

common loon

Gavia immer

FEATURES

The common loon averages 28 to 36 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). It has a strong, stout, pointed bill. In summer, the bird's back feathers have a black-and-white checkered pattern. The bill, head and neck are black. There are white chest feathers and an incomplete white neck ring. The eye is bright red. In winter, the loon has dark gray feathers on the back, tail, upper head and upper neck with white feathers on the chest, lower head and lower neck. The bill in winter is lighter than in summer.

BEHAVIORS

The common loon is a common migrant, rare winter resident and nonbreeding summer resident in Illinois. It may be seen on large lakes, ponds and rivers, swimming low in the water. This bird usually migrates at night. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in late March. The common loon nests in the northern United States and Canada. The nest is placed close to the water's edge. The nest at first is a very small pile of plant debris, but nest construction continues by both sexes throughout incubation until a substantial pile of vegetation exists. One or two, green or green-brown eggs with dark spots are deposited by the female. Both the male and the female share incubation duties over the 29-day incubation period. Fall migrants begin returning to Illinois in October. The common loon eats fishes. It makes distinctive wailing, yodeling or laughing sounds.

TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Gaviiformes

Family: Gaviidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

ILLINOIS RANGE



© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2024. *Biodiversity of Illinois*.

Unless otherwise noted, photos and images © Illinois Department of Natural Resources.



chick



adult



adult on nest

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan; rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none