

IDENTIFICATION



How do I know
if it's a Swainson's hawk?

Here are some basic tips for identifying the Swainson's hawk, which was listed as a Threatened Species in California by the Fish and Game Commission in 1983:



buteo swainsoni

Wingspan: 4 to 4-1/2 feet
Body Length: 17 to 22 inches
Weight: 1.5 to 2.5 pounds

In flight, the Swainson's hawks long, pointed, gently upsloped wings are a key characteristic

Usually seen soaring or perched in trees or snags

When perched, their wing tips extend slightly below their tails



Photo by C. Conard



Photo by C. Conard

Swainson's hawks have dark flight feathers (the trailing edge of the wings) which contrast with the often lighter leading edge of the wing

All adult Swainson's hawks have a dark bib, dark head, and dark back. Other plumage characteristics are variable



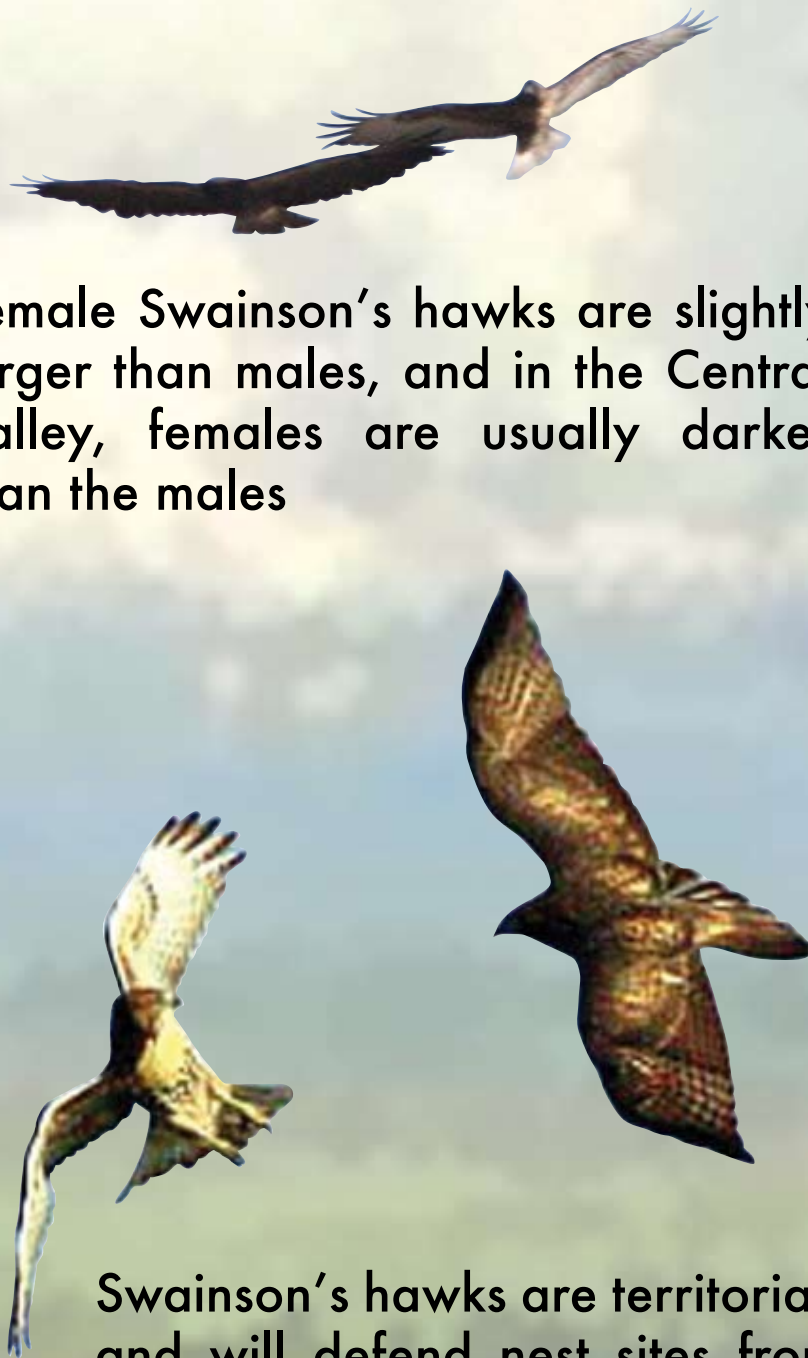
Plumage morphs vary from white wing linings and a white belly (light morph), to dark wing linings and a dark belly (dark morph), with a variety of intermediate morphs



Photo by C. Walker

Juveniles do not have the key markings of adult hawks

Female Swainson's hawks are slightly larger than males, and in the Central Valley, females are usually darker than the males



Swainson's hawks are territorial, and will defend nest sites from other raptors



Photo by J. Estep

Swainson's hawks soar above nest territories, along riparian areas, above agricultural crops or follow tractors and hunt in farm fields. In the fall, you can see them in large groups hunting or soaring together in "kettles"



Common raptors found in the Central Valley during breeding season include:



Swainson's Hawk



Red-Tailed Hawk



Red-Shouldered Hawk



White-Tailed Kite



Turkey Vulture



Northern Harrier