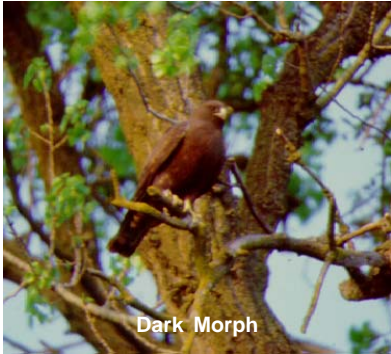


Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsonii*)

Status -- Federal: None; California: Threatened



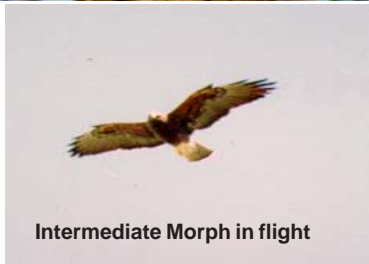
Dark Morph



Dark Morph in flight



Intermediate Morph



Intermediate Morph in flight

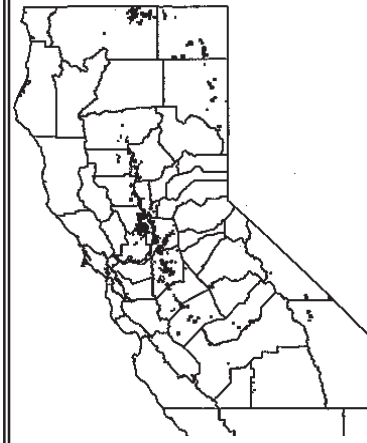
Photos: Leopoldo A. Moreno, DPR

Swainson's hawks (SH) are medium sized raptors, slightly smaller than red-tailed hawks (RT). They are long-range migratory birds, flying south to Argentina, where they winter. In early spring they return to their breeding grounds in North America. Like other hawks SHs have a several plumage colorations (morphs) from light to dark.

California Department of Pesticide Regulation
Endangered Species Program
<https://www.cdpr.ca.gov>



Swainson's Hawk



Characteristics Swainson's hawks weigh approximately 2 lbs, and have a wingspan of about 48 inches. Both sexes are similar in appearance, however the female is slightly larger than the male. Adult Swainson's hawks generally have dark upperparts. As mentioned before, the body plumage on the underside has several color variations.

Behavior Swainson's hawks are highly territorial, particularly during nest-building and incubation. Those that nest in relatively quiet, isolated areas are very susceptible to disturbance, particularly human activity and noise.

Swainson's hawks are also known to build their nests in urban areas, some with high levels of human activity and noise, however, this is more an exception than the rule, and a possible reflection of the impact of human encroachment upon the hawks' habitat.

Food Swainson's hawks have a very interesting diet, during the breeding season, they feed mostly on rodents such as ground squirrels, gophers, field mice, etc., and to a lesser extent on grasshoppers, locusts, and other insects, which they capture in open fields. While wintering in Argentina, they feed primarily on grasshoppers and locusts, often soaring into storm fronts which carry large quantities of these invertebrates.

Distribution In California, Swainson's hawks range throughout the Central Valley, with the highest nesting densities found in Yolo, Sacramento, and San Joaquin counties. In Siskiyou county, the Butte Valley supports one of the highest nesting densities of Swainson's hawks. Recent studies in that location seem to confirm the importance of high quality foraging habitat in close proximity to the nest site.