Who is the Swainson’s Hawk?

The Swainson’s Hawk is a broad tailed and winged hawk (buteo) that hunts small mammals and insects in farmlands and grasslands. It is typically 20 inches long with a wing span of 4 feet and a weight of almost 2 pounds. It is the most slender winged of the buteos. The Swainson’s Hawk soars with wings slightly raised at the end, and hunts by hovering with a back-pedaling motion. There are light plumage and dark plumage versions of Swainson’s Hawks, and variations in between. Look for the top edge of the wings to be lighter than the trailing edge (a contrast to the red-tailed hawk). Swainson’s Hawks are most likely to be seen in Central California soaring, and during their season here, they are frequently seen over alfalfa fields hunting for meadow mice.

In our region, Swainson’s Hawks can be confused with other similar hawks. The red-tailed hawk is about the same size as the Swainson’s Hawk, but stockier. Red-tailed hawks are seen soaring, but are most familiar as the hawks sitting on posts and poles along roads. They have a white breast and belly, bisected by a dark “cumberbund.”

Red tails are seen all year round in our region, with greater numbers in the winter. Swainson’s Hawks are only seen March to September.

Swainson’s Hawk Migration

Hundreds of thousands of Swainson’s Hawks migrate to Argentina each year. These are the hawks that breed outside of our area. Our Central California’s Swainson’s Hawks migrate on a different path. The Swainson’s Hawk Technical Advisory Committee, a group of research biologists, tracked Swainson’s Hawks from our region southward. What they found was that most stayed in Mexico during the winter, with smaller numbers flying further south. None of the Swainson’s Hawks from our region reached the wintering grounds of the larger population. Visit our web site to learn more about migration and the wintering grounds of our region’s Swainson’s Hawk population.

The smaller Red shouldereded Hawks are seen in trees and on wires looking down. Quite beautiful, they are not buteos and do not soar.

Northern Harrier or Marsh Hawks cruise low over the ground to hunt. They have a long tail and a white rump patch.

Coopers and Sharp shinned Hawks are active in trees, hunting small birds. They are quite a bit smaller than Swainson’s Hawks. They have short wings and a long tail. Visit our website for more information.
Who is Friends of the Swainson’s Hawk?

On August 15, 1992, three birdwatching buddies sat in a canoe on North Stone Lake watching a Swainson’s Hawk soar overhead. They talked about the wave of urbanization poised to pave over the Sacramento farmlands. They wondered how long the Swainson’s Hawk would survive with its habitat being paved over. So was born Friends of the Swainson’s Hawk, a grassroots non-profit organization. FOSH has taken on the challenge of protecting Swainson’s Hawk habitat in the range of the California Swainson’s Hawk.

Compassion

About two thousand Swainson’s Hawks nest and reproduce in California, primarily in Sacramento, Yolo and San Joaquin Counties. Each spring, Swainson’s Hawks return to our region from their wintering activities. They depend on our trees, rivers, streams, and agricultural fields to live and reproduce. In recent years some Swainson’s Hawks have returned to find their nesting trees gone and their foraging fields paved over. Others experience disruption of their nesting because of construction or because people have moved too close to them. Compassion requires us to stop this and allow future generations to know the Swainson’s Hawk.

Commitment

About seventeen thousand Swainson’s Hawks once flourished in California. The State of California classifies the Swainson’s Hawk as a threatened species under the California Endangered Species Act. Join us in making a commitment to maintaining a strong population of Swainson’s Hawks in your area.

Conservation

What can you do to help?
- Ask cities to stay within their existing boundaries.
- Support permanent farmland.
- Help monitor and preserve lands.
- Make sure that trees are planted to serve as nesting habitat in 25 years.
- Help educate the public and government about how to protect Swainson’s Hawks.
- Volunteer at a preserve or for FOSH.
- Donate to our programs or to our endowment for Swainson’s Hawk.

FOSH Scoreboard

Since 1994, FOSH has focused on enforcing laws and implementing policies that protect Swainson’s Hawk. The result has been achievements in Sacramento, Yolo and San Joaquin Counties. When we started, governments were holding on to funds that had been collected for mitigation fees and not buying the land intended to be purchased with the fees. Now, thousands of acres have been permanently protected and managed for Swainson’s Hawk because of the watchdog efforts of grassroots advocacy.

Join our Yahoo Groups list Serve at:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ Swainsonshawk

FOSH is a non-profit, 501-c organization, and donations are tax-deductible.

If you would like to make a donation to our programs, send check payable to:
Friends of the Swainson’s Hawk
915 L Street, Suite C-425
Sacramento, CA 95814

To donate to the tax-deductible Swainson’s Hawk Endowment Fund at the Sacramento Region Community Foundation. Send check payable to Swainson’s Hawk Endowment, SRCF.

We need help with reaching the public at fairs, festivals, and at schools.

Contact Us:
Phone: (916) 447-4956
Email: Contact@swainsonshawk.org
Website: www.swainsonshawk.org