

gray catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Mimidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The gray catbird averages about nine inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). This bird has gray feathers all over except for the black cap and the rust-colored patch under the long tail. The large bill is turned slightly downward.

BEHAVIORS

The gray catbird is a common migrant, summer resident and rare winter resident statewide. It lives in woodland edges and urban areas, staying low in brush. It has a varied song with each phrase repeated only once and including catlike sounds. Spring migrants arrive in Illinois in May. The breeding season lasts from May through July. The nest is built low to the ground in thickets, briars, shrubs or small trees. Both male and female construct the nest of twigs, leaves, grasses and other plant materials over a period of five to six days. Four, dark-green eggs are deposited by the female, and she incubates them for the entire 12- to 13-day incubation period. The nest is often parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird that deposits an egg that the gray catbird will hatch and raise, taking food and care away from its own young. Unlike most birds, the catbird female has been known to throw the cowbird egg out of the nest. Fall migration starts in mid-October. The gray catbird winters as far south as Panama. It eats insects in spring and fruits at other times in the year.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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