

# Swainson's hawk

*Buteo swainsoni*

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Accipitriformes  
Family: Accipitridae

## ILLINOIS STATUS

endangered, native

Swainson's hawk is endangered in Illinois. This bird reaches the eastern limit of its range in Illinois. It has always been relatively uncommon but is now much less widespread than it was in the late 1800s. Protection of nesting birds from human disturbance is crucial for the bird's survival.

## FEATURES

Swainson's hawk averages 19 to 22 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). There is a dark band on the breast. The rounded tail is gray shading to white. When flying, the lower sides of the broad wings appear tan at the leading edge in contrast to the other dark feathers. There are two color morphs of this bird: light and dark. The light phase birds do not have the dark, breast band of feathers. The dark phase birds are uniformly dark. The immature birds have brown feathers on the back and have streaks of brown on the chest. This bird of prey (meat eater) has a hooked beak to help tear its food apart for eating.

## BEHAVIORS

Swainson's hawk is a rare migrant throughout Illinois and a local summer resident in the northern one-half of the state. It lives in open grassland habitats. Spring migrants arrive in late March and early April. Nesting does occur in northern Illinois, usually in isolated trees in agricultural or grassland areas. Fall migrants begin to arrive in late September. Swainson's hawk winters from Florida to South America. When flying, this raptor soars in circles. It eats small mammals and insects. Its call is a whistled "kreeeer."

## ILLINOIS RANGE



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juvenile

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adult

### **Aquatic Habitats**

none

### **Woodland Habitats**

none

### **Prairie and Edge Habitats**

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie