

3/26/14

Well, it was another week without Alan. Sometimes, that's a recipe for a record but the record high for week 13 is 37, the highest all-time for any week. That's a tall order, I think. Perhaps, we should have tried for an eight hour walk. We might be able to work our way up into the 30s. Of course, that didn't happen. We sit on the median with 20 species and were very happy to get there, at least I was. For a while, I thought we might be a threat to the record low of 14 for week 13 but the second half of the walk brought us enough new species to take us out of that ugly form of frustration. There was a general lack of cooperation from the local birds but they relented enough. It became a pleasant walk with a respectable species and numbers count.

See the plots at http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird_data/species_time.html and http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird_data/two_plots.htm



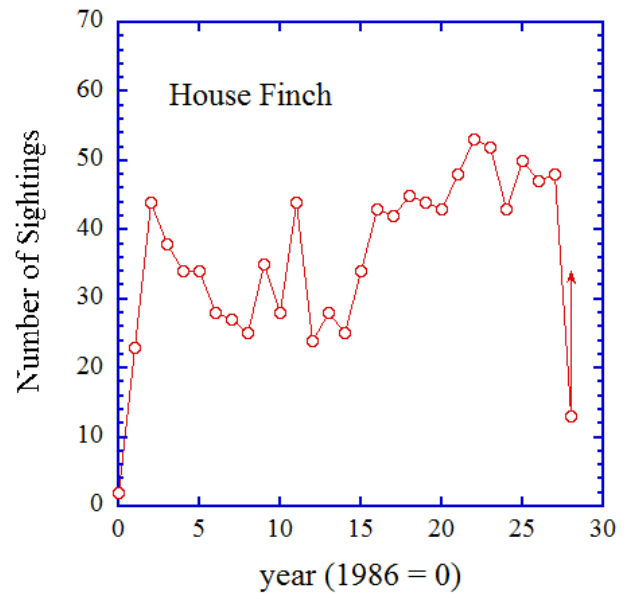
You might think that the big species count weeks of the year would be later, during the height of the spring migration, but this is actually the last week with a record high that lifts above 30 until the gasp of December (week 49). We lose winter residents faster than we gain the odd migrant. The heights of records fall from this point into the summer. It will be 18 in week 27 and, eventually, we will bottom out on week 33, which "boasts" a

record low high of 14. What is there to say? It's just tough in August, even if you have air conditioning. Fortunately for us, it's still March and there are migrations yet to flow through and around us, although there are already hints in absence. We have almost certainly seen our last sapsucker, northern flicker, and Say's phoebe for the season. The sapsuckers have mostly moved up north and the Say's has moved back out into the desert. Abandoned winter territories lie fallow if the collapse is caused by a resource failure or a unique reservoir like a sapsucker tree that can't be accessed by the competition but, if it's merely the death or departure of a local king, there will be a new king to guard the treasure in his absence. During the winter, a Say's controlled the North Athletic field whenever he wanted to but, now, there's a black phoebe guarding the field, not the one shown above, who was photographed near Arms, but he certainly can stand for the phenomenon. We still have phoebe times; they may be changing from winter to spring, but the midges are just as tasty.

We live in the often words, in the bones of tissue larking the sun and we all sit on a photosynthetic perch no matter what pedigree grafts the fool to think himself much better than he is. We all bleed the

ocean and breed the sun but we seem to have a gift that can freeze in a moment or a lifetime and let us forget what we really are. So, let's look to a feather take on the often words, the most common birds. Black phoebes are now common on campus. They once were rare. House finches are now common. They have never been uncommon on the walk but they appear to have been a major beneficiary of the decline of the campus house sparrow. The photo shows a house finch taken on the walk near the old Child Care Center. She is dubious about my intentions, so she sits for but a moment and then flies off before I can isolate a better view.

Since Vicky asked about them, I toss in a fiery skipper at the end. It was working some flowers outside the old Child Care Center and, unlike the house finch, willing to pose. Fiery skippers are fairly common on campus in spring and summer, and since we water our lawns into the drought, enough of the next generation of grub is likely to bring us flecks of orange well into the year (the grub live on grass and there are generally three or four generations in a given year), which is why we will be seeing them for quite a while.



The date: 3/26/2014

The week number: 13

The walk number: 1240

The weather: 65 F, partly sunny, windy

The walkers: John Beckett, Yoshi Tuttle, Vicky Brennan, Viveca Sapin-Areeda, Kent Potter

The birds (20):

- 1 Northern Mockingbird
- 1 Mourning Dove
- 7 House Finch
- 1 Anna's Hummingbird
- 2 Acorn Woodpecker
- 8 American Crow
- 1 Mallard
- 6 Bushtit

- 2 Band-tailed Pigeon
- 1 Common Raven
- 4 Black Phoebe
- 6 Lesser Goldfinch
- 30 Yellow-rumped Warbler
- 1 Snowy Egret
- 1 Hawk, species (buteo)
- 1 Orange-crowned Warbler
- 35 Gull, species
- 1 California Towhee
- 1 European Starling
- 1 Swift, species



--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,
Alan Cummings,
8/14/14