



## Executive Director's Corner



Dear Friends,

**The first two Saturdays of Heron Watch were a huge success.** Lots of children and adults came to see the heron chicks! The excitement was palpable as adult herons flew in to feed the chicks, and their partners left to feed themselves. Squawking chicks could be heard around Stow Lake! We now have a total of 11 chicks in five nests. We have one more nest with eggs. We are grateful to our volunteers, who share their knowledge of herons and provide spectacular views through high-powered spotting scopes. Heron Watch continues through May 22nd.

**This year we have six enthusiastic interns from middle and high school.** The eight-week (30-hour) program revolves around the local birds, using spotting scopes and binoculars, recording events of the heron colony in their sketchbooks, and habitat restoration. Joy and Agastya are shooting a short film about this year's herons for our website. All six interns are learning to journal, as they sketch nests and birds they spot on walks, and illustrate a heron's life cycle for a magazine we will publish in June.

**Our spring fundraising campaign continues through May 31st.** An anonymous donor has given us a matching grant of \$10,000. Please make a generous tax-deductible contribution. Last year we were unable to celebrate our 20th anniversary. Help us make up for lost revenues and support our environmental education and birding classes in schools, internship programs for middle and high school students, Heron Watch, and field trips. Thanks so much for your support.

Best regards,

Nancy H. DeStefanis

Link: Please read this *Richmond Review* [April 14th article](#) about the 2021 Stow Lake Heron Colony.



Above: Parent arrives at nest #6 to feed chicks. Below: Three chicks in nest #6 on April 18th.



Ian Reid

Helene Sobol

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# April 10: Opening Day of Heron Watch



Ian Reid

Above: Two chicks bill-dueling in their nest. Right: This Great Blue Heron raided our neighbor's outdoor fish pond recently at 14th & Noe Streets. We had no idea that our neighbors were keeping fish on their third floor deck . . . but the gorgeous yet unfortunate fish caught the heron's eye as it flew from bayside toward the west. —Brian Fitch



Brian Fitch

Clockwise from below: Volunteers Win Mixer; Pat Koblentz ; Jennie Yoon.



Helene Sobol



Helene Sobol



Helene Sobol

## Heron Watch on April 17th: Visitors and Growing Chicks



Grace Ruth



Helene Sobol

Above: Hungry chicks and parent in nest #6. Right, from top: Heron Watch regulars Chelsea Boilard and daughter, with former Supervisor Sandy Fewer, and Nancy DeStefanis; new chick in nest #2. Below: Volunteers at Heron Watch, left to right: Janel Schulenberg, Nancy D., Gillian Imazumi, and Kiyoko Imazumi. Gillian Imazumi shows heron chicks to a young visitor.



Ian Reid



Helene Sobol



Helene Sobol

## UPCOMING: HERON WATCH CONTINUES

Every Saturday, 10 am to 1 pm, through May 22, at our new Observation Site, southeast of our former site. Volunteers will direct attention to the nesting herons and chicks, explain their behavior and answer questions. **Please bring binoculars if you have them.** Because of the pandemic, we will set up spotting scopes as we deem safe. We clean lenses on scopes after every use. See the nests numbered on our website: [www.sfnature.org](http://www.sfnature.org).

Heron Watch is a free program, but donations are welcome. Please wear a mask and practice social distancing while among volunteers, interns, and the public. Click [here](#) for location at Stow Lake in our Heron Watch Flyer.

## Second Day of Intern Training at Stow Lake Anasuya, Sixth-Grade Intern



On March 27, we had our second training at the Stow Lake Observation Site. We joined Joy, senior intern, Nancy DeStefanis, and Steve Wolsford to unload equipment. Steve set each of us up with a spotting scope and tripod.

It was fun to watch all the nests close-up! My brother Agastya and I saw something which we believed was an egg in nest #7.

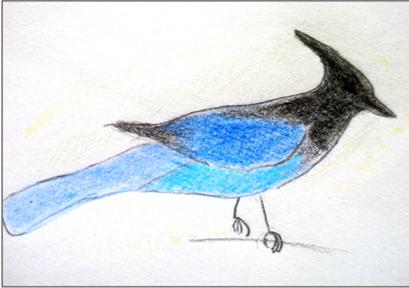
Joy taught us how to do nature journaling, and for some time after that we looked through the scopes and sketched what we saw in the nests. There was a lot of activity, particularly in nest #8, where the herons delivered sticks and greeted each other using a stretch display.

Then we had ten minutes to take a pop quiz on herons. After that we went on a walk around the Stow Lake.

We observed 17 bird species. One of my favorites was a Red-winged Blackbird.

After she reviewed the quizzes (we all got A's!), Ms. D discussed projects. We picked a topic about a particular stage in nesting season. We would later make an outline of heron activities during that stage, and in the six-week internship draw six pictures of herons doing those activities. The final result will be a magazine of all the drawings by the interns. Then Joy discussed another assignment—sketching any animal of our choice for our next meeting on April 10th.

Ms. D then gave us our own notebooks for observations. She let the new interns take home binoculars, a gift from SF Nature Education. We all gave an elbow-bump, packed up, and said bye. I used my new binoculars at Arastradero Preserve last weekend and observed woodpeckers!



Drawings by Anasuya, from top: Steller's Jay, Red-winged Blackbird, Canada Goose. Above: Interns Jose, Jackson, Joy, Anasuya, Agastya, and David in front of the HeronMobile.



Joy, senior intern, teaches nature journaling.



Agastya using the scope.

# What We Did on Opening Day of Heron Watch Jose, 8th-Grade Intern

Jose Amayo



Saturday April 10th was a big day, opening day for the SF Nature Education Heron Watch Program. On Saturday morning, all interns arrived promptly at 9 AM, unloaded table, deck chairs and equipment, and started sketching the six active nests on the tree where Great Blue Herons nest.

After about an hour of sketching, Agastya, Anasuya, Joy, David, Jackson, and I walked around Stow Lake to the bench honoring Pat Kearns (longtime SF Nature volunteer and friend), where we were able to see the Red-tailed Hawk's nest, and we took our snack break.

Thirty minutes went by and we saw a Great Blue Heron from nest #3 make five trips to steal sticks from the Red-tailed Hawk's nest! This indicated that the Red-tailed Hawk was no longer using the nest, which upset fellow intern David very much. David has been closely watching the hawk nest since 2016.

Then the crew and I, with volunteer Janel and photographer Helene Sobol, continued our walk around Stow Lake to find what kinds of birds were roaming around. Some interesting birds we spotted were a Black Phoebe in a nest on the Rustic Bridge, Dark-eyed Juncos, and an Anna's Hummingbird.

The highlight of the day was seeing the Black-Crowned Night-Heron flying by and then standing right in front of us! In all, we saw 21 species.

After the walk we reviewed all the birds we had discovered. We called it a day, packed up, and loaded the cars. Opening day of Heron Watch was definitely a great day. Lots of people visited the program and had tons of fun!



Photos: Helene Sobol

From top, drawings by Jose: Black-crowned Night-Heron, Golden-crowned Sparrow; Mallard.

Above: Interns on nature walk at the Rustic Bridge: Jackson, Jose, Anasuya, and David.

Right: Interns line up to show their sketchbooks to Ms. D. Left to right: Jackson, Jose, David, Anasuya, Agastya, and Joy, with Nancy DeStefanis seated in front.





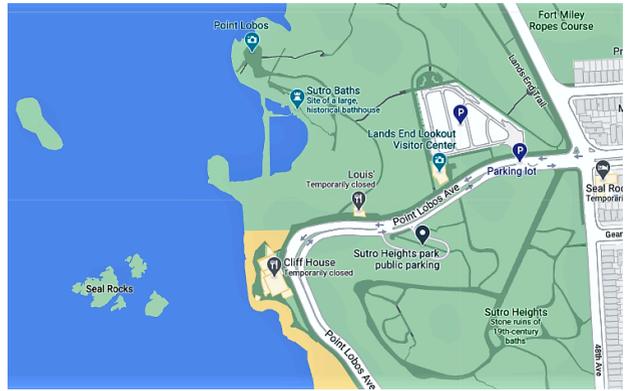
When birdwatchers visiting the city ask me where to go birding, The Sutro District—with Cliff House, Seal Rocks, Sutro Baths, and Point Lobos—is at the top of my list. With the pounding Pacific Ocean crashing against bird-covered rocks, a brackish pond, and a bit of a wetland, the area has many habitats to explore. Although the Cliff House restaurant and Louis' Diner have closed, there is still access to the best birding spots from the Lands End Visitor Center parking lot off Point Lobos Avenue.

Along the Cliff House's north side a flight of steps goes to a large observation deck where it is possible to look for shorebirds on the rocks. To the north are the remains of Sutro Baths. Adolph Sutro created the baths in 1894. They contained an ocean pool aquarium and massive glass-covered swimming pools that accommodated 10,000 bathers.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area bought the land in 1973. GGNRA has since retained some of the historic foundation, but has also created native habitat and the visitor center.

Seal Rocks have nesting **Western Gulls** and **Brandt's Cormorants**. **Pelagic Cormorants** visit but are less common; a cormorant on Sutro Baths Pond will be a **Double-crested Cormorant**. **Black Oystercatchers** are the only nesting shorebird. **Black Turnstones**, **Surfbirds**, and occasionally **Wandering Tattlers** begin to trickle in during July and will stay into May. Usually high tide is the best time to look for shorebirds when they are roosting. Unfortunately, our shorebird numbers have declined due to a recent accumulation of sand over rocks the birds once fed on at low tide. **Brown Pelicans** and their accomplices **Heermann's Gulls** can be abundant at times. Winter gulls include **California**, **Glaucous-winged**, **Herring**, and **Iceland (Thayer's)**.

Seal Rocks are misnamed—there have never been seals on the rocks. When there are pinnipeds on the rocks they are **California Sea Lions**. There are other mammals offshore;



hard to see but almost always present are **Harbor Porpoises**. Closer to shore and much larger are **Bottlenose Dolphins**. When present, their larger dorsal fins make them easy to see. In the spring **Gray Whales** migrate by when whales with calves are close to shore. **Humpback Whales** have become

more common recently—their exuberant blows can be seen from a distance.

The baths themselves are now a brackish pond used by bathing **gulls** and hunting **herons** and **egrets**. **Mallards**, **Ring-necked Ducks**, and **Buffleheads** are the most common waterfowl. Occasionally something rare, such as a **Tufted Duck**, will show up.



The observation deck at Point Lobos is a good place to watch for seabirds. **Common Murres** are seen year-round.

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From top: Map of the area; Sutro Baths ruins and Seal Rocks; Green Heron at Sutro Baths.

Photos: Alan Hopkins

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**Pigeon Guillemots** are present in the summer and tiny **Marbled Murrelets** are sometimes seen in the fall and winter. Rafts of **Western Grebes** are offshore.

During the summer and fall, post-breeding **Elegant Terns** arrive from Mexico at about the same time **Parasitic Jaegers** are migrating south from the Arctic. Aerial dogfights are frequent as the jaegers attempt to rob fish from the terns.

Among the most spectacular occurrences: tens of thousands of **Sooty Shearwaters** swirling around just over the surface like clouds of smoke.



Photos: Alan Hopkins

From top left: Surf Scup and Black Turnstone below the Cliff House; Humpback Whales off Point Lobos observation deck; Sooty Shearwaters beyond Seal Rocks.

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San Francisco Nature Education is in its 21st 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.

## Great Horned Owls of Glen Park Sandi Wong

Young Great-Horned Owls typically leave the nest when they're six weeks of age. In a stage known as branching they climb onto nearby tree branches. At seven weeks they begin taking short flights, and at nine to ten weeks they can fly.

This mother Great Horned Owl (below) raised three owlets in a eucalyptus tree. Here the owlets are about six weeks old. One of the owlets branched on April 7th.

