



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 a Great Blue Heron was spotted standing in a nest on the new nesting island on December 18th. Here's hoping we match or exceed 2017's five nests and fourteen chicks!

We have two Saturday field trips planned for January: SF Botanical Garden and Heron's Head Park.

We will have two interns starting in March. There is still time for students to apply. See the application information on page 6. Also, we are looking for adult volunteers for Heron Watch walks.

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 extent allowed by law. Thanks again for your support!

Best regards,

Nancy DeStefanis

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

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David Guenetie

These five baby Barn Owls hatched in a barn near Chilliwack, British Columbia, last June. Below: American Robin with toyon berries.



Grace Ruth

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Chain of Lakes Walk, December 9th

Alan Hopkins, Naturalist



Our December trip to Golden Gate Park had beautiful clear skies and a nice crew to enjoy the park's birds. After the gang went through introductions we stopped by South Lake. There wasn't much on the water; a **Belted Kingfisher** called from the distance. There seemed to be **Yellow-rumped Warblers** everywhere. One of the day's surprises was a Yellow Warbler flying into a nearby eucalyptus for a few moments and then back across the lake. Yellow Warblers are common fall migrants, but by December they should all be gone.

There had been reports of some nice birds at North Lake, so we made our way across Kennedy Drive and down the steps. The toyon berries at the bottom of the steps attracted our only finch of the day. Overhead a eucalyptus was teeming with birds. We spotted a **Nuttall's Woodpecker** and two **Downy Woodpeckers**, **Pygmy Nuthatches**, **Townsend's Warblers**, and more **Yellow-rumped Warblers**. All the time, **Red-tailed Hawks** circled and called to the west. As we walked along the east side of the lake we found wintering sparrows. In the willows and Albizia shrubs we found **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** and two **Orange-crowned Warblers**. Some of us caught a glimpse of a **Wilson's Warbler** just as it flew across the lake.

Since North Lake was restored in 2003 the tule reeds and cattails have grown to the point where it has become hard to see the water from the trail. We did find **Mallards**, **Coots**, **Pied-billed Grebes**, and **Ruddy Ducks** beyond the vegetation. The nice thing about the tule and cattails is that they provide habitat for the two **Common Yellowthroats** we saw.

The highlight of the walk at North Lake was an immature **Orchard Oriole** that had been found the day before. Orchard Orioles are an eastern North American species, but a few have been showing up along our coast each fall and winter. The immature Orchard Oriole looks very similar to our Hooded Oriole, however the Orchard is smaller with a more slender bill and bolder wing bars. A close look at photos of this bird show that it has chestnut feathers next to its black bib, something a Hooded Oriole would never show.

continued on next page



Alan Hopkins



Bill Hunnewell



Bill Hunnewell

From top: Nuttall's Woodpecker, Orchard Oriole, also at left. Below: Orange-crowned Warbler.



Jeff Harter

continued from previous page

We made our way along the north side of the Bison Paddock where we found **Mourning Doves** and **Killdeer**. In some of the Monterey Pines at the east end of the paddock we located yet another flock of Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warblers. From up in the trees came "a weak, nasal ink or yennk" call as Sibley describes the call of the **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. We had nice comparisons of Red-breasted Nuthatches and Pygmy Nuthatches in the same tree.

At Spreckels Lake and we added a few **gulls** and **Canada Geese** to the list. Another highlight was a **Red-necked Grebe** on the pond.

In San Francisco Red-necked Grebes are uncommon at best, and they are usually seen on the bay or ocean as distant specks through a spotting scope. To see one up close was a treat.

The trip's last surprise was not a bird. We were walking along the south side of the Bison Paddock trying to get better views of the Killdeer when for some reason the **Bison** became very animated. They began to wallow in the dirt and then chase each other around the paddock at full speed.

None of us had ever seen anything like it! It was somehow hilarious watching the usually tranquil beasts run around as if in a mini stampede! At one point the bison ran through the flock of Killdeer and what we thought were about five birds turned into about twenty as they flew for their lives.

To finish off the day we walked around Middle Lake and found yet more **Yellow-rumped Warblers**. The warblers were a just the right height so we could study the difference between the **Audubon's** buffy to yellowish throat and indistinct facial marking and the **Myrtle's** white throat and distinct cheek patch. They were once considered separate species and may be split again.

From top: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Red-necked Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler, North Lake, bison.



Alan Hopkins



Bill Hummewell



Alan Hopkins



Sandi Wong



Alan Hopkins



Alan Hopkins

Birding for Everyone, December 2nd

Sarah Barsness, Naturalist



A birding guide once pointed out to our group the absurdity of trying to spot small, rare birds: what are the odds of finding a flying object the size of your thumb in deep thickets of bush, trees, and grasses? And yet, we persist in the irrational pursuit and—more often than seems reasonable—we find our bird, and the thrill of that moment can't be described. But let me try!

About halfway through the recent Birding for Everyone outing to the SF Botanical Garden, we stopped at the Succulent Garden to see if we could find the **Rufous Hummingbird** we heard was lingering there. We were hopeful but prepared for disappointment. When a tiny, brilliant orange bird flew up and perched high on a salvia branch in plain view, we gasped with joy. A few seconds later he vanished into a brush, just before the remainder of our group arrived. Those of us who saw him felt graced.

Instead of our usual circuitous route we followed our intuition and the hints of other birders to seek out fall migrants and new winter arrivals. While pre-birding, I had noted a few areas that were active with birds, and met up with birder friends who had spotted the lingering **Wilson's Warbler**, **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, a **Varied Thrush**, and a **Black-and-white Warbler**. I caught a quick glimpse of the latter before hurrying off to meet our group. We moved quickly past some of our usual spots, noting a few birds along the way, including a number of **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, a mature **Black Phoebe**, and a raucous **Steller's Jay**.

We saw kinglets flying away and heard their distinctive high-pitched piping calls. I led us towards the large *Pyracantha* on the edge of the Conifer Lawn. I hoped we might see the Varied Thrush among the **American Robins** that were busily popping the large

orange berries down their throats. Just as we arrived, one of our party got a nice look at a **Varied Thrush** before it disappeared.

A **Hermit Thrush** perched near us in a bare bush; **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** flitted in a nearby shrub, filling the air with their "angry typewriter" call; a group of **Golden-crowned Sparrows** foraged in the grass for berries and insects; and dozens of **American Robins** worked the upper branches.

In the Children's Garden three **Northern Flickers** were feeding. We admired their orange wings and distinctive flight. I was pleased to find the flock of **Pine Siskins** I had seen earlier in the week. The birds gave us a lovely show, hanging upside down and fluttering from branch to branch. We noted the very small bill and yellow wing marks.

We passed through the Succulent Garden, where we found the **Rufous Hummingbird** with guidance from a nearby birder. Even an Allen's Hummingbird this late in the year would be unusual—but a Rufous is very rare. He really should be in the south of Mexico by this time!

We decided to pause at the Moon Viewing Garden. What a lovely finale! **Golden-crowned Kinglets** decorated an entire tree. Just across the lawn, the lingering **Wilson's Warbler** that we saw last month made a return visit, and everyone was able to admire his black cap and bright yellow body.

With gratitude to all the birds for offering us a respite from worldly affairs, we called it a (wonderful) morning. Observed: 35 species.



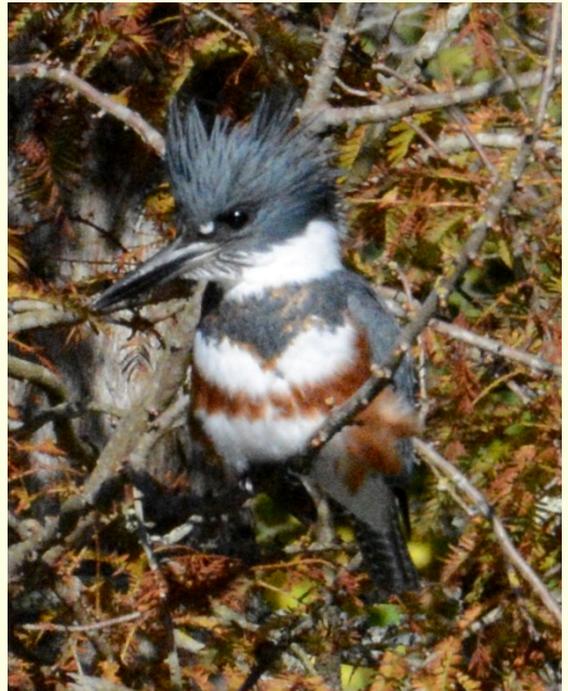
From left: Black Phoebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet (top), Black-and-white Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Pine Siskin. Photos: Bill Hunnewell, except Kinglet: Sarah Barsness, and Wilson's Warbler: Grace Ruth. More photos on pages 5 and 6.



Some Birds of the SF Botanical Garden

Photos by Grace Ruth

Spotted in early December, clockwise from left: Great Blue Heron (2x), Belted Kingfisher, Rufous Hummingbird, Cedar Waxwing.



Birds of the SF Botanical Garden

Photos by Sarah Barsness



From top: Golden-crowned Sparrow, Steller's Jay.

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. 9, 2018. 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.

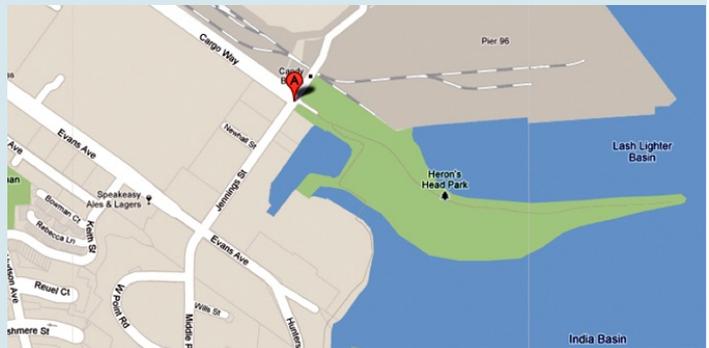
Dates, information, and applications are available at: http://sfnature.org/get_involved/intern.html.

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. 6, with Megan Prelinger, also Feb. 3. 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: Saturday, January 13, with Megan Prelinger, 10 am to noon. Meet at start of path, near parking lot at Cargo Way & Jennings St.



Crissy Field: Saturday, February 10, 10 am to noon. Meet outside Warming Hut.

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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 of Stow Lake
and Lloyd Lake**
Photos by Sandi Wong

From left: Great Egret and Northern
Shovelers at Stow Lake; Hooded
Mergansers with prey, and mating,
at Lloyd Lake; Bufflehead (Stow Lake).

