

11/6/13

There is a time for everything. There is a time for a new record and time for great moments to be shared and appreciated. This week brought no records. Our final tally on the species front was 22, not a record but just two wayward birds below the record for week 45 and highly respectable. We also had a couple of very nice moments.

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

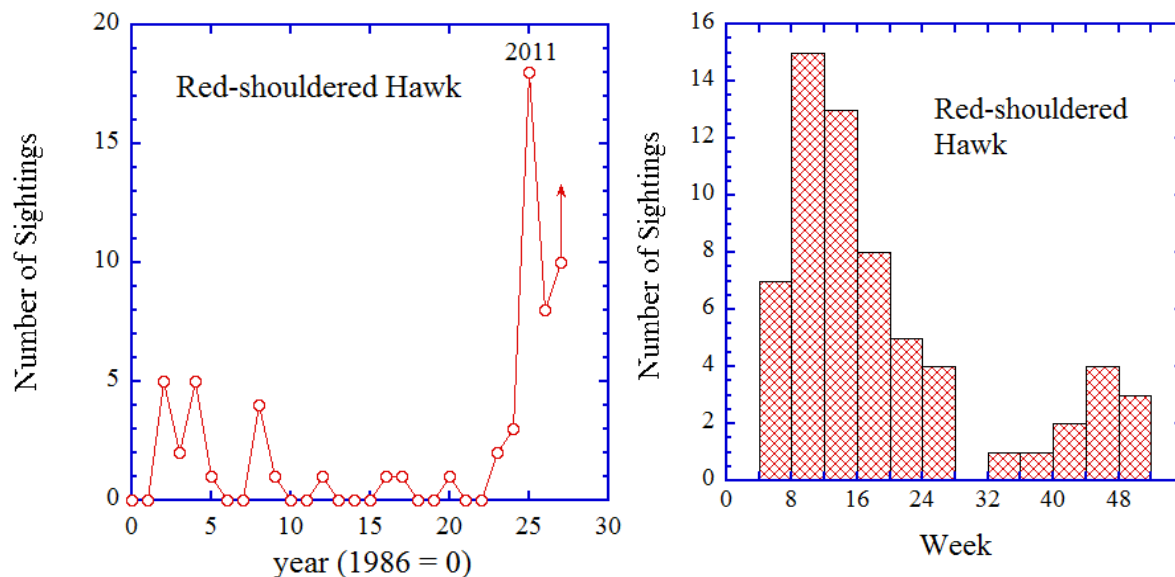
Our red-lore parrot showed up again. We last saw him a couple of weeks ago in a tree across the street from the Public Affairs office. This week, he was in the same tree but on top of the canopy. Underneath was a collection of ten or so red-crowned parrots, mostly in pairs and narry a yellow cheek among them. Our red-lore parrot may not have found love but he has certainly acquired some companionship. This is our third sighting of a red-lore parrot and the second for this year. If you are record starved, the two sightings for 2013 constitute a new record for greatest number of red-lore parrot sightings in a calendar year.

We are all dreamers. For some of us, the dream is a wild and surrealistic child sprouting like a foaming weed. It is nearly sublimated out of REM and captured only as a translucent curtain of aerosols, rising from the ill-formed marsh of a near waking day. For others, the dream is tightly controlled, a subliminal thinking mind that extends the working day and somehow, in absence, solves to duty and desire. I have both kinds of dreams but I also have an oddly persistent mannerist dream that is a simple expression of desire. I dream of seeing all six of the parrot species listed on the California Parrot Project's site (http://www.californiaparrotproject.org/parrot_pages.html) on the Caltech bird walk. We have seen three of them (red-crowned, red-lore and yellow-headed). The other three have been reported in Pasadena at various times, so, what's to stop us? I think there are a couple of reasons. The first is that the birds need to be on campus at the right time of day for us to see them. The best way to pick up parrots is to go to one of the major roosting spots and wade through all the individuals of the most common species to pick up the oddities. This kind of walk needs to be at dusk or dawn and it has to be spatially flexible. If you have a walk relegated to the noon hour and a specific place that doesn't include a roosting spot, you can't play this game. We aren't a parroting desert but we generally have to take siesta birds and the odd flock in flight. A second reason damping exuberance is the ease with which these other birds can hide in the obvious and that's a statistical quirk we can do something about.

In the interest of priming the pump, let's divide the Parrot Project parrots into a pair of naturally unnatural classes. If the bird has red on the head, the natural tendency is to just label it as a red-crowned parrot. That's playing smart odds but a religious application will have you miss some opportunities to expand the Caltech repertoire. If you see yellow, you instantly start down the yellow-headed parrot path but you could be wrong.

The California Parrot project lists six parrots. There are potentially many more species of parrots in the southern California air basin because any pet is a possible sighting upon escape but the Parrot Project six are by far the most common. You can break this up into two basic categories, those parrots you might confuse with a red-crowned parrot, the visceral response to red on the head, and those you can potentially confuse with a yellow headed parrot, the visceral response to yellow on the head. For possible yellow-headed parrots, look for something other than yellow just above the beak. If you see it, start thinking about other species. For likely red-crowned parrots, it's more a case of looking for something odd, like yellow on the cheek or an unusually abbreviated red "crown." I enclose a pair of sheets based on photos swiped from the California Parrot Project (<http://www.parrots.org/> is also a great place to look at galleries of well posed parrots). My purpose here is not to create a comprehensive identification format. I haven't even touched on juveniles. It is simply to suggest where you might want to feel a little uneasy about dismissing your bird(s) as red-crowned or yellow-headed parrot. There should always be a hint of doubt in the face of the obvious.

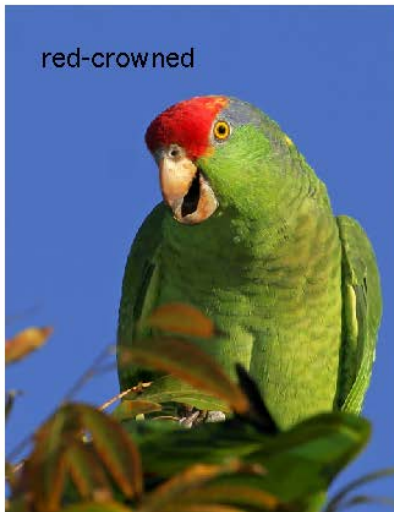
As I've stated previously, all of these parrots are introduced species. The red-lore parrots belong in Central America or northern South America, the yellow-headed parrots from the Caribbean and Pacific slope of Mexico, lilac crowned parrots from the Pacific slope of Mexico, and white-crowned parrots from the Pacific slope of Mexico and Guatemala. Red-crowned and blue-fronted parrots are south Americans. The red-crowns are from Brazil and blue-fronted parrots from Brazil, Paraguay and northern Argentina. There is no living parrot in the state of California who belongs here.



I have been making much of the parrots for this walk but the bird of the week is something quite different. The starting point for the walk at the corner of California with the driveway into the old gym and the new underground parking structure and child care center. This is a good place to collect people but we usually don't acquire a lot of birds. This time, we get a terrific view of a red-shouldered hawk perched on the side of Bridge.

The composition was terrific (Peter where are you). He then flies over to the lamp post right in front of us, providing a detailed view of features. Having decided that there weren't any rats or other suitable delicacies to be acquired from among us, he flies off and we lose him. We now have ten red-shouldered hawk sightings for 2013, which is second best all-time behind the great nesting extravaganza of 2011. Our bird is probably part of a migrational pulse (as opposed to the breeding pulse in the spring). We have a chance of catching another bird over the next month but, based on the distribution of sightings by week, there is also a good chance that he will be the last red-shouldered hawk we will see until February.

Parrots with red feathers on the head



red-crowned

Large, bright red crown, yellow iris; lavender on head generally subtle



Red-lored

usually yellow cheek; red iris; red does not extend past the eye; usually some dark color on beak

dull red front but no red on crown; prominent lavender crown



Lilac-crowned



White-fronted

white fronted; red feathers surround eye to give mask effect but not on crown

Parrots with yellow feathers on the head



yellow-headed

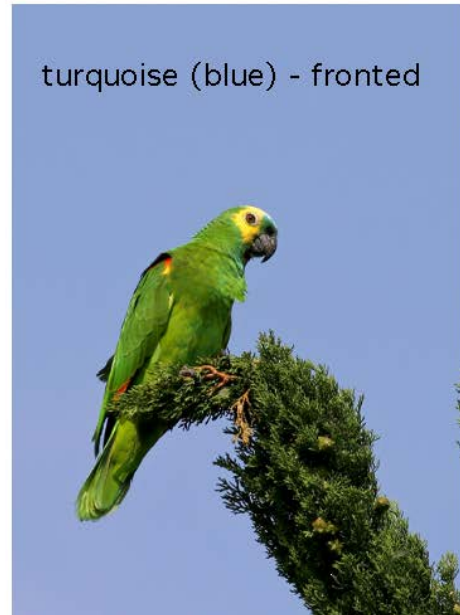
yellow-headed;
light colored bill

blue (turquoise) - fronted; dark bill;
crown has some green



Red-lored

red-front; yellow only on cheek;
usually some dark color on beak



turquoise (blue) - fronted

The date: 11/6/2013

The week number: 45

The walk number: 1220

The weather: 79 F, sunny

The walkers: John Beckett, Roy Williams, Viveca Sapin-Areeda, Vicky Brennan

The birds (22):

- 2 Scrub Jay
- 1 Northern Mockingbird
- 4 Mourning Dove
- 7 House Finch
- 1 Anna's Hummingbird
- 2 Acorn Woodpecker
- 3 American Crow
- 19 Yellow-rumped Warbler
- 1 Red-shouldered Hawk
- 1 Orange-crowned Warbler
- 3 Lesser Goldfinch
- 1 Bewick's Wren
- 2 Black Phoebe
- 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- 1 Nuttall's Woodpecker
- 20 Cedar Waxwing
- 10 Red-crowned Parrot
- 1 Red-lored Parrot
- 1 Townsend's Warbler
- 1 Spotted Towhee
- 1 Red-tailed Hawk
- 1 Hummingbird, Selasphorus

--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,
Alan Cummings,
11/13/13