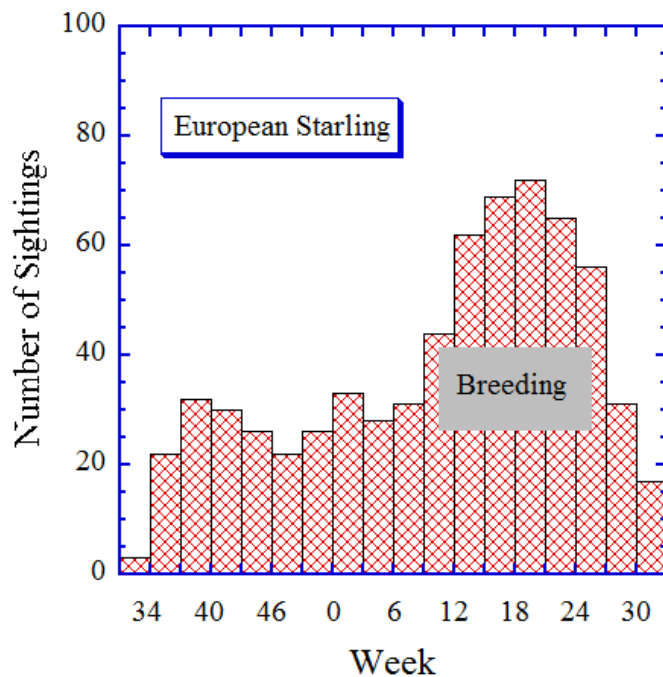


4/16/14:

Walks in April are respectable if you pull in 20 species and very good if you make it into the mid-twenties. On this walk, we encountered 24 species = very good. This was well off the record of 28, which was set last year, but above the median of 18 and double the record low of 12. There were no new species for the year and no hawks of any description, but we did see Wilson's warblers for the second week in a row and both types of towhees. We had no regrets and, if there were any complaints, I didn't hear any.

See the plots at [http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird\\_data/species\\_time.html](http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird_data/species_time.html) and [http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird\\_data/two\\_plots.htm](http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird_data/two_plots.htm)



We are a bedroom community for starlings. Often, you can hear them calling in the morning but the adults soon fly off to forage for the day, returning late in the afternoon. We, the already fed, are foraging on campus for our own nuggets through the morning when the starlings don't count and split the day with a walk that calls to birds no longer there. So, the starlings are unreliable when we walk and that's just the way it is unless you are in the breeding season. Then, you have a good chance to see a starling as the adults must incubate the eggs (both adults incubate during the day, although it's mostly done by the female, and they take breaks (it's all female on the night shift)). Both parents feed the chicks and, as fledging time approaches, it's a regular conveyor belt designed to maximize chick mass. We didn't see any

fledglings this week but we did see several adults, including three over the grill-work on Bridge where they have nests. The photo of the adult on the left comes from a pole for the chain link fence bounding the North Athletic field. It struck me as a rather regal pose for a starling. Incidentally, if you see a dark medium size bird with a straight yellow beak in this country, you are looking at a starling. There's no competition on the identification. So what do you do with the brown bird on the right? That's a very



recently fledged starling. It happens to be from Sierra Madre but dating to this week. Cooper's hawks believe in that old Franklin maxim: "a starling a day keeps the starving away" but the biggest problem for starlings on campus is probably nest depredation by gray squirrels, common ravens, and Maintenance. So, making it out of the nest is a big deal.



Usually, Wilson Ave. between Morrisroe and Prufrock is a bit of a dead zone for the bird walk. We add few or no new species and few new birds but we do occasionally get a highlight. The Vaux's swift a couple years ago comes to mind and the street has produced its fair share of turkey vultures. This year, we have been seeing dark-eyed juncos along Wilson including this bird, who was perched outside the gym. Breeding dark-eyed juncos maintain territories of a couple acres, so the fact that we have been seeing them along Wilson, a

block north and south of California and along Holliston suggest that we have at least two and probably three breeding pairs on campus this year. They should be fledging next month and, although Caltech is not prime junco territory, there's a chance that one of the pairs will try for a second clutch. Since I happen to have you looking at a photo, note the creamy white underside that extends all the way along the tail. If you are seeing the bird from below, this sea of white can be definitive, especially if you can pick up the black cowling.



We saw three Wilson's warblers in the Prufrock tree, which makes two weeks in a row for us. Wilson's warblers winter in central Mexico south into Panama and breed north of us up through Alaska but as far south as Santa Barbara. So we only see them in a short window as they come and go through campus in the spring and fall. This is a fairly typical view, mostly from below but it's all you need because the combination of yellow breast and undertail coverts with a gray tail is definitive for a Wilson's. Perhaps we will make it three in a row next week.

The date: 4/16/2014

The week number: 16

The walk number: 1243

The weather: 70 F, sunny

The walkers: Alan Cummings, John Beckett, Vicky Brennan, Ashish Maharbal, Viveca Sapin-Areeda, Yoshi Tuttle

The birds (24):

- 1 Western Scrub Jay
- 1 Northern Mockingbird
- 3 House Sparrow
- 8 House Finch
- 4 Anna's Hummingbird
- 8 Acorn Woodpecker
- 7 American Crow
- 3 Lesser Goldfinch
- 3 Dark-eyed Junco
- 4 Black Phoebe
- 1 Spotted Towhee
- 3 White-throated Swift
- 7 European Starling
- 1 Hummingbird, Selasphorus
- 2 House Wren
- 20 Cedar Waxwing
- 1 Black-chinned Hummingbird
- 10 Bushtit
- 2 Band-tailed Pigeon
- 1 Yellow-rumped Warbler
- 3 Wilson's Warbler
- 1 California Towhee
- 1 Common Raven
- 2 Mallard

--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,  
Alan Cummings,  
8/28/14