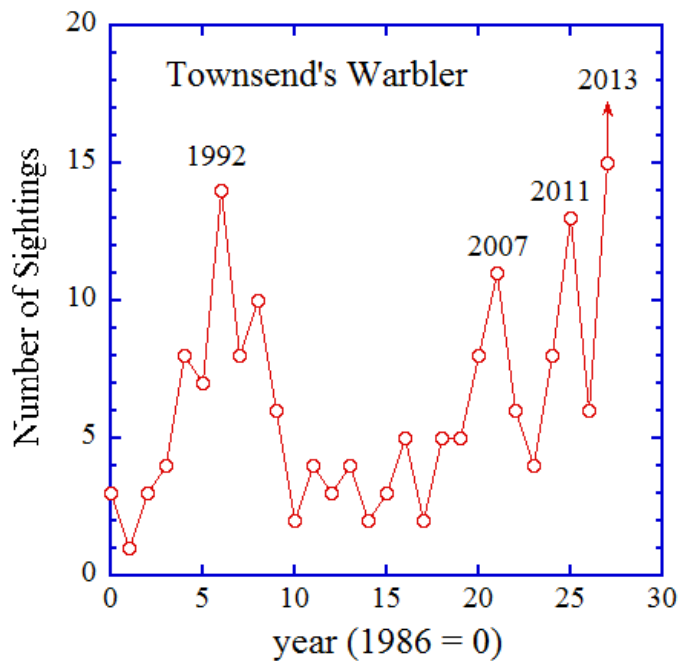


11/27/13

The ladies are absent today, leaving just the two amigos and the results show the loss. Arden was fairly quiet, although we did pick up a Townsend's warbler and a kinglet. The playing field and track were empty. Tournament Park has almost nothing. The hummingbird lady's house yields no hummingbirds. As we round onto Wilson, we have just seven species. We don't know where the record low is for the week but it was definitely above seven. We are in trouble. Alan half jokingly suggests that we stop the walk just shy of the half way mark and pretend that it never happened. I offer a brittle laugh. Maybe, he is serious. However, we amble on. We pick up one more species along Wilson, a Nuttall's woodpecker in an oak next to Morrisroe. We are still in trouble. However, the last third of the walk yields another eight species giving us a final total of 16. This is good enough to surpass the record low of 12 but doesn't rise enough to meet the record of 25 or even the median of 18. We are stuck with a negative score (i.e., below the median for the week) but happy with what we had.

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

Sometimes, most of what you see is the least of what you see. Alan picks up a single cedar waxwing perched on top a small oak in Avery garden. The cedar waxwing was our thirteenth sighting of the year, which is not a matter of great note but it becomes noteworthy in absence. A cedar waxwing in winter has identity within a flock, happiness within a flock. Most frugivores need to be in a flock because it provides more eyes against and more confusing flock responses to predator attacks. Also, food resources for frugivores tend to be concentrated but scattered. A flock is the best way to exploit them. So, convinced that there must be more cedar waxwings in the area, we give the oak,



adjacent trees, and trees across the street a good visual soaking. We hear nothing. We find nothing. Was he lost and waiting for his flock to fly by? Was he the last cedar waxwing from a flock whittled down by buildings, traffic and hawks to this lone bird?

Although we didn't know it at the time, the Arden Townsend's warbler gave us sightings on fifteen weeks this year, which breaks a long standing record of 14 set in 1992. From the figure, this is not a freak accident. We appear to be in a Renaissance for Townsend's warblers at Caltech with sightings generally increasing since about the

year 2000.

I decide, for the first time, to bring a camera along on the walk. I have resisted doing this because I find that, when I have a camera, I have a tendency to be continuously looking for a composition and pay much less attention to birds or potential birds that aren't likely to yield a well posed shot. That's semi-birding. It becomes much more of an exercise in bird photography than of birding. I reconsidered the idea of a camera for two basic reasons. The first is that I hope to eventually enhance the Caltech birding site by having descriptions and discussion of all of Caltech's reported species adorned with pictures of each, taken at least for the most part on the walk. Without a camera, this is a nonstarter. With a camera, I suspect that I can get a viable photo or two every week. The second reason is that we sometimes have difficulty with small birds foraging or resting on the athletic fields and a bit more zoom than is possible with our binoculars would help with



these, even if you are looking through a rather mediocre image finder. The camera has a nice optical zoom and a pretty good image stabilizer. It's an impressive mobile birding camera, given the price. So, I have my first Caltech birdwalk with camera capability and I face temptation almost immediately. There is, I think, a decent photo to be had of the Townsend's warbler we see at Arden. He is foraging relatively

low in the canopy and offering accessible lines of sight. However, going after the photo would mean taking at least several minutes and I am already running late. The task master isn't calling but I feel his absence, so I turn and don't see Alan. He has already drifted up the driveway to the Health Center. I give a last glance at my warbler and turn away, in no mood to celebrate this mild victory for discipline. After Arden, there are no new photographic temptations greeting me until we come up to the corner of Wilson and California where we see a juvenile red-tailed hawk perched in the eucalyptus tree. Ok, big and sessile. I don't need much time. Besides, the traffic light at the corner is against us. I can handle this.

The date: 11/27/2013

The week number: 48

The walk number: 1223

The weather: 75 F, partly cloudy

The walkers: Alan Cummings, John Beckett

The birds (16):

- 1 Northern Mockingbird
- 3 House Finch
- 3 Acorn Woodpecker
- 3 American Crow
- 30 Yellow-rumped Warbler
- 1 Western Bluebird
- 3 Black Phoebe
- 1 Townsend's Warbler
- 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- 3 Red-tailed Hawk
- 1 Nuttall's Woodpecker
- 1 Bewick's Wren
- 1 Hummingbird, Species
- 1 Cedar Waxwing
- 2 Common Raven
- 20 Band-tailed Pigeon

--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,
Alan Cummings,
1/23/14