



American Coot

Coloring instructions:

Dark red - the shield

Red - the eyes

White - the bill and undertail

Dark gray - the sides and the belly

Black - the head, neck and back

Greenish yellow - the legs and feet

American Coot

Length: 12" **Wing span:** 25"

Habitat: Resident of ponds and rivers

Field marks: Black "duck-like" bird with a white bill

Many people think these birds are black ducks. They are not. Their bills are quite different - more like a chicken's than a duck's. Their feet are not webbed like a duck's. Their feet are **lobed**. The bird's long, yellow-green toes have two to three rounded pieces of flesh that are attached to its tall, sturdy legs. The oversize, bizarre-looking feet make it easier for the bird to get around both on water and on land, unlike most other waterfowl.

American Coots hunt for food in a variety of ways - walking, swimming, dabbling, and diving. They aren't restricted to dabbling, like mallards, or diving, like mergansers. Coots mainly eat plants but may also feed on the insects and amphibians they find among the plants. Because coots bring up plants which are too deep to reach for the dabbling ducks, the dabbling ducks will sometimes steal their food.

An interesting choice faces birds that feed underwater. Flight is easier if a bird is light. But going underwater is easier if you are heavy. Scuba divers put on weights to make diving easier.

Mallards tip their rear ends upwards, but their heads can only go a short way underwater. So, mallards are found mostly in shallow water. Though their lightness prevents mallards from going deep, it allows them to jump into the air with almost explosive quickness. Swans solve the problem with long necks so their mouths can go far underwater, while the large body floats on the surface.

Heavy birds, like coots and mergansers, cannot take off so easily. They must run along the surface of the water to build up enough speed to take off, just like an airplane. Coots require some of the longest take-offs of all birds.

American Coot Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- See a coot dive.
- See the lobed footprints of coots in the mud near a pond with coots in it.
- See the yellowish-green color of the coot's feet.
- See the reddish color of the coot's eyes.
- Hear the strange calls of the coot: grunting, croaking, and squawking noises.
- See a coot take off by running across the water.
- Can you see a coot all by itself? Coots are very social and are usually seen in groups.
- See a mallard hanging around diving coots and stealing some of the vegetation that coots are harvesting.

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