

rough-legged hawk *Buteo lagopus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The rough-legged hawk averages 19 to 24 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). The lower side of the bird is dark or spotted with dark color. The tail is white with a dark band or bands near the tip. Both light and dark color phases of the bird exist. The legs are feathered to the toes. This bird of prey (meat-eater) has a hooked beak to help tear food apart for eating. It is diurnal (active during the day).

BEHAVIORS

The rough-legged hawk is a common migrant and winter resident throughout Illinois, although it is seen more often in northern Illinois. In winter this raptor may be seen at marshes, fields and open plains. It hovers while flying. The rough-legged hawk spends the summers in the Arctic tundra and along Arctic coasts. It winters as far south as the southern United States. Spring departure from Illinois starts in March. This bird of prey eats rodents, rabbits, small birds, reptiles and road kills.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

marshes; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2017. Biodiversity of Illinois.