

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

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URBAN-NESTING OF SWAINSON'S HAWKS IN SASKATCHEWAN¹

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Nesting in cities has been reported for relatively few species of raptors (Newton 1979, Cramp and Simmons 1980, Palmer 1988, Johnsgard 1990). I report here the first known instances of urban-breeding Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*).

The observations were made between May and July, 1988-1991 in the city of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada (50°27'N, 104°37'W) which has a population of about 170,000 people. Swainson's Hawks typically nest in the open terrain of western North America and they are commonly found breeding on the Regina Plain which surrounds the city. In these more typical habitats, it is not unusual to find them close to human habitations (Schmutz 1984, Bechard et al. 1990). However, I can find no previously published record of this species nesting in densely populated cities.

Five nesting attempts of the Swainson's Hawk were observed in Regina. All involved birds in adult plumage and all occurred in the same general area, suggesting that birds returned to the same territories between years. Of the five nestings, two were in residential areas, in nest trees located in private yards (Fig. 1a). Two others occurred in commercial areas of the city, where one of the nests was placed on a railway signal gantry (Fig. 1b). The fifth occurred in a city park. At least one involved the use of an already existing American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) nest. Studies in more typical habitats have shown that Swainson's Hawks use man-made structures much less than other sympatric buteos (Schmutz et al. 1980, Schmutz 1984, Bechard et al. 1990), but they will adopt special nesting poles when provided (Schmutz et al. 1984). Three out of the five nestings in Regina were in coniferous (*Picea glauca*, *P. pungens*) trees and one in a deciduous tree (*Acer* spp.), the opposite of that found in more typical habitats (Schmutz et al. 1980, Bechard et al. 1990). Within the city of Regina, deciduous trees are perhaps at least ten times more abundant than coniferous trees. A similar

switch from rural deciduous trees to urban coniferous trees for nesting has also been reported for the Merlin, *Falco columbarius* (Warkentin and James 1988). Four of the five urban nestings were successful, with an average of 1.4 young being produced per nesting attempt. This compares favorably (1.2-1.5) with the reproductive output of this species in more traditional habitats (Palmer 1988, Johnsgard 1990).

Finally, it is perhaps worth noting that the appearance of urban-nesting Swainson's Hawks is occurring in a region where the Merlin has already undergone a dramatic colonization of the cities in the last two decades (James 1988). In the case of the Merlin, the presence of the abundant House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and nests from colonizing corvids have been suggested as reasons for the invasion of these cities. Swainson's Hawks usually build their own nests although the cities do have a much higher density of trees compared with the surrounding prairie. The usual prey of Swainson's Hawks, Richardson's Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus richardsonii*), is also present within the city limits. In addition to this, raptor nests within cities are less likely to be interfered with by people. All, or some of these factors, may be operating to make the city of Regina an attractive habitat for this large prairie hawk.

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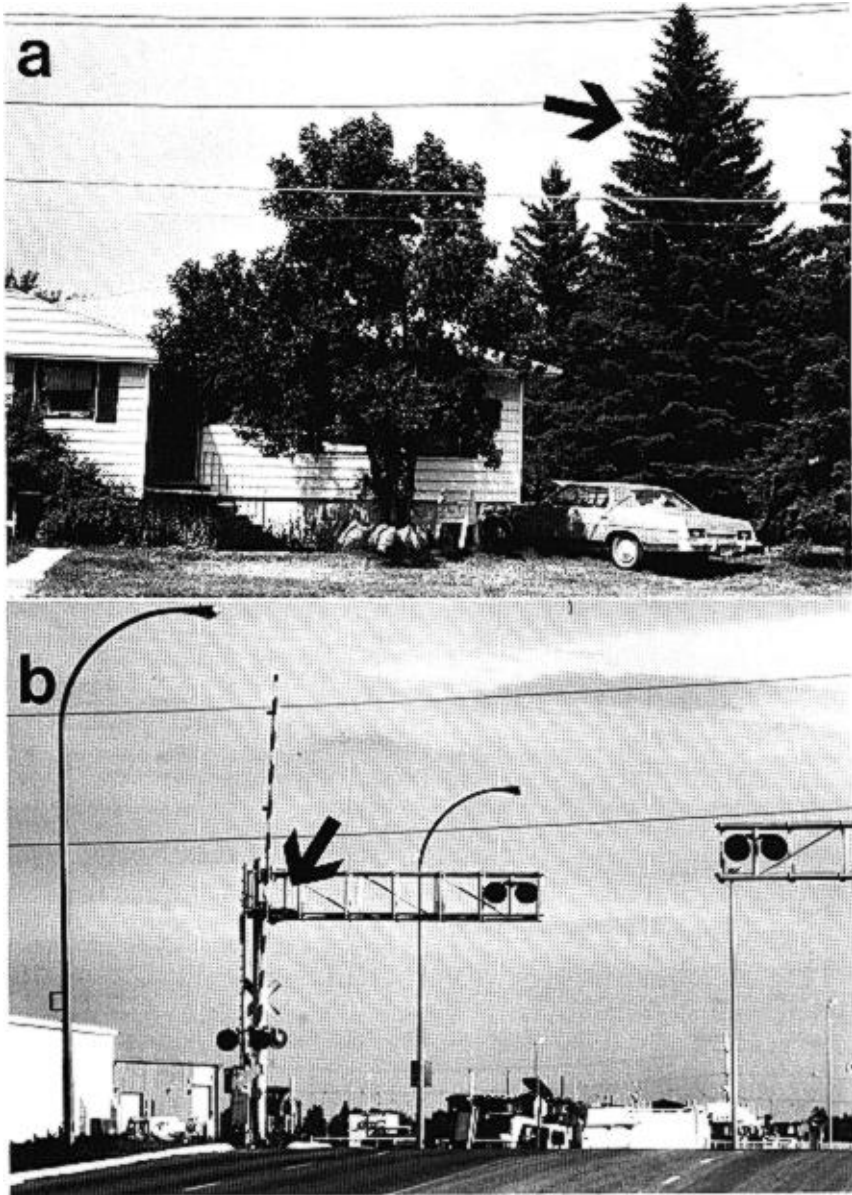


FIGURE 1. Urban nest-sites of Swainson's Hawk in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. (a) Coniferous tree in residential yard, 1988. (b) Railway signal gantry in commercial area, 1990. Arrows indicate nest locations.

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