



Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your support throughout the year. All of us at San Francisco Nature Education wish you and yours a very happy and birdy New Year! Because of your contributions, we are able to continue our school, intern, and Saturday programs.

I want to offer a special thank you to our outstanding volunteers from the past year: Judy Harter, newsletter editor; Peter Shen, webmaster; Michelle Hunnewell, film reviewer; photographers Bill Hunnewell, Grace Ruth, and Sandi Wong; field trip leaders Megan Prelinger, Sarah Barsness, Alan Hopkins, Bob Hirt, Missi Hirt-Gavic, and Sharon Pretti.

Thank you to our field trip volunteers: Trace Kannell, Mark Levin, Andrew Sundling, Jacob Zollinger, Mike Smylie, Janel Schulenberg, Ellen Niemann, Isabelle Chow, Janelle Jara Campos, Kendra Carter, Christine Malfatti, Anne Galjour, Ariane Burwell, Ian Hull, Taylor Garcia, Jim Leist, Jessica Leist, Stephen Ferenz, Anthony Saponara, Kevin Biggerstaff, and Greg Greenman.

A special thank you to our Heron Watch interns: Fiona, Ben, Chiara, and Zed. Your efforts on behalf of San Francisco Nature Education make our programs shine.

There is still time to donate before the end of the year.

If you wish to make a contribution you can donate now or send a check. All donations are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

I look forward to seeing you on the trails and at our special events.

Nancy

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Birding the Chain of Lakes, December 12th

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist



After days of rain we were greeted by a beautiful clear morning as we began our walk around the Chain of Lakes. We began at South Lake, where early arrivers saw Brown Creepers working the side of a eucalyptus. A Belted Kingfisher called from a distance but never came into view. On the

water the usual **Mallards** and **Coots** were present, and a **Pied-billed Grebe** showed off its fishing prowess. Sharp eyes spotted **Mew Gulls** sitting atop the shoreline redwoods.

When I traveled along the Gorge Park Highway from Anchorage to Denali in Alaska, I saw them sitting at the top of spruce trees, where they nest. They are our only white-headed gull that nests in trees. Mew Gulls are the smallest of the common gulls in San Francisco.

The adults (all white tail and black wing-tips with white spots) are easy to identify by their straight slender yellow bills that lack any distinct spots. Maybe the highlight at South Lake was a **Hermit Thrush**, that, going against its shy and twitchy nature, sat perfectly still.

We headed west to the Bercut Equitation Field, where we were greeted by a **Black Phoebe**. The flowers at the top of a nearby eucalyptus had flitting **Yellow-rumped** and **Townsend's Warblers**. I managed to coax a few down for closer looks, but they were still difficult to see. At the west end of the maintenance yard there is a brush pile worth checking for sparrows, and behind a cyclone fence there is a white pan that the Rec & Park people keep filled with water. We saw warblers enjoying a bath in the pan.

We headed across JFK Drive to the steps down to North Lake. There were **Pygmy Nuthatches** working up and

down a nearby tree, and an **American Robin** was snagging the last of the ripe berries from a Toyon.

One of the day's highlights was watching a pair of **Song Sparrows** on the same Toyon. The male sat just a few inches from the female and sang his soft and sweet song to her, and it's not even spring! Along the west shore two **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** fed in the ground foliage. We had nice looks at these birds.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Photo: Bill Hunnewell

From the west shore we were able to see two young and one adult **Black-crowned Night Heron** enjoying the sun. In the northeast corner we were treated to fine views of a **Common Yellowthroat** as it gleaned for insects along the edge of the tules. A **Double-crested Cormorant** dried its wings on its favorite pipe, giving us the opportunity to study the yellow-orange skin on the bird's gular pouch, its hooked bill, and green eye.

We made our way to the Bison Paddock where we found **Killdeer** beyond the fence. They can be hard to spot at first, but once you've got your search pattern

down you realize there are many Killdeer in the grass. I'd guess there were about fifty. Many of us struggled to see a **Northern Flicker** on the far side of the paddock.

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Like the Killdeer, its cryptic coloration is well-suited for feeding on the ground.

As some folks looked for the Flicker, others watched the **White-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** perched on the barbed-wire fence. As we watched the sparrows a Flicker flew in and landed on a fence post, then another landed on the ground, and another in a pine! Counting on our luck we decided to cross JFK without being hit by a car, bicycle, or jogger. Safely across the street, we had no problem finding the Great Horned Owl sitting contentedly on its nest in a Monterey Pine. A fitting end to a fine day.

Chain of Lakes	Northern Flicker
12/12/2015	Black Phoebe
Compiled by:	Steller's Jay
Alan Hopkins	Common Raven
Birds: 36 species	Bushtit
Mallard	Pygmy Nuthatch
Ring-necked Duck	Brown Creeper
Bufflehead	Belted Kingfisher
Ruddy Duck	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Pied-billed Grebe	Hermit Thrush
Double-crested Cormorant	American Robin
Black-crowned Night Heron	Common Yellowthroat
Red-tailed Hawk	Yellow-rumped Warbler
American Coot	Townsend's Warbler
Killdeer	California Towhee
Mew Gull	Fox Sparrow
California Gull	Song Sparrow
Rock Pigeon	White-crowned Sparrow
Mourning Dove	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Great Horned Owl	Dark-eyed Junco
Anna's Hummingbird	



Bird photos:
Bill Hummwell



Clockwise from far left: Northern Flicker; Killdeer; Anna's Hummingbird; group at North Lake; meeting at Middle Lake (Alan Hopkins in red cap); American Robin in Toyon tree; Golden-crowned Sparrow; juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron (center).



Photo: SFNE



Photo: SFNE

Birding for Everyone, December 5th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



We were a small but intrepid group facing the chilly air and gray skies of early December, and our courage was rewarded with a wonderful birding day in the SF Botanical Garden.

In the Waterfowl Pond two male **Hooded Mergansers** in crisp breeding plumage

preened and dove at one another, presumably displaying for a female. On the island in the middle of the pond a **Great Blue Heron** studied the water for food, as three **Mallards** and a pair of **American Coots** dabbled in the shallow waters near the lawn.

In the open grounds around the pond and in the sky above we counted many species that are commonly seen in the garden, including both **Red-tailed** and **Cooper's Hawks**, **Black Phoebes**, and high-flying **Western Gulls**.

Under the low-hanging oaks and maples in the Moon Viewing garden we observed a number of birds take baths in the cascading series of small rocky pools that feed the shady pond. The first bathers were **Pygmy Nuthatches** — a species that is abundant in the garden but rarely seen as closely as the individuals in the pools.

Following the nuthatches were **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** and **Townsend's Warblers**; species that are abundant but not often seen in a dabbling mode. Behind us a **Brown Creeper** worked the trunk of a large maple.

Smaller birds scattered as a comparatively large-bodied **Varied Thrush** swooped in. We were very pleased to see this bird and four other members of this species during the walk. The Varied Thrush has a normal two-year cycle

of fluctuation; abundant years alternate with scarce ones, and 2015 has been a scarce year compared to last year.

The Children's Garden offered good views of wintering **Golden-crowned Sparrows** and **Fox Sparrows**, in addition to the year-round **White-crowned** and **Song Sparrows**, and two finch species: **House Finch** and the smaller **Pine Siskin**.

California Towhees scraped the dirt at the path's borders as we walked through, and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and **Hermit Thrushes** were visible in the bushes.



Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Jon D. Anderson



Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Grace Ruth



Photo: Grace Ruth

SF Botanical Garden	Golden-crowned Sparrow
12/05/2015	Fox Sparrow
Compiled by:	Song Sparrow
Megan Prelinger	House Finch
Birds: 30 species	Black Phoebe
Great Blue Heron	Red-tailed Hawk
Hooded Merganser	Lesser Goldfinch
Pygmy Nuthatch	Cooper's Hawk
Brown Creeper	American Robin
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Varied Thrush
Townsend's Warbler	Hermit Thrush
California Towhee	Western Scrub Jay
Anna's Hummingbird	Rock Dove
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	American Coot
Steller's Jay	Mallard
Western Gull	Common Raven
Pine Siskin	Red-masked Parakeets
White-crowned Sparrow	

Clockwise from left: Song Sparrow; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Common Yellowthroat; Hermit Thrush; Northern Flicker; Townsend's Warbler; Varied Thrush.

A Day at Bobcat Ranch

Sarah Barsness, Naturalist



"I won the lottery!" I exclaimed to a friend a few weeks ago. She looked thrilled and amazed — until she learned that my prize was not a million dollars but a one-day permit to bird on Audubon's Bobcat Ranch, which allows only a handful of birders on the property each year.

Audubon acquired the 6800 acre Bobcat Ranch, just outside of Winters, CA, in 2007, as part of ongoing research on, and restoration of, oak woodlands and rangelands. This working cattle ranch has a wide range of habitats, from blue oak woodlands to grasslands and annual wetlands. It is located near the Putah Creek Wildlife area and Solano Lake. A few times a year, Audubon invites birders to spend time on a small portion of the ranch, on either side of Bray Canyon, and gather information about the bird inhabitants.

On December 5th, eight birders had permits but only six of us were able to make the trip. We met up with the Audubon representative at the locked Bray Canyon gate, marked only by a large *No Trespassing* sign. The day was perfect — cool, but with sun breaks — and the grasslands, dotted with oaks, were rich in autumn color. I explored the ranch with three other birders: Lorna, from the Sacramento area; Katie, with a background in evolutionary biology; and Juan-Carlos Solis, a knowledgeable Bay Area naturalist. We were excited to get inside the gate and start our adventure!

We immediately spotted a number of birds in the grasslands at the foot of Bray Canyon, including a single **Say's Phoebe** and a pair of **Lincoln's Sparrows**. We heard a pair of **Belted Kingfishers** and looked up to see them chasing each other across the sky. Behind them a single **Osprey** was hunting. We headed up Bray's Canyon, listening carefully as we walked. An **Acorn Woodpecker** called out from an oak on the right. On our left, we saw **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** and **Oak Titmice**. Juan-Carlos helped



us refine our listening skills by discerning the difference between the trill of the Titmouse and the rat-a-tat-tat typewriter sound of the Kinglet.

As we walked north, the birds got a bit less numerous, but none of us were disappointed. The surroundings were intoxicatingly beautiful. We were glad to be wearing hiking boots, as the trail was muddy, rough, occasionally steep, and full of branches and boulders. We stopped to examine a magnificent conglomerate boulder, and talked about the formation of sedimentary rocks. The ground was scattered with golden brown **buckeyes**, and we also spotted many **oak galls** on the fallen blue oak leaves. These are created from the oak plant material by wasps for protection. These particular galls are not harmful to the oak and resemble small pink anemones.

We spotted a number of orange and brown **California Newts**, and were careful to watch our step, as they liked to pause on the flat sandstones. These little creatures have a dark side — they are highly toxic to most animals, including humans, if ingested. Juan-Carlos, who often collects specimens for the California Academy of Sciences, told the story of finding and collecting a dead grebe just one hour after seeing it alive. He learned later that its stomach contained a California Newt.



We continued to bird by ear as we headed up the canyon, and were

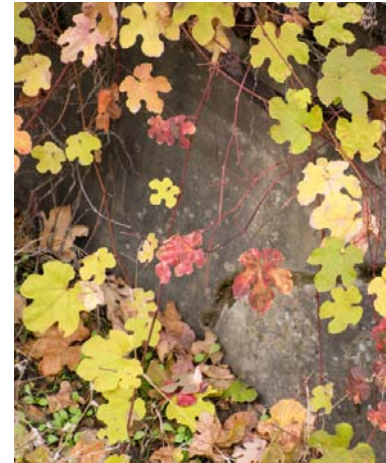
Clockwise from left: Lincoln's Sparrow; Acorn Woodpecker; California Newt; oak galls; California wild grape vine.



rewarded with glimpses of a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** and a **Nuttall's Woodpecker**. We stopped for a lunch break on a hill overlooking the canyon and watched **Golden-crowned Sparrows** and **Spotted Towhees** compete for feeding space in the shrubs. A flock of several dozen **Pine Siskins** flew past, wings glinting in the sunlight.

We took our time on the way back, stopping to examine a tree studded with dozens of acorns jammed into carefully carved holes. This granary was the handiwork of **Acorn Woodpeckers**. We attempted to pry some of them out but none of us could loosen even a single acorn! We noted

signs of deer, wild pigs and even the soft round prints of a bobcat. None of us wanted to leave, but Juan-Carlos and



Katie had families waiting for them.

Lorna and I stayed a bit longer. To our amazement, a patch of soft brown fur behind a bush across the creek turned out to be a bobcat! We watched as he sidled silently through the bush and up the hill, disappearing into a dark fissure in the rock. What a perfect finish for our day!

Bobcat Ranch
12/05/2015

Compiled by: Sarah Barsness

Fauna species: 32 species

California Quail	Black Phoebe
Double-crested Cormorant	Western Scrub Jay
Osprey	Common Raven
Northern Harrier	Oak Titmouse
Red-tailed Hawk	Bushtit
Mourning Dove	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Anna's Hummingbird	Hermit Thrush
Belted Kingfisher	American Robin
Acorn Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Red-breasted Sapsucker	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Nuttall's Woodpecker	Song Sparrow
Hairy Woodpecker	Lincoln's Sparrow
Northern Flicker	California Towhee
American Kestrel	Spotted Towhee
	Pine Siskin
	Lesser Goldfinch
	California Newt
	Bobcat

Local Color at Fort Mason Community Garden

Photos by Sandi Wong



Clockwise from top left: Sharp-shinned Hawk; Lesser Goldfinch; first-winter Yellow-rumped Warbler; Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Above: Yellow-rumped Warbler, Myrtle variety, typically found north and east of British Columbia. Note the dark cheek and pale throat color.

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: Jan. 2 & Feb. 6 with Megan Prelinger and 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: Jan. 16, with Bob Hirt and Missi Hirt-Gavic; 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. \$100 internship fee; scholarships available.

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



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Some Lucky Ducks

Ducks have been numerous lately at Lloyd Lake and Radio Road in Redwood City.

Photos by Sandi Wong



Clockwise from top left:
American Wigeon at Lloyd Lake;
Green-winged Teal at Radio Road;
Cinnamon Teal pair at Radio Road;
Ring-necked male and female
at Lloyd Lake; Northern
Shoveler at Radio Road.

