

short-eared owl *Asio flammeus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Strigiformes

Family: Strigidae

ILLINOIS STATUS endangered, native

FEATURES

The short-eared owl averages 13 to 17 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). Its feather color pattern is light brown with dark brown streaks. This owl has a large head with a dark, circlelike appearance on the flattened face. The large, yellow eyes face forward. Short "ear" tufts can be seen on the head. The tan patch on the wing can be seen when the bird is flying. The short-eared owl is a bird of prey (meat eater) with a hooked bill and claws to help in capturing and eating its food.

BEHAVIORS

The short-eared owl is an uncommon migrant and winter resident and a rare summer resident throughout Illinois. It was once probably the most abundant owl species in the state. This raptor lives in prairies and marshes and roosts in grassy fields or pines. It is active at dawn and dusk, and sometimes during the day, in fields and marshy areas. It has a floppy flight motion, somewhat like that of a butterfly. Migrants begin to appear in Illinois in March and April. A few short-eared owls nest each year in Illinois. Eggs are produced from April through mid-May. This owl nests in wet prairies on the ground among tall grasses or reeds. The same nest site may be used several years in a row. Four to eight white eggs are deposited by the female, and she does most of the incubation for the 21-day incubation period. The male brings food to the female as she sits on the nest. Fall migrants begin appearing in Illinois in October. The short-eared owl winters as far south as central Mexico. Birds, insects and rodents make up the diet of this raptor. The call of the short-eared owl is "kee-yow!," "wow!" or "waow."

Destruction of wetland and grassland habitats are the main reasons for the short-eared owl's endangered status in Illinois. Preservation of large blocks of prairie and marsh habitat are necessary for the species to survive in the state.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

marshes

Woodland Habitats

coniferous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

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

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