



The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education · February 2021

Executive Director's Corner



Dear Friends,

Since mid-December, Great Blue Herons have started flying in to their nesting tree at Stow Lake. Five herons at one time have been spotted so far. Observers have seen mating and a pair building a new nest on the south side of the Heron Tree.

As you can see from the adjacent photo, the left side of the tree that held three limbs and three nests has fallen into the lake. The topmost limb fell during strong winds on January 18-19. We still have five nests. Only two nests have been steadily occupied, but it is still early in the season. If all goes well, February should bring increased mating and courtship activity. The females generally lay their eggs in March; eggs should hatch in April.

We will keep you posted on when it is safe for us to resume field trips and programs. But meanwhile, come out and observe the herons, while socially distancing, from three different locations: Strawberry Island near the Taiwan Pavilion, and on the path around Stow Lake that faces the tiny Heron Tree island from the north and south. Here's a [map](#) to our observation site.

It helps to use 8x42 binoculars. We recommend Fireside Camera Pro-staff binoculars in SF, and Vortex Optics Diamondbacks online. Both vendors support our programs—tell them we referred you. Please stay healthy and safe.

Best regards,

Nancy

Nancy H. DeStefanis

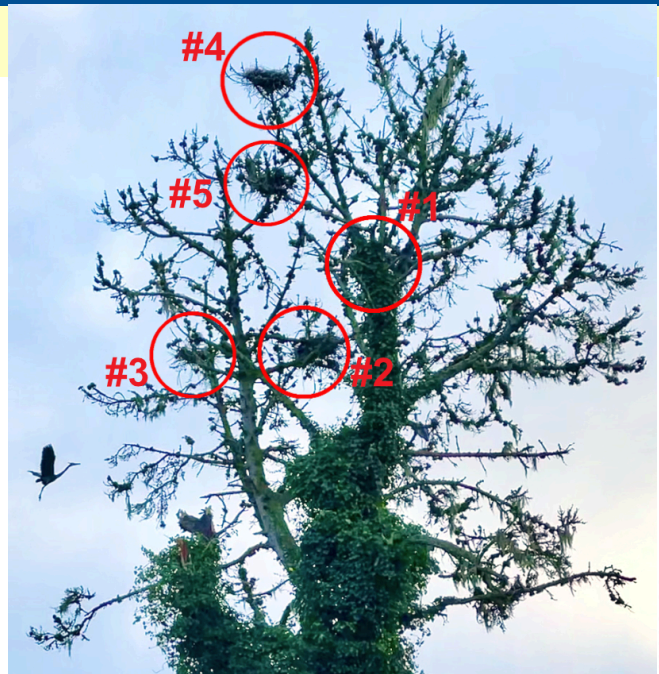
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Helene Sobol



Herbert B. Goodman

Above: Great Blue Heron flies toward nesting tree at Stow Lake on 1/22/21. Left side of tree recently lost three limbs. Each limb held a nest.

Left: Herons form pair bond on branch.

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Crissy Field and the Restored Quartermaster Reach Alan Hopkins



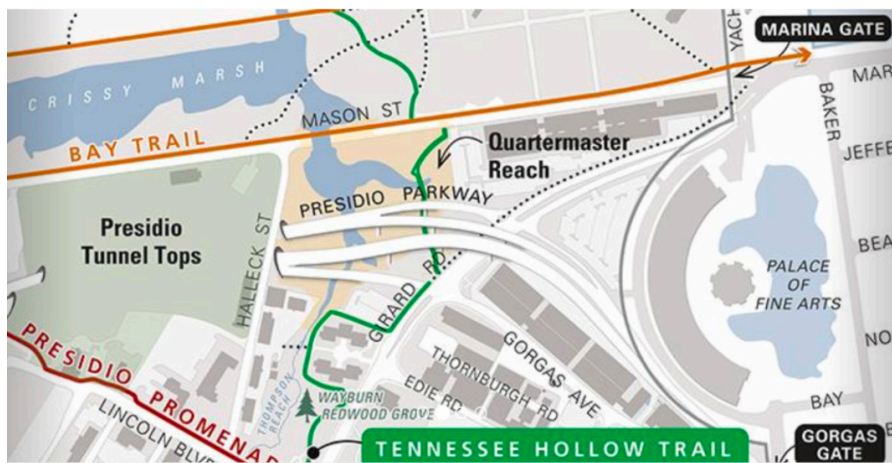
Recently the Quartermaster Reach Marsh at Crissy Field opened to the public. The seven-acre marsh has been a long-awaited addition to the Crissy Field Marsh, and ties the marsh to the Tennessee Hollow Watershed. The marsh can be accessed across Mason Street at the eastern end of Crissy Field, where there are a trail and bridge that run below Highway 101 and the Presidio Parkway.

It is possible to make a half-mile loop: where the path ends at a stoplight at the Gorgas Ave. and Garrard Rd., cross the light, cut through the parking lot to the west, and look for the white bridge that crosses Quartermaster Reach at the end of Thompson Reach. Continue west past the buildings, which takes you to Halleck St. and north back to Mason St. and Crissy Field. When all 23,000 new native plants are growing it should be amazing.

History: Quartermaster and Crissy Marshes are recreations of the marsh that once extended from the Presidio to Fort Mason. The original marsh was filled from the 1800s until 1915, the year of the Panama-Pacific Exposition. From 1921 to 1936, the Army used the flattened landscape as the center of military aviation on the west coast.

After the Presidio was decommissioned, the National Park Service and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy conceived recreating the marsh. About 87,000 tons of material were removed from the site to create the wetland. In 1999, a canal was created and the first tides flooded into the marsh.

By 2001, with the dunes restored, thousands of native plants planted, and trails and bathrooms finished, Crissy Field was officially opened. The marsh is smaller than it should have been, but it is still a treasure.



Birding Crissy is fairly simple: there are trails that surround the marsh. Starting at the East Beach Parking Lot follow the Golden Gate Promenade/Bay Trail west as far as the Farallon Marine Visitor Center. From the trail, check the marsh for shorebirds, and the bay for Red-breasted Mergansers, loons and grebes. Artic Terns and Red-footed Booby have been seen by the unpainted pier near the Marine Center. Snowy Plovers can still be found to the east of white Tidal Gate Pier.

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Above: Crissy Field area and trails. Below: the white bridge across Quartermaster Reach Marsh.



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Returning to the marsh, cut across the grassy airfield. While a large lawn may seem unproductive, rarities such as Bobolink, Red-throated Pipit and McCown's Longspur have been found in the grass. The southwest corner of the marsh can have Night-Herons, Common Yellowthroats, and occasionally Rails.

The vegetation is good for land birds along the marsh's south side as you walk back. The best birding of all is on the aluminum bridge that cuts across the southeast part of the marsh. It is a great place to study winter gulls, and from August to November a large flock of Elegant Terns can be seen. The sandbar can attract migrating shorebirds that join the resident Killdeer and Long-billed Curlew.

Parking is available off Mason St. at East Beach, and on the west side of the Sports Basement. Bathrooms are at East Beach and beyond the Farallon Marine Center west of the Warming Hut.

Find more information at the Presidio's [Quartermaster Reach website](#).



Clockwise from top: Crissy Marsh from the bridge; visiting Ruff in winter plumage and Elegant Terns; Long-billed Curlew; Snowy Plover.



Photos: Alan Hopkins





Snowy Egret, SF Botanical Garden



Townsend's Warbler, Strawberry Hill



Song Sparrow, SF Botanical Garden



Double-crested Cormorant, Stow Lake



Hooded Mergansers, Mallard Lake

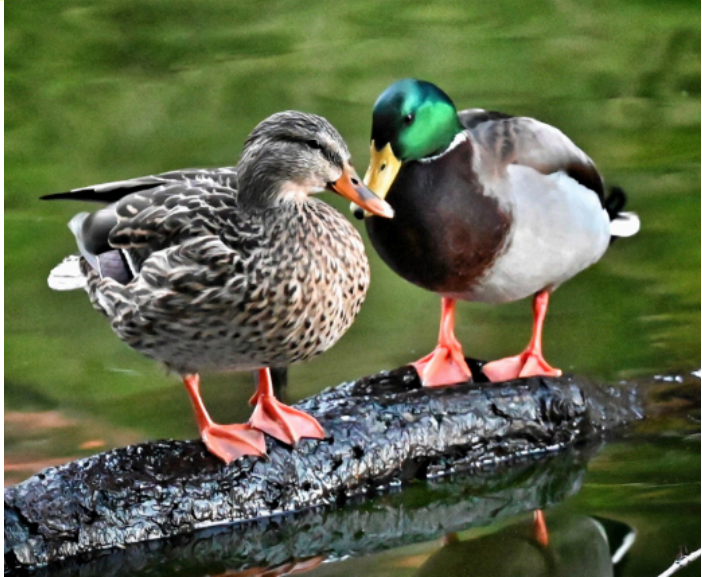


Yellow-rumped Warbler near de Young Museum

Winter Birds of Stow Lake Helene Sobol



Great Egret



Loving Mallards prepare for Valentine's Day



Hooded Mergansers



Ruddy Duck



Buffleheads



Lesser Scaup

Great Blue Herons Arrive, Using Old Nests and Building New Ones!



Grace Ruth

Pair has begun courtship rituals at the Stow Lake colony.



Ian Reid

Heron arrives with a stick for the nest.



Ian Reid

Adult male stretches to attract female.



Grace Ruth

Pair mates and builds new nest.

Information and applications for [interns](#) and [volunteers](#) are online. Our planned 2021 Heron Watch schedule is [here](#).



Clockwise from left: Lesser Goldfinches; Hairy Woodpecker; Red-breasted Sapsucker (x2); Yellow-rumped Warbler. When the sapsucker wasn't around, the warbler searched for insects in the holes the sapsucker had made.

