

## American Coot *Fulica americana*

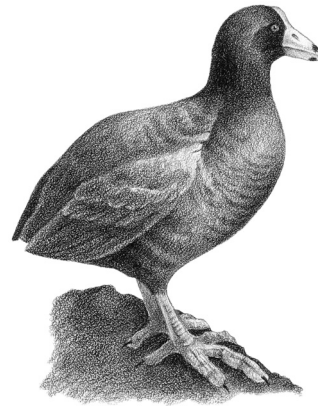


**Folk Name:** Baldface, Blue Peter  
**Status:** Migrant, Winter Resident  
**Abundance:** Fairly Common  
**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, marshes

At 15 ½ inches, the American Coot is the largest of our birds in the family Rallidae. It has a black head, dark gray body, and a white bill that has a band at the tip. It has a red eye. Like the gallinules, it is a duck-like waterbird, and is regularly seen near ducks on ponds and lakes throughout the region. It often bobs its head as it swims, and it makes odd noises.

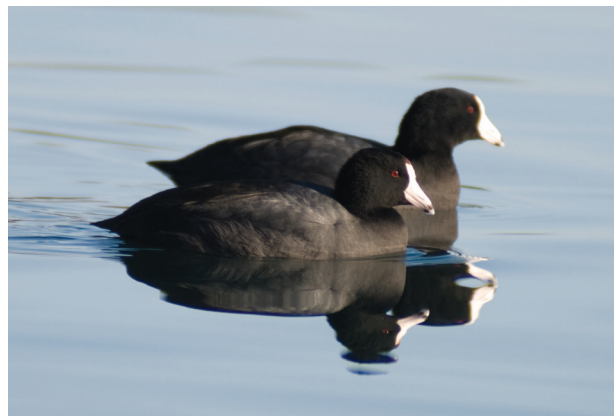
The Coot is widespread throughout North America, and it is by far the most common member of this family seen in the Carolina Piedmont. American Coots generally arrive here from their northern breeding grounds in late September and early October, and they are common here until late April or early May. Non-breeding (or perhaps injured) birds can be found on lakes or urban impoundments during the summer months as well. Flocks in the region have been estimated at 500 to 5,000 birds, although most groups number fewer than 50 individuals.

Since 1990, thousands of American Coots have been found dead on lakes and ponds throughout the southeastern United States, including some in the Carolinas. The cause of death is believed to be a neurotoxin that is produced due to the presence of an invasive plant called *hydrilla*. *Hydrilla* is also known locally as “the kudzu of the water.” Hundreds of Bald Eagles that prey on these coots and other species of waterfowl have died from the neurotoxin as well. The Lake Norman and Lake Wylie Marine Commissions have developed and implemented management plans to battle the continuing spread of *hydrilla* along the Catawba River. Scientists from Duke Energy are working to keep this plant out of Mountain Island Lake which is the source of Charlotte’s drinking water. Both the American Coot and the Bald Eagle will



benefit from the success of these initiatives.

We have one confirmed instance of American Coot breeding in the Central Carolinas. Jeff Lemons found a pair of adults and five precocial young at a retention pond at Concord Mills Mall in Cabarrus County on June 26, 2017.



American Coots. (Jeff Lemons)