

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Common Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

The Common Moorhen, formerly called the Common Gallinule, inhabits freshwater wetlands throughout the state. Almost any pond or lake in the peninsula with dense shoreline cover is likely to have breeding moorhens. The Common Moorhen breeds, in suitable habitat, over much of North America through Central America and northern South America.

Habitat. Common Moorhens breed at the edge of ponds, lakes, marshes, and swales. They are omnivorous, feeding on seeds, invertebrates, aquatic plants, lawns near water, and on grain provided by humans (Howell 1932; H. Kale, pers. commun.).

The nest is built on the ground by the water, in dense cattails, or on floating vegetation in the water. Additional nests for brooding the young are sometimes built in the breeding territory (Harrison 1978). The nest is usually a bulky platform of dead plant material. Living plants growing around the nest are often pulled down over it to conceal it. Common Moorhens usually lay from 5 to 11 eggs. However, as many as 21 have been recorded, which may represent egg dumping by more than 1 female. The eggs are grayish-white to pale buff or greenish with spots of reddish-brown and blue-gray (Harrison 1978) and are laid on consecutive days. Incubation is by both sexes and takes 19 to 22 days. The young are precocial and may stay in the nest for several days. The adults are fearless in defense of the nest, recklessly attacking any human who approaches the site closely. They often raise more than 1 brood in a season, and young of earlier broods may help feed later broods. The young are able to feed alone at about 3 weeks, are independent at 5 weeks, and can fly in 6 to 7 weeks. However, they tend to remain with the adults for some weeks thereafter (Harrison 1978).

Seasonal Occurrence. In Florida, Common Moorhens breed all year long. Winter nesting has been recorded in Wakulla, Broward, Hillsborough, and Pinellas counties (Bryan 1981). Banding and tower collision data indicate that Common Moorhens migrate through Florida in March and April and again in September through December.

Status. Common Moorhens are much less common in the Panhandle and inland north Florida and are rare or absent from areas with extensive forests. In suburban areas, Common Moorhens breed close to human activity canals, retention ponds, and city lakes and ponds.

A close look at the Atlas map reveals an interesting breeding record at Key West as well as another "possible" in the lower Keys. The absence of the species as a breeder in much of mainland Monroe and Collier counties is a surprise. Common Moorhens breed only rarely on the prairies of DeSoto and Hardee Counties, as one would expect. Most other areas where it is absent are heavily forested with few marshes and only small ponds. Then too, the entire 6-year period of the Atlas was a dry spell in north-central Florida with below-average rainfall in every year. With more water, more quadrangles may well have had nesting Common Moorhens.

Robert W. Loftin

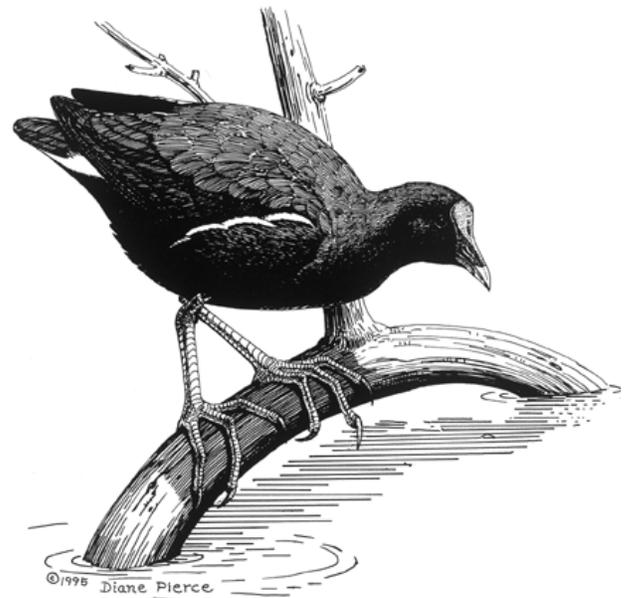


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