

American coot *Fulica Americana*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Gruiformes

Family: Rallidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

An adult American coot is 13 to 16 inches in length. Both sexes are similar in appearance. This bird has dark, blue-gray body feathers with darker head and throat feathers. The bill is white with a spot of red at the base. There is a white spot under the tail and white tips on the underside of the wings. The American coot has red eyes. Chicks have dark feathers and a red-orange head.

BEHAVIORS

The American coot is a migrant throughout Illinois. It commonly breeds in northern and central Illinois. It is an uncommon winter resident in southern Illinois. This bird winters in the southern United States along the Gulf of Mexico. The American coot lives on and around ponds, lakes, mudflats, marshes and other places where there is short grass around water. It eats aquatic insects, crayfish, mollusks (snails, mussels) and aquatic plants. It dives in deep water to gather food. The call is "kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk." Migration occurs at night. Spring migrants may be seen as early as February. Nesting occurs from May through June with the nest built on the ground near water or on water plants, like cattails. Five to 15 tan eggs with dark spots are laid. Fall migration begins in August.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; marshes; temporary water supplies

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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