



The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education · September 2019

Eight

Best Heron Season Ever!



Our 26th season of Heron Watch produced our best season yet. The Great Blue Herons at Stow Lake occupied eight nests, and hatched and fledged 21 chicks. The grand total of chicks that have fledged at Stow Lake is now 232.

It was our most exciting six months ever—the single Monterey Pine tree was bulging at the seams with heron nests. The three chicks in the last nest, #8, fledged in the last week of August.

Meanwhile, there was a lot of drama in the other tree on the tiny island. Red-tailed Hawks have occupied this tree for at least five years. This season three hawklets emerged. An observer spotted one hawklet fall out of the nest in early June, and a second one disappeared soon after. So then there was one. Thankfully, this hawklet fledged in late June.

Over nine Saturdays our 23 dedicated volunteers showed eager visitors the herons and hawks through spotting scopes, and field trip leaders led nature walks for the public. Two family walks were well attended by folks of all ages.

Interns Jose and David Aguayo completed the program on June 15th, and were honored with field packs and other gifts at a special lunch at Louis' restaurant at Ocean Beach. These middle school students were enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and did an excellent job of conveying information to the public.

We estimate that at least 2,500 people visited us at Stow Lake from April 13 through June 15! We will announce winter programs in our October issue.

Nancy

Nancy H. DeStefanis, Executive Director



Howard Levy



Grace Ruth

From top: parent flies to nest with heron chicks; Red-tailed Hawklet prepares for flight.

On the pages ahead:

- 2 Wrap-Up of 2019 Heron Watch
- 3 More Herons and Heron Watch Volunteers
- 4 What I Learned at Heron Watch, by Jose Aguayo
- 5 My Experiences at Heron Watch, by David Aguayo
- 6 Conservation Science Intensive, by Joy Chang; Upcoming Events

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

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Hérons and 2019 Heron Watch Volunteers



Family field trip led by Missi Gavic (fourth from right) and her dad, Bob Hirt (far right).

Volunteer photos: SFNE

Helene Sobol



Adult heron feeds hungry chicks.

Below: Volunteers and interns on the last day of Heron Watch. Front row: David and Jose Aguayo, Nancy DeStefanis, Anne Galjour, and Jennie Yoon. Back row: Greg Lyon, Kathy Duffy, Steve Wolford, Diane O'Donohue, and Kimiko Bouey.



Right: Kathy Duffy and visitor; Jennie Yoon shows the herons.



More Hawks, Herons, and Heron Watch Volunteers



Frank Marino



Frank Marino



David Sullivan

From left: Two hawklets in nest; newly-fledged Red-tail; parent Red-tailed Hawk near nest. Below: Volunteer crew for June 8th—Joy Chang, Kimiko Bouey, Ian McNamara, Nancy DeStefanis, Kathleen Sullivan, Diane O'Donahue, Janel Schulenberg, and David Sullivan.



SFNE



Jeff Harter

Heron chicks become agitated at the prospect of a feeding.



Jeff Harter

What I Learned at Heron Watch

Jose Aguayo, Intern

I graduated from the Heron Watch program on June 15th. During my internship I volunteered five Saturdays at Stow Lake. One important thing I learned is that at seven weeks a heron starts to branch-hop, and at approximately 11-12 weeks old it starts to fly. Herons are four feet tall, really tall for a bird. I learned about how they eat gophers, fish, and small birds. This season we broke the record for the number of heron nests. We got eight nests this season. Last season we had six.

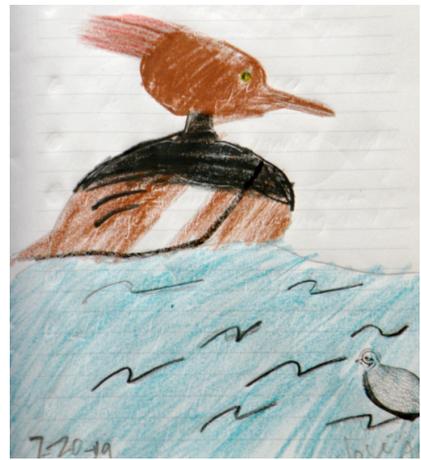
Incubation lasts for 25-29 days. Heron watching is fun! You go outside, have fun looking at amazing birds you have never seen before, and help by giving out information about herons and other birds. Overall, I increased my knowledge. In September I start seventh grade.

I enjoyed watching birds because we get to see these birds once a year, which makes it really special. I enjoyed the nature walks and snacks—watermelon, cantaloupe, and guacamole with chips. I liked helping visitors by giving them information about Great Blue Herons. By talking to lots of adults and children I learned to perfect my social skills. I liked working with other volunteers. They were helpful, gave me tips on how to talk to people, and encouraged me.

I enjoyed being an intern birder at Heron Watch. It really helped me learn to love the birds in the park, so that in the future, if I ever bird-watch on my own, I will know how to do it.

Hooded Merganser

One of the best things I saw in my opinion was the Hooded Merganser, one of my favorite birds.



Clockwise from top right: female Hooded Merganser and male Hooded Merganser by Jose; Nancy D with David, Jose, and their father at the graduation lunch. Above: Jose, Nancy D, and David at Stow Lake.

Ten Cool Facts About Hooded Mergansers

- A Hooded Merganser's diet is fish, aquatic insects, crabs, and crayfish
- Its species is *Lophodytes cucullatus*
- The species name derives from Greek: *lophos* meaning crest, and *dytes* meaning diver
- It measures 16–19 inches wide
- It weighs about 1.2–1.5 lbs.
- They nest in tree cavities
- Ducklings leave their nest cavity within 24 hours
- Hooded Mergansers find their prey under water by sight
- They are common in small ponds and rivers
- The oldest Hooded Merganser was 14 years, six months old



My Experiences at Heron Watch

David Aguayo, Intern



I really liked Heron Watch. What I enjoyed during the program was telling people about the Red-tailed Hawks nesting on the island, because they are my favorite type of bird. I was able to teach people how one hawk protects the eggs while the other adult hunts. Another thing I enjoyed was going on the nature walks. I loved seeing and learning about different plants and birds.

I came on two Saturdays in March for training and five more for Heron Watch. I learned a bunch of interesting facts about different birds. I enjoyed being with the trip leaders and volunteers who helped me on nature walks.

On one walk I found out that the Red-tailed Hawk eggs had hatched, so I was very excited when I saw the hawklets and they looked like puffballs.

Sighting of a Female Wild Turkey

One Saturday as we left Stow Lake I spotted a female Wild Turkey on Crossover Drive!!! Ms. D. stopped the car so we could get a good look and I did my sketch right there! I then did research and wrote up some cool facts on this very unexpected addition to my bird list.

I start sixth grade in September.



Ten Cool Facts about Wild Turkeys

- Largest game bird in North America
- The male's call can be heard from one mile away
- They eat seeds, nuts, acorns, and insects
- Female is 37 inches long and male is 46 inches
- Turkeys gobble
- They can fly but not too fast or high
- They can run 25 miles per hour
- Their top speed in flight is 55 miles per hour
- They mostly live in the east in North America
- They mostly live in coniferous hardwood forests



Clockwise from top right: Wild Turkey drawn by David; Red-tailed Hawk chicks in nest; David and Jose with gifts; the last hawk chick in the nest. Above: David, Andy Stone of SF Rec and Park, and Jose.





This summer I was fortunate to attend the Conservation Science Intensive camp with Audubon Canyon Ranch and apply skills I had earned at my SF Nature Education Heron Watch internship.

Sixteen girls including myself, ages 14 to 17, stayed four nights in Volunteer Canyon, near Bolinas Lagoon in Marin County. We had three incredible instructors at CSI: Julianne Bradbury, a resource ecologist at Modini Mayacammas Preserves; Natasha Lekach, education programs manager at Martin Griffin Preserve; and Jacqueline Levy, education programs manager at Bouverie Preserve. All three were inspiring examples of how women can make a difference in science and education.

Each day was packed with engaging activities, such as hiking, wildlife tracking, and practice in public speaking. On the first day I saw my first peregrine falcon, and on the second day we discovered a mountain lion kill site and used various clues to learn about it. By examining the bones and teeth we learned that the mountain lion's prey was a three-year-old mule deer.

Program participants stayed in two rustic yet cozy bunkhouses located near a dining hall where we ate

our mouthwatering plant-based meals. We closed each evening with a warm campfire. To spend four nights away from the city lights was extraordinarily memorable; every night I could gaze at a spread of stars sparkling across the pitch black sky.

A fire ecologist introduced us to the concept of "prescribed burns," which are controlled wildfires used to help keep forests and their biodiversity healthy. Before I learned about prescribed burns I had a negative view of wildfires due to California's enormous, destructive ones. However, I understand now the benefits of small, more frequent ones.

On the last day I observed mist netting early in the morning. Some of the entangled birds included an Orange-crowned Warbler, a Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and a male juvenile Anna's Hummingbird. Each bird was fitted with a unique nine-digit band, or if it already had one, new data was collected.

The Conservation Science Intensive was one of the most immersive and interactive science experiences I have ever had. I strongly recommend this program to other high school girls who have an interest in conservation and field research. I made wonderful friends and memories and learned invaluable lessons and skills, which I hope to take to the next level in the future.



Hiking through Audubon Canyon Ranch with CSI; Golden Eagle drawn by Joy.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

SF Nature Walks: Adults \$10, children always free. RAIN CANCELS.

Birding for Everyone: First Saturdays, 10 am to noon in the SF Botanical Garden. Meet at SFBG bookstore, 9th Ave. near Lincoln. Garden admission is free to SF residents; non-residents pay a fee. Next walks: Sept. 7 and Oct. 5.