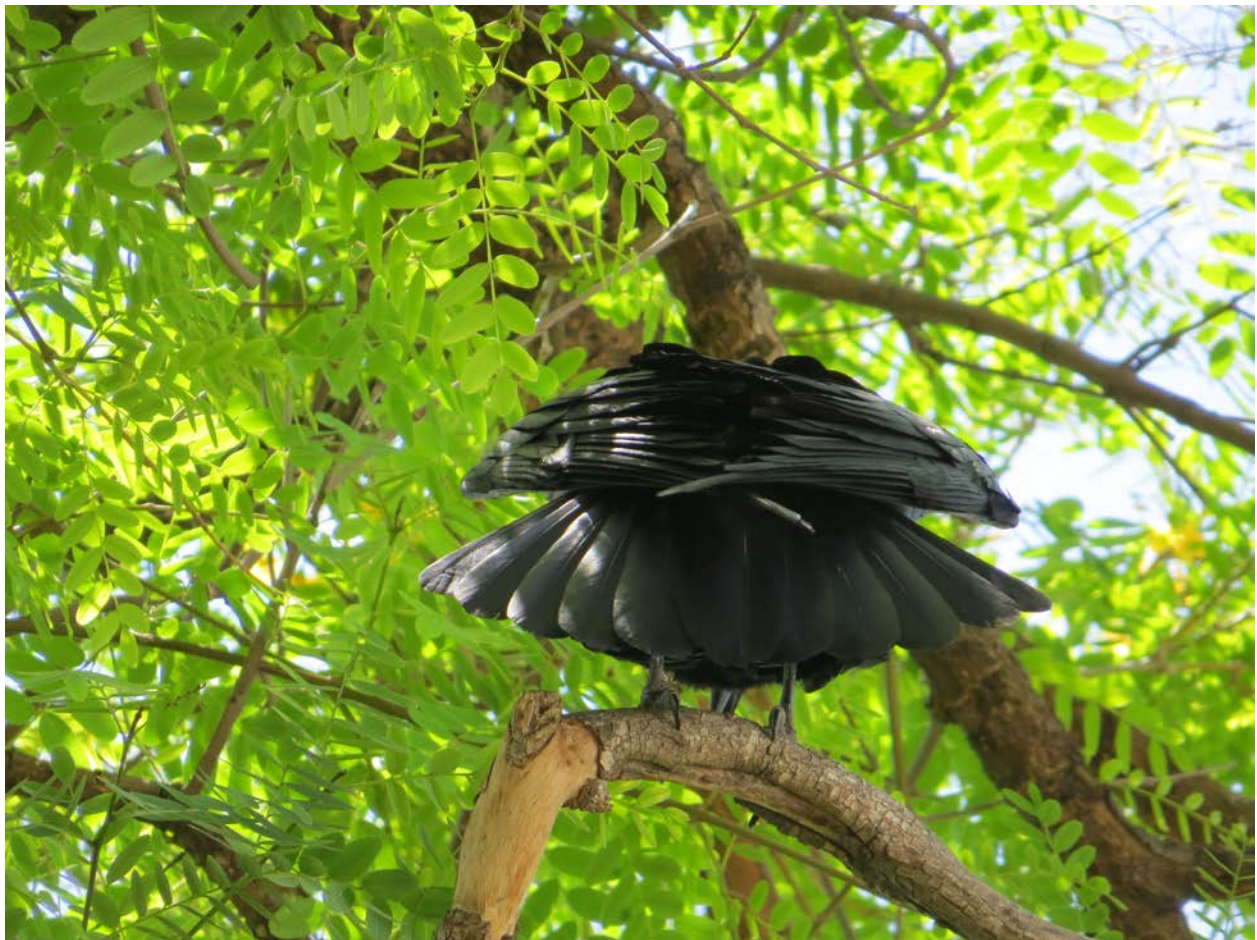


5/21/14

New thoughts do occur. New days will dawn. New records will happen. We ended the walk in a tie with the old record of 26 set in 2009 but, because I peeled early, I happened to run across a dark-eyed junco on the way back to my office. I had expected that this would only affect the number of birds, not the number of species, but the main group of walkers didn't see a junco in the last half of the walk, so my little addition put us over the top into pristine record territory for week 21 with 27 species. We were, by definition, well separated from the median of 16 and the all-time frustration record of 11.

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



The big news of the day is that the Parsons-Gates ravens have fledged! The nest is empty but at least one of the juveniles, shown in the photo, only made it around the corner before performing what I am sure was the avian equivalent of a belly-flop. He is now semi-happily ensconced in the Parsons-Gates tree closest to the big down-set Engelmann oak and was busy engaging in preening and stretching exercises when we went by. We didn't see his two siblings but they are probably perched in their own personal trees and are almost certainly within a couple hundred meters of our bird. He'll probably stay close to this spot for a couple of days and, as wing muscles and confidence grow, he will begin to accompany the adults on short distance foraging exercises. This will give us fairly good ravening

opportunities for the next month or so but, once they start soaring, the territory system is going to break down and the juveniles will disperse. This bird fledged within the last couple of days and probably hatched five or six weeks ago. You could see that chicks were in the nest as early as 4/17 (i.e., a month ago) and the female was incubating as late as April 2nd.

If you are going to be a raven, you have to be an opportunist but you also need to know when not to try your luck. Although I'm sure both species would be insulted by the comparison, a young raven is a lot like a kitten: fearless, curious, and open to any and all new experiences. A young raven will do a taste and manipulation test on just about anything he encounters (neophilia, if you want to get fancy), especially if it might be a potential food item. However, glasnost doesn't last forever. If he isn't introduced to a concept in the first few months of life, he will be extremely cautious about interacting with it later. If you are a raven prey item, your best hope is to be attacked by a juvenile that doesn't know what he is doing and your second best hope is that you are dealing with an adult that hasn't seen your kind before.



You may well think of sparrows as seed eaters but they also eat insects if it's not too difficult to get them and, during the breeding season, they are highly motivated to get them because a healthy chick is a chick with a protein-rich diet. The dark-eyed junco in this photo has just caught a bee and in my anthropomorphizing world, I would say that he is a very happy camper (can't say the same for the bee). A bee visiting blossoms

in a jacaranda tree is probably a tough capture for a dark-eyed junco but, when their purple flowers start dropping to the ground, you can often see bees hovering over them. An enterprising junco with a hungry batch of chicks to feed is going to be ready.

Although I like our raven and junco, the highlight bird is, unfortunately, one I wasn't able to get a photo of. In one of the oak trees around the restrooms of Tournament Park, we saw a warbler foraging in mid-canopy but not providing extended views, as is the wont of many warblers. Now, at this time of year, you could reasonably expect a Wilson's warbler, which we saw on the last two walks, although not today. A yellow warbler, which tends to pass through campus with or after the Wilsons' was also a possibility but this was neither. We had a hermit warbler, the first since February of 2006 (our only winter sighting) and only our fifth sighting ever. Since this is such a distinctive little bird, I felt it necessary to show a photo and, since I don't have one, I lifted the following stellar image from the

Audubon site (<http://birds.audubon.org/birds/hermit-warbler>). This is probably a spring male, given how bright the throat patch is. Nobody on our walk got a good enough look to sex the bird, but given timing, it was probably a female. Mostly, hermit warblers breed in the northern continental U.S. and winter in Mexico south into Central America and to a much lesser extent along the California coast. We have, as I noted above, one winter sighting (week 9 of 2006). Hermit warblers hybridize freely with Townsend's warblers and there is some suggestion that the Townsend's are slowly extending their breeding range south at the expense of hermit warblers.



The date: 5/21/2014

The week number: 21

The walk number: 1248

The weather: 68 F, partly cloudy

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

The birds (27):

- 1 Western Scrub Jay
- 1 Northern Mockingbird
- 3 Mourning Dove

- 7 House Finch
- 2 Anna's Hummingbird
- 4 Acorn Woodpecker
- 5 American Crow
- 3 White-throated Swift
- 3 Lesser Goldfinch
- 2 Black Phoebe
- 2 European Starling
- 1 Spotted Towhee
- 1 Black-chinned Hummingbird
- 1 Red-shouldered Hawk
- 1 Killdeer
- 4 House Wren
- 1 Red-tailed Hawk
- 1 Cooper's Hawk
- 20 Bushtit
- 1 Hermit Warbler
- 1 Bewick's Wren
- 1 Orange-crowned Warbler
- 2 Red-masked Parakeet
- 3 Common Raven
- 1 California Towhee
- 1 Hummingbird, Selasphorus
- 1 Dark-eyed Junco



--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,
Alan Cummings,
9/30/14