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Common Moorhen

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Common Moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*) (also known as the "swamp chicken"^[2]) is bird species in the **Rallidae** family. It is distributed across many parts of the **Old World**.^[3]

The Common Moorhen lives around well-vegetated marshes, ponds, canals and other wetlands. The species is not found in the **polar regions** or many **tropical rainforests**. Elsewhere it is likely the most common **rail** species, except for the **Eurasian Coot** in some regions.

The closely related **Common Gallinule** of the **New World** has been recognized as a separate species by most authorities,^[3] starting with the **American Ornithologists' Union** and the **International Ornithological Committee** in 2011.^[4]

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Name [edit]

The name *mor-hen* has been recorded in **English** since the 13th century.^[5] The word *moor* here is an old sense meaning *marsh*;^[5] the species is not usually found in **moorland**. An older name, **Common Waterhen**, is more descriptive of the bird's **habitat**.

A "Watercock" is not a male "Waterhen" but the rail species *Gallicrex cinerea*, not closely related to the Common Moorhen. "Water Rail" usually refers to *Rallus aquaticus*, again not closely related.

Common Moorhen



Eurasian Common Moorhen
(*Gallinula chloropus chloropus*)

Conservation status

Extinct

Threatened

Least Concern

EX

EW

CR

EN

VU

NT

LC

Least Concern (IUCN 3.1)^[1]

Scientific classification

Kingdom:

Animalia

Phylum:

Chordata

Class:

Aves

Subclass:

Neornithes

Infraclass:

Neognathae

Superorder:

Neoaves

Order:

Gruiformes

Family:

Rallidae

Genus:

Gallinula

Species:

G. chloropus

Binomial name

Gallinula chloropus
(Linnaeus, 1758)

Subspecies

About 5, see [text](#)

- Беларуская

Български

Brezhoneg

Català

Cebuano

Čeština

Cymraeg

Dansk

Deutsch

Diné bizaad

Eesti

Español

Esperanto

Euskara

فارسی

Føroyskt

Français

Frysk

Gaeilge

Հայերեն

Ido

Bahasa Indonesia

Italiano

עברית

Kurdî

Latviešu

Lietuvių

Magyar

Македонски

Bahasa Melayu

Nederlands

Nedersaksies

日本語

Nordfriisk

Norsk bokmål

Norsk nynorsk

پنجابی

Picard

Piemontèis

Polski

Português

Runa Simi

Русиньскый

Русский

Sámegiella

Seeltersk

The **scientific name** *Gallinula chloropus* comes from the **Latin** *Gallinula* (a small hen or chicken) and the **Greek** *chloropus* (*khloros* χλωρός green or yellow, *pous* πούς foot).^[6]

Description and ecology [edit]



Common Moorhen feet have no webbing

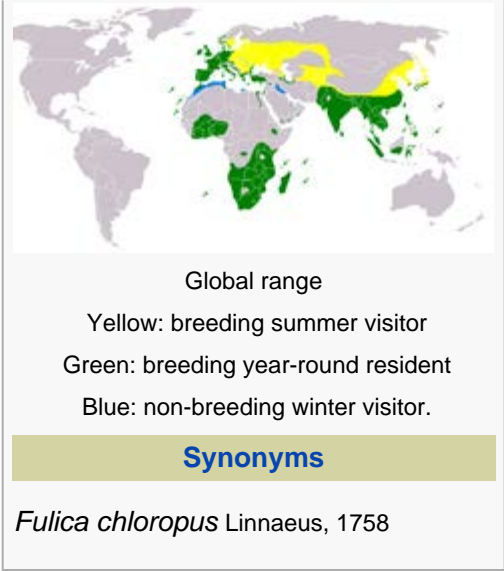
The Moorhen is a distinctive species, with dark plumage apart from the white undertail, yellow legs and a red **frontal shield**. The young are browner and lack the red shield. The frontal shield of the adult has a rounded top and fairly

parallel sides; the tailward margin of the red unfeathered area is a smooth waving line. In the related Common Gallinule of the Americas, the frontal shield has a fairly straight top and is less wide towards the bill, giving a marked indentation to the back margin of the red area.

The Common Moorhen gives a wide range of gargling calls and will emit loud hisses when threatened.^[7] A mid-sized to large rail, it can range from 30 to 38 cm (12 to 15 in) in length and span 50 to 62 cm (20 to 24 in) across the wings. The body mass of this species can range from 192 to 500 g (6.8 to 17.6 oz).^{[8][9]}

This is a common breeding bird in marsh environments and well-vegetated lakes. Populations in areas where the waters freeze, such as eastern Europe, will **migrate** to more temperate climates. This species will consume a wide variety of vegetable material and small aquatic creatures. They forage beside or in the water, sometimes walking on lily pads or upending in the water to feed. They are often secretive, but can become tame in some areas. Despite loss of habitat in parts of its range, the Common Moorhen remains plentiful and widespread.

The birds are territorial during breeding season. The nest is a basket built on the ground in dense vegetation. Laying starts in spring, between mid-March and mid-May in N hemisphere temperate regions. About 8 eggs are usually laid per female early in the season; a brood later in the year usually has only 5–8 or fewer eggs. Nests may be re-used by different females. Incubation lasts about three weeks. Both parents **incubate** and feed the young. These fledge after 40–50 days, become independent usually a few weeks thereafter, and may raise their first brood the next spring. When threatened, the young may cling to the parents' body, after which the adult birds fly away to safety, carrying their offspring with them.^{[7][10]}



Global range

Yellow: breeding summer visitor

Green: breeding year-round resident

Blue: non-breeding winter visitor.

Synonyms

Fulica chloropus Linnaeus, 1758



Unfledged *G. c.*
chloropus young, about
1 month old, in [Kolkata](#)
([India](#))



Immature *G. c.*
chloropus, 3–4 months
old, in [Parc de Bercy](#),
[Paris \(France\)](#)

On a global scale – all subspecies taken together – the Common Moorhen is as abundant as its vernacular name implies. It is therefore considered a species of **Least Concern** by the IUCN.^{[1][1]} However, small populations may be prone to **extinction**. The population of **Palau**, belonging to the widespread subspecies *G. c. orientalis* and locally known as *debar* (a generic term also used for **ducks** and meaning roughly "waterfowl"), is very rare, and apparently the birds are hunted by locals. Most of the population on the **archipelago** occurs on **Angaur** and **Peleliu**, while the species is probably already gone from **Koror**. In the **Lake Ngardok** wetlands of **Babeldaob**, a few dozen still occur, but the total number of Common Moorhens on Palau is about in the same region as the Guam population: fewer than 100 adult birds (usually fewer than 50) have been encountered in any survey.^[11]



The Common Moorhen is one of the birds (the other is the [Eurasian Coot](#), *Fulica atra*) from which the [cyclocoelid flatworm parasite](#) *Cyclocoelum mutabile* was first described.^[12] The bird is also parasitised by the [moorhen flea](#), *Dasypsyllus gallinulae*.^[13]

Subspecies [[edit](#)]

Five **subspecies** are today considered valid; several more have been described that are now considered **junior synonyms**. Most are not very readily recognizable, as differences are rather subtle and often **clinal**. Usually, the location of a sighting is the most reliable indication as to subspecies identification, but the migratory tendencies of this species make identifications based on location not completely reliable. In addition to the extant subspecies listed below, an undescribed form from the **Early Pleistocene** is recorded from Dursunlu in **Turkey**.^{[14][15][16]}

List of subspecies by date of description			
Common and trinomial names		Description	Range
<div>Eurasian Common Moorhen</div> <div><i>G. c. chloropus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)</div> <div>Includes <i>correiana</i> and <i>indica</i>.</div>		Wings and back blackish-olive	Ranges from Northwest Europe to North Africa and eastwards to Central Siberia and from the humid regions of the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia eastwards to Japan ; also found the Canary , Azores , Madeira , and Cape Verde islands.
<div>Indo-Pacific Common Moorhen</div> <div><i>G. c. orientalis</i> (Horsfield, 1821)</div>		Small, with slate grey upperwing coverts and large frontal shield.	Found in the Seychelles , Andaman Islands , and South Malaysia through Indonesia ; also found in the Philippines and Palau . The breeding population existing on Yap in Micronesia since the 1980s is probably of this subspecies, but might be of the rare <i>G. c. guami</i> . ^{[17][18]} Population size:

References [\[edit\]](#)


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- ³ ^a ^b "Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) (Linnaeus, 1758)" . Avibase. Retrieved 1 November 2013.
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External links [\[edit\]](#)

- (Common) Moorhen – Species text in The Atlas of Southern African Birds 
- Common Moorhen videos, photos & sounds  on the Internet Bird Collection
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology – Common Moorhen 
- USGS Patuxent Bird Identification InfoCenter – Common Moorhen Information 
- Madeira Birds – Moorhen breeding in Madeira Island 



Wikimedia Commons has media related to ***Gallinula chloropus***.

- [Ageing and sexing \(PDF; 5.7 MB\)](#) by Javier Blasco-Zumeta & Gerd-Michael Heinze 

Categories: [IUCN Red List least concern species](#) | [Gallinula](#) | [Rails](#) | [Birds of Azerbaijan](#) | [Birds of Pakistan](#) | [Birds of Puerto Rico](#) | [Birds of Europe](#) | [Birds of Turkey](#) | [Birds of Lithuania](#) | [Animals described in 1758](#) | [Birds of Cameroon](#) | [Birds of Ukraine](#)

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