



Executive Director's Corner



Dear Friends,

As we approach the end of 2020, I want to wish you a safe and healthy new year.

Your support has helped SFNE establish and expand our public and school programs in SF over the past 20 years. **Your contribution in this 20th anniversary year will help launch the third decade of our work.**

How does your gift help?

- Heron Watch 2021—Eight Saturday programs at the Stow Lake Colony, engaging and delighting park visitors and fostering environmental awareness through our volunteers, interns, and spotting scopes.
- Our Youth Internship Program will continue to teach and mentor middle and high school youth, who interact with park visitors during Heron Watch Saturdays. 250 interns have graduated to date.
- Field trips throughout the city: 30 field trips will be scheduled as soon as it is safe to walk together in small groups.
- Elementary school field trips to the Heron Colony will resume when safe.
- *The Blue Heron* newsletter is published online ten times per year. Besides great photos and videos of our favorite birds, we now include a column by Alan Hopkins on the best places to bird locally during the pandemic.

This is the perfect time to renew and send a gift to SFNE. Please be generous, and know that every tax-deductible donation will make a difference, whether it's \$1,000, \$500, \$250, or any amount. We appreciate your support. You can donate at www.sfnature.org.

Best regards,

Nancy H. DeStefanis

Please donate online—Network for Good portal is secure—
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Grace Ruth



Grace Ruth

Top: Townsend's Warbler; above: Hermit Thrush.
Photographed in the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

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Birding During the Pandemic at Fort Mason Alan Hopkins



Located on San Francisco Bay in the Marina District of San Francisco, Fort Mason can be accessed from the end of Franklin Street beyond the intersection with Bay Street.

Fort Mason, due to its strategic placement on the bay, has a fascinating history dating

back to 1797, when the Spanish occupied the area. In 1821, the settlement became part of Mexico. During the Mexican-American War, in 1846, the US claimed California. The fort became a military outpost to protect ships entering the bay. By the 1970s, the military had concluded that the fort no longer served a function, and the base was decommissioned.

Fortunately for us, in 1972, Congressmen Phillip Burton and William S. Mailliard co-sponsored legislation to turn former bases Fort Mason and the Presidio into urban parks. With a large amount of public support, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area was born. Fort Mason's former hospital is now the GGNRA's headquarters. Starting there, you can take a self-guided half-mile tour around the grounds that will give a more in-depth account of Fort Mason's history.

There are actually two parts to Fort Mason: lower Fort Mason was the embarkation point for soldiers and sailors, including my father, to ship out to military operations during World War II. Today the area has been converted into an arts center with theaters, galleries, and restaurants, but few birds.

Upper Fort Mason is where the birding action is. More than 200 species have been spotted on the grounds and in the bay beyond. Located at the top of a hill and surrounded by the urban landscape, the vegetation acts as a magnet for migratory birds.

Little of San Francisco's native flora remains here; it has been replaced by non-native plants from across the globe.

As a result of this diversity plants are in flower or producing fruit when most of our native species are dormant. The Community Garden is known for overwintering orioles that get nectar from exotic plants.

From the front of the headquarters building look south across Franklin Street to the large lawn in front of the elegant building known as the General's Residence or Officers Club. The building is now used for public events, so you are free to look for Western Bluebirds and Phoebes on the grounds. Franklin Street splits into Pope in front of the chapel; look to the left for the flagpole end and building 204.

To the right of 204 find the gate to the Community Garden. The garden is a maze of small plots, and on most days there are a few people tending their plots. Birds seem to love all the plantings. Older, larger trees around the garden's perimeter attract warblers, orioles, and sapsuckers.

The true attraction here is the number of migrants that visit. Rarities such as Poorwill, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Dickcissel are a sampling. Twenty-two species of warblers have been recorded, including Bay-breasted, Yellow-throated, and Cape May Warblers. This is the best place in the city to look for orioles. Hooded Orioles nest in the palms, Bullock's Orioles are common migrants, and Orchard Orioles occasionally over-winter here. We have David Assmann to thank for many of the records—David's consistent visits and careful observations have proven to be of value to us all.

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From top: Thick-billed Fox Sparrow; Golden-crowned Sparrow; entrance to Fort Mason.

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To check some of the other areas, return to Pope St. and head north to the lawn in front of the Hostelling International building. Watch for Meadowlarks and Blackbirds on the lawn. Red-masked Parakeets (Cherry-headed Conures) frequent eucalyptus trees that border the Great Meadow. From Funston St., walk between the



residences to Franklin St., where it ends at the Black Point Battery. The trees around the battery are typical of those that surround other city batteries and can host migrants.

There is a stairway at the northeast corner of the battery that leads down to Aquatic Park and Municipal Pier. Black-crowned Night-Herons roost in the London plane trees that line the end of Van Ness Avenue. Watch the bay for Western Grebes, Surf Scoters, Cormorants, and human swimmers from the Dolphin Club in Aquatic Park Cove. You can avoid walking back up the stairs by following the promenade west from the base of the pier to the Great Meadow on the western edge of Fort Mason complex.

Most of the buildings that cover the grounds are residences or offices, so if you go, please respect the privacy of the occupants. There is two-hour parking in front of building 201, park headquarters. Public restrooms are located in the southwest side of the Great Meadow.



Top: Red-masked Parakeet. Left: Common Poorwill; Above: Orchard Oriole.

Photos: Alan Hopkins

San Francisco Nature Education



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www.sfnature.org. All contributions are tax-deductible.
Our tax ID no. is 54-2111941.

San Francisco Nature Education is in its 20th year of delivering comprehensive environmental education programs to students from schools in the San Francisco Unified School District and conducting Saturday field trips and programs for adults and children.



Reaching for an abutilon flower



Guarding his territory at Stow Lake



Showing off his colors



Zeroing in on a salvia flower on Strawberry Hill



With California fuchsia on Strawberry Hill



With cuphea at Stow Lake

Heron Watch Scheduled to Start April 10th—Volunteers and Interns Welcome!



Photos: SFNE

Heron Watch interns in spring, 2015. Information and applications for [interns](#) and [volunteers](#) are online. See our planned 2021 Heron Watch program schedule on our [website](#).

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Ian Shanley McNamara



Video Link of the Month: [A Hawk Swoops In](#)

A Red-tailed Hawk steals a live gopher from a startled Great Blue Heron on Kennedy Drive in Golden Gate Park, near the entrance to Stow Lake, in May, 2019.

Video by Ian Shanley McNamara. Ian served as a Heron Watch intern in Spring 2019, and graduated from the program at the end of May.

