

green heron *Butorides virescens*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Pelecaniformes

Family: Ardeidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

An adult green heron is one of the smallest members of the heron family at 16 to 22 inches long. It has a long neck with maroon feathers and head patches of white feathers. The top of the head has black feathers. The back and belly feathers are gray with olive-green feathers on the sides. The bill is pointed. This bird has small, skinny, green legs. Both the male and female are similar in appearance.

BEHAVIORS

The green heron is a common migrant through Illinois and a summer resident in Illinois. Rarely does it reside in Illinois during the winter. The green heron winters from Florida to the northern parts of Columbia and Venezuela. This species lives along lakes, ponds, marshes, swamps or streams. It walks along the shoreline and feeds on aquatic insects, crayfish and fishes. Its call is "skeew." This bird migrates at night. Like the other herons, its neck is held in an "S" formation during flight with its legs trailing straight out behind its body. Spring migrants begin appearing in Illinois in April. Nesting occurs from May through early July. The green heron nests singly or in small colonies of not more than 25 pairs. The nest is a platform of sticks and is usually built in a willow tree. Two to five pale, blue-green eggs are laid. Fall migration begins in August.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; rivers and streams; marshes; swamps

Woodland Habitats

southern Illinois lowlands

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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