

News from the Field

Update on Migration Study of the California Central Valley population of Swainson's Hawks

To date, the Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee (California) has placed satellite-tracked transmitters on 20 Swainson's Hawks in 4 years. This year we placed transmitters on 5 birds, including a new solar-powered unit that has worked very well. In contrast, 3 of the 4 battery-only transmitters failed within a few months of use, and no migration data was collected from 2 failed transmitters; one failed in December. One Swainson's Hawk for which we have data wintered on the west coast of Mexico, between Culiacan and Hermosillo. The second subject bird wintered in the very northern tip of Argentina and southern Bolivia. The third bird, whose transmitter failed in December, was in Columbia at the time.

All Swainson's Hawks trapped for this study have nested between Knights Landing and Tracy, California. The winter range of the Central Valley Swainson's Hawks, based on our data, is from the Central Valley to Northern Argentina. Ten of 17 birds (59%) have wintered in Mexico; one continued to Nicaragua for part of its winter, and one returned to the Delta for part of its winter. Three of 17 birds (18%) wintered in Columbia. Four of 17 birds (23%) wintered in N. Argentina/Bolivia. One bird died before leaving the Delta, and two birds had defective transmitters which resulted in no winter data.

Other than tracking the Swainson's Hawk with the solar-powered transmitter through its second, and potentially, third winter seasons, the TAC will likely discontinue this portion of the study, and will focus on genetics, nesting range, and long-term monitoring of wintering areas of the population. The TAC will seek to publish its initial findings this Spring, and an extensive analysis of the data in 2002.

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