

## Dickcissel *Spiza Americana*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Cardinalidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

### FEATURES

The dickcissel averages six to seven inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). The male has a black throat blotch on his yellow chest. His head is gray with a yellow-white eye stripe. The female is paler than the male and lacks the black blotch on the chest. Both sexes have a brown back with a rust-colored patch on the upper wing also present. In the fall of the year, the male becomes light brown nearly all over and loses the black blotch.

### BEHAVIORS

The dickcissel is a common migrant and summer resident throughout Illinois. It may be found in open areas such as hayfields, grasslands, shrubs and fence rows. It may sing “Dick-ciss-ciss-ciss” all day from its perch on fences, trees, weeds and lines. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in late April. The breeding season occurs from May through August. The nest is built on the ground or up to six feet off the ground in weeds or small trees. The female constructs the nest of weeds, grasses and other plant materials in about four days. From three to five blue eggs are deposited by the female, and she alone incubates them for the 11- to 12-day incubation period. Two broods are produced each year. Fall migration begins in September. The dickcissel winters from Mexico to northern South America. It eats seeds, fruits and insects.

### HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

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

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