



Great Basin Wildlife Rescue

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Swainson's Hawks

This summer has been a busy one here at Great Basin Wildlife Rescue. We have rehabilitated all sorts of owls, falcons, eagles, and hawks. In particular, we've received a lot of Swainson's hawks. Swainson's hawks are medium sized hawks that have a stout body and broad wings. These birds are easily identified by their dark chest band (bib) and dark flight feathers with a pale inner wing. Swainson's are generally found in open areas such as grasslands, shrublands, and agricultural areas.

Typically, you can only see Swainson's hawks in North America during the summer months. In the fall, this hawk travels up to 10,000 km (6,214 miles) to South America, particularly Argentina. The trip takes about 2 months to complete. During this migration, Swainson's hawks forage and travel together, sometimes in groups of thousands of hawks at a time. During the breeding season, Swainson's eat small mammals, birds and reptiles. During non-breeding months, they eat insects such as grasshoppers and dragonflies.

Currently, Swainson's hawks are considered a "species of least concern" meaning that they are not threatened or endangered. Several years ago though, this was not the case. Farmers in South America were spraying pesticides to kill insects that were threatening their crops. However, the Swainson's would eat these poisoned insects and would die or become very sick. In addition, their eggshells would become very brittle and would break when they laid on them to try to incubate their eggs. Through conservation efforts here in the United States and in South America, farmers have changed the pesticides they use and the Swainson's hawk has made a miraculous recovery and seen a population increase. Even though this species is considered "of least concern" it is still protected by state and federal law. If you find an injured bird of prey, please contact Great Basin Wildlife Rescue or your local Division of Wildlife Resources or Fish and Game agency.



Do birds drink water?

Although birds don't sweat, they still lose water through breathing and from their droppings. So birds need water to survive, though the amount they drink depends on the type of bird. For example, hummingbirds can get much of their moisture from the nectar they drink, and carnivores and insectivores can get it from the food they eat. Birds that live off a mostly dry diet of seeds, however, need more water.

Many birds drink by dipping their beaks in water and then tilting their heads back so the water can run down their throats. Birds like pigeons and doves can use their beaks to suck up water, while others like pelicans simply hold their beaks open in the rain.

Birds drink water from a variety of sources. As mentioned earlier, some get it from their food. Other natural sources include puddles, ponds, lakes, streams, and sometimes even morning dew. Birds also drink out of backyard birdbaths, so one great way to attract a variety of birds is to keep fresh water in a birdbath, especially during the summer and winter when natural water sources are scarce.

How do birds beat the heat?

If you've lived in Utah during the summer, you know that it can get really hot. While we can cool down by turning on an air-conditioner or fan, birds don't have it so easy. So how do birds survive hot temperatures? As it turns out, they have a variety of methods they use to keep cool.



One way is by panting, which allows cooler air to travel through the lungs and move heat away from their bodies. Similarly, birds may flutter their throats, since that area has a lot of blood and hence a lot of heat. Birds might also ruffle their feathers and spread their wings to allow air to reach their skin, and birds with lighter feathers may turn them

towards the sun to reflect the heat. While birds of prey can take to the skies to find cooler temperatures in higher altitudes, many other birds find water and take a bath to cool off. Just like us, birds also cool down by staying in the shade and not being very active during the hottest parts of the day.

Volunteer Spotlight

Hailey attends Utah Valley University as a full time student. Some of her hobbies are running, reading, piano, hiking, photography and anything that's outdoors. Her favorite bird of prey is the Golden Eagle because they are so beautiful and majestic. She has been volunteering with Great Basin for over a year now. She first came into contact with Great Basin at different events when she was younger but decided to volunteer with them after she talked to them the International Sportsman's expo in Salt Lake City, Utah.



Her favorite thing about volunteering is being able to work closely with the wildlife and giving them the help they need. She says that it's not every day that you get to see wildlife up close and it's a great learning experience. Wildlife rehab is important to her because without it, many animals would die when they still could have had the chance to live. It's one way for her to give back and help the environment.

Picture Credits

p.1. Swainson's Hawk, Great Basin Wildlife Rescue.

p.2 top. House Sparrow. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Passer_domesticus_-Russia_-female-8.jpg. Author is [Reasonable Excuse](#)

p.2 bottom. European starlings. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sturnus_vulgaris_-four_bathing_in_birdbath_-London-8.gif. Author is [NatJLN](#).

p.3. Great Basin Wildlife Rescue.