

laughing gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Laridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

An adult laughing gull is 16 to 17 inches long. The male and female are similar in appearance. The body feathers are white, and the wing feathers are long and dark gray wings with black tips. The tail appearance may be used to tell different age classes apart. There is a complete black line across the tip of the tail in the first year bird. A partial black line on the tail is present in the second year. The tail is squared and completely white at three years of age. The bill is pointed and somewhat turned down. There is a white stripe on the edge of the wing near the tail. In the summer, the bird's head is black and the beak is orange-brown. During the rest of the year the head is white with gray tinting, and the bill is orange-gray.

BEHAVIORS

The laughing gull is a rare migrant along the rivers of Illinois. It winters from the southern United States to South America. The laughing gull lives on beaches and sand bars, at lakes, along rivers and in marshes. This bird is an omnivore that feeds on aquatic plants and organisms and will eat carrion (dead organisms) and garbage. Its common name, laughing gull, came into use because its call of "ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-haah-haah-haah" sounds similar to a laugh. This bird migrates into Illinois beginning in April. Fall migration starts in September.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

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

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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