



# The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education • Summer 2021

## Executive Director's Corner



Dear Friends,

Despite the pandemic, more than 1,000 adults and children visited Heron Watch over seven Saturdays! Our volunteers were knowledgeable and adept at using spotting scopes to provide exciting views of the nesting herons and their chicks.

Our five interns excelled at all their projects: sketching the life cycle of the Great Blue Herons for a magazine we will publish in July, sketching birds observed on their eight field trips, volunteering with SF Rec & Park to perform habitat restoration, and operating scopes to observe herons close-up.

In mid-August we will update the calendar on our home page and list events in our September newsletter. We hope to start our field trips soon.

**We have extended our Spring Campaign to match a grant of \$10,000. Please donate online, or mail a donation by June 30th, to help us reach our goal. Thanks for your support! Have a wonderful summer.**

Best regards,

Nancy H. DeStefanis



Black Phoebe ("Shhh") above the Rustic Bridge by intern Jose. Two Black Phoebe nests—one below 1893 plaque and one below right arch.



Rachel Way

Above: 5-week-old heron chicks. Below: 8-week-old heron chicks fight over food.



Helene Sobol

Donate online or mail a check to: SFNE, PO Box 210303, SF CA 94121

[Become a Member/  
Donate Online](#)

Tax ID no.: 54-2111941. Membership: Adults, \$35; Seniors 65+, \$30. Joint Membership for 2 seniors at same residence \$50; students 21 or under, \$25. Email: [info@sfnature.org](mailto:info@sfnature.org) telephone: 415-205-0776 [www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org)

### On the pages ahead:

- 2 Heron Watch Interns' Graduation
- 3 Last Two Saturdays of Heron Watch
- 4 Strawberry Hill Habitat Restoration
- 5 Heron Watch Visitors, Interns, and Chicks in Early May
- 6 A Nature Walk with Alan Hopkins
- 7 Intern Nature Walk Reports; Support SFNE!
- 8 Heron Watch Volunteers on April 24th

# Heron Watch Interns' Graduation

## A Note from Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

Interns Joy Chang, David Aguayo, Jose Aguayo, Jackson Fukutome, and Anasuya Pawate graduated from the program on May 22, 2021. The interns had spent thirty hours studying the Great Blue Herons, sketching them and other local birds, going on weekly birding walks, and restoring habitat. During the program interns observed 43 species of birds. Three interns—Joy, Jose, and David—participated in the program for a second year.

Each of the interns received gifts in recognition of their hard work. Their sketches of birds will be collected in a self-published magazine. Senior intern Joy's short film on the Great Blue Herons and Joy's production of the interns' Robotics Animation Project on the herons will be published on our website in September.

All interns received a certificate of achievement for their outstanding work. We congratulate them!



Photos: Helene Sobol



Top: Joy with Ms. D. and scope. Middle row: Jackson with his drawing; Anasuya with her certificate and Ms. D; David and Jose hold two-volume edition of John J. Audubon's *Birds of America*. Anasuya and Jackson received John Muir Laws' *Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling*. Bottom: Five interns with Ms. D, left to right: Anasuya; Joy, senior intern; David; Jackson; and Jose.

## Last Two Saturdays of Heron Watch: Volunteers, Visitors, and Chicks

Photos: Helene Sobol



Volunteers Janel Schulenberg, Jennie Yoon, and Win Mixer on May 22nd.



Father and daughter at a spotting scope.



Volunteer Steve Worsfold back from hike with interns.



Volunteers Parker Kaye, Kiyoko Imazumi, and Gillian Imazumi.



Chicks fight over a mole.



Chick with bulging crop won the battle royal.

# Strawberry Hill Habitat Restoration



Photos: Ian Reid

Restoring habitat on Strawberry Island. Top row: David, Anasuya. Middle row: Joy, Pipevine Swallowtail, Anise Swallowtail.



**Joy, 11th-Grade Intern** Saturday, May 8th, the Heron Watch interns climbed up to Strawberry Hill. We were led by Andy Stone, SF Park and Rec supervisor, for a habitat restoration field trip. Andy taught us about plants that grow around Stow Lake. Some invasive species are German ivy and hemlock, and native plants like California gooseberry. Our objective was to remove plants that were crowding out native plants.

We spotted some butterflies, such as the **Pipevine Swallowtail** and the **Cabbage White**. Many native butterfly species are able



Above: Andy Stone and interns are ready to work.

to lay eggs on or eat only specific native plants, which is why it is even more important to control aggressive or invasive species.

We spent most of the time pruning and clearing out plants like sweet cicely, hemlock, and wild radish. It was an unusually hot day, but we worked mostly in the shade and were able to clear out multiple areas of vegetation. It was an enjoyable field trip!

# Heron Watch Visitors, Interns, and Chicks in Early May



Claire Hunter Chow

Adults and kids gather with Nancy DeStefanis on May 1st.



Ian Reid

Three 7-week-old chicks in nest #6.



Helene Sobol

Interns on a birding walk with volunteer Anne Galjour on May 1st.



Helene Sobol

Six-week-old chicks start to spread their wings.



Sophie Chow

Volunteers Claire, Anne, Isabelle, and interns Jose, Jackson, and Joy join Nancy DeStefanis to close the session with the elbow bump circle on May 1st.



Grace Ruth

Oldest chick is fierce as it grips parent's beak to stimulate regurgitation. Parents generally spend very little time with chicks after they feed them.

## A Nature Walk with Alan Hopkins Jackson, 8th-Grade Intern



On the morning of Saturday, April 24th, the other interns and I started our birding walk with Alan Hopkins, a renowned birder, and Ian Reid, a photographer. Alan told us about a bird checklist app named *eBird*, which was developed by Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology. It gives you a checklist of birds in

your area. When you find a bird on the list you check it off to keep track of what you see. The data is shared with others for scientific research, education, and conservation.

After spotting a **Western Gull** and some **Canada Geese** we headed down the path that loops around Stow Lake to look for **Black-crowned Night Herons** on the opposite side of Strawberry Hill, and we succeeded.

As the group walked on the paved path we saw a **Great Blue Heron** on the lawn below us, sneakily tracking something below the dirt. Then we realized it was hunting! Everyone grabbed phones as the heron jabbed its beak under the dirt and emerged with a gopher. It didn't even chew it! The heron just swallowed it whole and went on with its day. And so did we.

Our group then headed across the Rustic Bridge, which was erected in 1893, and survived the 1906 earthquake. We walked to Strawberry Hill and made a right turn to go to the Taiwan Pavilion. Up on the roof of the pavilion was a small **Black Phoebe** nest!

We sat at the tea table to have a snack, and Alan taught us how to clean our binoculars. Then we took a steep trail to the top of Strawberry Hill for the 360 degree view of the city, and to see the remains of Sweeney's Observatory, destroyed in the 1906 earthquake.



We hiked down to Huntington's Waterfall to eat lunch. I was surprised to see an **Allen's Hummingbird** bathing in the water.

Our last activity was to sketch one bird we found interesting. The bird I chose was the **Steller's Jay**, because of its unique color and feather patterns. Then we headed back to our site overlooking Heron Island.

It was a great day. We spotted 31 bird species *and* we learned a lot about bird watching and listening from Alan Hopkins.



Drawings, clockwise from top: Double-crested Cormorant; Steller's Jay; Turkey Vulture by Jackson.

Below, Jackson draws the Heron Tree nests.



Helene Sobol



On the walk, from left: Jackson and Jose, Alan Hopkins, David, Anasuya, and Joy.

Ian Reid

# Intern Nature Walk Reports



Ian Reid



Ian Reid



SFNE

**David, 7th-Grade Intern** On April 17th, we set up the spotting scopes and chairs. Then the interns drew the Heron Tree and the activities of the Great Blue Herons. At 10:30, we went on the weekly birding walk and were joined by Mrs. Sobol and Janel Schulenberg.

On the walk we stopped at the bench dedicated to SFNE volunteer and friend Pat Kearns, and we used the scope to investigate

the Red-tailed Hawk nest next to the Heron Tree. I have been studying Red-tailed Hawks for five years with Ms. D (Nancy DeStefanis), and what I saw shocked me. In the hawk nest was a Great Blue Heron stealing sticks and then flying back to nest #3!

We walked to the Taiwan Pavilion and got a good look at nests 4, 5, and 8. Later we met up with Ms. D. and talked of the 22 birds we saw. My favorite species were the **Red-tailed Hawk**, the **White-crowned Sparrow**, and the **California Towhee**.



From top left: Four interns with Alan Hopkins; Allen's Hummingbird at the waterfall; Red-tailed Hawk by David; Tree Swallow by Anasuya.



Helene Sobol

**Anasuya, 6th-Grade Intern** On May 1st, we sketched the heron activity in the **Great Blue Heron Tree**. The branch with nest #3 had fallen a couple of days before, and the nest and two chicks were lost. The chicks in nests 6 & 7 were five weeks old, and it was amazing how much they had grown!

We went on our birding walk with volunteers Helene Sobol and Anne Galjour. I spotted a **Tree Swallow** perched on a birdhouse over the water. All morning they had been flying over the lake. We observed 16 bird species, and I learned from Ms. Galjour how the **Anna's** and **Allen's Hummingbirds** dive differently: the Anna's dive is a simple J-dive, while the Allen's does a pendulum display for the female in addition. Later we sketched our favorite birds from the walk (mine was the swallow).



San Francisco  
Nature  
Education



**SUPPORT OUR SPRING CAMPAIGN! HELP US MEET OUR \$10,000 GOAL BY JUNE 30th!**

Please [donate online](#)—Network for Good portal is secure—  
or mail a check payable to SFNE: PO Box 210303, SF CA 94121

e-mail: [info@sfnature.org](mailto:info@sfnature.org) telephone: 415-205-0776 [www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org).  
All contributions are tax-deductible. Our tax ID no. is 54-2111941.

# Heron Watch Volunteers on April 24th



Volunteers Isabelle Chow, Claire Hunter Chow, Diane O'Donahue, and Pat Koblentz prepare to show the heron chicks.



Diane O'Donahue shows herons to father and son.

Volunteers: Helene Sobol



Folks arrived via all sorts of transportation to see the herons.

Adult heron with gopher.



Officers from Richmond Station watch the herons along with Isabelle and Claire.



Helene Sobol



Three-week old chicks in the nest with parent.

Ian Reid

SFNE