

Return to Heron's Head

Blue Heron Newsletter • January 2010

Executive Director's Corner

Nancy DeStefanis

Happy New Year!

Thanks to all who contributed to our end of the year appeal. We greatly appreciate your donations that support our school and public programs.

This year marks our tenth anniversary of delivering outdoor environmental education programs to students in underserved elementary schools and to the general public in our popular Saturday programs.

Please join us on one of our upcoming birding tours of the San Francisco Botanical Garden or Heron's Head Park.

And thanks again for your support.

Best regards,
Nancy DeStefanis

Support SF Nature Education:



Donate Now

Inside

- 2 Heron's Head Park Photos
- 3 New Event: *Birding Safari*; School Report
- 4 School photos; Upcoming Events; How to Volunteer at SF Nature Ed.
- 5 *Birding for Everyone* Report



Opening Day at Heron's Head Park

Aileen Luo, Intern

On the morning of January 9th, a group of about thirty people, including adults and children, turned out for opening day tours at Heron's Head Park in the southeastern corner of San Francisco.

Leading the first tour of the day I was a bit nervous. This tour was for a group of children from **Friends of the Children**, which mentors and tutors low-income students throughout San Francisco. Four children came with three adult chaperones. As the tour progressed we began to get acquainted with the children, and we all were able to relax and enjoy ourselves.

Yvonne and I led the group into Heron's Head Park, and as we walked one of the youngsters pointed to a female Bufflehead and shouted, "What's that bird?" We heard that question over and over during our tour. As we walked down the dirt path the kids pointed out birds, and we would identify the birds' species along with some interesting facts about their behavior.



Interns at Javalencia Cafe after a winter morning in the field.



Intern Aileen Luo demonstrates how to use a spotting scope.

Sometimes the children shouted the names of the birds without prompting. When they tried to locate a bird with their binoculars but couldn't, they would become a little frustrated. But when they did eventually find it their faces lit up with satisfaction and amazement at how close the bird seemed, especially when seen through the spotting scope.

One of the highlights of the morning was the sighting of a Great Blue Heron. I had mentioned earlier that the park had been named after the Great Blue Heron, and the possibility of seeing one on our tour. The joy on the children's faces upon spotting it made me smile, and reinforced the reasons that I woke up early to lead tours on a cold Saturday morning.



Student sketches a bird on the cover of her field journal.

(continued on next two pages)

Heron's Head Park *(continued from page 1)*

We spotted a very respectable 45 bird species, and counted about 452 individual birds. Not bad for our first day! Here are some photos of the birds and the people who watched them at Heron's Head Park.

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



Black-necked Stilt

Photo: Ernest Gaudreau



Interns Melissa and Megan with student using a scope.

Photo: SFNE



Horned Grebe

Photo: Ernest Gaudreau



Photo: SFNE

L to R: Yvonne, Lowell intern; student; *Friends of the Children* director Charlotte Burchard; student; FOTC chaperone with two students; Beth Kamieniecki, SFNE naturalists; Aileen Luo, Lowell intern.



American Wigeons

Photo: Judy Harter



Observing marsh birds.

Photo: SFNE



Black-bellied Plover

Photo: Ernest Gaudreau



Willet

Photo: Ernest Gaudreau



Brant Goose

Photo: Doug Greenberg

Thanks for Foundation Support

We are grateful to ERM Foundation and the Jiji Foundation for their generous support of SF Nature Education's school programs in 2010. Some ERM employees have volunteered for SFNE's popular Saturday program at Stow Lake, called Heron Watch. This year will be the third in which ERM employees have participated. We welcome them back.



Photos: SFNE

Myla Ablog, ecologist for LEJ, and Nancy DeStefanis in front of the new Eco Center.

SF Nature Education received this note from a Heron's Head tour participant:

Hi Nancy,
Thanks again for a wonderful birding morning at Heron's Head Park. The Lowell H.S. interns were wonderful: Justine and Rosanna (and Arty on the scope)—enthusiastic and knowledgeable! And seeing the three Brants was a special treat, too.

I appreciate the work and efforts of the SF Nature Education programs.

Sincerely,
Sara Segal



Intern Aileen helps a student spot a bird.

Hidden Feathers: A Birding Safari Fundraiser in SF Andy Kleinhesselink



Few cities have as many bird species as San Francisco. Over 390 bird species have been recorded in the city to date, and 149 species have been seen in a single day! Anyone who lives near San Francisco is in one of the most exciting places to watch birds in the United States.

This is especially so in the spring when migrating birds surge north along the California coast. Each spring birders celebrate the season by touring the city for a day and trying to see as many species as they can. However, a successful "big day" is not simple, it requires advanced planning and lots of knowledge about where to look for birds.

So to help more people enjoy this seasonal spectacle, we have enlisted expert guides from the city's birding community to lead you through an exhilarating day of birding in the city this spring. Each leader will design a special route to find as many bird species as possible in one morning and afternoon. Over 100 species might be possible!

The spring *Birding Safari* will be a special fundraising event for the educational programs of SF Nature Education. The money raised will go directly to our mission to introduce public school students to the diversity of life and nature in San Francisco.

Participation requires a donation of \$100 per individual (only about a dollar per bird—a great deal!). Field trips will take place from 8 am to 3 pm on two Saturdays: March 27th and April 10th. (Select only one date.) Trips will cover the entire city starting in different locations, and will wrap up with a tallying of our lists and recounting of highlights at the end of the day.

Groups will be limited to six attendees; trips will go rain or shine. Field leaders will include: Angie Geiger, Alan Hopkins, Andy Kleinhesselink, and Dominic Mozur, among others.

Space is limited. Reserve yours by clicking [Donate Now](#) and e-mailing us contact information and the date you have selected, or mail us a check for \$100 per participant with the coupon below to:

SF Nature Education
3450 Geary Blvd. Ste. 208
San Francisco, CA 94118

Registration for SF Nature Education's Birding Safari 2010

Name: _____

Address: _____

Date Requested: ____ Sat., March 27 ____ Sat., April 10 (pick one)

Amount of check enclosed @ \$100 per participant: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: (just in case) _____

Please make check payable to *San Francisco Nature Education*. Thank you!

School Report

Tina Lui, School Program Coordinator



On Tuesday January 11, 2010, four naturalists from San Francisco Nature Education conducted a classroom visit with Ms. Deidre Elmansourmi's third graders from E.R. Taylor Elementary. SFNE is collaborating with Ms. E. on the students' first field trip to Heron's Head Park to see shore birds, diving ducks, and other species.

We reviewed the birds that the students were likely to see on their field trip to these restored wetlands. At the three stations, staffed by SFNE volunteers Linda Grant, Beth

Kamieniecki, and myself, we displayed various parts of bird anatomy.

At the first station our volunteers showed real bird bones so students could see that they are hollow and light; wings to show how real birds fly; and the difference between contour and down feathers.

At the second station students observed beaks of local birds to learn how different beaks have adapted to different diets. Last but not least, students learned sketching skills by drawing a real (taxidermal) Canada Goose.

At the conclusion of demonstrations, the students told us what they had learned and liked from our presentations. We provided the class with field guides to the birds of

(continued on next page)

School Report (continued from previous page)

San Francisco and copies of the text *What Is a Bird?* Next they will go on a field trip to Heron's Head Park, where each student will borrow binoculars to view birds in the field.

All students have been given special field journals in which to color the birds of Heron's Head Park and to draw their own pictures. We naturalists are as eager as Ms. Elmansourmi's enthusiastic third graders to go to Heron's Head Park.

As a longtime volunteer, I can report that taking students into the field is why we love this program so much. Not only are we able to give back to the community by helping underserved students, we get great pleasure in knowing that we're making a difference in children's lives.



Volunteer Linda Grant show students how birds adapt with their beaks.



Third graders learn to fly (with Red-shouldered Hawk and Barn Owl wings).

Photos: SFNE

Interested in Volunteering as a Naturalist?

To become part of our exciting nature education programs for underserved youth, please send us a letter of introduction, including a description of your experience in nature; any relevant training, degrees, and/or affiliations; details of any experience with birds or working with children; when you are available (we need Tuesday to Friday mornings for school programs, or Saturday mornings to help with nature walks); and anything else you think we might want to know about you. We provide training—experience is not required. Please send your e-mail to: volunteer@sfnature.org.

You can download an application from this web page: http://www.sfnature.org/get_involved/volunteer.html

Upcoming Events

Birding for Everyone

First Saturdays: February 6 and March 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; no one turned away due to lack of funds.

Birding Classes for Kids

First Saturdays: February 6 and March 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; no one turned away due to lack of funds.

Heron's Head Park Tours

Dates: Saturdays, February 6 and March 6

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.

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

Birding for Everyone Report

Angie Geiger, Naturalist

The second day of 2010 began with overcast skies at the *Birding for Everyone* walk in the SF Botanical Garden. In spite of the gray skies it was quite warm, and the folks who roused themselves from bed for a morning of birding were eager to see what the new year would bring.

Before the walk began we saw a number of exciting birds in the paved area next to the Garden Bookstore. A **Brown Creeper** became the first bird of the day as it worked its way up the trunk of a nearby tree. Then a **Red-shouldered Hawk** flew in and landed in a tree just above us.



Hermit Thrush

Photo: Jerry Oldenettel



Dark-eyed Junco

Photo: Judy Harter

It was soon joined by a second hawk. Both called loudly. That did not prevent the arrival of two **Hermit Thrushes** on the pavement adjacent to us. These usually

secretive birds were out in the open, allowing great views of their constantly flicking wings and rufous rumps. The thrushes were joined by a number of **Dark-eyed Juncos**.

After lingering there for some minutes we continued through the Great Meadow. Near the flowering trees one sharp-eyed participant discovered a male **Downy Woodpecker**. Our attention was drawn to the lawn, which was alive with a large number of little brown birds (LBBs). Scanning the flock we found **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **White-crowned Sparrows**,



White-crowned Sparrow

Photo: Judy Harter

California Towhees, **American Robins**, and a **Song Sparrow**. We moved on to the Wildfowl Pond.

There we were delighted to see four **Hooded Mergansers**. The brightly plumed male was sound asleep but the three other mergansers were quite awake. After studying them carefully we concluded that there were two females and an immature male. Eventually the adult male woke up, and we were able to fully observe his beautiful black and white crest. The only other birds on the pond were **Mallards** and **American Coots**, but there were also passerines nearby, including **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and a **Black Phoebe**.



Male Hooded Merganser

Photo: Doug Greenberg



Great Egret

Photo: Judy Harter

From there we moved on to the Chilean Garden to look for the **Red-breasted Sapsucker** responsible for the countless wells in two of the trees. After almost giving up, we moved around to the other side of the trees and were delighted to find our bird. It was quite active, reopening old wells and moving up the trunk of the tree. All of a sudden a large white bird appeared a short distance away. We followed its path and discovered a **Great Egret** in the Moon-viewing Pond. It caught and swallowed small fish while we watched.

We next headed up the stairs in the direction of the Succulent Garden. We were amazed to see a second **Red-breasted Sapsucker** land in the stunted redwood that leans over the path. It was definitely a different

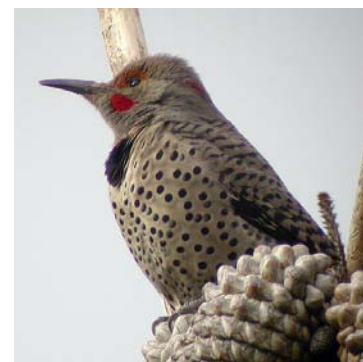


Townsend's Warbler

Photo: Doug Greenberg

bird, as evidenced by its much shorter "moustache." Many robins were enjoying the orange berries in the tree above us and making quite a racket.

We arrived in the Succulent Garden and paused there for some moments to see what would appear. Aside from the expected **Anna's Hummingbirds**, we had several glimpses of a fast-moving **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and a **Townsend's Warbler**. Noisy calls attracted our attention to two **Steller's Jays** and a **Northern Flicker**.



Northern Flicker

Photo: Len Blumin

On our way back toward the entrance we strolled through the California Garden. There we found **Western Scrub Jays** and more **Golden-crowned Sparrows**.



Western Scrub Jay

Photo: Len Blumin

In the end, we thought our total of 31 species was a great start to the year. Good birding!

San Francisco
Nature
Education



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