

Executive Director's Corner



Dear Friends,

SF Nature celebrates 25 years of Great Blue Herons at Stow Lake! It's hard to believe, but the herons arrived at Stow Lake in 1993.

Twenty-five years later we celebrate their presence and beauty with a variety of school and Saturday programs.

This year we have a \$10,000 matching grant from two anonymous donors to support our Heron Watch program and internships for middle-school youth. Please contribute to the match by May 30th, so we can reach our goal! You can donate now online or send a contribution to our address below.

To celebrate the anniversary we will feature photos from the last 25 years in each issue through December of this year.

We are very fortunate that 2018 has produced five nests so far. Herons at three nests have been observed incubating eggs. It is very likely we will have chicks to observe on Opening Day, April 17th. We have expanded Heron Watch to nine Saturdays, so the public can observe the chicks' first flights in June.

Our thirty volunteers and three interns stand ready to facilitate breathtaking views of the herons and information on their behavior.

Please donate online or send a contribution by mail. Thanks for your generous support!

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis

Membership: Adults, \$35; Seniors 65+, \$30; students 21 or under, \$20.

Renew or join by linking to [Donate Now](#) below, or send a check to:

PO Box 210303, San Francisco CA 94121

e-mail: info@sfnature.org

telephone: 415-205-0776

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Donate Now



Hérons: Bill Hunnewell



Top: Great Blue Heron delivers stick during nest-building. Above: Heron pair bonds in their nest. Photos taken in March 2018.

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Red-tailed Hawks Nesting Again at Stow Lake

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

Red-tailed Hawks are among the most commonly observed raptors in the Bay Area. They are generally monogamous. Clutch size is typically two to three eggs. Parents incubate the eggs for about 28 days.

After hatching, the hawklets usually remain in the nest for about six weeks before traveling with their parents for another six months.

Last year, Stow Lake's Red-tail nest produced four hawklets, which we watched as they learned to fly! This year the Red-tails have returned to their nest and begun incubating (see photo bottom right). We hope to watch their progeny during Heron Watch.



Hawks: Bill Hunnewell



A Review of iNaturalist.org

Nicolas Forestell, Intern

iNaturalist is an online program created by the California Academy of Sciences, where citizen scientists can submit sightings of flora and fauna and help identify other people's sightings. This valuable information can then be used by scientists for research. I've been trying it out for around two months now, and have experienced my share of good and bad things about it.

The main aspect of the program is submitting your sightings and identifying other people's sightings. When you submit, you include a photo, location, best identification guess, and possibly notes. Once this is complete, people can then identify or correct your identification by clicking a button.

Because you must submit sightings individually, if you have a lot, it can be time consuming to add photos,

location, etcetera, for every sighting. On the other hand, helping to identify others' sightings is something that I find much easier to use, and is helpful for the observer. You can quickly suggest your ID and agree or disagree without needing to look at a profile and emailing the person.

I give iNaturalist a rating of four out of five stars. It lacks the option to submit multiple sightings quickly and efficiently. It would be nice if you could put multiple sightings under one location, add species and photos, and then drag or assign the photos to their appropriate species, or something similar.

I'm looking forward to being a citizen scientist for Heron Watch this year by keeping track of the progress of the heron nests. I'm anticipating educating people while enjoying nature. I hope to see some of you then!

You can find iNaturalist at <https://www.inaturalist.org/>.



Heron on the Hunt

Photos by
Sandi Wong



Diet of the Great Blue Heron

Nancy DeStefanis

The Great Blue Heron has a varied diet, given opportunity: fish, gophers, frogs, dragonflies, large insects, and small birds.





Birding for Everyone, March 3rd

Sarah Barsness, Naturalist

March came in like a lion this year, and it looked like rain might cancel our Birding for Everyone field trip in the SF Botanical Garden. As I headed to the main gate, just before 10 am,

it began to pour. A group of ten regular birders met me, and a few minutes later the sun returned and we headed towards the California Garden, with the songs and calls of birds increasing with the light.

Spring is on the way. We noted the incredible range of the songs and calls of the **American Robin**, as well as the variations from young **Song Sparrows** learning their notes.

A **Pacific Wren** sang clearly from the south side of the path, and we stopped to see if we could locate the small brown bird in the darkness of the undergrowth. To our delight, it was within just a few feet, atop a sign, and despite our proximity continued its spectacular song, tail perfectly vertical.

We walked through the California Native Garden, noting brilliant **Allen's Hummingbirds**.

Just above the reservoir we were startled when two hawks flew towards the Redwood Grove, sparring or courting. We spotted one of them — a young **Red-tailed Hawk**, high in a tree holding a dead rodent. We heard the call of a **Red-shouldered Hawk**, and moments later it flew into the grove, rousting the Red-tailed Hawk. Squabbling, the two flew into the tall trees.

We headed to the Children's Garden, where we spotted a spectacular **Ruby-crowned**



Kinglet displaying his fiery crown and singing a phrase or two of song (which we so rarely hear) in between the clatter of his winter "typewriter" call.

A second small, greenish bird flew into the trees — a type of *Empidonax* flycatcher.

I identified it initially as a Pacific Slope by its shape, size, eye-ring, and wing bars, although I noticed the beak was a bit smaller and sharper than I expected — a bit more like a Kinglet. Later that day, local experts confirmed that we had spotted a **Hammond's Flycatcher**, distinguished from the Pacific Slope only by beak size and wing-tip length. This bird turned out to be a lifer for many of us.



We walked along the path towards the Moon Viewing Garden, keeping our eyes open for the female **Varied Thrush** that has been seen throughout the winter. One of our group spotted her completely disguised in the leaf fall beneath a tree. She waited cooperatively as we all got a nice view. While not as dramatic as a male, her delicate markings and rich orange color were a treat for our eyes.

Our last treat that day was a vivid yellow **American Goldfinch**, preening atop a tree just outside the Fragrance Garden before we returned to the main gate.

continued on next page



From top left: Pacific Wren, Hammond's Flycatcher, Red-tailed Hawk, Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Above: Varied Thrush. Photos: Sarah Barsness, except Kinglet: Jeff Harter.

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San Francisco Botanical Garden

March 3, 2018

Compiled by Sarah Barsness

40 species:

- Canada Goose – 2
- Mallard – 2
- Pied-billed Grebe – 1
- Turkey Vulture – 1
- Cooper’s Hawk – 1
- Red-tailed Hawk – 3
- Red-shouldered Hawk – 1
- California Gull – 2
- Glaucous-winged Gull – 1
- Rock Pigeon – 3
- Anna’s Hummingbird – 5
- Allen’s Hummingbird – 8
- Downy Woodpecker – 1
- Hammond’s Flycatcher – 1
- Black Phoebe – 2
- Hutton’s Vireo – 1
- Steller’s Jay – 1
- Western Scrub Jay – 3
- American Crow – 5
- Common Raven – 17
- Chestnut-backed Chickadee – 3
- Bushtit – 3
- Pygmy Nuthatch – 5
- Pacific Wren – 5
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet – 5
- Hermit Thrush – 1
- American Robin – 5
- Varied Thrush – 1
- Yellow-rumped Warbler – 20
- Townsend’s Warbler – 4
- Wilson’s Warbler – 1
- Fox Sparrow – 1
- Dark-eyed Junco – 2
- White-crowned Sparrow – 1
- Golden-crowned Sparrow – 3
- Song Sparrow – 7
- California Towhee – 1
- House Finch – 1
- Purple Finch – 1
- American Goldfinch – 1

From the Stow Lake Archives: 2016



Nancy DeStefanis



David Sullivan

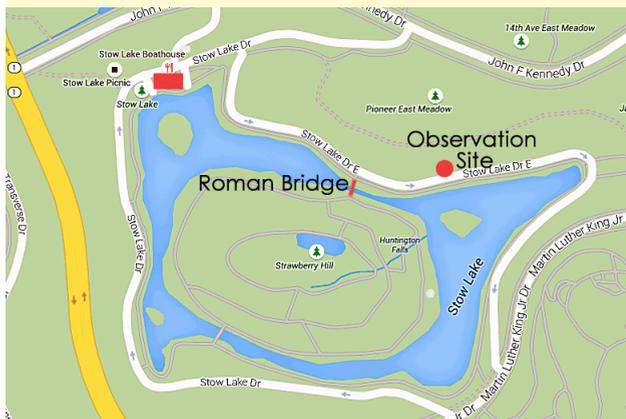
UPCOMING EVENTS

SF Nature Walks: Members free, non-members \$10, children always free. Please bring binoculars if you can, and a pencil. Rain cancels all walks. For directions see our [events calendar](#).

Birding for Everyone: First Saturdays from 10 am to noon in the SF Botanical Garden. Next: Apr. 7 and May 5, with Sarah Barsness or Megan Prelinger. 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.

Lecture & Slide Show: "Great Blue Herons of Golden Gate Park." Nancy DeStefanis will lecture on the thriving colony and show photos of their lifecycle. Wednesday, Apr. 11, at 7 pm, at the Merced Branch of SF Public Library: 155 Winston Dr., corner 19th Ave., near Stonestown Mall. Free.

Heron Watch at Stow Lake: Free—donations welcome. Opening Day, April 14. Nine Saturdays through June 16 (excluding May 26), 10 am to 1 pm. Volunteers use spotting scopes to assist visitors. Nature walks, including ascent to Strawberry Hill: 10:15–12:30, approx. Apr 14, with Megan Prelinger; Apr. 21, with Sharon Pretti; Apr. 28, with Nancy DeStefanis. \$10 for adults; children free. See our [Heron Watch 2018 Flyer](#).



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under, \$20.

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**San Francisco
Nature
Education**



San Francisco Nature Education is in its 18th year of delivering comprehensive environmental education programs to students from schools in the San Francisco Unified School District.



**Birds in and around
Stow Lake**
Photos by Sandi Wong

Top row: Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Duck. Left: Mandarin Duck (female). Below: American Wigeon, Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

