

Executive Director's Corner



Herons and Hawks Off to a Late Start

We've had a strange season at the Stow Lake Great Blue Heron Colony. Although we started with seven nests, only two produced chicks before the middle of May. Nest no. 1, with two chicks, fell to the ground on April 9th.

We think the same pair constructed a new nest above their old nest in mid-April—no. 8. Two teenaged herons in nest no. 2 are ready to fledge, and have been branch hopping for at least two weeks. Two newly-hatched chicks in nest no. 4 emerged around May 14th.

Five more nests seem to have adults incubating eggs. It's apparent that most of our herons got a late start this year. Usually all the nests have offspring by the middle of April. The Red-tailed Hawks nesting in the adjacent Monterey Pine tree produced three hawklets at the end of April, also late.

On several occasions we have observed Steller's Jays flying into the hawk nest and being chased away by an observant parent. These jays are omnivores, and eat eggs and nestlings as a regular part of their diet.

Each Saturday hundreds of adults and children visit our Observation Site to see the majestic herons. Our field trips have been filled with enthusiastic families eager to learn about the wildlife in Golden Gate Park. On one of our field trips two Great Horned Owlets were seen on Strawberry Hill.

We resume Heron Watch for three final Saturday programs: June 2, 9, and 16. Please join us!

Our matching grant deadline has been extended to June 15th! Please help us meet our goal of raising \$10,000, by donating online or sending a contribution. Thanks for your 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
www.sfnature.org



Top: Great Blue Heron with new chick. Above: Red-tailed Hawklet.
Photos: Bill Hunnewell.

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Heron Watch, May 12 & 19th

Below: Missi Gavic and her father Bob Hirt (second and third from left) lead visitors on the Family Nature Walk.



Steve Wolford and Jennifer McCarthy (in hat) at their scopes with visitors; right: Judy Harter (r) points out heron chicks to an observer; Jennifer McCarthy with a young visitor.

Below: Heron Watch crew, May 19th. L to r: Greg Lyon, Nancy DeStefanis, Kathy Duffy, Joachim, Suellen Sleamaker, Sabrina, Angela Tremolada, Nicolas, Ashley Gallagher, Nancy Elsner, and Diane O'Donahue.



Director's Note We are *very* grateful to our thirty dedicated volunteers who volunteered multiple Saturdays to share their knowledge and expertise with the public: Victoria Aceves, Natasha Arnold, Kevin Biggerstaff, Isabelle Chow, Jeanne Crawford, Kathleen Duffy, Nancy Elsner, Anne Galjour, Ashley Gallagher, Missi Hirt-Gavic, Jeff & Judy Harter, Bob Hirt, Alan Hopkins, Trace Kannell, Kevin & Katie Koenig, Greg Lyon, Jennifer McCarthy, Diane O'Donohue, Megan Prelinger, Sharon Pretti, Janel Schulenberg, Sueellen Sleamaker, Angela Tremolada, Shannon Westberg, Steve Wolford, Natasha Yankoffski, Jennie Yoon, and Shana Simondi. Our interns have been outstanding: Sabrina Chin, Nicolas Forestall, Joachim Gonzalez. Also thanks to Jeff Harter, Bill Hunnewell, Frank Marino, Grace Ruth, David Sullivan, Sandi Wong, and all of our talented contributing photographers.



Volunteers Jeff Harter and Anne Galjour. Group photos: SFNE. All others by Jeff Harter, except above, by Nancy DeStefanis.



Volunteers, Interns, and Visitors

Left to right: Volunteers Kevin Biggerstaff and Janel Schulenberg, intern Nicolas, Trace Kannell, intern Sabrina, Diane O'Donahue, and Nancy DeStefanis.

Below left: SFPD Officer Lee, volunteers, and interns.

Below: Sharon Pretti, third from left, leads Strawberry Hill nature walk.

Bottom: Nancy DeStefanis (center) with interns and visitors at the waterfall on a family nature walk.



Another wonderful birding trip on May 5th, at Stow Lake! We viewed five heron nests—four incubating pairs and one pair with two six-week old chicks. We had the opportunity to see their stick presentation ritual, and a great view of the Red-tailed Hawks and their two new chicks. The Hooded Merganser was on display, and two families of Canada Geese. We observed a Black Phoebe nest on the stone bridge. A highlight was climbing up Strawberry Island, where we spotted



Great Horned Owls. The owlets are already branching, and mom is staying close by to protect them. A great group of volunteers and birders!
—Sharon Pretti

Photos: SFNE, except below: Jeanne Crawford.



Heron, Hawk, and Owl Chicks Grow Up

Bill Hunnewell



Bill Hunnewell



Frank Marino



Frank Marino



Frank Marino



Sandi Wong

Clockwise from left: two Great Horned owlets on Strawberry Hill; Red-tailed Hawklet and mom looking out over Stow Lake; Steller's Jay flies out of hawk nest; parent and two newly-hatched heron chicks in nest #4; hawklet stretches wings; two Great Blue Heron teenaged chicks standing in nest #2.

Interns Graduate Nancy DeStefanis

Sabrina Chin, Nicolas Forestall, and Joachim Gonzalez graduated from the Heron Watch internship program on May 19th.

During the eight-week program the interns discussed the herons' behavior, used spotting scopes, assisted on nature walks, wrote reports, drew local birds, and conducted surveys of nesting herons.

The interns were honored for their outstanding service at a luncheon following their last day at Stow Lake. Joachim Gonzalez was awarded binoculars. Sabrina Chin, a second-year intern, was presented with guides on owls and western hummingbirds, while Nicolas Forestall, also second-year, received *The Bird Almanac*.



Above: Nicolas Forestall with observer at scope; Sabrina Chin shows heron chicks to volunteer. Left: Joachim Gonzalez shows hawklets to visitor. Below: Sabrina, Executive Director Nancy DeStefanis, Joachim, and Nicolas. Photos: SFNE

All received a Great Blue Heron pin from William Spear and Co. in Juneau, Alaska. The interns and their families enjoyed an eight-course Chinese lunch and chocolate cake!



Restoring Strawberry Hill on May 12th Nicolas Forestall, Intern

Saturday morning, Sabrina, her mom, Joachim, and I lent a hand helping to restore butterfly habitat on Strawberry Hill at Stow Lake. The site is home to numerous species of wildlife, including Allen's Hummingbirds, California Pipevine Swallowtail butterflies, Western Tiger Swallowtails, Anise Swallowtails, and Great Horned Owls.

We pulled invasive plants and put in native grasses and shrubs. Our first job was the planting of native grasses by a drain. The purpose of the planting was to catch dirt being eroded by rain before it could reach the drain. With the aid of shovel and pickaxe we made quick work. We soon finished our task and were ready for a new one.

We planted some coyote brush on a hillside as directed by Andy Stone. Coyote brush is a common evergreen shrub that supports many kinds of birds, including chickadees, jays, finches, and sparrows. We dug into the reddish, tough soil, and carefully planted the foot-tall plants.

Our next mission was to tackle the invasive cape ivy, native to South Africa, that had climbed the hillside and begun to strangle some native sages and ceanothus. The task seemed endless as we unraveled the ivy and ripped it out again and again. We found a mouse home hidden in the brush. It comprised a ball of grasses with a hole in the center lined



with hair and fur. It seemed like the perfect place for its former occupier to get cozy and relaxed.

Our last task was to plant some sticky monkey flower, more coyote brush, and most interestingly, purple needlegrass. It is the state grass of California (who knew we had one!) due to being widespread throughout the state. We began to dig and plant. Unfortunately, we were not able to finish, as it was soon time to go back to the observation site to clean up and have our traditional group hug.

We had a great time restoring butterfly and wildlife habitat on Strawberry Hill. It's inspiring to help our local ecosystems by planting beautiful native plants, fighting back on our impact as humans on planet Earth.

I've enjoyed Heron Watch—talking to the public, sketching, and also helping to restore habitats.

The restoration program runs every second Saturday of the month and meets at the picnic tables on the east side of the Stow Lake Boathouse. To help, please leave a message for Andy Stone, Rec & Park Section Supervisor, Stow Lake, at 415-307-9207.

Sources:

Native Plants of San Francisco: <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants/search?zipcode=94131>

GGP: Strawberry Hill Butterfly and Trail Project: <http://sfrecpark.org/event/ggp-strawberry-hill-butterfly-and-trail-project-2/2017-12-09/>

Western Tiger Swallowtail photo: Jeff Harter

The Great Blue Heron's Cousin: The Black-crowned Night-heron

Sabrina Chin, Intern



Latin name The Black-crowned Night-heron's latin name is *Nycticorax nycticorax*.

Range It is the most widespread heron in the world. In the Americas, It breeds from Canada to the southern United States. It winters in the southern and coastal US, Mexico, Central and South America. In addition, it can be found in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.



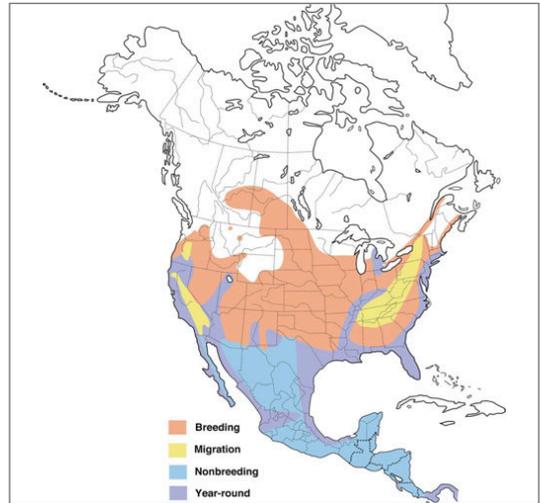
Appearance Height: 28 inches, wingspan: 4 feet. Adults are light-gray birds with a black back, black crown, and all-black beak. Immatures are brown with big white spots on the wings, blurry streaks on the underparts, and yellow-and-black beaks.

Why is it called the Black-crowned Night-heron?

The Black-crowned Night-heron gets its name because it hunts at night and early morning, then rests during the day.

Five Facts

1. The Black-crowned Night-heron can live for about 21 years in the wild.
2. It will often nest with other bird species, such as herons, egrets, and ibises, and will attack eggs and young of birds within the colony. Nest-robbing is rampant wherever this heron inhabits mixed heron colonies.
3. Their nighttime feeding habits might have evolved from attacks by day-hunting herons, forcing them to forage at dawn, dusk, and night to avoid threats and competition.
4. Young Black-crowned Night-herons will vomit up their stomach contents as a defense mechanism.
5. Each year they build over 100 nests on Alcatraz Island. Visitors can see the nestlings if they visit the island in May and June.



Left and top: Black-crowned Night-heron: photo & drawing by Sabrina Chin. Map: Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Below: parent and chick by Sandi Wong.





Birding for Everyone, May 5th

Megan Prelinger, Naturalist

It was a cool-weather Saturday for May, and windy. A flock of migratory **Cedar Waxwings** browsed around the crowns of the surrounding trees as our group assembled near the main gate. Four psitticines (local feral **Red-masked Parrots**) flew overhead with their loud chatter, and the lawn was filled with **American Robins**.

A pair of **Steller's Jays** was active in the trees above the bamboo grove as we headed down the curving path toward the California Garden. Throughout the day, numerous **Anna's** and **Allen's** (selasphorous) **Hummingbirds** zoomed around the edges of the path.

A **Wilson's Warbler** was calling in the California Garden, and a coyote scooted quickly out of the parking area at the greenhouse as we approached the reservoir. In the water we found a flock of very young **Mallard** ducklings with their parents.

At the Succulent Garden we observed **Pygmy Nuthatches** coming and going from their nest sites in the Century Plants, as a pair of **Downy Woodpeckers** browsed nearby.

A local **Great Blue Heron** flew over from Stow Lake and perched incongruously high in a eucalyptus on the ridge near the Children's Garden. Other species we found in the back quarter were **Tree Swallows** circling, nesting **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, and a **Red-tailed Hawk**.

In spite of the cool weather, **Pipevine Swallowtail** butterflies emerged around 11 am and were frequently near us. As we wound back, we savored the sound of birdsong, including abundant **Song Sparrows**, several **House Finches**, and at least one **Pacific Wren**.

We found a **Barn Swallow** making feeding flights over the main lawn, and a cast of regulars to round out the day: high-flying **Western Gulls**, local **Dark-eyed Juncos**, **Brewer's Blackbirds**, and numerous **Black Phoebes**.



Sandi Wong



Sandi Wong



Sabrina Chin

Clockwise from left: Wilson's Warbler; American Robin; Anna's Hummingbird; Pygmy Nuthatch; Nuttall's Woodpecker.



Bill Hunnewell



Judy Harter

Family Nature Walk, May 12th

Missi Gavic, Naturalist



What an enriching day for the Family Nature Walk. It was truly a family bird walk in that I had not only my father Bob Hirt with me (an expert birder, and VP of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society), but also my beginning birder, daughter Cami. How fun to have along three generations of birders. (Strapped to a front carrier, I went on my first bird walk with my father, Bob Hirt, when I was just six weeks old.)

This is an exciting time of year to be out at Stow Lake, with much bird activity around nesting, eggs, and new chicks. Our group on this warm May morning was all ages, with grandparents, parents, and six school-age children. After the binoculars and field journals were passed out we walked to the Roman Bridge, where we made introductions, gave an overview of the walk, and had a brief practice session using the binoculars.

One of the first things we saw was a **raccoon**, presumably looking for a meal, swimming and wading along the shore of the Strawberry Hill Island, headed right towards a **Canada Goose** sitting on its nest. Raccoons are very resourceful when it comes to hunting for food.

We saw **Red-tailed Hawks** getting attacked by both **Brewer's Blackbirds** and **American Crows**. We heard and saw many **American Robins**, **Song Sparrows**, and **Red-winged Blackbirds**. As we made our way to the waterfall and Taiwan Pavilion, we set up spotting scopes on a **Double-crested Cormorant** and a **Great Blue Heron**. We also got some great up-close looks at a **Steller's Jay** and many **Anna's Hummingbirds**.

Some other common birds sighted were **Mallards**, **Western Gulls**, a flock of **Rock Pigeons**, and some circling **Turkey Vultures**. We saw **Northern Shovelers**, and were able to see their distinctive spoon-shaped bills. We discussed how birds' bills and beaks are specially adapted for the food they eat. In the Taiwan Pavilion we took a break to color in our journals the birds seen. Other birds spotted were a **Black-crowned Night-heron**, **Pygmy Nuthatch**, and **Cooper's Hawk**.

As we made our way to the second bridge, we saw a very active honey bee hive high up in a tree, and a **Hooded Merganser** that seemed to think he was a Mallard, based on his interest in a female Mallard. Many of our younger birders had already counted 21 **Red-eared Slider** turtles. We set up our scopes to take a closer look at a **Black Phoebe** and its well-constructed mud nest.

As our nature walk was ending, we had two interesting sightings. We spotted a pair of **Pied-billed Grebes**. As we looked more closely with the scopes, we noticed their floating nest, with a bright white, golf-ball-size egg sitting on top. The pair was busy diving underwater, pulling up vegetation, and adding to their nest. Pied-billed Grebes have the unique ability to dive underwater or simply sink into the water. We next saw a **Common Raven** flying under the treetops with what looked like a large Canada Goose egg in its mouth. What an exciting and educational day at Stow Lake!

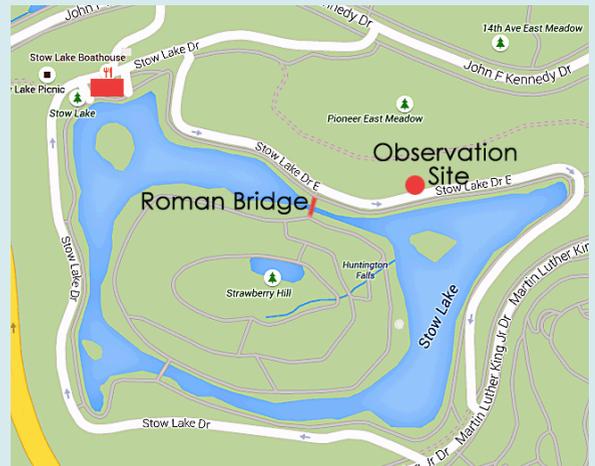
Please join us for our Family Nature Walk on Saturday, June 2nd.

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](#).

Heron Watch at Stow Lake: Free—donations welcome. Saturdays, June 2, 9, & 16, 10 am to 1 pm. Volunteers use scopes to assist visitors.

Family walk around Stow Lake: 10:15-12:30. June 2, with Bob Hirt & Missi Hirt-Gavic; June 9, with renowned birder Alan Hopkins; June 16, with master birder Megan Prelinger. \$10 for adults; children free. Meet at observation site.



Birding for Everyone: No walks in July or August. First Saturdays from 10 am to noon in the SF Botanical Garden. Next walk: Sept. 1, 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.

OUR MATCHING GRANT OF \$10,000 HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO JUNE 15TH. PLEASE HELP US MEET OUR GOAL BY DONATING NOW ONLINE OR BY MAIL!

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

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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.



Allen's and Anna's Hummingbird Hatchlings and Fledglings Photos by Sandi Wong





Great Horned Owls and Owlets in Golden Gate Park Photos by Sandi Wong

