

5/14/14

This was a nice walk but it sailed under the record high of 28 (2012) with 24 and held a drop of seven species from the previous week's extraordinary 31. Nevertheless, we were well above the record low of 12 and median of 18.

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

Time is a passing comment or a written report that bears the season. I miss last week's walk and, I get what I deserve. Last week's walk was not merely a record high for week 19. It was the latest spring 30 bird walk ever and the first 30 bird walk in May (April is envious). Ah well, it was a fair trade and I can't say that I regret the loss. I spent a very pleasant day at Upper Newport Bay. However, since missing a walk broke a long chain, I felt compelled to see how many successive walks I could command. The answer starts in week 39 of 2012 and stretches for a total of 84 walks. I assert without proof that this is a record for most consecutive Caltech bird walks but note that there are at least two caveats. The first is that, although there has only been one person with more than 50 walks in a year, which was part of my 84 walk necklace, it's certainly possible that somebody managed to string together 84 walks over two years. The second is that when Ernie Franzgrote and Alan started the walk, they weren't very religious about walking every week, so it is possible that somebody went on 84 consecutive walks, although not over 84 consecutive weeks. So, I simply assert that no such people exist and leave to you to prove the record wrong if you can. To put this in perspective, I appeal to the old kerf saw of a baseball analogy; you can think of this record as the Roger Maris form of the bird walk (leaving the drug induced haze where it belongs and not worrying about any asterisks). Eighty-four consecutive walks pales in the face of career records by Alan Cummings (1104 walks), Kent Potter (402 walks), Glenn Hamell (353 walks), and Viveca Sapin-Areeda, who is soon to become just the fourth person to take 300 Caltech bird walks (currently at 293).



I begin the real report with a pleasant, for me, composition. This curious bird was on the fencing adjacent to the North Athletic field in essentially the same location as a Savannah sparrow we saw a couple of weeks ago and it is certainly possible that this was the same bird. The important difference for us is that this sparrow took a good look at us and, thereby, inadvertently posed for

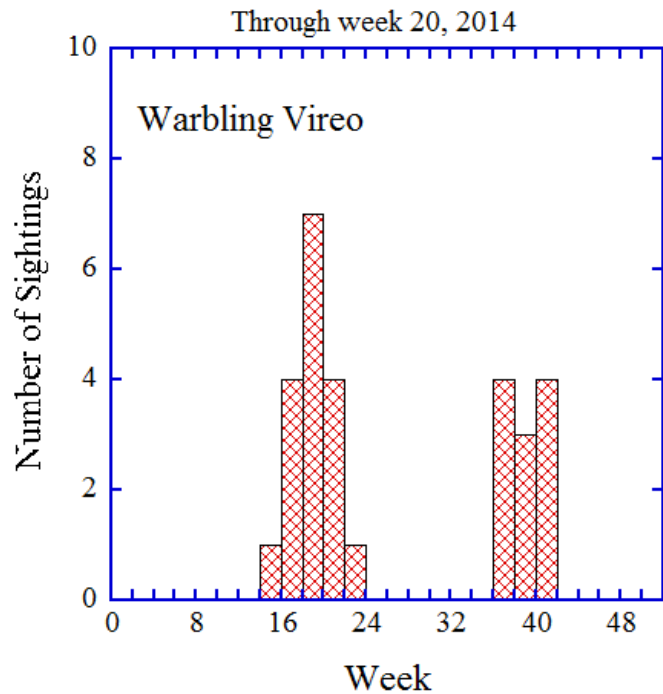
several minutes, while he mulled the monsters standing a few meters away and potential forage in the foreground. It was our second sighting of a Savannah sparrow this year but, lest you be complacent, it was only our fifteenth Savannah sparrow, all time.



It seems a week for second sightings. The Savannah sparrow was our second of the year and so were the killdeer and the warbling vireo, whose photo is shown on the left. We didn't hear any warbles but he was actively foraging in the Prufrock tree at a sufficiently low portion of the canopy to give me delusions of being able to get a photo. What I came away with supports the identification but claims little else. It is in times like these that I grieve for Alec's gun. Still, we have the bird and the timing, as did last week's, fits in perfectly with the distribution of sightings. Week 20 is high time for warbling vireos. They are strictly migrating birds for us, passing through campus in the spring around week 20 and in the fall around week 40. We've probably plumed our spring wardrobe of

warbling vireos but fall colors could be good this year. We see about one a year on average but it is episodic with none in some years and as many as three (2002) in others. Add in just one vireo this fall and we will match up with the best calendar year on record.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about motherhood. There are limits beyond life and the frenetic stream that holds a wren and its tangent splicing along the edge of what is possible but there are no distracted mother wrens. They are either dead or killing anything that dares to move on six or eight legs. When we enter Tournament Park in the spring and early summer, we usually are looking and listening for house wrens. The north end of the park boasts an outstanding nesting hole that has yielded several successful broods of house wrens over the last three years through an ambiance of music that lasts far beyond courtship. The male and his melodies can grace any decent singing perch within the northern third of Tournament Park but the hole is the center of the universe. Standing on the seat for one of the picnic tables actually gives you an eye-level view of the hole. It generates fine views of adult wrens coming over to drop in an insect (bedlam!) or carry out a fecal pellet and, if you are lucky with your timing, somebody from inside can see you. The two photos combine to show three of our four house wrens for the day.



The date: 5/14/2014

The week number: 20

The walk number: 1247

The weather: 93 F, sunny

The walkers: Alan Cummings, Vicky Brennan, Kent Potter, John Beckett, Viveca Sapin-Areeda

The birds (24):



- 2 Northern Mockingbird
- 3 House Sparrow
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 4 House Finch
- 5 Acorn Woodpecker
- 2 American Crow
- 2 White-throated Swift
- 1 Dark-eyed Junco
- 1 European Starling
- 4 Bushtit
- 2 Black Phoebe
- 1 Lesser Goldfinch
- 1 Savannah Sparrow
- 3 Hummingbird, Selasphorus
- 1 Killdeer
- 1 Spotted Towhee
- 1 Band-tailed Pigeon
- 4 House Wren

- 2 Yellow-chevroned Parakeet
- 1 Warbling Vireo
- 1 Black-chinned Hummingbird
- 5 Common Raven
- 1 Wilson's Warbler
- 1 Mallard



--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,
Alan Cummings,
9/21/14