

**Swainson's Hawk:
Their Biology and Conservation**

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Keith Babcock

Until recently, very little was known about the breeding home range and foraging habitat requirements of the Swainson's hawk in the Central Valley of California. And yet, this region is home to the highest concentration of Swainson's hawks in the state. Several radiotelemetry studies have been conducted on Swainson's hawks over the past five years that have added substantially to current knowledge on the natural history of this species.

The mean home range size of breeding Swainson's hawks in these studies ranged from 6,800 acres (10.6 sq. mi.) to 10,000 acres (15.6 sq. mi.). Individual hawks foraged as far as 15-18 miles from the nest area during foraging activities. In the Central Valley, Swainson's hawks depended heavily on various agricultural crop types for prey. During the radiotelemetry studies, cover types with less overall vegetative cover and greater prey availability ranked highest (alfalfa, disced and fallow fields, dryland pasture, some grain crops). The use of crop and other cover types were directly correlated with the amount of vegetation cover, prey availability, and farming activities such as harvesting, discing, mowing, and flood irrigating.

Peter H. Bloom

Between the early 1940s and 1970, the California Swainson's Hawk underwent a state-wide decline that went unnoticed. It wasn't until 1979 that a cooperative study by the Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Fish and Game brought light on the magnitude of the decline and the nearly complete extirpation of the southern California population. It was also determined that essentially nothing was known about California Swainson's Hawk ecology.

In the intervening years between 1979 and 1994, biologists have continued to monitor subpopulations and study the ecology of this species. The good news is that we are light years ahead of where our knowledge stood on the Swainson's Hawk in 1979; the bad news is that for some regions of the state, the populations continue to slide downward by as much as 90%.

K. Greg Elliott

The Cosumnes River Preserve is a cooperative project encompassing 5,000 acres of natural and restored freshwater seasonal marsh, freshwater tidal marsh, bottomland riparian forest, grasslands, and agricultural land located at the mouth of the Cosumnes River in southern Sacramento County. Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game and the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation own and co-manage the Preserve with the goal of protecting and restoring freshwater seasonal marsh and valley oak riparian forest habitat.

Restoration and management are undertaken to provide habitat for a number of rare and threatened species, among them the Swainson's hawk. Specifically, riparian restoration will increase available nesting sites along the river; managed seasonal marshes drawn down during summer provide excellent foraging habitat; and mowing