

yellow-headed blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Icteridae

ILLINOIS STATUS endangered, native

FEATURES

An adult yellow-headed blackbird is eight to 11 inches long. There are white spots on the underside of the wings. The male has black body feathers, yellow head and chest feathers and black wing feathers with a few white patches. The female has brown body feathers and yellow facial feathers. The female is smaller than the male.

BEHAVIORS

The yellow-headed blackbird is a locally uncommon migrant and summer resident in northern Illinois. It is a rare migrant in the rest of the state. This bird is a very rare winter resident in Illinois. It winters from the southwestern United States through southern Mexico. The yellow-headed blackbird lives in marshes. This bird eats insects, grains and seeds. Its call is "krick" or "kack," like a rusty hinge. This bird rests low in the vegetation. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in late March. Nesting occurs in May and June. The nest is attached to cattails in a marsh, about two or three feet above the water. Three to five tan eggs with dark markings are laid. Fall migration begins in July.

One reason for the endangered status of this blackbird is the drainage and development of its wetland habitat. Illinois is also on the eastern edge of the yellow-headed blackbird's range, so its numbers have never been high.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

marshes

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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