



# The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education • February 2016

## Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

We are patiently waiting for the Great Blue Herons to occupy last year's nests or build new ones. As we go to press, I checked the nests on Heron Island by the Stow Lake Boathouse, and the nests on the island by the waterfall. So far they're empty. I saw two herons nearby—one fishing near Strawberry Island and another standing on the grass near the steps to the Japanese Tea Garden looking for gophers. So the herons have arrived, they just haven't settled down.

As many of you know, February is a busy breeding month for Great Blue Herons. The male stands on his nest and performs numerous stretch displays to attract a female. Once a female has answered the call, both herons will be involved in elaborate courtship displays as they build the nest together. (If it's an old nest, they will add sticks to reinforce their bond.)

By the end of February or early March the female will lay eggs and the male and female will take turns incubating them.

If all goes well, in early April the eggs should hatch into tiny downy chicks. As soon as a nest on Heron Island is occupied, we will turn on the Heron Cam. Please stay tuned.

If you would like to help defray expenses for the Heron Cam, please donate now.

Many thanks,

*Nancy*

Nancy DeStefanis



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## Birding for Everyone, January 2nd, 2016

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



We had a cool and overcast day for our January walk, conditions that made the Botanical Garden quiet and peaceful. Our group of a dozen intrepid birders encountered a winter landscape of abundant avian life under the gray skies.

In the Fragrance Garden we were held by a succession of sights, including a low-perching **Steller's Jay**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Townsend's Warblers**, and a flock of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** bathing in the upturned palms of the statue of St. Francis. As we turned toward the Waterfowl Pond, a flock of **Bushtits** appeared and "followed" us all the way.

At the pond a pair of winter resident **American Coots** foraged at the shoreline. Two female **Hooded Mergansers** preened on the rocks of the center island.

At the Gondwana Circle one of us caught a fleeting glimpse of the **Nashville Warbler**, while we all had time to admire the less shy **Townsend's Warblers**, with males and females foraging in the



Above: Song Sparrow; Top: Steller's Jay.



Bird photos: Sarah Barsness

flowering bushes, allowing us to compare the differences between the bright males and the more subdued colors of the females.

During the middle portion of our walk we aimed to see a **Varied Thrush**. One fleeting glimpse just past the Gondwana Circle tantalized the group, and we roamed the hilly and chilly reaches of the garden, including the Children's Garden, searching for more. Along the way we found wintering **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, a lone female **Western Tanager** feeding in a eucalyptus tree, and a male **Downy Woodpecker** in the same tree.

We found our small flock of four **Varied Thrushes** on the slopes just behind the Redwood Grove. Then, down at the reservoir, there were two female **Buffleheads** swimming and diving in the water, a **Black Phoebe**

monitoring the periphery, and a **Red-shouldered Hawk** surveying the scene from a high perch in the adjacent California Garden.

Highlights of the last few minutes of the walk included a **Great Egret** in the Bamboo Pond, another **Downy Woodpecker** foraging in a tree above the path, and three **Lesser Goldfinches** in a low bush nearby.

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Clockwise from above: Downy Woodpecker, Varied Thrush, and Red-shouldered Hawk.

#### SF Botanical Garden 01/02/2016

Compiled by: M. Prelinger

Birds: 34 species

Great Egret  
Mallard  
Bufflehead  
Hooded Merganser  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
American Coot  
Western Gull  
Rock Dove  
Anna's Hummingbird  
Downy Woodpecker  
Black Phoebe  
Steller's Jay  
Western Scrub Jay  
American Crow

Common Raven  
Chestnut-backed Chickadee  
Bushtit  
Pygmy Nuthatch  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Hermit Thrush  
American Robin  
Varied Thrush  
Nashville Warbler  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Townsend's Warbler  
Western Tanager  
California Towhee  
Fox Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Golden-crowned Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Lesser Goldfinch

## 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: Feb. 6 with Sarah Barsness. 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.

**Heron's Head Park:** Feb. 13, with Megan Prelinger. All trips free to SFNE members; nonmember adults \$10, children free. Meet at 10 am at Cargo Way & Jennings St.



## Spring Internship Applications Now Online

*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. 19, 2016. 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.

Dates, information, and applications are available at: [sfnature.org/get\\_involved/intern.html](http://sfnature.org/get_involved/intern.html). \$100 internship fee; scholarships available.

Bird photos: Sarah Barsness

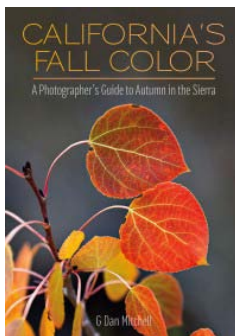
**SF Nature Education membership: Adults, \$35;  
Seniors 65+, \$30; students 21 or under, \$20.**



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## Book Reviews: Show and Tell



### **California's Fall Color: A Photographer's Guide to Autumn in the Sierra**

By G Dan Mitchell. Heyday, 2015; paperback, 7x5, 128 pp, full-color photographs; \$15.

**Reviewed by Bill Hunnewell**

Another great publication from our friends at Heyday in Berkeley: *California's Fall Color—A Photographer's Guide to Autumn*

*in the Sierra*. Author G Dan Mitchell explores in great detail a part of the state dear to many: the Sierra foothills, high alpine passes, and dry eastern ridges from Lake Tahoe to Yosemite, from Mono Lake to Bishop.

Though the primary focus is how, where, and when to maximize opportunity for a photographic journey in the Sierra wilderness, there is also value in it as a travelogue for one seeking outdoor adventure and natural beauty.

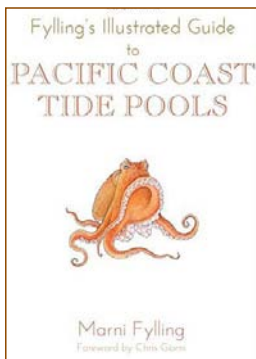


Photo (detail): G Dan Mitchell

Mitchell sticks mainly to the better-known corridors of color accessible from major highways, describing in brilliant detail and vivid photography what one might see upon a timely visit. He details routes for exciting side trips to Virginia Lakes, Lundy Canyon, Lee Vining Canyon, Mammoth and June Lake, where cottonwoods, aspens, dogwoods, maples, and oaks show off their lush fall colors.

I recommend this book to anyone looking for Sierra adventure and natural beauty, given its detailed maps, descriptions, and intelligent tips regarding peak lighting, exposure, and composition. I'm looking forward to exploring some of the destinations Mitchell details.

Though the book is a handy size, it's a shame there isn't a coffee-table edition for the photographs alone!



### **Fyrling's Illustrated Guide to Pacific Coast Tide Pools**

By Marni Fyrling, foreword by Chris Giorni. Heyday, 2015; paperback, 7x5, 96 pp, full-color illustrations; \$15.

**Reviewed by Jeff Harter**

Fyrling's pocket field guide, engagingly illustrated with her own watercolors, is ideal for the casual tide pool visitor, especially

if the visitor is a younger reader. The text is chatty, sprinkled with exclamation points and enthusiastic asides, but it ably covers the basic facts for each highlighted plant or animal.

At first glance the volume seems too slim to do justice to the amazing diversity of life found in the tide pools I am familiar with. But after a refresher visit to the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, just south of Pacifica, I was impressed by how well the 87 plant and animal species covered here represent what I encountered.

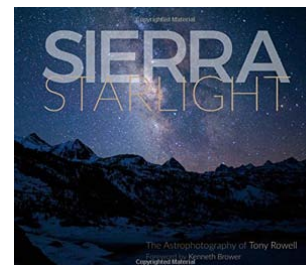
Entries are categorized into ten groups, from short chapters on fish, birds, and sponges to longer chapters on mollusks, arthropods, and algae. Other chapters cover anemones, worms, echinoderms, and tunicates.

Fyrling makes correlating observations with descriptions easy. The large illustrations, vibrant and detailed, are repeated in thumbnail size as reference keys for each entry. The large illustrations appear in full-page or double-page arrangements that help to underscore the wonderful diversity of forms found even within a single category. The two-page spread of mollusks is especially eye-opening.

Readers looking for a more encyclopedic field guide have many to choose from, but anyone looking for a good starter guide, or wanting to keep a grab-and-go guide handy, will find this pocket guide to be both pretty and pretty perfect.



Marni Fyrling



### **Sierra Starlight: The Astrophotography of Tony Rowell**

By Tony Rowell, foreword by Kenneth Brower. Heyday, 2015; paperback, 8x9, 96 pp, 50 full-color photographs; \$22.

**Reviewed by Bill Hunnewell**

Want to see the world in a whole new light? Check out *Sierra Starlight* by Tony Rowell (son of famed outdoor photographer Galen Rowell). It's not a how-to book, though Tony provides information on equipment, settings, and optimal viewing times. Rather, it's a new look at familiar and not-so-familiar sights of the Sierra Mountains under brilliant starlight.

Ornithologists have long known the importance of constellations for bird migrations, particularly a bird's ability to orient based on the North Star, Polaris. Tony uses a motorized equatorial mount that allows his camera to compensate for the earth's rotation. In doing so he is able to capture long exposures—some in wide angle, and others with telephoto lenses to capture deep space nebulae and galaxies. He often lights the foreground with a late off-camera flash.

For his efforts he is rewarded with images few will ever match: Tahoe, Bodie, Mammoth, Mt. Whitney, Death Valley, Yosemite, and more.

There are plenty of how-to books and articles on the web for learning to capture images of our universe. This book shows what someone can achieve after years of dedication to an extremely difficult form of photography. Check out the "moonbow" over Yosemite Falls or the Perseid meteor shower over Tuolumne Meadows. You won't regret it!



Photo: Tony Rowell





## End-of-Year Sightings at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge

Photos by Bill Hunnewell



Clockwise from top left: Bald Eagle; Loggerhead Shrike; Northern Pintail pair; Black-necked Stilt; Western Meadowlark; Greater White-fronted Geese; resting Northern Pintails with White-faced Ibis.

Bill Hunnewell has been photographing since he was ten years old, when his father bought him an Exakta, a German-made single-lens-reflex camera. He has always been interested in taking wildlife photos, especially in the last 35 years. He shoots all over the world, including under water, always striving to be better.