

# American Coot

Adult. Photo: Mark Eden/Great Backyard Bird Count



Coots are tough, adaptable waterbirds. Although they are related to the secretive rails, they swim in the open like ducks and walk about on shore, making themselves at home on golf courses and city park ponds. Usually in flocks, they are aggressive and noisy, making a wide variety of calls by day or night. They have strong legs and big feet with lobed toes, and coots fighting over territorial boundaries will rear up and attack each other with their feet. Often seen walking on open ground near ponds. In taking flight they must patter across the water, flapping their wings furiously, before becoming airborne.

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Conservation status</b> | Still abundant in many areas, although has decreased in recent decades in some areas, especially in east.   |
| <b>Family</b>              | <a href="#">Rails, Gallinules, Coots</a>  |
| <b>Habitat</b>             | Ponds, lakes, marshes; in winter, also fields, park ponds, salt bays. For breeding season requires fairly shallow fresh water with much marsh vegetation. At other seasons may be in almost any aquatic habitat, including ponds or reservoirs with bare shorelines, open ground near lakes, on salt marshes or protected coastal bays. Migrants sometimes are seen out at sea some distance from land. |

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## Photo Gallery

# Feeding Behavior

Wide variety of foraging methods -- dabbles at surface of water, upends in shallows, dives underwater (propelled by feet), grazes on land. Also steals food from various ducks.

## Eggs

6-11, sometimes 2-12. Buff to grayish with brown spots. Nests with more than 12 eggs probably indicate laying by more than 1 female. Incubation by both sexes, 21-25 days. Young: can swim well soon after hatching; follow parents and are fed by them. At night, young are brooded on a nest-like platform built by male. Young probably able to fly at about 7-8 weeks after hatching. 1 or 2 broods per year.

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## Diet

Omnivorous. Eats mostly plant material, including stems, leaves, and seeds of pondweeds, sedges, grasses, and many others, also much algae. Also eats insects, tadpoles, fish, worms, snails, crayfish, prawns, eggs of other birds.

## Nesting

Very aggressive in defense of nesting territory. In courtship, male may pursue female across water. Displays include swimming with head and neck lowered, wings arched, tail raised to show off white patches. Nest site is among tall marsh vegetation in shallow water. Nest (built by both sexes) is floating platform of dead cattails, bulrushes, sedges, lined with finer materials, anchored to standing plants. Several similar platforms may be built, only one or two used for nesting.

## Migration

Some populations probably permanent resident, others migratory. May winter as far north as open water permits. Probably migrates mostly at night.

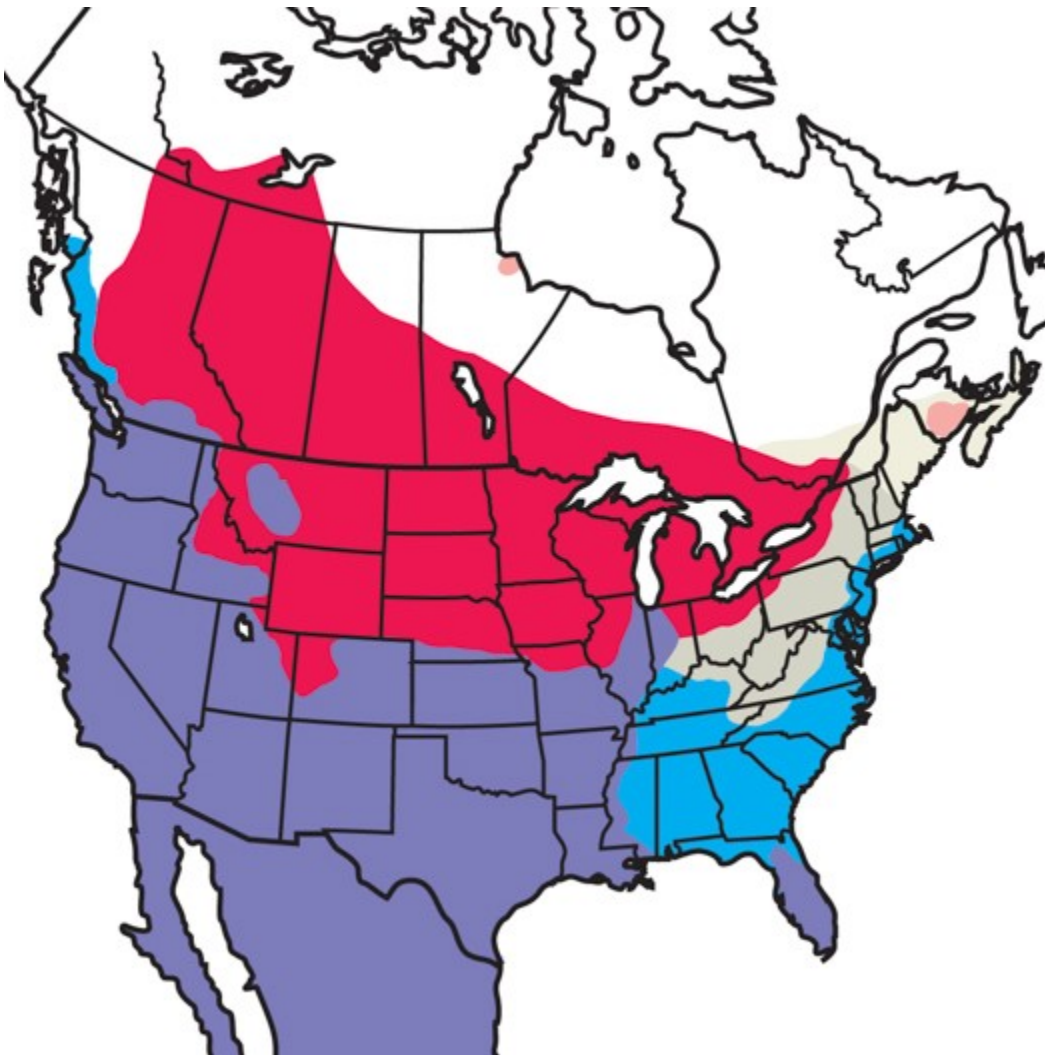
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- All Seasons - Common
- All Seasons - Uncommon
- Breeding - Common
- Breeding - Uncommon
- Winter - Common
- Winter - Uncommon
- Migration - Common
- Migration - Uncommon

# Songs and Calls

A variety of clucks, cackles, grunts, and other harsh notes.

Audio © Lang Elliott, Bob McGuire, Kevin Colver, Martyn Stewart and others.

[\*Learn more about this sound collection.\*](#)



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Photo: Ramesh Kodavatiganti/Audubon Photography Awards

Adult.





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Photo: Rick Derevan/Audubon Photography Awards

Adult and downy young.