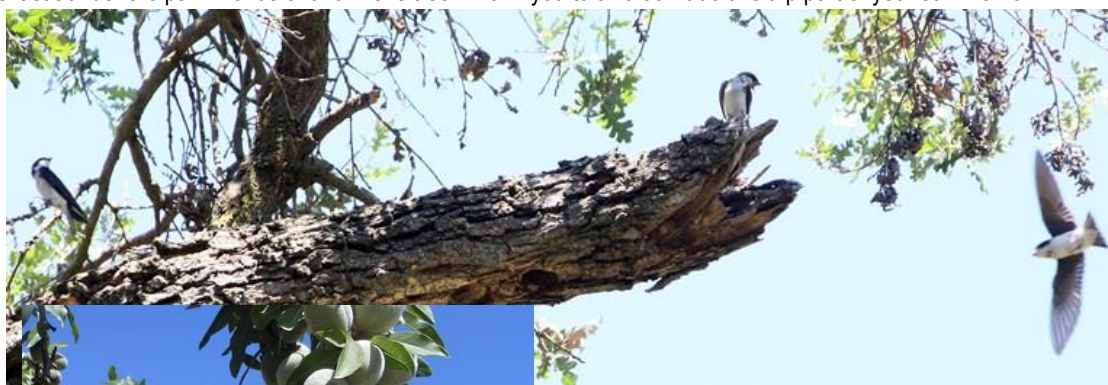


Quick Overview – Once a month Let's Go Birding and the Los Gatos Birdwatcher design trips that take us farther afield. We pick destinations that many would simply not venture to or find on their own. This trip was designed to take us into Swainson's Hawk summer territories in addition to birding the Central Valley hot spot of Caswell State Park. We knew the temperatures would be hot but everyone was a great sport and the trip filled fast. As we drove to Ripon, CA. we observed several Swainson's Hawks circling alongside the freeways but we did not stop until we got to the park. Located along the Stanislaus River the park is home to riparian oak woodland habitat. This type of habitat is in decline throughout the state as land is developed. A big thank you goes out to the Caswell family who donated 134 acres so it could be preserved and protected for future generations. Additional acreage was also obtained making the park 258 acres in total. We walked trails that took us alongside the river and under the shade of the huge oaks. We flushed Wood Ducks before all got a look, but later observed a Belted Kingfisher and nesting Rough Winged Swallows as they foraged near the sandy bank. This type of habitat is ideal for the birds and can be a challenge for birders. The dense cover and tree canopy had us looking hard for the birds we could only hear. While we found several Ash-throated Flycatchers and Western Wood-pewees, a great find was a Willow Flycatcher. Observing this bird's behavior, in its preferred habitat and listening to its call provided the perfect opportunity to talk about Empidonax flycatchers and how to tell them apart. We also found Tree Swallows throughout the park, plus several species of woodpeckers and we watched Western Bluebirds hunting for bugs. A hi-lite was watching a Red-tailed Hawk & Swainson's Hawk have a mid-air dispute. The differences between the two raptors were evident as they kept advancing on each other. We ended our day out from under the tree canopy and on the edge of an Apricot orchard. We stopped to scan the adjacent farm fields and soon had a lone Swainson's Hawk flew directly over our heads. The long tapered wings & dark flight feathers were just two field marks used to ID this hawk. Western Kingbirds were also on the phone wires above and we ended with a beautiful, male Hooded Oriole. We finally found it as it sat under the palm fronds of a farmer's tree. Thank you to all that made this trip part of your summer fun.

Final trip list

- Wood Duck
- Great Blue Heron (rt)
- Turkey Vulture
- Swainson's Hawk
- Red-tail Hawk
- Cooper's Hawk
- Mourning Dove
- Rock Pigeon
- Eurasian Collared Dove
- Belted Kingfisher
- Anna's Hummingbird
- White Throated Swifts
- Vaux's Swift
- Nuttall's Woodpecker
- Acorn Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Black Phoebe
- Ash Throated Flycatcher
- Western Kingbird
- Western Wood Pewee
- Willow Flycatcher
- Western Scrub-Jay
- American Crow
- Common Raven
- Tree Swallow
- Northern Rough Wing
- Bushtit
- Chestnut Backed Chickadee
- White Breasted Nuthatch
- Bewick's Wren
- House Wren
- Western Bluebird
- American Robin
- Wrentit (H)
- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Spotted Towhee
- California Towhee
- Song Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- Hooded Oriole
- House Finch
- Lesser Goldfinch
- Heard Only = (H)



We found several active nests during our day including these Tree Swallows - Tony Woo / Birding on the edge of an apricot orchard – Lisa Myers / The group under the cover of Caswell's lush vegetation – Lisa Myers / Swainson's Hawks were a target for our day's birding and we saw several. Although no photos were taken on this day, trip participant Linda Sullivan shared a photo she recently took of another California Swainson's Hawk.