

2/19/14

The day is weakness in a strong showing. We had 25 species, a recent spate of record breaking walks to keep us company, and three new birds for the year. It was not enough. We were up against a record high of 28 set in 1990, and matched in 2007, 2010, and 2011. So, on the gross species count, we had to be content with defeating the previous and current record low of 14 set back in 2006 and the current median of 22.

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

The walk begins in a flurry. Alan and Yoshi are at the starting point for the walk and, and at the first peal of noon, they march in good order down the street. I am on the wrong side of California as they leave but I get a cheery wave from Yoshi. By the time I catch up, there is already a first new species of the year for this walk, a pair of American goldfinches. I missed a chance to photograph them but I was in time to see a pair of California towhees working the driveway up to the Health Center and the adjoining hedge. I pick up a quick but not very good photo of one of them, which is shown below on the left, but I miss "the shot," one of the birds in a well-lit position and good pose on top of the hedge. In lieu of the one that got away, I include a California towhee photo that I do like. This bird lives in Bolsa Chica and was taken a couple of months ago.

There is always vision in a quiet beauty but you never know where or whether the window will open or for whom. It may be a spell for a person in the right time and of the right mind. In your eyes, what you see may flow through an entre of sound or drift by unseen. In mine, there may be nothing but a causal identification that flavors a loss in aesthetics or it may become the flowing blood of my life. In our eyes we may both see and appreciate or miss the point. The relevant moment came in Tournament Park, when Vicky and I hear a single note repetitive call, somewhat like a hawk but neither of us recognizes it. We are slowly drawn north, essentially retracing our steps towards the gate that we had passed through a few minutes before. Finally, we see the bird. He is high on a tree but in view. We can see nothing of the head but we can see a white slash along the wing. It was enough to guarantee a sapsucker but the slash couldn't tell us which kind. The bird is contemplating his next move. Finally, after much encouragement from below, he shifts enough to reveal a blush of red on the breast. That's enough for



an id but it gets better. We see the top of the head, and, finally, a full head. In the photo on the left, I show our red-breasted sapsucker. There is no hint of a clean white stripe across the face and, although he never showed his throat, the clear presence of red on the breast also argues against a red-naped sapsucker. For a comparison, I show a genuine red-naped sapsucker from a December walk. I want to emphasize the sapsucker slash, viewable from the side. Sapsuckers all have it and other woodpeckers don't.



The third new bird also represented the second sighting of this species all-time. This time, it was Viveca who picked up the bird foraging in one of the restroom oak trees in Tournament Park. It was a small gray bird with a prominent crest. Vocalization was not prominent but it let off enough verbal embellishments to confirm that we had an oak titmouse. Unfortunately, I never got a visual on the bird, much less a photo. So, we will have to hope for better luck next week.

The date: 2/19/2014

The week number: 8

The walk number: 1235

The weather: 67 F, partly cloudy

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

The birds (25):

- 2 House Sparrow
- 15 House Finch
- 1 Anna's Hummingbird
- 17 American Crow
- 3 Mallard
- 2 American Goldfinch
- 4 Black Phoebe
- 2 California Towhee

- 2 European Starling
- 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- 35 Yellow-rumped Warbler
- 1 Dark-eyed Junco
- 3 Orange-crowned Warbler
- 1 Band-tailed Pigeon
- 3 Lesser Goldfinch
- 1 Hummingbird, Selasphorus
- 1 House Wren
- 1 Cooper's Hawk
- 1 Red-breasted Sapsucker
- 15 Bushtit
- 1 Oak Titmouse
- 1 Woodpecker, Species
- 1 Common Raven
- 4 Townsend's Warbler
- 1 Cedar Waxwing

--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,
Alan Cummings,
2/27/14