

Caspian tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Laridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The Caspian tern is a large tern, about 21 inches long (bill tip to tail tip in preserved specimen). It has a red-orange bill with a dark mark near the tip. There is a very shallow fork in the tail, and the tail is short. The feather crest on the head is very short. A nonbreeding bird has gray-streaked feathers on the head while the breeding bird has black feathers in the same location. The primary wing feathers are gray-black when seen from below but light when seen from above. The remainder of the body and tail feathers are white. The wings are pointed. The bill is pointed and aimed toward the water when the bird is flying.

BEHAVIORS

The Caspian tern is a migrant statewide. It is seen at large lakes, rivers and beaches, particularly along Lake Michigan and large rivers where sandbars are present. It hovers and plunges into water head-first to capture fishes. It also eats small invertebrates. This species nests north of Illinois. It winters in coastal areas from the southern United States to northern South America.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams; lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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