

little blue heron *Egretta caerulea*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Pelecaniformes

Family: Ardeidae

ILLINOIS STATUS endangered, native

FEATURES

The little blue heron is about 24 inches long. The adult has maroon feathers on the neck with blue-gray feathers on the back, wings and belly. The bill is light blue with a black tip. The immature bird is white with gray on the wing tips. It has olive-colored legs, and the bill is blue-gray with a black tip. Individuals transitioning to the adult stage have both white and gray feathers.

BEHAVIORS

The little blue heron lives where there are shallow wetlands to feed in, particularly along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers in the southern one-half of the state. This species eats frogs, crayfish, fishes, insects and other small aquatic animals. Spring migrants begin arriving in early April. They nest in colonies, often with other wetland birds. A clutch contains three to six eggs. Little blue herons that have completed nesting may travel further north in the state until they are ready to migrate south for the winter. Fall migration usually begins in late August. The little blue heron breeds south to Central and South America and winters from the southern United States southward.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

swamps; rivers and streams; bottomland forests; temporary water supplies

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2020. Biodiversity of Illinois.