



The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education • January 2017

Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your generous end-of-year donations. All of us at San Francisco Nature Education wish you and yours a very happy new year!

I am pleased to report that we spotted a Great Blue Heron in a nest on the new nesting island on November 30th! We've also seen several herons fishing near the original colony's island opposite the Stow Lake Boathouse.

We have three Saturday field trips planned for January: SF Botanical Garden, then Heron's Head Park, and finally a trip to the Chain of Lakes, a walk we had to reschedule because of December rain.

I'm pleased to announce that we have a new intern starting in January. Oscar is an eighth-grader, and will be volunteering at Heron's Head Park, Crissy Field, and Heron Watch. He is an experienced birder, and we are lucky to have him!

If you wish to make a contribution you can donate online or send a check. All donations support our school and Saturday field trips, and are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Thanks again for your support!

Best regards,

Nancy

Nancy DeStefanis

New address and phone:

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



www.sfnature.org

Birding for Everyone, December 3rd Sarah Barsness, Naturalist



The last 2016 Birding for Everyone field trip in the arboretum was nicely birdy. The day was crisp and sunny, and all 12 of us were in good spirits when we met at main gate. We headed first to the California Native Garden, listening carefully and looking for movement along the way.

Yellow-rumped Warblers were in full force, and the sound of their kiss-like chirps came from every side. These are the most common warblers during our winter months, and one of the most social—they are nearly always in company with each other. Still, it is never wise to assume that just because you see a tree full of Yellow-rumped Warblers they are the only birds in that tree!

As we arrived in the Native Garden, we discerned at least one **Townsend's Warbler** among the crowd. These birds are likely to be solo, but they are hardly shy. They are among the easier warblers to observe at length—always a pleasure—as they don't seem much disturbed by nearby humans.

We paused to observe sparrows: all four of the common winter species were there: **White-crowned, Golden-crowned, Fox,** and **Song Sparrows.** We reviewed strategies for distinguishing between immature White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows. Without their different crowns this can be confusing, especially as both have unmarked breasts and forage on the ground.

We looked for the bright yellow-orange beak of the White-crowned Sparrow, as opposed to the duller one of the Golden-crowned. We noted an extraordinarily striking Song Sparrow. These small brown year-round residents are

often overlooked, but in the fall their plumage is fresh with distinct russet and black striations.

We heard, but could not see, a **Northern Flicker.** A **California Scrub Jay**, at the top of the tall conifer near the center of the garden, was visible and highly vocal. As we headed to the Conifer Lawn, we also heard and saw a **Steller's Jay.**

The large tree in the center of the lawn was teeming with birds, and we paused to take stock. **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and **Pygmy Nuthatches** were in the upper branches, while more sparrows were at the base.

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Clockwise from top left: immature White-crowned Sparrow; immature Golden-crowned Sparrow; Song Sparrow; Fox Sparrow. Photos: Judy Harter

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Someone spotted a brilliant red head, and to our delight we recognized a **Red-breasted Sapsucker**. It was working the branches on one side of the tree, and everyone was able to get a full view.

We caught a glimpse of a **Hermit Thrush** in the Redwood Grove, and compared it to the Fox Sparrow, which has similar plumage. The thrush has much smaller, slender beak and a spotted chest, as opposed to the chevron markings of the sparrow. For most of the year the Hermit Thrush lives up to its name, skulking alone in the inner branches of trees. Hermit Thrushes are devoted parents that work cooperatively to raise their young, but once they fledge they separate and live alone.

The Succulent Garden was relatively quiet, but we caught a glimpse of a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and a pair of **California Towhees**. As we went back through the Moon-viewing Garden we stumbled on a shrub full of **Bushtits**; unlike the Hermit Thrush, you will never see a Bushtit alone! We spotted more Ruby-crowned Kinglets, moving fast from branch to branch, and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**.

We looked up often and were rewarded with more than one view of a **Red-shouldered Hawk** and a pair of **Red-tailed Hawks**. **American Crows**, **Common Ravens**, and **Rock Pigeons** crisscrossed above us. As we arrived at the main gate, a **Glaucous-winged Gull** flew high over our heads—the same bird that had passed low as we were beginning our walk, book-ending our adventures.

San Francisco Botanical Garden
12/03/2016

Compiled by Sarah Barsness

Birds: 31 species

Canada Goose – 7

Mallard – 2

Red-shouldered Hawk – 1

Red-tailed Hawk – 2

American Coot – 2

California Gull – 2

Glaucous-Winged Gull – 1

Rock Pigeon – 3

Anna's Hummingbird – 10

Red-breasted Sapsucker – 1

Downy Woodpecker – 1

Black Phoebe – 2

Hutton's Vireo – 1

Steller's Jay – 1

California Scrub Jay – 2

American Crow – 5

Common Raven – 3

Chestnut-backed Chickadee – 6

Bushtit – 6

Red-breasted Nuthatch – 1

Pygmy Nuthatch – 10

Ruby Crowned Kinglet – 5

Hermit Thrush – 1

American Robin – 3

Townsend's Warbler – 2

Fox Sparrow – 2

Dark-eyed Junco – 4

White-crowned Sparrow – 3

Golden-crowned Sparrow – 10

Song Sparrow – 2

California Towhee – 2



From top: Red-breasted Sapsucker; Hermit Thrush; Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Photos: Judy Harter

Thank-You to Our Volunteers

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director



As we start a New Year here at SF Nature Education, we give thanks to our corps of wonderful volunteers.

First and foremost, I would like to thank our intrepid newsletter editor Judy Harter and webmaster Peter Shen.

Our field trip leaders are generous with their expertise and make our excursions truly enjoyable: Megan Prelinger, Sarah Barsness, Sharon Pretti, Alan Hopkins, and Ileana Betancourt.

The incredible volunteers at our Saturday programs give their utmost to explain bird behavior and help our attendees observe the birds through the spotting scopes. They include: Ileana Betancourt, Kevin Biggerstaff, Anthony Castillo, Isabelle Chow, Nancy Elsner, Anne Galjour, Ashley Gallagher, Juan Garcia, Taylor Garcia, Jeff Harter, Judy Harter, Bob Hirt, Missi Gavic, Michele Hunnewell, Trace Kannell, Kevin Koenig, Megan Prelinger, Sharon Pretti, Janel Schulenberg, Mike Smylie, Angela Tremolada, Natasha Yankoffski, and Jacob Zollinger.



A special thank you to photographers Sarah Barsness, Jeff Harter, Bill Hunnewell, Grace Ruth, Sandi Wong, and many others for their magnificent photographs!

We can always use more volunteers. Please email us at info@sfnature.org for more information if you are interested in donating a few hours on a Saturday morning.

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**Hooded Mergansers
at North Lake in
Golden Gate Park**
Photos by Sandi Wong



**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).



Seen and Noted at Heron's Head Park

by Bill Hunnewell

We went to Heron's Head on December 17th and saw some great stuff. Long-billed Curlews made several laps over our heads, and we saw a flock of Western Meadowlarks. What a morning!



Clockwise from top left: American Kestrel (x2); Long-billed Curlew; American Avocets; splashing Scaups; Great Blue Heron with meal; above it, American Wigeon; Eared Grebe (center).

UPCOMING EVENTS

SF Nature Walks: From 10 am to noon; *rain cancels all walks.* Members free, non-members \$10, children always free.

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: Jan. 7, with Megan Prelinger, also Feb. 4.

Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln.

SF Botanical Garden: Free to SF residents with proof of residency; non-residents pay a fee.

Heron's Head Park: with Megan Prelinger & Ileana Betancourt, January 14. Meet at trailhead. Volunteers will have scopes.

Chain of Lakes: with Alan Hopkins: Jan. 21, 10 am to noon, approx. Meet at Middle Lake parking lot.