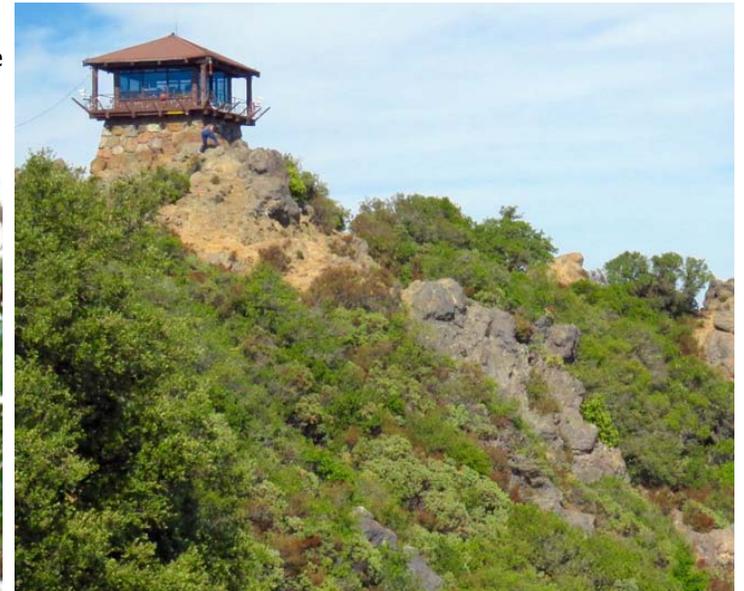
House Finch – 7

Purple Finch – 1



**The View from Mt. Tamalpais**  
Photos and commentary by Jeff Harter

A hike up Mt. Tam in mid-October took me past a redwood being used as a granary by acorn woodpeckers. The tree was at the intersection of Old Railroad Grade Fire Road and Upper Fern Creek Trail. Soon after spotting the granary I saw an Acorn Woodpecker preparing to cache an acorn. Common Ravens seemed to own the picnic area near the visitor center on East Peak. At right, the fire tower perched atop East Peak.





## Out and About in Golden Gate Park

Photos by Sandi Wong



From top left: Painted Lady butterfly; female Wood Duck; male Wood Duck; Northern Shoveler; Monarch butterfly.

## 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: Dec. 3, with Sarah Barsness; also Jan 7.

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.

**Chain of Lakes** with Alan Hopkins: Dec.10, 10 am to noon, approx. Meet at Middle Lake.

**Heron's Head Park** with Megan Prelinger: January 14. Meet at trailhead. Volunteers will have spotting scopes for close-up views.

SFNE members FREE. \$10 per nonmember adult, children welcome (free).

## Get a Spring Heron Watch Internship Application

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. 17, 2017. 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. Internship fee; scholarships available.

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

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