

Species Sheets: Swainson's Hawk



photo by Milo Burcham ©

Common name: Swainson's Hawk

Latin Name: *Buteo swainsoni*

Field Marks: Length 21 inches
Wing span 52 inches



Buteo mostly east of continental divide, and only during summer. Large soaring hawk. Adults with brown "bib" or upper chest and white throat patch, light or barred below. Immatures spotted without bib. Tail long and light gray-brown with bars and dark band at tip.

Habitat:

Bird of the Northern Plains of the west, arid and semi-arid country. Often seen on fence posts and even on ground.

Behavior:

Unusual in that their diet varies with season. May hunt rodents and some small birds during the breeding season. Switch to a diet of insects like grasshoppers, locusts and dragonflies in the winter. Prey usually taken in flights from perches. Pasturelands and hayfields provide good foraging country.

Nest and eggs:

Flimsy stick nest usually built in solitary tree,

shrub, shelter belt. Nest often lined with green vegetation. 2-3 eggs incubated mostly by female.

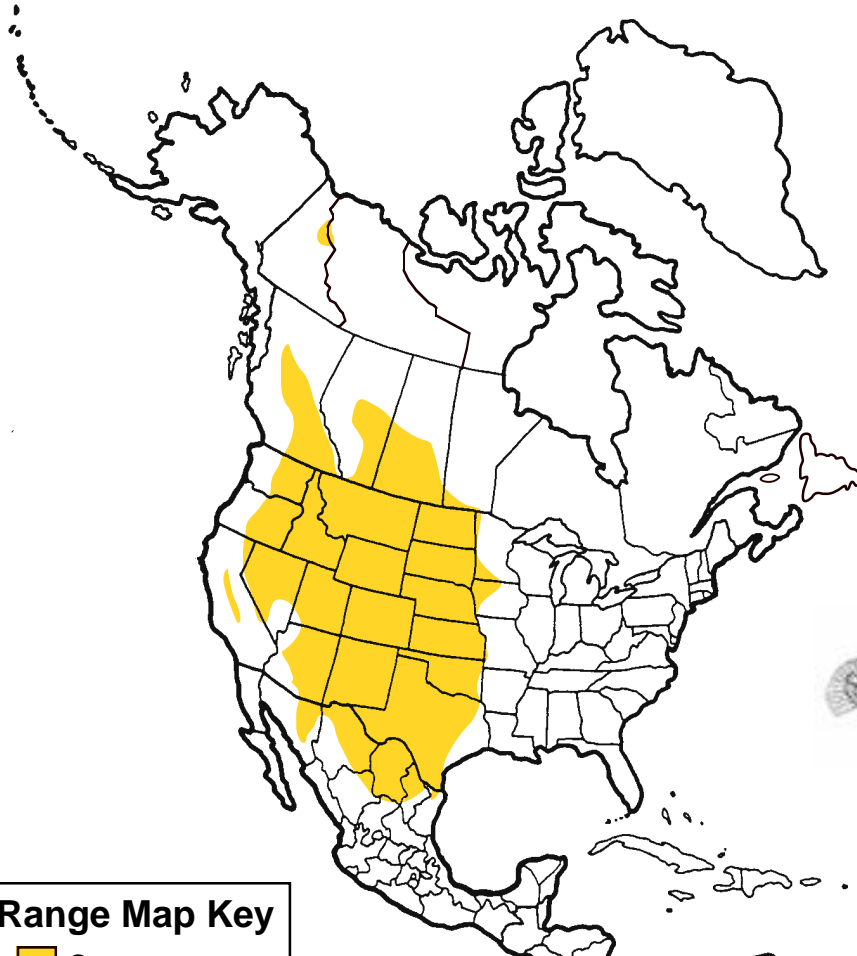
Movement:

Among the most migratory of North American raptors. Entire breeding population moves to Argentina, South America, to over-winter using mostly soaring and gliding as the power for their journey. Migrates only across land and as many as 400,000 seen in Veracruz, Mexico pooled up to avoid ocean crossing. Will not feed along the way. Total distance in 8 weeks of migration exceeds 7000 miles one way.

Interesting Fact:

Organochloride pesticides recently killed tens of thousands of Swainson's Hawks on their wintering grounds in Argentina. These poisons were used to kill the insects that these birds feed upon. These pesticides are now banned, or illegal to use in the United States, but not so in South America.

Range Map: Swainson's Hawk



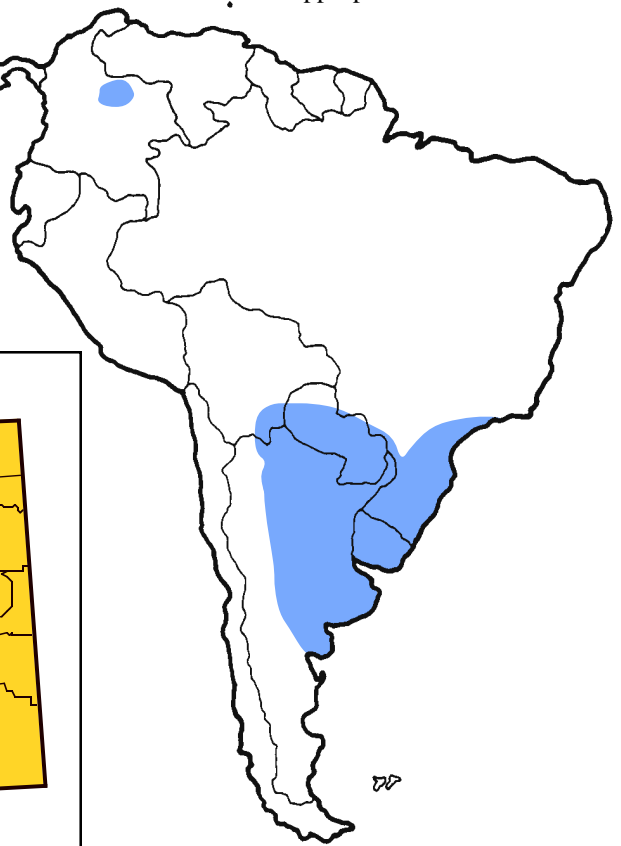
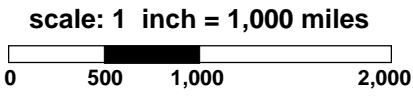
Swainson's Hawk. Copyright © Milo Burcham



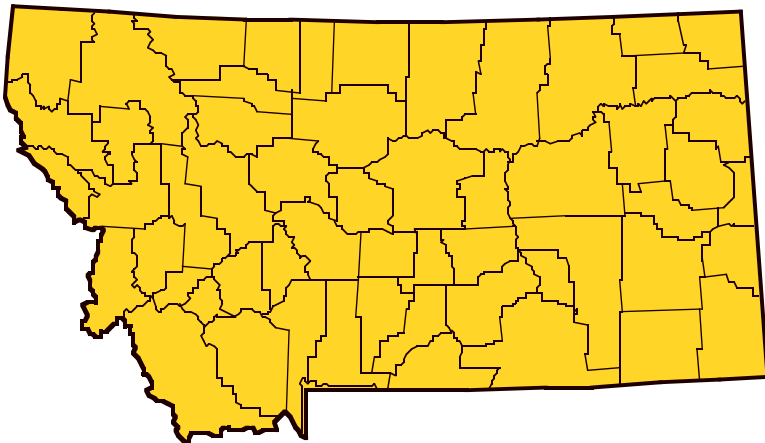
These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter



Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.