



# The Blue Heron

News from San Francisco Nature Education Apr/May 2022



Dear Friends,

We're off to a grand start for the Heron Watch season!!!!

**We have a matching grant from an anonymous donor – every dollar you donate through May 30<sup>th</sup> will be matched up to \$15,000!!!!**

Please take this opportunity to help us meet our goal and donate generously now via [Flipcause](#) or by mailing a check.

**Your donations are tax-deductible and help underwrite our Heron Watch program, youth internship program, family birding walks and Birding for Everyone field trips as well as K-3 trips for classes throughout the city!!!!**

**Please consider donations of \$250, \$500, \$1,000, or more!!!! SF Nature Education is now in it's 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Heron Watch.**

We now have 4 Heron nests, and the first chick has arrived!

The chick is awfully cute and we expect many more!!! In past years, two to four eggs have hatched at each nest. Our 20 adult volunteers and five interns stand ready to show you these magnificent dinosaur-like chicks!!!!

Don't miss this opportunity to view the most visible and accessible colony in Northern California!

Please join us at Heron Watch for six Saturdays – April 16 through May 21<sup>st</sup>, from 10 am - 1 pm. We are inaugurating a new program of *Family Walks around Stow Lake* during Heron Watch. Visit <https://www.sfnature.org/heronwatch22> for the Stow Lake map and information. And take the time to watch our new film, [Great Blues of the Golden Gate](#), directed by Joy Chang and produced by SF Nature Ed!!!

We hope to see you soon! Best regards,

Nancy H. DeStefanis  
Executive Director, San Francisco Nature Education

## First Chick Arrives!!! Photo by Raphaelxox.com



### On the Pages Ahead

- 2 Interns begin Heron Watch training
- 3 Interns learn about scopes and the Great Blue Heron
- 4 *Birding for Everyone* March Trip Report

### Become a Member / Donate Online

**Donate online or mail a check to:** SFNE,  
PO Box 210303, SF, CA 94121 [info@sfnature.org](mailto:info@sfnature.org)  
Tel: 415-205-0776 Tax ID: 54-2111941

**Membership:** Adults: \$35; Seniors 65+: \$30; Joint Membership for two seniors at same residence: \$50; Students 21 or under: \$25.

*Flipcause is a secure portal*



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[San Francisco Nature Education](https://www.sfnature.org)

## Interns Prepare for Heron Watch

From left to right: Hunter, Katie, Parker Kaye, Adlai, Kate and Maddie.  
Photos courtesy Helene Sobol.



## First Training for Interns on March 12

Report by Katie, 8th Grade Intern



I applied to be an intern because I love birds. I have always loved nature, but the pandemic was the first time I really began to learn about birds. I had gone bird watching before, but during the pandemic, I really became a birder.

It was also during the pandemic that I learned about the Heron Watch program. Last year I visited the program with my family and met the 5 interns in the 2021 program and was impressed. Middle and high school students have the opportunity to observe the Great Blue Herons that nest at Stow Lake every spring and learn their lifecycle and elaborate courtship displays.

Interns participate in two training sessions- we study the behavior of the herons and we sketch the herons and their chicks as they hatch, grow, and finally leave the nest. We also learn how to use spotting scopes. Then, for six Saturdays, we show the public the herons through the scopes. By then, we can answer just about every question the public asks us.

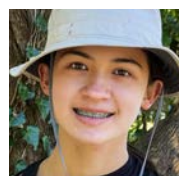
At the end of the program, we even get a pair of 8 x 42 Vortex binoculars! We are actually loaned the binoculars during the program, but we don't get to keep them until the end.

I am really excited about the internship because it is a really great opportunity to learn all about the birds at Stow Lake, especially the herons. Whenever I saw great blue herons around San Francisco, I always admired their beauty and elegance, and I wanted to know more about their lives. I am really excited to learn all about these amazing birds in the weeks to come.

We observed each of the five nests and saw that they each had an adult in it. There was even a chick in nest #2! The other three nests had herons sitting on eggs and there was a new nest as well! Then, we sketched and took notes on the nests and showed them to the other interns. Finally, Ms. D reviewed the nesting season month by month and everyone learned a ton. I thought it was a great start to the program!

## Birding Strawberry Island

Report by Maddie, 6th Grade Intern



At our first training, biologist Parker Kaye of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory led a birding walk around Stow Lake. On the walk were five Heron Watch interns: Katie, Kate, Hunter, Adlai and myself. I have been

a birder for about a year and a half. I'm a sixth grader and have seen over 150 different bird species in my time as a birder. I learned about the program last year when I visited Heron Watch.

We spotted 26 different bird species around the lake and on Strawberry Island. Katie, an intern, told us about the history of various parts of Stow Lake, including the 90 million year old stones used to construct the Rustic Bridge and the ruins of Sweeny's Observatory at the top of Strawberry Hill. When we were down at the lake, we observed the Great Blue Herons that have nested near the waterfall since 2015.

We also observed many different species near the Heron Observation Site: American Coots, Mallards, Hooded Mergansers, and Northern Shovelers. We also spotted a Red-tailed Hawk resting in a tree near the Roman Bridge. On the island, we spotted a few Brown Creepers; small, camouflaged climbers who creep (hence the name) along tree trunks, looking for insects to feed on. We also spotted many Black Phoebes on the hill, darting about in the air as they caught flies. Tree Swallows also catch flies; there were lots of them flying over the lake.

We had an amazing time spotting and identifying bird species around the island!



Photos by Helen Sobol.





## Second Heron Watch Training

Report by Kate,  
8th Grade Intern

Today during our second training for Heron Watch, we began by taking a Quiz which covered the information we were required to read about the Great Blue Herons (wingspan, prey, along with detailed facts such as the 1918 Migratory Bird Act to protect wild birds.) We all passed!

Then we examined Heron artifacts – the pale blue egg, beak and foot with four toes. The thing that stood out to me was the beak- due to how long and sharp it is. It looked really pointy and if you got hit with that at a rapid speed it would definitely cause some pretty severe injuries. It's amazing how strong a heron can be!

Once we finished inspecting the artifacts we moved onto sketching and recording the heron's activities minute by minute. While we were sketching the nests, we noticed that in nest #2 there were two chicks with an adult heron. In nest #1 the heron was sitting. In nest #3 we saw a heron stand up then sit back down. In nest #4, there was a heron standing the entire time that we were sketching.

Finally, Steve, an SFNE volunteer taught us how to use the spotting scopes. In the scope I saw that a bird flew over to nest #1 quite a few times standing not in the nest but on top of a branch. The highlight of my day was using the scope, learning how it works, and which lever and handles adjust the scope. Then we practiced on folks that walked by.

When the first person came up she was asking me many different questions which I was able to answer. Later someone thought I was a pro with the scope and talking about the herons' behavior!

## Heron Watch Volunteers Train to Lead Family Nature Walks

Report by Claire Hunter

As a regular volunteer with SF Nature Ed, I jumped at the opportunity to go on a birding training session, March 5, for the Heron Watch volunteers. Alan Hopkins, expert birder and field trip leader for SFNE, led our group of 10 volunteers around Stow Lake and up Strawberry Hill. For two hours he patiently pointed out all the local birds. One of the many highlights was watching the Allen's Hummingbirds stop to drink from the pools at the top of Huntington Falls. We also saw Ruby Crowned Kinglets, Townsend's Warblers, Brown Creepers, Hooded Mergansers, Double Crested Cormorants, Short-billed (formerly mew) gulls and a Black Crowned Night Heron. I was thrilled to see a Red Tailed Hawk fly into its nest to meet its mate high above the Roman Bridge.

Volunteer, Anne Galjour, told us some fascinating facts about the history of Stow Lake. It used to be a quarry! The Rustic Bridge is made from 90 million year old chert from the quarry. Sweeney's Observatory still has a few bricks remaining after it was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. The walls were to keep the sand from getting in the eyes of visitors from the dunes that surrounded the area back then. The railroad baron built Huntington Falls in 1894. Volunteers will lead family walks during HW, as well as 2 new interns, Katie and Maddie.



Double Crested Cormorant.  
Photo by Helen Sobol.



Hunter, an intern,  
practices using scope.  
Photo courtesy of SFNE.



From left to right: Anne Galjour, Claire Hunter, interns Maddie and Katie; Center-Alan Hopkins, Janel Schulenberg, Brede Fuchs, Diane O'Donahue; Rear- Gillian Imazumi-Hegarty, Kiyoko Bouey. Photo courtesy of SF Nature Education.



## Field Trip to San Francisco Botanical Gardens

By Alan Hopkins – March 12, 2022

By our 9:30 starting time the morning fog had lifted leaving a cloudless and pleasantly cool morning. Spring was clearly on the way. As we assembled we watched a pair of Ravens carrying nesting materials to the big Cypress near the kiosk. At first the birding was a bit slow but the blooming Magnolias did not disappoint. Many birds were feeling the spring by singing from the treetops. One of the walk's highlights was a Pacific Wren that burst into song at eyelevel just a few feet off the trail going through Chilean Garden. It seems amazing that a four-inch bird can have such a loud and long song. Birds, unlike humans who depend on their lungs for vocalizing, have air sacs throughout their body that they can use for song and help with respiration in flight. I think of birds having a set of bagpipes as well as just lungs.

We found our old friend the Red-naped Sapsucker in a Asian Cloud Forest Magnolia. A pair of Nuttall's Woodpeckers frolicked in an oak above the Succulent Garden. At the Muir Trail Pond the budding willows had Lesser Goldfinches and a Pine Siskin. Overhead an Osprey circled above. On the return trip we spotted a Red-shouldered Hawk in flight with talons full of nesting material. Can chicks be far off? Another fine day.

### Birds Spotted: 35 Species

- Canada Goose
- Mallard
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- American Coot
- Western Gull
- Rock Dove
- Anna's Hummingbird
- Allen's Hummingbird
- Red-Naped Sapsucker
- Nuttall Woodpecker
- Black Phebe
- Steller's Jay
- California Scrub Jay
- American Crow
- Common Raven
- Chestnut-Backed Chickadee
- Bushtit
- Pygmy Nuthatch
- Ruby-Crowned Kinglet
- Hermit Thrush
- American Robin
- Cedar Waxwing
- Yellow-Rumped Warbler
- Townsend's Warbler
- California Towhee
- Fox Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- Golden-Crowned Sparrow
- White-Crowned Sparrow
- Dark-Eyed Junco
- Purple Finch
- House Finch
- Pine Siskin
- Lesser Goldfinch

All photos by Bill Hunnewell



Common Raven – Wearing Origami Hat



Nuttall's Woodpecker



Lesser Goldfinch



Pacific Wren

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### Please Donate to Our Matching Grant!

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All contributions are tax-deductible. Tax ID #54-2111941

San Francisco Nature Education is in its 22nd 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.

