



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

Winding Up the Year

Blue Heron Newsletter • December 2009

Executive Director's Corner

Nancy DeStefanis

I'd like to wish you and yours a very happy holiday and new year. We hope you'll kick off the year with an excursion to Heron's Head Park on Saturday, January 9th. Heron's Head is very birdy during the winter migrations, and the Lowell H.S. interns will be sure that you see the birds up close and personal!

We also hope you'll spread the word about our new *Birding Classes for Kids* program at the San Francisco Botanical Garden. The monthly classes and birding walks are led by SF Nature Education naturalists—and the young people and accompanying adults can always count on a fun learning experience.

We look forward to seeing you on some of our 33 birding walks in 2010!

Best regards,
Nancy DeStefanis

Please Donate Now!

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Thank you to all who have responded to our end-of-year appeal for contributions. We greatly appreciate your support and will be sending you a special gift from San Francisco Nature Education along with an acknowledgment of your donation.

If you haven't yet given, we ask you contribute now. Your support will enable SF Nature Education to continue our school programs for underserved students, as well as our 33 Saturday programs for

adults and children in 2010. In these lean times we need your support more than ever. SF Nature Education operates on a budget of less than \$100,000, so every dollar you donate is utilized to the fullest.

Please 

or mail your contribution to:
San Francisco Nature Education, 3450 Geary Blvd.,
Suite 208, San Francisco, CA 94118

Winter Field Trips Commence

Tina Lui, School Program Coordinator

In early November, naturalists from SF Nature Education led field trips for 55 kindergartners from Bret Harte Elementary School and their chaperones. A classroom presentation about birds by Tina Lui at Bret Harte preceded the field trip to the SF Botanical



Garden. There the students enjoyed sunny weather as they walked among bamboo trees and observed the Mallards and Coots in the Wildfowl Pond.

Naturalists also led field trips for third graders from Frank McCoppin Elementary School. Teachers Ms. Hong and Ms. Quan accompanied their classes, and numerous parents came along as chaperones.

(more pictures on next page)



Above: Naturalist Tina Lui, teacher Ms. Scott, and students emerge from the bamboo grove at the Botanical Garden.

Left: Naturalist Linda Grant, teacher Ms. Cooper, chaperone, and kindergarten class take a snack break in the Botanical Garden.



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Third graders in the Ancient Plant Garden try to locate a bird with their binoculars.



Beth Kamieniecki leads group of third graders; teacher Ms. Hong is at left.



Chaperone and students get their hands on a dawn redwood in the SF Botanical Garden. Photos: SFNE

Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

Saturday, December 5th, started out chilly, but the sun soon came out to warm the participants of the *Birding for Everyone* walk. We started in the Demonstration Garden, where we encountered a flock of sparrows feeding. Included were mostly **White-crowned Sparrows** in adult and immature plumage, and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** for comparison.



Hooded Mergansers

From there, we moved on to the Wildfowl Pond. Just as we arrived, a pair of **Hooded Mergansers** flew in! They stayed visible just long enough for us to observe the flashy plumage of the male and the futuristic crest of the female. Then they disappeared under some overhanging trees and were not seen again, despite our best efforts.

There was lots of other activity in the area of the pond. We were treated to great views of **Mallards**, **American Coots**, and a **Western Gull**, and lots of **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Song Sparrows**, and a **Black Phoebe** on the periphery. On the island in the middle of the pond were two birds that are often confused with one another: **Fox Sparrow** and **Hermit Thrush**. This was a great opportunity to compare the two species side by side.

We eventually moved on to the Chilean Garden, where we looked for the **Red-breasted Sapsucker** in the



Red-breasted Sapsucker



Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Photo: Judy Harter

“sapsucker” tree, a tree riddled with wells from many prior visits by this sap-loving bird. The bird was not present, so we moved on.

On the way to the Succulent Garden is a dwarf redwood, and to our surprise the **Red-breasted Sapsucker** was visible on a bare section of trunk. Everyone had great views of this elusive bird.

Our next treat was a **Red-tailed Hawk** that flew in just above our heads to land in a nearby tree. Other birds in the area were an **American Robin**, **Scrub Jays**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**.

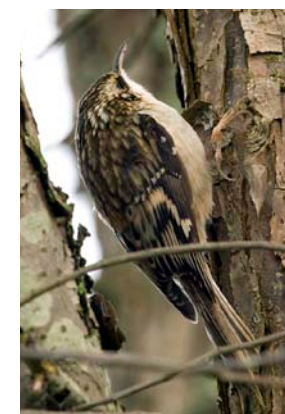
We moved from the Succulent Garden to the California Garden, which was relatively quiet, with only a few **Song Sparrows** there. We decided to try for another look at the Mergansers, so we cut through the South Africa Garden. There we came upon a family of **Brown Creepers** that was so busy foraging they paid no attention to us. This was a very active spot, with **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and a **Townsend's Warbler**.

Although we didn't find the Mergansers, we got a special parting treat when we came upon a flock of **California Quail** adjacent to the Great Meadow. There were two males and three females feeding on the lawn. This proved a very satisfying end to another great bird walk.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Brown Creeper

Photo: Rick Leche

Birding Tours of Heron's Head Park

In 2010, San Francisco Nature Education and SF's Lowell High School will continue their collaboration into a second year.

SFNE has trained nine enthusiastic Lowell interns to lead tours at the reclaimed Heron's Head Park wetlands in the southeastern part of San Francisco.

Thanks to the Port of San Francisco—and the efforts of many others—trash has been removed, trails improved, and the wetlands expanded and repurposed; Heron's Head Park is now a reality.



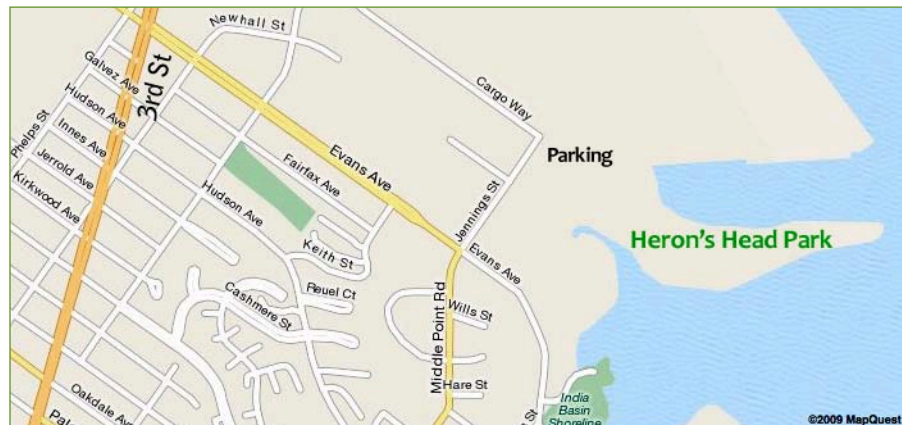
Greater Yellowlegs

Photo: Rick Leche

It hosts more than 100 bird species during the winter, including the **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Least Sandpiper**, **Long-billed Curlew**, **Eared Grebe**, **Surf Scoter**, **Ruddy Duck**, **Bufflehead**, **Snowy Egret**, **Willet**, and **American Kestrel**, among many others.

Interns will be joined by Nancy DeStefanis and SF Nature Education naturalists Alan Hopkins, Beth Kamieniecki, and Ken Moy.

This public program is co-sponsored by Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) and the Port of San Francisco.



Common Goldeneye

Photo: Doug Greenberg



Least Sandpiper

Photo: Bob Gunderson

Donate to SF Nature Education; Enjoy a Free Peet's Coffee

Peet's Coffee at Laurel Village has chosen San Francisco Nature Education to be the beneficiary of all charitable donations made at that location on Thursday, December 24th, 2009.

Peet's will generously match all customer donations. They will also display flyers about SF Nature Education programs. Our thanks go to Peet's employee and former SFNE volunteer Jack Baird for the nomination.

If you're in the neighborhood on December 24th, please stop by Peet's at 3419 California Street and Laurel. Make a donation to support San Francisco Nature Education and enjoy your free cup of coffee!

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: January 2 and February 6, 10 am—noon. Meet us near the bookstore inside the main gate of the SF Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park (MLK Drive near 9th Ave. at Lincoln). Adults \$10.

Birding Classes for Kids

First Saturdays: January 2 and February 6, 10 am—noon. Meet us near the bookstore inside the main gate of the SF Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park (MLK Drive near 9th Ave. at Lincoln). Adults \$10; children free.

Birds Online! You can see many photos and videos of birds and plants in the SF Botanical Garden at SFinBloom.com. Birds are featured first in its [photo galleries](#).

Wish List: Used backpacks and binoculars. Many of our students lack backpacks. We need a large number to lend during our field trips so students can be hands-free to focus binoculars. Please mail to SF Nature Education office or drop them off.

Dates: Saturdays, January 9, February 6, & March 6, 2010.

Tours: 10, 10:30, 11, and last tour @ 11:30 am. Tours take approximately one hour.

Location: Jennings Street & Cargo Way, two blocks south of Pier 96.

Donation: Adults \$10, children free; no one turned away due to lack of funds.

Parking: Available near park entrance. Please visit sfnature.org for more information, or plan your trip via public transit at [MUNI's web site](#).

Recent Attractions: Sighted at Stow Lake

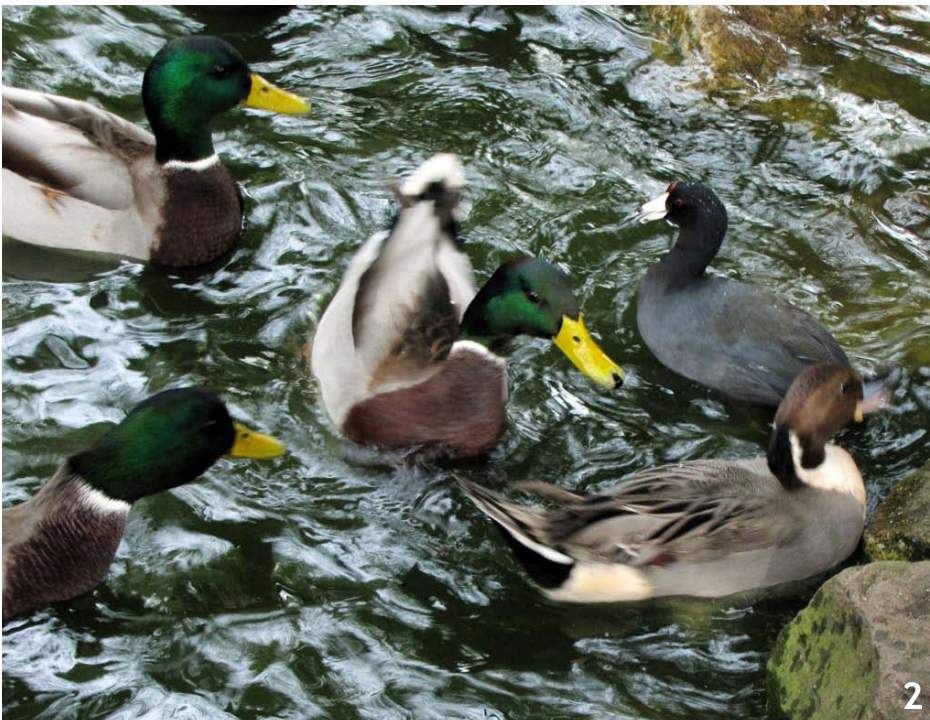
Judy Harter

We recently spotted a lone male **Northern Pintail** (1) among the large local Mallard population near the southern edge of Stow Lake. A gracefully proportioned dabbling duck found across North America, the breeding Northern Pintail male has a brown head, blue-gray beak, whitish breast, and long pointed tail.



Until someone started feeding them, the species seemed to be coexisting harmoniously. But as soon there was competition for food, the Mallard drakes chased the Northern Pintail right out of the water. The nearby **American Coot** showed no interest (2 and 3).

In our many trips around Stow Lake we have never



Photos: Judy Harter

before seen a Northern Pintail. We hope it stays in the neighborhood!

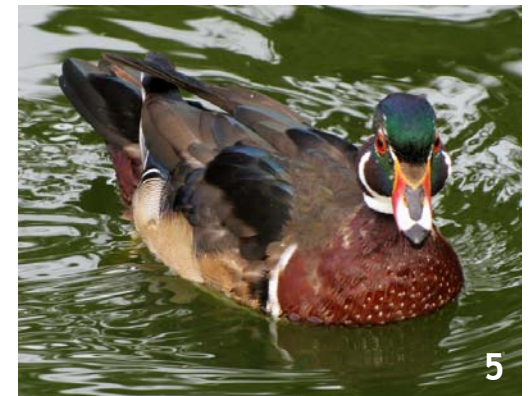
Sighted near the boat house at Stow Lake on the same November day was a spectacular **Wood Duck** in breeding plumage (4 and 5). Unlike the vast majority of North American ducks, Wood Ducks build their nests in trees. They are the only North American ducks to typically produce two broods in a single year.



Newly-hatched ducklings must jump down from the nest tree and find their way to the nearest body of water. That's a tall order for a hatchling.

This lone male was content to dabble with a

group of Western Gulls and Mallards, but a feisty little **Pied-billed Grebe** (6) chased it some distance away. Not intimidated, the Wood Duck was still there a few weeks later.



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