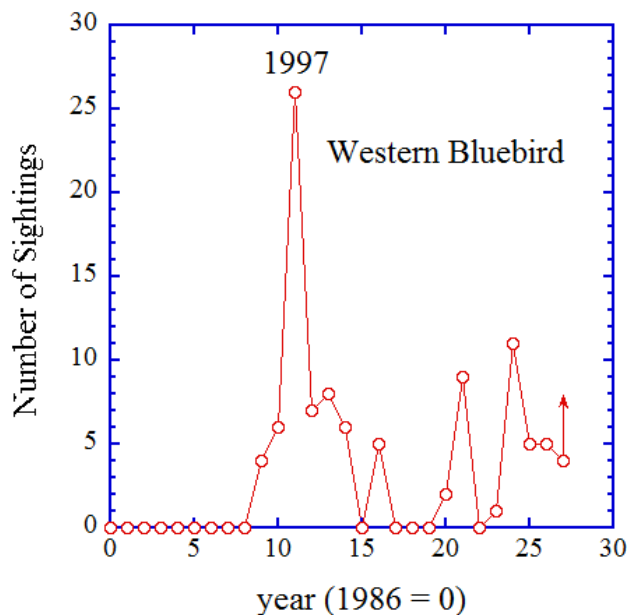


8/14/13

Fourteen species grace a walk and you say it's near historic? How can this be? The answer is that you have to think in the moment. Perhaps a sports analogy would help. Consider the game of golf. It is nominally the same course from week to week. The basic structure remains the same from day to day although there may be minor shifts in pin placement or pruning that change the apparent texture. However, the individual score depends on the interface between the player and the course on a particular day. The greens may be fast one week with a tap leading to a gallop but soggy the next, your ball splatting like Napoleon's cannonballs at Waterloo. You can't compare a score under very windy conditions with one from a placid day or a soggy course with a dry one. You can't compare a score from the bird walk of a hot August day with a pleasant walk from March or April. Week 33 has the lowest record high species total of the year, never higher than 14 and that's where we ended this one, the 14 being wrought by a rock pigeon *Viveca* caught peeking out over the lip of the second floor balcony on Arms after the official end of the walk (you are allowed to report birds you see in walking from your office to the starting point of the walk and to your office after leaving the walk). On week 3 or 13 or 23, 14 species, however achieved, would be viewed as disastrously bad. On week 33, it's a record high as we matched the record set in 2010. This sounds impressive and is, but week 33 is also a week of little dynamic range. We were fortunately on the polished side of the veneer but we were flirting with the record low half way through the walk, but fortunately we have a second half. In the end, we were safely above the record low of 9 as well as the median of 11.

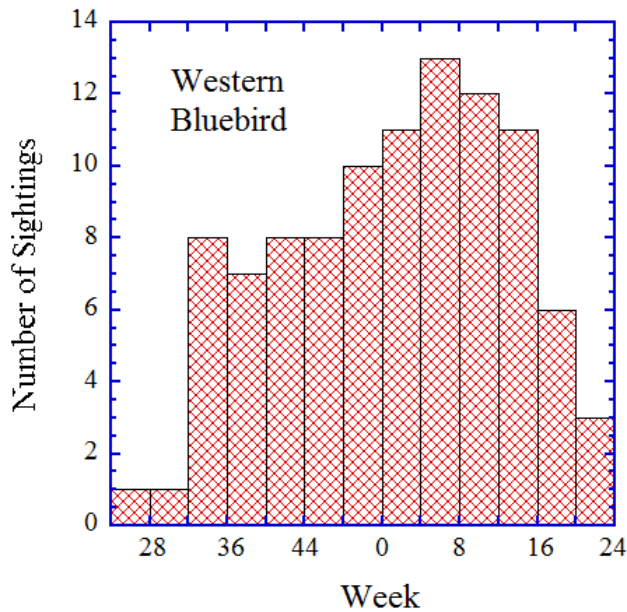
See the plots at http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird_data/species_time.html and http://birdwalks.caltech.edu/bird_data/two_plots.htm



There were a number of highlights. I mentioned the rock pigeon, which is important primarily because it put us into record territory. *Viveca* also brought a Crellin house sparrow to the walk, which allowed us to check off that now hard to catch species. I would also be remiss in not pointing to the hummingbird lady. We certainly could not have made the record without her help. Her feeders yielded three species of hummingbirds and we didn't see two of them (Allen's and black-chinned) elsewhere on the walk. From a rarity perspective, the turkey vulture needs to be mentioned. *Viveca*, Alan, and Kent almost simultaneously jumped on this bird soaring north of campus. Midsummer turkey vulture sightings are fairly rare although we can expect the frequency to rise as we move into

September. The most obvious highlight was, however, a western bluebird sighted over the orange beaver pad around the scoreboard at one end of the baseball field. This is a low probability bird in the middle of the August, so he was a bit of a shock. The blue was quite strong so this was an adult male and not a dispersing juvenile, whose plumage would have been much more subdued. There was a second bird of similar size in an adjacent tree but it stayed in the shade and wasn't moving much. Unfortunately, we lacked sufficient gain on our binoculars to turn this into a second bluebird. We might

have had a chance with Viveca's 10x binoculars but she had not yet joined the walk. Still, one midsummer bluebird is much better than none and, if a pair of bluebirds has decided to take up residence at the north end of the baseball field, we have an excellent chance of seeing more of them later in the year. If they were to stick around into the winter and our Say's phoebe from last year returned, there could be a serious turf battle but, having said that, I don't recall ever actually seeing a western bluebird - Say's phoebe interaction. Maybe, Say's phoebes only care about black phoebes, which they generally will not tolerate, and there will be a cozy bluebird-phoebe detente.



If you ignore the year of the bluebird (1997), western bluebirds are a few times a year (or less) type of capture for us but they are the kind of colorful and elegant bird that you would be happy to see every week. There is a strong seasonal component to our sightings; we start seeing them in early fall with probabilities slowly increasing through the fall and winter and a tapering off in the spring. The local nesting hole collection is modest and fiercely contested, so a western bluebird that wants a family is probably going to have to leave campus to do it. Scattering a few bluebird houses around campus would almost certainly add some year round color to those cool days of August. I leave you with a photo of a male-female pair of western bluebirds taken by Justin Watts in Santa Barbara. I lifted his photo from the IBC (Internet Bird

Collection) site at <http://ibc.lynxeds.com>, which is a good place to go if you are looking for bird images (also songs and video clips). The shot is just a tad washed out but you can't argue with that composition.

The date: 8/14/2013
 The week number: 33
 The walk number: 1208
 The weather: 86 F, sunny

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

The birds (14):

- 1 Rock Pigeon
- 1 House Sparrow
- 3 Mourning Dove
- 6 Anna's Hummingbird
- 3 Acorn Woodpecker
- 4 American Crow
- 8 Red-masked Parakeet
- 1 Western Bluebird

- 1 Black Phoebe
- 22 Bushtit
- 2 Black-chinned Hummingbird
- 1 Hummingbird, Selasphorus
- 2 Lesser Goldfinch
- 1 Turkey Vulture



--- John Beckett

Respectfully submitted,
Alan Cummings,
9/16/13