

common nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Caprimulgiformes

Family: Caprimulgidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The common nighthawk averages nine and one-half inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). Its gray-brown feathers have a white bar on each wing, easily seen as the bird is flying. The male has a white bar on the tail and a white patch on the throat that are not present on the female. The bill is tiny, but the mouth is large.

BEHAVIORS

The common nighthawk is a common migrant and summer resident throughout Illinois. It may be found in open habitats and urban areas. When sitting on the ground or perched in a tree, its coloration makes it difficult for other animals to see it. Its “peent” or “beerp” call notes are familiar summer sounds. The flight of the nighthawk is often erratic. The male performs a courtship display involving diving and sudden upward flights. Nighthawks are usually active in the dawn and twilight hours, which is also when they migrate. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in April. The breeding season occurs from May through July. The nighthawk nests on the ground or on flat rooftops and does no nest construction. Two, white or tan eggs with dark markings are deposited by the female, and she alone incubates them for the 19-day incubation period. Fall migration begins in August. The nighthawk eats insects that it catches while flying.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2016. Biodiversity of Illinois.