

BIOLOGY, LEGAL STATUS, CONTROL MATERIALS AND DIRECTIONS FOR USE

American Coot

Fulica americana

Family: Rallidae



Introduction: The American coot (*Fulica americana*) is found in wetlands and open water. They breed in marshes from southern Canada to the Pacific coast, and as far south as the northern portions of South America. Coots nest in well-concealed locations in tall reeds. They are frequently seen swimming in open water. They migrate from northern locations to the southern United States; however, they are often year-round residents where water remains open in winter. Their call is a high-pitched squeaking honk somewhat like a goose but hollower sounding.



Identification: Usually about 16 inches in length and weighing 1.4 pounds, adults have a short thick white bill and white frontal shield, with a reddish-brown spot near the base of the bill between the eyes. The body is grey with the head and neck darker than the rest of the body. Their legs are yellowish, with scalloped toes rather than webbed feet. Their chicks have black bodies with bright red head and beak, and orange plumes around the neck. Further information including is available at:

[Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

[The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#)



Legal Status: Coots are classified as migratory game birds in the U.S. Code of

Federal Regulations. They may be controlled under permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Notification of California Fish and Game is advised. No federal permit is required to scare or harass depredating waterfowl, except threatened or endangered waterfowl (i.e. Aleutian Canada goose).

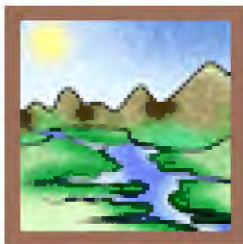


Damage: Alfalfa, oats, peppers, tomatoes, beets, beans, barley, rice, wild rice, peas, clover, livestock feedlots, natural pastures, and turf; deterioration of water quality through fecal contamination; denuding of vegetation next to natural or man-made ponds or lakes.



Range: Coots are found year-round throughout California. During winter when most damage occurs, coot numbers within the state increase significantly from Pacific flyway migrants.

[American Coot](#)



Habitat: Ponds, lakes, salt marshes, bays, and urban or suburban man-made or natural ponds, with a preference for shallow bodies of water.



Biology: During winter, coots are highly gregarious and, as waterfowl, are outnumbered only by mallards and pintails. Coots primarily consume aquatic plants mostly at the surface but can dive up to 25 feet. If aquatic vegetation is scarce or lacking, coot flocks may wander, often far, grazing like domestic geese, pulling up seedlings and clipping grass. They puddle and trample vegetation and turf in areas

near water. They may consume grain set out for migrating ducks. Coots seasonally eat animal food, mollusks, insects, etc., when present, and opportunistically take bread, popcorn, fruit cores, fish bait, etc., in handouts.

During the breeding season from April through September, coots become solitary and vigorously defend their nesting territory. Coots prefer shallow waters for nesting; a floating nest of reeds or grass is anchored to cattails or bulrushes, or placed deep in reeds to prevent drifting.

Clutch size averages eight to twelve, usually ten, spotted or buff-colored eggs. Chicks are precocial and both adults share parental duties.



Damage Prevention and Control Methods

Frightening devices: Frightening devices are sometimes effective at discouraging coots from landing in crops. It is important to have the sound units ready before the damage begins. The fields should be closely watched during the morning and evening hours when the birds feed. A combination of two or more sound devices is often needed to alleviate the damage. The units should be mounted on stands or

telescoping tripod towers above the crop so the sound is dispersed over a wide area.

Shooting: Sometimes is useful if allowed by the depredation permit. Shotguns can be relatively cost effective and efficient manner when coots are damaging crops. When coots inhabit bodies of water at recreational facilities or near human habitation, safety and public sentiment often discourages or eliminates shooting as a control option.

Cannon Nets: Cannon nets have been used with limited success to capture coots. The birds are pre-baited in front of the net with bread or chicken scratch for several days. The net is thrown over the feeding birds by rockets attached to one side of the net. The other side of the net is anchored to the ground.

Trapping: Funnel traps have been successfully used in capturing coots. Cereal grain or bread bait is spread heavily in the funnel entrance. Bait trails should run out about 100 feet from the entrance. The operator enters the trap through the funnel and herds the birds into a holding pen. The coots are normally removed from the portable trap with a dip net through the top.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READING

Parkhurst, James A., 1994. An Overview of Avian Predation and Management Techniques at Fish-Rearing Facilities. Proc. 16th Vertebrate Pest Conf. (W.S. Halverson & A.C. Crabb, Eds.) Published at Univ. of Calif., Davis. Pp. 235-242.

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Woronecki, Paul P., R.A. Dolbeer, T.W. Seamans, W.R. Lance, 1992. Alpha-Chloralose Efficacy in Capturing Nuisance Waterfowl and Pigeons and Current Status of FDA Registration. Published at Univ. of Neb., Lincoln , Pp. 72 – 78..

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