



Executive Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Our luck holds—we have three active Great Blue Heron nests at Stow Lake and at least one Red-tailed Hawk nest nearby!

We have a slew of field trips planned for March: Birding for Everyone at the SF Botanical Garden on March 4th; Crissy Field on March 11th; and a family field trip around Stow Lake on March 18th. Please join us!

Our spring fundraising campaign is now underway. We have a \$5,000 matching grant to support Heron Watch for all donations received by March 31st.

Please give generously to support our six-week Heron Watch program and internships for enthusiastic young people. I am pleased to report that we have three interns in training to volunteer every Saturday during Heron Watch: two sixth-graders and one eighth-grader.

Heron Watch begins April 15th, and will continue every Saturday through May 20th. This year, 25 volunteers and interns have signed up to educate the public about these charismatic birds and to lead field trips!

Thanks so much for your support. All donations are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis

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



www.sfnature.org

Stow Lake Herons Settling Down! Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director



So far this season we have seen three active Great Blue Heron nests on the island near the waterfall at Stow Lake.

Three nests from last year are occupied, a fourth nest from last year has blown inside out, and the fifth has disappeared. There's still time for more herons to arrive and start nesting. It typically takes only two weeks for a pair to build a new nest.

Meanwhile, a pair of Red-tailed Hawks has taken up residency in an adjacent tree on the island.

Raccoons continue to swim over to the island, but so far we haven't spotted any of them climbing trees to interfere with the birds' nesting.

By early March we can expect the herons to settle down and take turns sitting on the nests and incubating eggs. Since incubation takes only thirty days, we hope to see chicks by early April. About ninety days later, the chicks will have learned to fly and will leave for parts unknown.

To date we have seen 179 chicks fledge at Stow Lake. We have not set up the Heron Cam on the new island; unfortunately, our power source does not extend far enough.

I am happy to report that we have three interns for the upcoming Heron Watch season at Stow Lake. Please come by and give a warm welcome to Oscar, Sabrina, and Nicolas!



A Great Blue Heron in a Stow Lake nest, February 2017.

Photo: Nancy DeStefanis

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Top row: Great Blue Heron pair prepare their nest. Middle row: delivering a stick for the nest; Heron looks for food in Stow Lake (2x). Left: Heron waits for its mate to return to their nest.

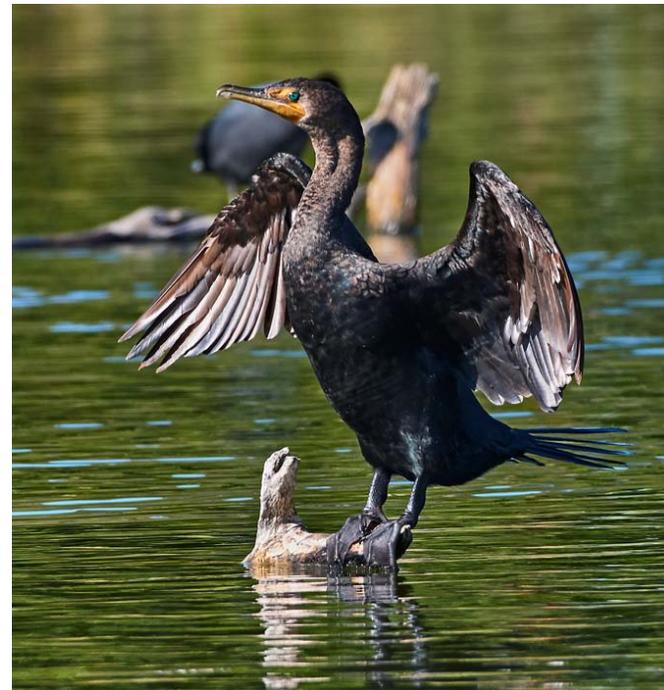
Stow Lake Herons Settling Down!

Photo: Nancy DeStefanis

Photos above and right: David Sullivan

The Varied Birds of Stow Lake

Photos by David Sullivan



Clockwise from upper left:
Red-tailed Hawk, Canada
Goose, Double-crested
Cormorant, Pied-billed
Grebe, American Coots.

Heron's Head Park, February 18th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



The day was bright, crisp, and breezy, with high scattered clouds as we gathered near the EcoCenter. Intern Oscar assisted the walk with the spotting scope and his wide base of knowledge, and we were also joined by two EcoCenter staff, who contributed knowledge of the park's history to our understanding of its ecology. We had so many adults and families that Nancy DeStefanis and Jeanne Crawford led a separate family walk.

The EcoCenter's immediate neighborhood was populated by the resident **Anna's Hummingbird**, the local **White-crowned Sparrow** group, and a calling flock of **Bushtits** cloistered inside a dense bush. On the fence line south of

the center we found a dozen **Western Meadowlarks**, and an even larger flock of non-native **European Starlings**. A **Black Phoebe** and a **House Finch** rounded out the land-side locals in the park.

The shallows north of the peninsula hosted a floating raft of **Ruddy Ducks**, with a lone **Western Grebe** resting in the middle of them. All birds were dozing in the patchy sun, and holding their place in the current with little lazy kicks. In the sky over the Recology center to the north, two **Red-tailed Hawks** were circling and being chased by a flock of **Common Ravens**. At least a hundred gulls populated the roof of the center, too far away for a certain species ID. The waters off the peninsula also hosted pairs of both **Greater** and **Lesser Scaups**, similar

species that are differentiated in the field primarily by their head shape, with the Greater having a softly rounded and larger head, and the Lesser having an angled, wedge-shaped head.

We turned our attention to the expanse of marshland south of the path, where a receding tide was opening mudflats for browsing by **American Avocets**, **Black-necked Stilts**, **Marbled Godwits**, **Snowy Egrets**, and several **American Wigeon** pairs. In the marshy landscape around the pools and inlets we found **Long-billed Curlews**, another **Godwit**, and a **Great Blue Heron**. Further along, Oscar focused the scope on the rocky south shore of the peninsula beyond the marsh. A large mixed flock of gulls occupied an exposed rocky flat,

continued on next page



Left to right: Sandi Wong; Sandi Wong; Rick Leche



Above: Least Sandpipers, Western Meadowlark, Marbled Godwit. Left: Long-billed Curlew, Common Loon.

Left to right: Sandi Wong; Alexandra Mackenzie



Photos: SFNE



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and we could see the differences in size and shape between **Mew, California, Western, and Ring-billed Gulls**. Near them were more resting **Wigeons** and **Willetts**, as well as a single **Black-bellied Plover**. It was beginning to molt in dark feathers that in a few weeks will form its bright breeding plumage.

The outer third of the peninsula is rockier, and brings the path closer to the shoreline. We saw flocks of **Least Sandpipers** on both sides of the path, and lone **Spotted Sandpipers** making their way through the shoreline.

On the south side, a **Black Oystercatcher** foraged on the rocks. Contributing naturalist Sarah Barsness found a **Common Loon** in the open water off the tip of the peninsula. Other aquatic species were **Bufflehead, Horned Grebe, and Double-crested Cormorant**.

The wind picked up enough to make conversation difficult, and we all leaned into it as we made a fairly rapid return to the EcoCenter. At the end of the wrap-up, a circling **Forster's Tern** rounded out our full list of 43 species sightings.

**Heron's Head Park
02/18/2017**

Compiled by Megan Prelinger

Birds: 43 species

- Canada Goose - 6
- American Wigeon - 33
- Greater Scaup - 4
- Lesser Scaup - 2
- Bufflehead - 7
- Ruddy Duck - 24
- Common Loon - 1
- Eared Grebe - 1
- Horned Grebe - 2
- Western Grebe - 20
- Clark's Grebe - 2
- Double-crested Cormorant - 1
- Great Blue Heron - 2
- Snowy Egret - 3
- Red-tailed Hawk - 2
- American Coot - 15
- Black-necked Stilt - 7
- American Avocet - 20
- Black Oystercatcher - 1
- Black-bellied Plover - 1
- Whimbrel - 1
- Long-billed Curlew - 2
- Marbled Godwit - 3
- Least Sandpiper - 26
- Western Sandpiper - 1
- Spotted Sandpiper - 3
- Willet - 6
- Mew Gull - 23
- Ring-billed Gull - 6
- Western Gull - 25
- California Gull - 4
- Various Gulls - 100
- Forster's Tern - 1
- Rock Pigeon - 40
- Anna's Hummingbird - 2
- Black Phoebe - 1
- Common Raven - 6
- Bushtit - heard
- European Starling - 25
- Yellow-rumped Warbler - 2
- White-crowned Sparrow - 5
- Western Meadowlark - 12
- House Finch - 1

Visitors with naturalist Jeanne Crawford, holding scope, at Heron's Head Park. Below: American Avocet.

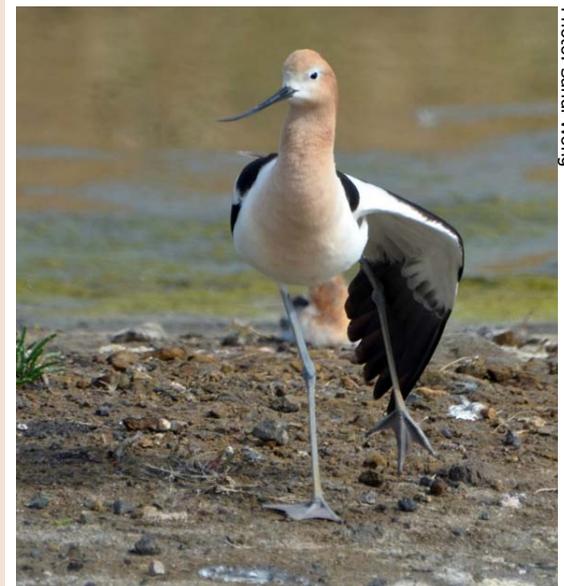


Photo: Sandi Wong

An Emperor Goose in Pacifica

The Emperor Goose is largely restricted to the Bering Sea region in the North Pacific Ocean. It breeds in Arctic and sub-Arctic Alaska and along the northeast coast of Russia. The majority of the population spends winters along in the Aleutian Islands, and also in Canada and Alaska.

The Emperor Goose is one of the rarest geese in North America. This one has been seen hanging around Sharp Park Golf Course in Pacifica for about a month.



Photos: Sandi Wong

Birding for Everyone, February 4th Megan Prelinger, Naturalist



On a gray but promising morning I walked over to the Botanical Garden to lead this month's Birding for Everyone walk. A **Yellow-rumped Warbler** was in the trees near the Friend Gate. Approaching the Waterfowl Pond, the clear and complex song of the **Pacific Wren** streamed from the forest to my right. This tiny bird with its powerful voice, silent for the past seven months, is already greeting spring in spite of the midwinter calendar date. Never mind that the wind was picking up; birds' spring songs are inspired by hormonal changes triggered by lengthening daylight hours. That is why a bird will sing even on a stormy day in spring.

A **Pied-billed Grebe** and two **Mallards** were in the Waterfowl Pond, and moments later our group of ten was gathering at the Main Gate. During the quarter-hour that we were assembling we found a number of species. A small flock of **Red-masked Parakeets**, feral parrots, flew westward, as did a pair of **Band-tailed Pigeons**, followed by many more **Rock Pigeons**. A pair of **Steller's Jays** hung out in the patio adjacent to the library. That species is a nonmigratory resident of the park. They are typically seen in the Botanical Garden in midwinter, when young and mature birds are dispersed from their breeding territories in the nearby coniferous parts of the park.

We started our walk in the direction of the California Garden, and were rewarded with a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** in a low tree. A few minutes later we had good looks at a bright male **Anna's Hummingbird**, and then found **Song Sparrows** and **White-crowned Sparrows**.

We heard the call of a **Red-tailed Hawk** in the distance. The call of another **Pacific Wren** reached us from the woods behind the bamboo grove. That was the last bird we observed, because a moment later the skies opened up and we were caught in a powerful downpour. We retreated to the bamboo tunnel for shelter and evaluated waiting out the rain, but it proved to be a full storm. Our 10 am walk was stopped at 10:15 and called off at 10:30.

San Francisco Botanical Garden
02/04/2017

Compiled by Megan Prelinger

Birds: 14 species

- Red-tailed Hawk - 1
- Mallard - 2
- Pied-billed Grebe - 1
- Band-tailed Pigeon - 2
- American Crow - 3
- Steller's Jay - 2
- Pacific Wren - 2
- California Towhee - 2
- Song Sparrow - 5
- White-crowned Sparrow - 2
- Anna's Hummingbird - 1
- Yellow-rumped Warbler - 1
- Red-masked Parakeet - 4
- Rock Pigeon - 15



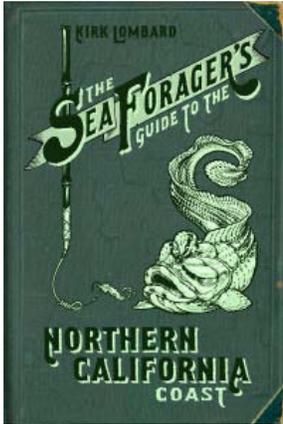
Photo: Len Blumin



Photo: Mike's Birds

From top: California Towhee,
Red-masked Parakeet.

Book Reviews



The Sea Forager's Guide to the Northern California Coast

Heyday Press; paperback, 5.5 x 8.5, 272 pages, with over 100 black-and-white illustrations; \$22.

By Kirk Lombard

Reviewed by Nancy DeStefanis

I always enjoy these books about gathering your own seafood along the California coast, and this book is a real standout.

In the first four chapters Lombard covers forage fish: sardines, sand dabs, king salmon, leopard shark, and others. His chapter on baitfish alone is worth the price of the book. Lombard describes the Pacific staghorn sculpin (bullhead) as the “Jake LaMotta of baitfish—able to stoically endure all kinds of abuse.” Another baitfish, the plainfin midshipman, “is a rare bird. In fact the humming of midshipmen caused quite a furor in Sausalito a few years ago when houseboat owners could not figure out what that terrible buzzing was: evidently the buzzing of midshipmen in May and June is so loud the citizenry of Sausalito has a hard time getting to sleep at night.”

In chapter five Lombard describes shellfish and mollusks: mussels, clams, limpets, octopus, sea urchins, and crabs. As a long-standing mussel gatherer and chef, I appreciated his clear warnings about red tides that can poison shellfish. He includes information about the biotoxin-monitoring hotline, so you can be sure it's safe to harvest shellfish on any given day.

Lombard performs an important service when he reminds mussel foragers to pick them with their hands and not use crowbars or garden spades, which will devastate the mussel beds. During World War II, mussels were a major source of protein for Americans. Having prepared them in at least ten different ways,

I can attest to the fact there is nothing as delightful as freshly cooked mussels!

The final chapter covers seaweed. There are recipes throughout and lots of tips and advice for making your foraging trip a success. This is a fun read for yourself and any foragers in your life.

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: Mar. 4, with Megan Prelinger, also Apr. 1. 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.

Crissy Field: Saturday, March 11, 10 am to noon. Leader: Ileana Betancourt. Meet outside Warming Hut. Volunteers will carry spotting scopes.

Family Field Trip at Stow Lake: March 18, 10 am to noon. Leaders: Bob Hirt, former president Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society and Missi Hirt-Gavic. Adults \$10, children always free.

All children provided with SF Nature Ed. Field journals while supplies last. Meet at Stow Lake Boathouse. Volunteers will carry scopes for up-close and personal views of nesting birds.

SUPPORT SAN FRANCISCO NATURE EDUCATION!

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

Help us meet our matching grant goal by March 31st!



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Vermilion Flycatcher at Cypress Lawn Cemetery in Colma Photos by Sandi Wong

From the Cornell Ornithology Lab: A spectacular and distinctive flycatcher, the bright red Vermilion Flycatcher inhabits riparian areas and scrub in the southwestern United States and southward. It perches conspicuously, making periodic flights to nab insect prey.

HERON WATCH—SAVE THE DATES!

Saturdays, April 15 through May 20, from 10 AM–1 PM.

OBSERVATION SITE SPOTTING SCOPES!

WATCH THE GREAT BLUE HERONS—FREE.
NATURE WALK EVERY SAT., 10:15 TO 12:15. Adults \$10, children always free. Follow signs from Stow Lake Boathouse.