

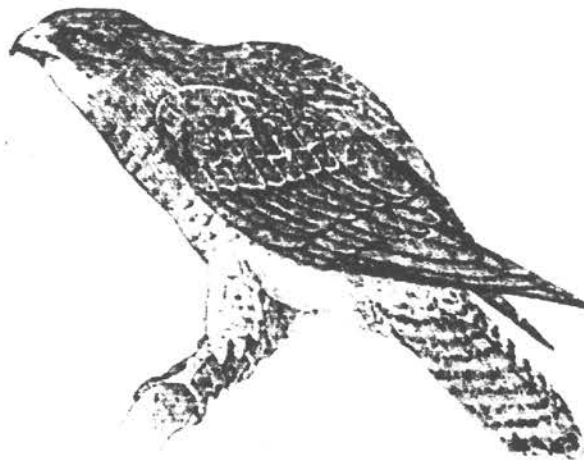
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Sunday,

[DFG Home](#)[HCPB Home](#)[About HCPB](#)[Branch Highlights](#)[How You Can Help](#)[Conservation Planning](#)[Conservation and Mitigation Banking](#)[Conservation Projects](#)[Partnerships and Related Programs](#)[Environmental Review and Species Take Permits](#)[California's Plants and Animals](#)[Publication Information](#)

California Department of Fish and Game
Habitat Conservation Planning Branch

CALIFORNIA'S PLANTS AND ANIMALS



Swainson's Hawk
Buteo swainsoni

State Status: Threatened, 1983
Federal Status: None



Habitat Conservation Planning
 Branch
 1416 Ninth St., Sacramento, CA
 95814
 Telephone: (916) 653-4875

The Status of Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Animals and Plants in California, Swainson's California Department of Fish and Game, 2000.

SWAINSON'S HAWK

The Swainson's hawk is a medium-sized hawk with relatively long, pointed wings and a long, square tail. Females weigh 28 to 34 ounces and males 25 to 31 ounces. Swainson's hawks breeding in California winter in Mexico and South America. Central Valley birds appear to winter in Mexico and Columbia from northeastern California have been satellite-transmitter tracked to Argentina. The diet of the Swainson's hawk varied with the California vole being the staple in the Central Valley. A variety of bird and insect species are taken. Over 85 percent of Swainson's hawk territories in the Central Valley are in riparian systems and suitable foraging habitats. Swainson's hawks often nest peripherally to riparian systems of the valley utilizing lone trees or groves of trees in agricultural fields. Valley oak, Fremont cottonwood, walnut, and sycamore, with an average height of about 58 feet, and ranging from 41 to 82 feet, are the most commonly used in the Central Valley. Swainson's hawks require large, open grasslands with abundant prey in associated nest trees. Suitable foraging areas include native grasslands or lightly grazed pastures, alfalfa and other crops, and certain grain and row croplands. Unsuitable foraging habitat includes crops such as vineyards, citrus, and certain row crops, rice, corn and cotton crops. Suitable nest sites may be found in mature riparian forests or groves of oaks, other trees in agricultural fields, and mature roadside trees.

Swainson's hawks were once found throughout lowland California and were absent only from the Sierra Nevada, the north Coast Ranges and Klamath Mountains, and portions of the desert regions of the State. Today, Swainson's hawks are restricted to portions of the Central Valley and Great Basin regions where suitable nesting habitat is still available. Central Valley populations are centered in Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Yuba. During historical times (ca. 1900), Swainson's hawks may have maintained a population in excess of 1000. Based on a study conducted in 1994, the statewide population is estimated to be approximately 800. More recent surveys have been planned to revise this estimate, there has been inadequate funding to carry out the research. However, surveys in 1998 and 1999 in the Owens Valley area of the State reported a population (about 20 pairs) than previously documented, centered around alfalfa fields in the area.

The loss of agricultural lands to various residential and commercial developments is a serious threat to Swainson's hawks throughout California. Additional threats are habitat loss due to riverbank protection projects, and from agricultural crops that provide abundant foraging opportunities to crops such as vineyards and citrus, and provide fewer foraging opportunities, shooting, pesticide poisoning of prey animals and hawks on wild competition from other raptors, and human disturbance at nest sites.

An ad-hoc group of researchers called the Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is developing a draft of a recovery plan for the species. The TAC has been active in habitat management symposia sponsorship, and county planning issues within the critical three county range of the species currently active in several telemetry research projects. Despite the lack of a recovery plan, actions for recovery have been ongoing since the listing in 1983. These include the development of federal HCP 2081 incidental take agreements within the range of the species. Management needs of the Swainson's hawk are fairly well known for the Central Valley breeding population. These include ensuring the availability of nesting and foraging habitat through preservation of riparian systems and groves of and lone mature agricultural fields, and maintenance of compatible (with the Swainson's hawk) agricultural practices in pastures and croplands. Compatible agriculture is essential to the maintenance of current Swainson populations.

Recent die-offs of several thousand Swainson's hawks and other raptors attributed to pesticide use in fields in Argentina have prompted intense interest and actions on the part of scientists, industry, and to alleviate the problem. In partnership with chemical companies and landowners, initial efforts of recovery have resulted in certain chemical compounds known to cause hawk mortality being replaced with what are less dangerous substitutes. Monitoring will continue to detect and ensure against further hawk die-offs.

In 1997, six hawks were fitted with satellite transmitters and tracked during their southward migration. They were located wintering in a region north of Mexico City, Mexico, and near Bogota, Columbia. No bird from the Central Valley has been tracked further south, although a bird from northern California was tracked during the winter of 1996. This study is ongoing and is intended to gather data on migration and wintering of the species over the next several years. The significance of the finding that Swainson's hawks winter south of the equator rather than Argentina is that there is little exposure to the kinds of pesticide poisoning suffered by birds in the equatorial region. Agricultural operations are different with little or no pesticide application to croplands that frequent in order to find prey. Transmitters were affixed in 1998 and 1999 and results confirm that the hawks of the Central Valley migrate to a wintering area (in Mexico) quite different (and perhaps safer) than the majority of the Nation's population of Swainson's hawks.

The DFG is currently developing state-of-the-art GIS products for use in Swainson's hawk recovery. Earlier generations of these same GIS tools have been developed at the county level to aid in land use planning and HCP development.

The status in 1999 of Swainson's hawk: Declining.

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<http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/es/espdfs/swhabio.pdf>

Central Valley Bay-Delta Branch, Wildlife Gallery, Swainson's Hawk.

<http://www.delta.dfg.ca.gov/gallery/swainson.html>

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