



ENVIRONMENT

# Homes for Herons

*Learn a lesson in compassion  
about the Bay Farm Island Egrets.*

By Sarah Phelan

Seven years ago, Cindy Margulis of the Golden Gate Audubon Society helped initiate a heron monitoring program on Alameda's Bay Farm Island, where snowy and great egrets nest on a pine tree along a lagoon next to a suburban housing development. From a distance, the Bay Farm Island egrets look like a heavenly mix of massive wings, lacy feathers, and long white necks. But the society's director soon discovered, not everyone in the neighborhood was enamored with the birds.

"I realized there was a lot of interest but also some opposition," she said, recalling noise and poop complaints. "I figured the best way forward was to educate folks."

So she organized bird photo exhibits and slideshows at Bay Farm Island's tiny library and volunteered with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, which began monitoring the

Alameda egrets in 2007. This summer, Margulis will participate in the Bird Observatory's "Birds in Your Neighborhood" event 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. June 6 at the Bay Farm Library.

In the meantime, other Bird Observatory volunteers keep a watchful eye on the Bay Farm egrets.

"It's the biggest little colony in a single tree," said volunteer Cathy Araujo. In 2014, Araujo captured seven chicks, all of which survived, except one, which had a broken wing. "We have an extendable pool net to retrieve chicks that fall into the lagoon and get sopping wet because they can't swim." It's gotten to the point where people bring rescued chicks to her office, which is a five-minute walk from the tree. "I put them in a carrier, place them in a quiet room with a heater to dry, and take them to the bird rescue center in Newark," she said.

Also in 2014, four egrets wearing red bands that indicated they were rescued under the Alameda egret tree and were released to Arrowhead Marsh showed up at the Bay Farm rookery. "They found their way back by following birds that forage at the Martin Luther King shoreline," Margulis said. "These are the birds that someone rescued. This is how compassion works."

*"Birds in Your Neighborhood" is a free program about the colony of Bay Farm egrets the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is studying as part of its colonial waterbird program. For more information, visit [www.SFBBO.org](http://www.SFBBO.org).*

Photo by Cindy Margulis