

We Need Your Support

Blue Heron Newsletter • November 2009

Executive Director's Corner

Nancy DeStefanis

Dear Friends,

We need your help more than ever. To continue our current level of programming we need your increased support. The global financial crisis is challenging for us all, particularly for a small nonprofit like San Francisco Nature Education (SFNE).

I'm sure you remember the magic of the first time you visited a park, went for a hike, or identified a bird, and how it opened up your worldview. I am writing today to urge you to contribute so our naturalists can continue to provide exciting Saturday programs for the public and field trips for third, fourth, and fifth graders who might never have this chance otherwise.

The story of one of our new interns, Yvonne C., who first connected with San Francisco Nature Education in 2003, while still in elementary school, illustrates the impact we are having on youth and the wider community.

Yvonne first spotted an Anna's Hummingbird in Golden Gate Park six years ago. She was a fourth grader in SFNE's nature program at E.R. Taylor, an excellent school located in SF's Portola District that draws students from Hunter's Point and Bayview.

Fast-forward to today . . . and Yvonne is a junior at Lowell High School. She continues to live in the Bayview, and recently applied for SFNE's Heron's Head Park-Bayview Birders Saturday internship program.

At our interview her eyes lit up as she told us how her first birding experiences with SFNE introduced her and her classmates to the wonders of birds in our local parks.

She recalled working with her classmates, in 2003, to make their California Quail costumes, practicing the quail's call, and performing a skit for SFNE's second annual bird-calling contest. All 100 participating students received a new *National Geographic Field Guide*. Yvonne brought her copy,

with my personalized note on the flyleaf, to our interview.

She talked about how her interest in birds has grown since then. Last summer she applied her interest during a summer interpretive program at Alcatraz Island, where she enjoyed identifying seabirds for new and seasoned birders of all ages.

On winter weekends you can now find Yvonne in field training in Heron's Head Park. She is preparing to lead public tours at these remarkable wetlands during January, February, and March 2010.

Not only did SFNE introduce Yvonne to the wonders of the natural world, she now shares her passion and knowledge to educate and inspire others. Remember that this is the generation of children growing up with the reality of global warming and unprecedented environmental challenges. What will it mean if our children have fewer opportunities to experience nature?

Whatever you can contribute will support programming for 1200 children during the 2009-2010 school year, and will help support our twenty-one Saturday public excursions.

\$1,500 sponsors two classroom visits and two field trips for two third-grade classes.

\$1,000 sponsors a classroom visit and a field trip to the coast for two fourth-grade classes.

\$500 sponsors one fourth-grade class.

\$250 sponsors books and materials for two classes.

\$100 sponsors one pair of binoculars for student use.

Please give generously; your support is vital to educating and inspiring the next generation of environmental leaders.

You can donate online [here](#). Thank you.

Best regards,
Nancy DeStefanis

School Program Underway

Tina Lui, School Program Coordinator

In October, three SF Nature Education naturalists visited two third-grade classrooms at McCoppin Elementary School in SF. Each class learned about bird wings and bones, sketched a California Quail or Canada Goose, and observed beaks of local birds.



Photo: SFNE

Third graders sketch a California Quail in their classroom.

Students participated in a conservation activity that demonstrated the importance of disposing of plastic properly, i.e., in a recycle or trash bin. As pieces of plastic were dropped in a tub of water, students observed that plastic bottles, bags, and caps float on top, where seabirds might mistake them for food and choke on them.

These groups and others are now preparing for their two-hour field trips to San Francisco Botanical Garden in early November. Each naturalist will lead a small group of six or seven students. Additional schools will participate from January through spring 2010. (*more pictures on next page*)



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Third-grade students get their hands on some local birds.



Photo: SFNE

How does it feel to have wings?



Photo: SFNE

SFNE's Linda Grant and McCoppin students learn about beaks.

Bayview Birders Program at Heron's Head Park Alan Hopkins

San Francisco Nature Education and Lowell H.S. continue to collaborate on the Bayview Birders program. Last year, during the pilot program, six high school interns from Lowell H.S. studied the birds at Heron's Head Park, in the southeastern part of the city, and led public tours.

Once a blighted and ignored landfill known as Pier 98, Heron's Head Park is now a favored destination for bird lovers and people who just want a unique view of San Francisco Bay. In 1991, spurred by the wealth of bird life found there, Golden Gate Audubon proposed that the area become a park for both people and birds. Thanks to the Port of San Francisco, and many others, trash was removed, trails were improved, and the precious wetlands were expanded and refined—Heron's Head Park became a reality.

Nine interns have signed up for this year's program. During one classroom visit and three field trainings this winter, the interns will learn about bird anatomy and migration from Allan Ridley as well as interpretive skills from Angie Geiger. I will be helping students identify many of the 100 species that stop at the park during winter migration.

Interns spotted 34 different species at the October field training, including: Horned Grebes, Brown Pelicans, an American Kestrel (also known as the Sparrow Hawk), Black-necked Stilts, Black Oystercatchers, Greater Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plovers, and herons and egrets.



Photo: Alan Hopkins

Lowell H.S. interns attended field training in October.



Photo: Alan Hopkins

The group sketches shore birds after field training.

Intern-led public tours of Heron's Head Park will be held on January 9, February 6, and March 6, 2010. All visitors are welcome. Adults will be asked for a \$10 donation, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Children are free.

Tours take one hour and leave at 10 am, 11 am, and 11:30 am. This program is co-sponsored by Literacy for Environmental Justice and Port of San Francisco.

Please visit sfnature.org for more information.



Photo: Alan Hopkins

Interns learn to use a spotting scope and observe birds at Heron's Head.

Stow Lake Renovation Revisited

Nancy DeStefanis, Executive Director

In 2004, Stow Lake underwent its first major renovation in over fifty years. Algae bloom that had become prevalent was killing hundreds of fish of different species and affecting the Great Blue Herons that nest there each year.

I met with the park planners and we agreed to a renovation plan beginning in August 2004 and ending by December 15, 2004, so the Great Blue Herons would not be disturbed by the noise of general construction and the placement of pipes in the water to improve circulation.



Photo: SFNE

In 2004, Jim Elliot and his daughter access Stow Lake via the newly added sidewalk.

While the construction was going on, I worked with the park planners to ensure that there was additional access for local citizens with disabilities. As a result, two new sidewalks were installed near the

parking lot, so that the public and students in our programs would no longer have to walk in the path of automobile traffic.



Photo: Mary Rose Cassa

Aquamogs are specialized dredging equipment for shallow water. The dredger scooped sediment from the bottom of the lake and deposited it in a collection area at lakeside for later removal by SF's Recreation and Park Department.



Photo: Mary Rose Cassa

An Aquamog removes dirt and debris from Stow Lake.

Other improvements included more curb ramps for people in wheelchairs to access the sidewalk. New parking spaces reserved for the disabled were added.

On Christmas Eve of 2004, the SF Recreation and Park Department's general manager, Yomi Agunbiade, called a meeting to discuss the contractor's inability to finish the project on time. After much discussion and consulting the contract, which stipulated that the work be suspended during the herons' nesting period (January to July), the general manager agreed that work at Stow Lake must be postponed. The project was finished after the nesting period had ended.

Five years later all of us can enjoy a freshly aerated lake with new picnic tables and access for all.

Upcoming Events

Birding Classes for Kids with Andy Kleinhesselink

First Saturdays, November 7th & December 5th, 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.

Birding for Everyone with Angie Geiger

First Saturdays, November 7th & December 5th, 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.



Townsend's Warbler.



Photos: Judy Harter

Song Sparrow in the Ancient Plant Garden at SFBG.

Birds Online! You can see many birds and plants of the SF Botanical Garden at a new web site: SFinBloom.com. Birds are featured first in the [photo galleries](#).

Wish List: Used or new binoculars and backpacks for our programs.

San Francisco
Nature
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Contact SFNE:
e-mail: info@sfnature.org
telephone: 415-387-9160
www.sfnature.org

Donations to San Francisco Nature Education from September 1, 2008 to August 31, 2009

The generosity of these individuals, businesses, and foundations has made possible the special relationships between students and their SF Nature Education mentors, and has allowed us to expand our public programs. Thank you!

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