

snowy egret *Egretta thula*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Pelecaniformes

Family: Ardeidae

ILLINOIS STATUS endangered, native

FEATURES

An adult snowy egret is 20 to 27 inches long. It is a white-feathered, small, thin egret. It has a yellow patch between its eye and black bill, but during the breeding season the patch is red. The legs are black, and the feet are yellow.

BEHAVIORS

The snowy egret is a rare migrant through Illinois and a summer resident in southwestern Illinois along the Mississippi River. It winters from the southern coastal United States to South America. The snowy egret lives near marshes, lakes, ponds, sloughs, flooded fields and lowland thickets or forests. This bird feeds mainly on crayfish, fishes, frogs and insects. It is active in seeking prey and may be seen fluttering over the water or running through the water to catch food. This bird spends much time wading along the water's edge. Like the other herons, its neck is held in an "S" formation during flight with its legs trailing straight out behind its body. It nests with other snowy egrets in a tree colony, called a rookery. Nests contain three to four blue-green eggs. The call of the snowy egret is "wulla-wulla-wulla."

The endangered status is due to the massive number of snowy egrets that were killed in the late 1800s for their feathers (plume hunting). The snowy egret was never very common in Illinois before this period of plume hunting and has not recovered well since.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests; lakes, ponds and reservoirs; temporary water supplies; marshes; swamps

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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