
PHOTO ESSAY

SWAINSON'S HAWK

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¹ text - Nokomis, SK.

² photographs - Simpson, SK

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is an opportunistic predator, focusing on available prey whether small rodents, birds, reptiles or invertebrates.

Hunting methods are as varied as the prey. Soaring above a grass fire or farm machinery allows the hawk to find suddenly homeless voles.¹ Others may watch patiently from a tall perch before stooping on a rodent. Aerial agility allows it to catch large flying insects like dragonflies with its talons and eat in flight. Swainson's Hawk walks easily as it chases and pounces on grasshoppers.

When hunting ground squirrels (*Thomomys* spp.) it perches near fresh mounds, waiting for gophers to push fresh dirt to surface, then pounces stiff-legged on the mound and pulls out the gopher.²

Eating requires different skills. A larger prey such as a pocket gopher is carried to a feeding perch and picked apart. When the hawk wants to move, it may use its talons to transfer the prey remains to its beak, before flying away.

1. Taylor PS (2007) Swainson's Hawk response to fire at Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area, SK. *Blue Jay* 65:138-139.

2. Bechard MJ, Houston CS, Sarasola JH and England AS (2010) Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/265>









