

ruff

Calidris pugnax

FEATURES

The male ruff is about 12 to 13 inches long (bill tip to tail tip in preserved specimen) while the female is about nine inches in length. The name “ruff” comes from the erect feathers around the male’s throat in the breeding season that resemble a stiff collar, known as a ruff, that was once worn by people in the 1500s and 1600s. The breeding male also has ear tufts that stand up. The color of these feathers varies from black to white with many combinations in between. His legs may be green, orange or yellow. The breeding female does not have the ruff or ear tufts, but she does have dark feathers in the breast area. Nonbreeding birds have brown and black feathers on the back, gray across the breast and two, white oval feather patches on the tail that can be seen when the bird flies. The bill is short.

BEHAVIORS

This species is native to Europe and Asia and has expanded its range. It currently also breeds in Alaska and is a very rare migrant along both coasts of the United States and in the Great Lakes region. In Illinois, it is most often seen in the Lake Calumet region of northeastern Illinois. Spring migrants appear in April. Fall migrants begin appearing in early July. This shorebird eats small invertebrates that it finds while probing mud with its bill.

TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Scolopacidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

ILLINOIS RANGE



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Aquatic Habitats

temporary water supplies; wet prairies; rivers and streams; lakes, ponds, reservoirs

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge