

SASKATCHEWAN FLOCK OF SWAINSON'S HAWKS

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While helping Monty McGrath with the harvest between 25 and 28 August 1987 we spotted a large flock of Swainson's Hawks feeding in the Mantario district. With the use of binoculars from the vantage of the top of a bin as many as possible of the hawks were counted. In one field 120 birds were counted perched on the ground. With the birds in flight and on the ground in other fields the flock was estimated to be about 200 birds.

A great variation in colour was evident — from very dark birds to one that stood out from the rest because of the amount of white on both its front and back.

The birds appeared to be feeding mostly on grasshoppers and crickets. Monty witnessed one of them near the swath ejecting a pellet consisting of cricket re-

mains. The carcass of one bird was found under a swath, probably taken by one of the coyotes that were heard howling in this area. The location of the night roost of these birds was not found, however one evening at dusk a number of the birds were seen on the ground in a finished field. Dean Francis indicated that he had also seen these hawks 10 mi. further south during the week of 1 September; the flock had grown to approximately 400 birds.

The Swainson's Hawks that nested in the local coulees were still in the area when this large flock arrived. The young were still screaming for food from the adults. Although able to fly very well, they did not yet appear to be hunting on their own. This must have been quite a shock for them to see this invasion of their territory.



Swainson's Hawk

Brian Johns