

least tern *Sternula antillarum*

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Laridae

ILLINOIS STATUS

state and federally endangered, native

FEATURES

The least tern is about nine inches in length. The yellow legs, yellow feet and white forehead patch are distinctive. The bill in breeding birds is yellow with a black tip. There is a black edge to the outer wings. Nonbreeding and immature birds have a dark bill.

BEHAVIORS

The least tern is an uncommon migrant and rare summer resident in southern Illinois. It may occasionally be seen as a migrant or wandering individual in northern Illinois. Migration: Spring migrants begin arriving in mid-May. Fall migration starts in early September. This species winters in South America. The preferred habitat includes rivers and lakes with sandbars or sand islands where it feeds on fishes, insects and other aquatic macroinvertebrates. This species prefers to nest on sandbars or sand islands, habitats that are rare and vulnerable to flooding, dredging, dumping and human disturbance.

Aquatic Habitats; lakes, ponds and reservoirs; rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats; none

Prairie and Edge Habitats; edge

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