



northern harrier

Circus cyaneus

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Aves
Order: Falconiformes
Family: Accipitridae

FEATURES

An adult northern harrier is 17 to 24 inches long. This hawk has a narrow body and wings and a long tail. There is a white patch at the base of the tail. The body of the male is gray while the female is brown-and-cream streaked. The underside of the wing has a dark tip.

BEHAVIORS

The northern harrier is a common migrant and uncommon winter and summer resident in Illinois. It winters in Central and South America. The northern harrier lives in marshes or fields. This bird eats amphibians, birds, insects, mammals and reptiles. It flies near the ground, gliding over an open field or marsh looking for food. The wings form a shallow "V" during flight. While migrating, the northern harrier flies alone. Its call is "pee, pee, pee." Spring migration begins in late February. Nesting occurs from May through July. The nest is built on the ground and is made of twigs and grasses. Two to five blue-white eggs are laid. Fall migrants begin appearing in July.

HABITATS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bottomland forests | <input type="checkbox"/> rivers & streams |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lakes, ponds & reservoirs | <input type="checkbox"/> swamps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lake Michigan | <input type="checkbox"/> temp water supplies |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> marshes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> wet prairies & fens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> peatlands | |

ILLINOIS STATUS

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> common | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> endangered | <input type="checkbox"/> threatened |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> native | <input type="checkbox"/> exotic | |

The endangered status of the northern harrier is mainly due to human destruction of marshes and prairies in Illinois.

ILLINOIS RANGE

Summer Resident: northern 2/3. Migrant: statewide.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.
Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume I: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.