



# The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education · April 2019



## Executive Director's Corner

I'm happy to report there are seven active Great Blue Heron nests at Stow Lake. The last three nests were constructed in a whirlwind

of activity between March 16th and 23rd. Great Blue Herons flew with twigs and branches from all directions into the new nests. Passersby were transfixed by the frenzy of activity.

The Red-tailed Hawks are now ensconced in their old nest in the tree next to the herons' tree.

Heron Watch opens on April 13th, from 10 am to 1pm. Interns and volunteers will be ready to show the nesting birds, answer questions, and assist on Stow Lake nature walks. We have terrific leaders for our nature walks, which will start at 10:15 every Saturday of Heron Watch.

**We have one month left to reach our goal of \$10,000 for our matching grant. Please make a generous contribution by April 30th by donating online or through the mail. All donations are fully deductible to the extent provided by law.**

Please join us at Heron Watch and meet our new interns: Ian, Joy, Jose, and David!

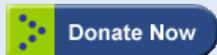
Best,  
*Nancy*

Nancy DeStefanis

Membership: Adults, \$35; Seniors 65+, \$30; Joint Membership for two seniors at same residence \$50; students 21 or under, \$20.

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Great Blues ready to commence mating. Below: collecting branches to add to the nest.

Photos: Grace Ruth



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## Editor's Note: New Interns Train for Heron Watch

We're fortunate to have four new interns who are committed to learning about the Great Blue Herons and other birds at Stow Lake.

The interns are excited about sharing their knowledge and using the spotting scopes to inform the public. They have been studying the herons and will welcome your questions!



Jeff Harter



Jeff Harter



SPNE

Clockwise from above: new intern Ian at first training; new intern Joy; interns Jose and David learn about the herons at Stow Lake.

## Great Horned Owls Charm the Public



Sandi Wong

On March 16th, volunteer Kevin Biggerstaff and executive director Nancy DeStefanis showed the nesting Great Horned Owl to the public. She has produced at least three owlets (see one at left)!



David Sullivan



## Birding for Everyone, March 2nd

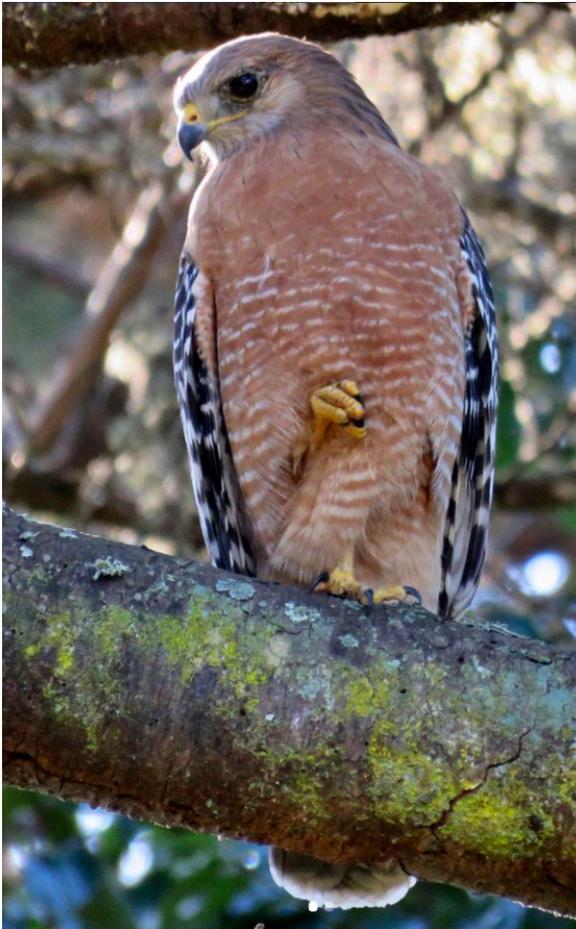
### Megan Prelinger, Naturalist

Eight participants arrived ready for the gentle drizzle that lasted throughout the walk in the SF Botanical Garden. The birds were out too: it was the lightest rainfall of the day and birdlife was abundant. On the main lawn a lethargic **Red-tailed Hawk** held our attention—it appeared wet, and was uncharacteristically browsing for food by walking around and poking the grass with beak and claw.

We discussed how raptors lack the type of waterproofing system that protects waterbirds, and they are vulnerable to damp and chill in winter weather, and may become weakened by it. They rely on nutrition, shelter, and breaks between storms to regroup.

Just a few yards away, pairs of **Brown Creepers** were full of energy, with males singing their characteristic piccolo-toned “tree tree beautiful tree!” song and enhancing the day with their spiral down-flights and energetic climbs up the cypress and pine trees.

Also singing loudly were **Song Sparrows**, and we reviewed how birds’ spring hormonal cycles are triggered by the number of hours of daylight, rather than by weather conditions. That is why a Song Sparrow will perch high and sing loudly in the rain.



Jeff Harter

Meandering around the garden, we saw that nearly every stand of trees was busy with a mixture of small birds, including **Townsend’s** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, and **Pygmy Nuthatches**. Even a **Hermit Thrush** was perched in a tree, as were a flock of **Golden-crowned Sparrows**.

The west end of the garden is a little wilder than the east side, with some taller trees and grass and shrub areas that are less cultivated. Such an area is typically rich with larger birds, and today we found raptors and woodpeckers there, including two **Red-shouldered Hawks**, a **Nuttall’s Woodpecker**, and a pair of **Northern Flickers**. Other notable sightings included a **House Wren** in the California Garden, an uncommon winter visitor.



Jeff Harter

From left: Red-shouldered Hawk, juvenile Great Blue Heron.

#### SF Botanical Garden March 2, 2019 Compiled by Megan Prelinger

#### 37 species:

Canada Goose 2	Common Raven 9
Mallard 4	Chestnut-backed Chickadee 8
Anna’s Hummingbird 3	Pygmy Nuthatch 30
Rufous/Allen’s Hummingbird 2	Brown Creeper 4
Western Gull 6	House Wren 1
California Gull 4	Pacific Wren 2
Gull sp. (Larinae sp.) 5	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 5
Great Blue Heron 1	Hermit Thrush 2
Red-shouldered Hawk 2	American Robin 5
Red-tailed Hawk 1	House Finch 3
Nuttall’s Woodpecker 1	Fox Sparrow 3
Northern Flicker 2	Dark-eyed Junco 15
Red-masked Parakeet 23	White-crowned Sparrow 3
Black Phoebe 8	Golden-crowned Sparrow 12
Steller’s Jay 4	Song Sparrow 15
California Scrub-Jay 4	California Towhee 2
American Crow 5	Orange-crowned Warbler 2
	Yellow-rumped Warbler 30
	Townsend’s Warbler 6



## Family Walk, February 23rd Missi Gavic, Naturalist

We gathered for Birding for Families at the SF Botanical Garden. My dad, Bob Hirt, board member of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, would co-lead the excursion. Our group was mostly families and young children (mostly beginning birders). We timed the walk for the blooming of the spectacular magnolias.

A few students spotted our first birds: **Canada Geese** picking through the lawn for insects. The kids were excited to see these birds up close. We discussed that we were now entering the home of the birds; and that it was important to observe quietly. The next birds we saw were **American Crows** flying over.

We spotted **Western Gulls, White-crowned Sparrows, Golden-crowned Sparrows,** and a **Fox Sparrow**. From there we ventured off course onto an unpaved path. We held a moment of silence to become aware of the sounds of nature and the birds around us. We discussed that when searching for birds we can use our eyes and ears as guides. This led to the discovery of a **Song Sparrow**.

Next we headed towards the century-old Redwood Grove, spotting three **Steller's Jays** on the way. They are easily distinguished from common California Scrub Jays by their prominent black crest, shorter body, and lack of white. Steller's Jays often mimic the call of hawks to scare away other birds from their food source. Overhead raptors were soaring—a **Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawks,** and a **Red-shouldered Hawk**.

We found a spot in the shade to rest and get out our field journals. Here we identified, reviewed, and began coloring the birds we had seen. **American Robins** could be seen hopping about in the grass nearby. **Anna's Hummingbirds** were zipping, diving, and chirping. Other species of birds spotted were **Dark-eyed Juncos, California Towhee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches, Bushtits,** and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**. As we rounded the garden, our budding naturalists were delighted to see some very active **Gray Squirrels!**

We ended at the Waterfowl Pond. A few **Black Phoebes** were flitting about near the water's edge, staying low and catching insects mid-air. The pond was teeming with fish, and there were a **Red-eared Slider Turtle** and two **Mallards**. To everyone's great delight a **Great Blue Heron** flew over us and landed nearby. We continued drawing birds, with the Great Blue Heron looking on from the pond. What a perfect bird to end our day on!

It's an honor to provide education and create enthusiasm for our natural world. A special thanks to Bob Hirt for his hawk-like eyes and wealth of knowledge. I am grateful to learn something new from him every time we go out birding together.

NOTE: Missi Gavic and her father, Bob Hirt, will lead two family walks at Stow Lake during Heron Watch, on May 18 and June 15, from 10:15 to 12:15. Walks will leave from the observation site. See page 5 for map.



Missi Gavic

Above: Children take time out to color the birds they've seen.

Right: Family groups set off; Bob Hirt at left, Missi Gavic center, wearing nametag.



Elizabeth Brown

# San Francisco Nature Education



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## 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, 10 am to noon in the SF Botanical Garden. Next walks: Apr. 6 and May 4, with Megan Prelinger or Sarah Barsness. Meet at SF Botanical Garden bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. **SF Botanical Garden:** Free to SF residents; non-residents pay a fee.

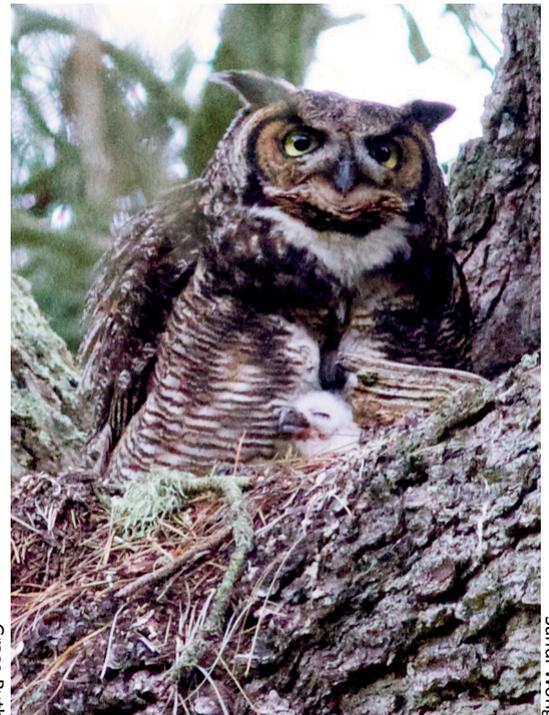
**Free Lecture & Slideshow:** Wednesday, Apr. 10, at 7 pm. Nancy DeStefanis will discuss the history of **Golden Gate Park** and the herons, hawks, and owls that nest there. SF Public Library, Merced Branch, 155 Winston Drive.

**Heron Watch** begins at Stow Lake on Apr. 13, and will run for ten Saturdays, 10 am–1 pm. Nature walks leave from observation site: April 13, Megan Prelinger; April 20, Alan Hopkins; April 27, Sharon Pretti. See map at left, and our **Heron Watch 2019 Flyer**.

San Francisco Nature Education is in its 19th year of delivering comprehensive environmental education programs to students from schools in the San Francisco Unified School District.



Grace Ruth

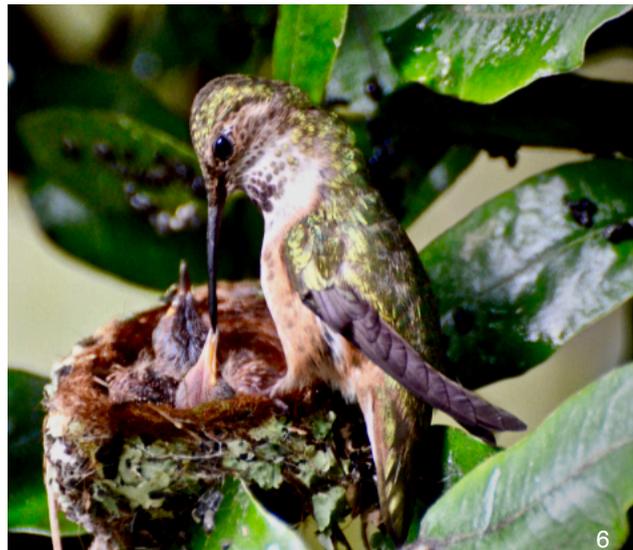


Sandi Wong



**An Allen's Hummingbird & Chicks  
in the SF Botanical Garden** Photos by Sandi Wong

Left to right, from above: female Allen's Hummingbird gathers nest material; building nest; two eggs; chicks hatch; feeding two-day-old hatchlings; feeding growing hatchlings. *continued...*





Hummingbirds grow and fledge in the Botanical Garden.  
Below: male Allen's Hummingbird. **Photos by Sandi Wong**

