

## snowy owl *Bubo scandiacus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Strigiformes

Family: Strigidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

### FEATURES

The snowy owl averages 20 to 27 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). This bird has white feathers with dark flecks. The snowy owl has a large, round head with a circlelike appearance on its flattened face. Its huge, yellow eyes face forward. This bird of prey (meat eater) has a hooked bill and claws to help in capturing and eating its food.

### BEHAVIORS

The snowy owl is an Arctic owl that occasionally winters in Illinois, mainly in the northern one-half of the state. When present, it may be seen in prairies, fields, marshes, lake edges, airports, golf courses and cities where it is active during the day. It may perch on the ground or on more elevated objects. Spring migrants leave Illinois in March. In summer, the snowy owl lives in the tundra. Fall migration into Illinois seems to be somewhat dependent on prey population sizes in more northern areas. When the prey population levels are low, there is a better chance for the birds to winter in Illinois. Fall migrants usually appear in November. The snowy owl feeds on small mammals and birds. It usually does not make sounds but may give a “krow-ow” call in the breeding season.

### HABITATS

#### Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan; marshes; peatlands; wet prairies and fens

#### Woodland Habitats

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

#### Prairie and Edge Habitats

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

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