

## NESTING OF SWAINSON'S HAWK IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA IN 1977

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The Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) was once a common raptor inhabiting eastern San Luis Obispo County (Louis Silveria pers. comm., Fred Truesdale field notes). It is now an uncommon breeding species throughout California and nesting in San Luis Obispo County is extremely rare. I attempted to locate Swainson's Hawk nesting territories during spring 1977 while conducting other research in the Coast Ranges of California.

A pair of Swainson's Hawks was reported to nest in 1976 on the San Juan Creek, San Luis Obispo County (Ron Walker pers. comm.). The nest was occupied in 1977 by Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) (Lynette Shirley pers. comm.). I observed this nesting territory in 1977. It consisted of a large, isolated, dead cottonwood (*Populus* sp.) in the dry floodplain of San Juan Creek which runs through oak woodland, grassland and agricultural plant communities. The nest was placed on one of the few remaining large horizontal branches of the tree. It appeared that the nesting Red-tailed Hawks had added fresh sticks to the bulky stick nest.

I surveyed the length of San Juan Creek (53 km) by automobile and foot travel. Eleven similar territories were located. Nine sites contained large (approximately 20 m), isolated dead cottonwood trees with a buteo-type stick nest. One site had two large dead trees that were isolated from other trees in the area and both trees contained buteo-type nests. A final site contained a large, isolated dead cottonwood tree with only remnants of a stick nest. Live and non-isolated trees were also checked. No Swainson's Hawks were observed in those situations although Red-tailed Hawks and Great-horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) were common (11 and 4 pairs respectively).

Of the eleven territories observed, seven were occupied. Five were occupied by Red-tailed Hawks and two by Swainson's Hawks. The two Swainson's Hawk nests were 6 km apart. One tree occupied by Red-tailed Hawks also contained Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) in the hollow trunk.

Four Red-tailed Hawk nests contained two young each and one contained one young. Each Swainson's Hawk nest contained one young, both of which were successfully fledged. The fledging success of the Red-tailed Hawk nests was not determined. No egg counts were conducted.

Because the Swainson's Hawk is: 1) occasionally mis-identified as the abundant Red-tailed Hawk, 2) not generally used by falconers for hunting, and 3) currently a widely spaced nesting species in California, it has received little of the attention or study awarded other species in recent years. These nesting attempts are among the few documented attempts for the central Coast Range region in the 1970s; clearly there has been a large scale population decline and range reduction for this species. Hopefully more researchers will document the occupancy and the productivity of Swainson's Hawk territories in other regions.

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