

CARRION CROW

CARD 116



GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Passeriformes

FAMILY
Corvidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Corvus corone



The carrion crow is a familiar sight in Europe and Asia. With its wingtips splayed, this solitary black bird flies over open landscapes searching for food—both alive and dead.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Length: 1½ ft.
Weight: About 20 oz.



BREEDING
Sexual maturity: 2 years.
Breeding season: Spring.
Eggs: 2-7. Greenish, with darker markings.
Incubation: 2½ weeks.
Fledging period: About 1 month.



LIFESTYLE
Habit: Usually found alone or in pairs. Territorial.
Diet: Wide range of plants and animals; some carrion and refuse.
Lifespan: Up to 10 years in the wild. Longer in captivity.



RELATED SPECIES
The 40 species of the genus *Corvus* include the common raven, *C. corax*; the American crow, *C. brachyrhynchos*; and the fish crow, *C. ossifragus*.



Range of the carrion crow.

DISTRIBUTION

The carrion crow, *Corvus corone corone*, and the hooded crow, *Corvus corone cornix*, are found throughout Europe and Asia, and there are some hybrids.

CONSERVATION

Although in some regions it is under attack by gamekeepers and farmers, the carrion crow remains a common and widespread bird.

FEATURES OF THE CARRION CROW

Nest robbing: The carrion crow is adept at carrying off the young and eggs of other birds. It often waits until a parent bird leaves its nest and then snatches its prey.



Flight: Slow wingbeats, with tips of wings spread. Commonly seen flying over open landscapes.

THE HOODED CROW



The hooded crow has a gray back and underparts. It may cross-breed with the carrion crow.

Feet: Strong and flexible. They hold food while the crow tears it with its bill.

Eggs: 2 to 7 in yearly clutch. Slight greenish tinge with darker markings. Hatch in 2½ weeks.





The carrion crow is known for its adaptability and intelligence. Commonly found in open country, this bird thrives on farmland and has even settled in the heart of cities. Its name is misleading, for the carrion crow does not rely on dead flesh for food. It has a varied diet and is quick to exploit any new source of food that becomes available.

HABITS

Even though it uses trees and shrubs for nesting and roosting, the carrion crow is a bird of open spaces such as hills, moors, semideserts, seashores, farmland, and pastures. It can also be found in city gardens and parks.

The carrion crow ranges over most of Europe and Asia, but there are two subspecies in Europe with separate ranges. The carrion crow lives mainly in the west, while the hooded crow occurs in northern and eastern Europe. Hybrids occur where these two ranges overlap. Other subspecies inhabit India, Japan, the Middle East, and Asia. Each subspecies has

similar habits, but some northern hooded crows are unusual because they migrate south for the winter.

Both European subspecies are unsociable birds and are usually seen alone or in pairs. Established pairs maintain a territory through the year, where they rest, feed, and breed. In winter some pairs fly each evening to communal roosts in the area, sometimes sharing the site with other crow species. Loose, roaming groups of carrion crows are usually immature and non-breeding adults. They are chased away if they trespass on the space of territorial pairs.

BREEDING

Pairs of carrion crows usually nest in a large tree, or they may use shrubs, cliff ledges, empty buildings, or electrical towers. Both sexes build the nest using sticks, bark, twigs, grass, and earth, with hair and other soft materials as lining.

The female incubates the eggs and broods the young

Left: A solitary bird, the carrion crow lives in both rural and urban habitats.

while the male finds food for them. Later, both parents forage for food, which they carry in their throat pouches. Large items are carried in the bill and then torn up at the nest for the young. The chicks are fed for a month after fledging, and they remain in or near the parents' territory until the next spring.

Right: The carrion crow gives a harsh call to a territorial neighbor.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Crows are very intelligent. Some carrion crows know that when people are near, the eggs of other birds will be left unprotected. Others drop mussels onto hard surfaces to crack the shells open.
- In cold regions the hooded crow uses its feet to pull up

fishing lines set in holes in the ice. Either the catch or the bait is the reward.

- The carrion crow mobs birds of prey in flight to drive them away from their nests.
- Territorial neighbors regularly keep in touch by calling and answering back.



BIRDWATCH

Farmers are on the lookout for the carrion crow because it eats grain. But, on the positive side, it eats soil-dwelling grubs and other insects that are harmful to agriculture.

In places where the carrion crow is not under attack, it

has become quite tame. In some European cities, bread crumbs have become an important source of food. The crow can also be seen along the sides of roads, watching for insects that have been killed by passing cars.

FOOD & FEEDING

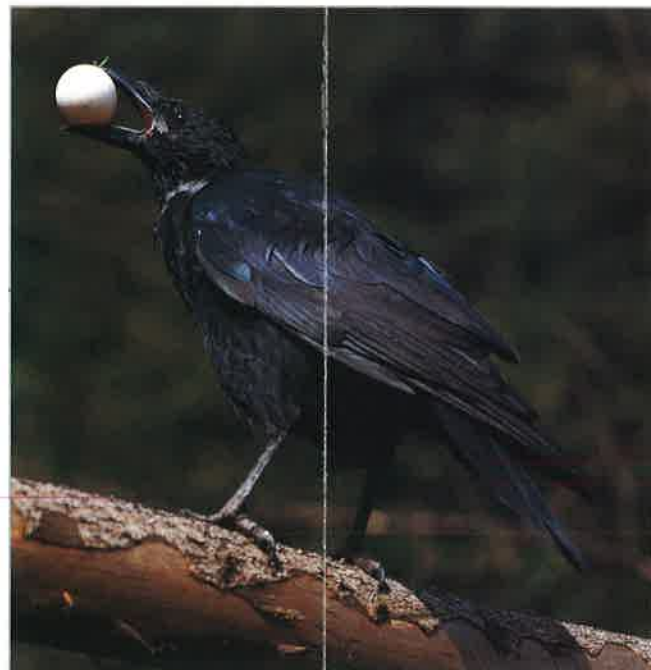
The carrion crow can find food in most places, and it takes advantage of new feeding opportunities. With its heavy bill, it can bite off vegetable matter, kill small creatures, and tear flesh off dead animals. Common foods include grain, fruit, insects, worms, frogs, lizards, eggs, chicks, stranded fish, and small rodents.

The carrion crow feeds primarily on the ground, striding along on its strong feet and probing into the grass or digging into crevices. It flips

Left: The carrion crow sometimes steals the eggs of other birds to feed on.

over stones with its bill and tears bark from wood to find the creatures underneath. In some places flocks of carrion crows rummage through garbage dumps and pick food out of gutters.

The carrion crow uses its beak and feet with great dexterity. It can hold a large article in its bill and rub it against a branch or the ground to break it apart. Or the crow can hold food down with its feet and dismember it with its bill. Sometimes it dips food in water to soften it or to make it less sticky. In times of plenty the bird may hide food and retrieve it later.



EAGLE OWL

CARD 117

GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Strigiformes

FAMILY
Strigidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Bubo bubo



The eagle owl is a giant among the birds of the night, dwarfing other owls in Europe and Asia. A powerful predator, it swoops on all kinds of creatures, even animals its own size.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: 2-2½ ft.
Wingspan: 5-6 ft.
Weight: 5-7 lb.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 2-3 years.
Breeding season: Varies, but usually February to May.
Eggs: 2-4.
Fledging period: 5½- 8½ weeks.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Nonmigratory, territorial.
Diet: Mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, crabs, insects, and spiders.
Lifespan: Oldest recorded, 21 years.



RELATED SPECIES

There are 11 related species of the genus *Bubo*, including the great horned owl, *Bubo virginianus*, of North and South America.



Range of the eagle owl.

DISTRIBUTION

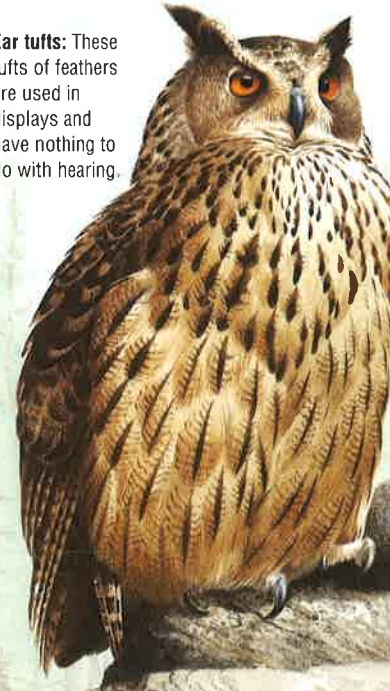
Found in northern Africa, southern and central Europe, and Scandinavia, east to Siberia, Korea, and China.

CONSERVATION

The eagle owl is becoming rare in many parts of its range. This is mainly due to shooting, nest robbing, pesticide poisoning, collisions with power lines and vehicles, and harassment from other birds.

THE EAGLE OWL AND ITS NEST

Ear tufts: These tufts of feathers are used in displays and have nothing to do with hearing.



Eyes: The owl has a limited field of vision. To compensate, it is able to rotate its head 360 degrees.

Young: Downy gray plumage camouflages the young. Unable to stand for 16 days, the birds leave the nest site after 6 to 10 weeks and fly 2 weeks later.

A GIANT AMONG OWLS



The eagle owl stands 12 to 16 inches taller than the barn owl.

Eggs: 2 to 4 white; incubated by the female.

The eagle owl is an extremely adept hunter, capable of snatching animals as large as a fox.

This bird is found in a variety of habitats, from rocky deserts to temperate woodland.

But the eagle owl requires a secluded nest site, and there are fewer and fewer places where such a big bird can find sanctuary today.

CHARACTERISTICS

One of the largest owls, the eagle owl is found throughout Europe, Asia, and North Africa. It can live in almost any habitat, but it prefers areas with plenty of prey and many hiding places.

Most of the time the eagle owl leads a solitary life. The male and female stay in the same territory all year but usually hunt alone and roost separately. The owl fiercely defends its territory, which may cover 6 to 30 square miles.

Like most owls, the eagle owl is active at night, when it does its hunting. During the day it roosts in a tree, under a bush, or on a sheltered rock ledge. While resting, it is often tormented by crows and other birds that try to drive the predator off. When the owl flies during the day, it is usually because it has been disturbed by these birds.

Right: *The eagle owl observes prey from a safe distance before swooping down.*



DID YOU KNOW?

- The eagle owl preys on other predatory birds, like hawks and other owls. It may even kill more powerful birds, like snowy owls.
- An eagle owl was once seen carrying a full-grown red fox in its talons.
- The eagle owl is known to fly out and seize shot birds before they hit the ground.
- If an eagle owl cannot eat all of its prey at once, it may bury the kill and finish eating it the next day.
- Nesting eagle owls have been seen at elevations as high as 15,000 feet.

FOOD & HUNTING

The eagle owl's diet is one of the most varied of all predatory birds. In part this is because it is powerful enough to subdue large prey. But it is also because the eagle owl is an adaptable hunter, able to change its appetite and hunting methods as new food becomes available.

Across its range, it has been known to prey on 110 species of mammals and at least 140 species of birds. It also eats small prey like snakes,

frogs, fish, mice, and insects.

The eagle owl prefers to hunt in open terrain, but it sometimes hunts in forests. It catches most prey by waiting on a rock or tree, watching for signs of movement, and then swooping down on its victim. The eagle owl may also make short flights to look for prey among nesting colonies on rocks, in trees, and on marshes. Prey weighing up to seven pounds has been found in the nests of eagle owls.

BREEDING

An unpaired male eagle owl calls to females to attract their attention. He may start before sunset and call for more than an hour. Once eagle owls have paired, they establish a bond that lasts for life.

The birds use few materials for their nests, which they build in the shelter of a rock crevice or under an overhang. In forests they nest among tree roots or under fallen trunks. Eggs are often laid when there is still snow on the ground. The female carries out the five-

week incubation alone, but the male brings her food. After hatching, he feeds her and the young while she broods them (covers them with her wings) for four or five weeks.

The young open their eyes after six days and can stand upright after 16 days. They soon develop mottled, downy plumage that camouflages them on the ground. At six to ten weeks they leave the nest, and they begin to fly about two weeks later. Both parents feed them for another month.

Left: *The chicks are fed by their parents for two and a half months after hatching.*

Right: *Like many of its relatives, the eagle owl preys chiefly on mice and rats.*



GREYLAG GOOSE

CARD 118

GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Anseriformes

FAMILY
Anatidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Anser anser



The greylag is a big, powerful bird that is the wild ancestor of the domestic goose. It flies great distances to reach its winter refuges in Europe and parts of Asia.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Length: 2½-3 ft. Male larger than female.
Wingspan: 5-6 ft.
Weight: About 8 lb.



BREEDING
Sexual maturity: 2-3 years.
Breeding season: April to May.
No. of broods: 1.
Eggs: 4-6, creamy white.
Incubation: 4 weeks.
Fledging period: About 8 weeks.



LIFESTYLE
Habit: Gregarious, migratory, active mainly by day.
Diet: Grass, crops, waterweed, seeds, and berries.
Lifespan: Typically 4-5 years.



RELATED SPECIES
Close relatives of the greylag goose include the white-fronted goose, *Anser albifrons*, and the snow goose, *Chen caerulescens*.



Range of the greylag goose.

DISTRIBUTION

One of the most widespread of all geese, the greylag breeds in Iceland, Scotland, Scandinavia, eastern Europe, and across Asia to eastern Siberia.

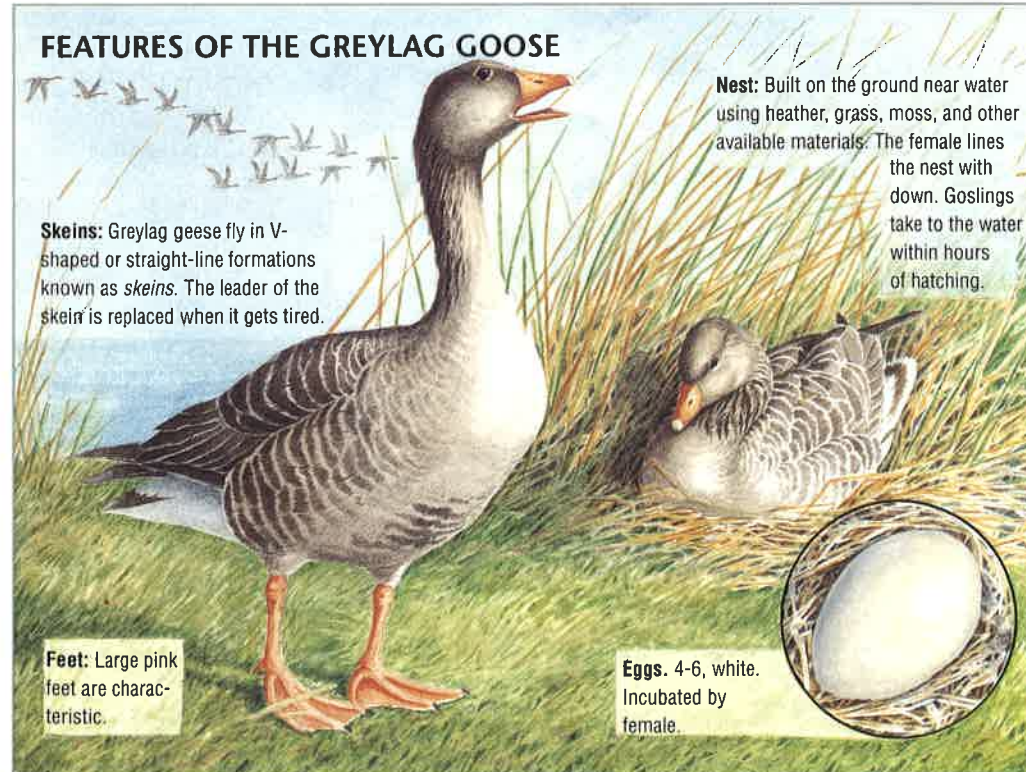
CONSERVATION

Although intensive farming has displaced the greylag goose from many of its former breeding grounds in Europe, it remains numerous.

FEATURES OF THE GREYLAG GOOSE

Skeins: Greylag geese fly in V-shaped or straight-line formations known as *skeins*. The leader of the skein is replaced when it gets tired.

Feet: Large pink feet are characteristic.



Nest: Built on the ground near water using heather, grass, moss, and other available materials. The female lines the nest with down. Goslings take to the water within hours of hatching.

Eggs: 4-6, white. Incubated by female.



The greylag goose is the largest of the gray geese that fly south each year to the fields and meadows of Europe and Asia. Since it often forages in large flocks and feeds on crops and grain, it is not usually welcomed by farmers.

HABITS

Greylag geese spend spring and summer in their breeding grounds in Scandinavia, eastern Europe, and central Asia. In fall the geese migrate south. Flying in long, ragged skeins (flocks), often in a V formation, they converge on the coasts of western and southern Europe. They settle on grasslands near rivers and estuaries, where their clam-

orous honking can be heard from far away.

The greylag goose prefers to feed during the day, taking off at dawn in small parties to search for food. At dusk the greylag returns to roost on tidal mud banks, although it may go inland. In populated areas it is more wary, foraging by moonlight and retreating at dawn to the shore.

BREEDING

In spring greylag flocks break into breeding pairs as the geese return to their nesting grounds. The greylag mates for life, but the pair frequently becomes separated during winter. At the nesting sites they renew their bond in a noisy and elaborate ritual of posturing with straight necks and upturned bills.

The pair builds a large nest among thick heather or rushes

near water. The female incubates the eggs while her mate stands guard nearby. The down-covered goslings are born in May and leave the nest within a few hours of hatching. But the family group remains together until the following spring. In fall the family flies south to the wintering grounds. In this way the young birds learn the migration routes by example.



Left: The greylag's serrated bill is adapted for shearing the vegetation it eats.

Right: At the nest site both parents guard the chicks and are alert to any danger.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Nervous and constantly alert, greylag geese are very difficult to approach. This wariness has been inherited by domestic geese, which make excellent "watchdogs."

- On hatching, greylag goslings latch on to the first animal they see and accept it as a parent. Normally this is their true parent, but they readily accept humans.



BIRDWATCH

The greylag goose is larger and sturdier than other gray geese and has paler plumage, a heavy neck, and a large orange bill. Skeins of

graylags flying overhead make a deep, sonorous flight call that resembles the call of the bird's descendant, the domestic goose.



Top left: The greylag's heavy orange bill sets it apart from other gray geese.

Left: Toward the end of the day, the greylag may fly inland to spend the evening on a placid lake.

FOOD & FEEDING

The greylag goose feeds mainly on grass, which is ground up in its gizzard. Because it lacks the complex digestive system of *herbivorous* (plant-eating) mammals, the greylag has to eat a vast amount of grass to get enough nutrients. It may spend most of the day feeding and is very selective, choosing only the youngest and most succulent grass tips.

The greylag goose supplements its diet with flowers, fruit, and seeds. Flocks of greylags often invade farm fields to pick up wheat and barley grains left after harvesting. Greylag geese may also feed on growing crops, neatly snipping off young shoots with their heavy bills, which have saw-toothed edges. This behavior brings them into conflict with farmers.

EURASIAN GOLDEN PLOVER

CARD 119

GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Charadriiformes

FAMILY
Charadriidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Pluvialis apricaria



The Eurasian golden plover is a black- and gold-speckled wading bird that spends most of its time on the ground. It winters in western Europe and northern Africa.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: 10-12 in.
Wingspan: 2-2½ ft.
Weight: 6-9 oz.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 1 year.
Breeding season: May to August, but varies according to location.
No. of broods: 1, but will replace broods lost to predators.
Eggs: Usually 3-4.
Incubation: 1 month.
Fledging period: 1 month.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Flocking bird.
Diet: Insects, larvae, and worms. Also plant material.



RELATED SPECIES

The American golden plover, *Pluvialis dominica*, is closely related to the European species. It looks similar but is smaller.



Range of the Eurasian golden plover.

DISTRIBUTION

Breeds in Iceland, Great Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, parts of Europe, and the Soviet Union.

CONSERVATION

Throughout its range, the population of the Eurasian golden plover has been seriously affected by changes in land use—particularly the planting of large commercial pine forests. The northern populations are stable.

FEATURES OF THE EURASIAN GOLDEN PLOVER

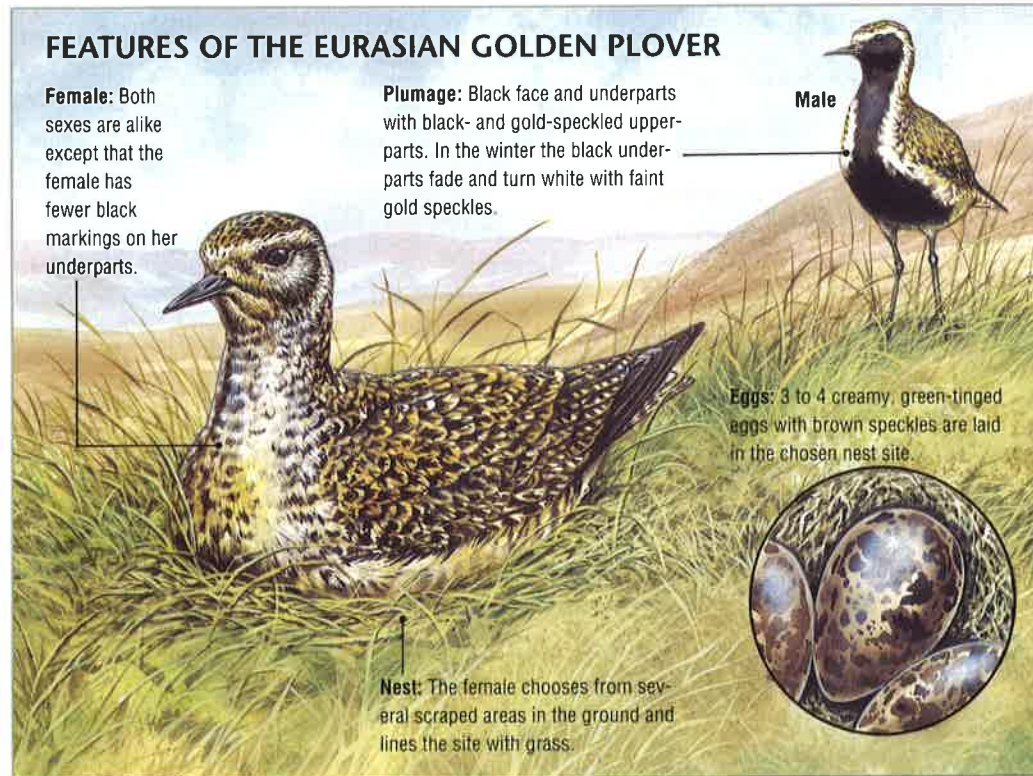
Female: Both sexes are alike except that the female has fewer black markings on her underparts.

Plumage: Black face and underparts with black- and gold-speckled upperparts. In the winter the black underparts fade and turn white with faint gold speckles.

Male

Eggs: 3 to 4 creamy, green-tinged eggs with brown speckles are laid in the chosen nest site.

Nest: The female chooses from several scraped areas in the ground and lines the site with grass.





The Eurasian golden plover usually leaves its breeding ground in fall to migrate to warmer areas, where it mixes with the local bird population. In Great Britain and western Europe, however, most golden plovers do not migrate—they remain in the same location year round.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Although the Eurasian golden plover is a wading bird, it seldom wades.
- Disputes often occur when the plover's range overlaps the lapwing's, but the plover never wins.
- Humans may barely hear plovers' contact calls.
- The plover's enemies include foxes, crows, and gulls. The plover may fake a broken wing to distract a predator from the nest.
- Parents may divide the brood to care for the chicks.

HABITAT

The Eurasian golden plover spends much of its time on the ground and prefers a flat, open habitat with sparse vegetation and tree cover, so it can run quickly if threatened. It favors moors, heaths, and peatland during the breeding season. In winter it is often found on burned fields, open farmland, and flooded land. Near the coast it prefers open land away from the shore.

Right: While his mate incubates the eggs, the male stands guard to watch for intruders.



BREEDING

Before breeding season starts, the Eurasian golden plover molts into its bright breeding plumage. It usually chooses its mate just before arriving at the breeding grounds. Once they pair, the bond lasts a lifetime.

At the breeding site the male defends his territory vigorously, often dueling with a rival bird. Having claimed a territory, the male digs a number of shallow areas in the ground. The female then chooses one, while participating with the male in a series of courtship displays that

Left: The Eurasian golden plover has a beautiful-sounding liquid, piping call.

ends in mating. The nest is then enlarged and lined, and about three weeks later the female lays three or four eggs in it over a period of several days. Both parents incubate the eggs. The male may incubate during the day with the female taking over at night, or they may share duties at regular intervals.

The eggs hatch after 27 or 28 days, and the hatchlings are well developed. Soon after birth both parents lead the chicks to a nearby feeding ground and stand guard while they eat. The chicks fledge fully at about a month and are able to breed the next year.



Above: The eggs are laid in a shallow nest in the ground, but they are well camouflaged by their speckles.



Left: A hatching chick has the same distinctive gold-speckled coloring as an adult.

FOOD & FEEDING

In the breeding season the parent birds feed outside the nest site while the chicks feed closer to the nest. The off-duty parent may feed by day or

night. Insects and larvae are the main food, but worms form much of the winter diet in many areas. The plover also eats slugs and pecks at grass.

MIGRATION

The migratory habits of the Eurasian golden plover vary. In Great Britain only a few migrate. Those that do begin in July, after the breeding season, and travel to southern France and Portugal, returning again the following spring. Plovers that remain in Great Britain winter on low ground near their breeding areas.

Populations that breed in Iceland leave in October to winter mainly in Ireland. Their return trip starts in mid-April. Most birds move southwest to winter in the warmer maritime climate of western Europe.

Before migrating, the plover

molts into its winter plumage, but birds traveling long distances may molt only partially. The birds form flocks of 50 to 5,000, but some birds travel alone or in pairs.

Below: In winter the plover's feathers lose their golden sheen.



COMMON MOORHEN

CARD 120



GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Gruiformes

FAMILY
Rallidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Gallinula chloropus



The common moorhen, with its eye-catching red beak, is a familiar sight around fresh water. This greedy eater and fast breeder is found on every continent except Australia.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: 14 in.
Wingspan: 20-22 in.
Weight: 7-12 oz.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 1 year.
Breeding season: April to August.
No. of broods: 2 or 3.
Eggs: 6-10.
Incubation: 3 weeks.
Fledging period: 6-7 weeks.



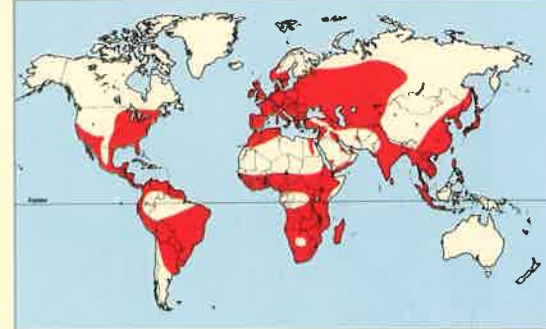
LIFESTYLE

Habit: Sociable, except during breeding season.
Diet: Plants, berries, insects, and other small animals.
Lifespan: Rarely over 3 years.



RELATED SPECIES

There are 2 other species of *Gallinula*: the lesser moorhen, *G. angulata*, of Africa and the dusky moorhen, *G. tenebrosa*, of the East Indies and Australia.



Range of the common moorhen.

DISTRIBUTION

Found in North, Central, and South America, the West Indies, Eurasia, Africa, and Indonesia east to Celebes. Northern birds migrate south for the winter.

CONSERVATION

The common moorhen eats almost anything and is a fast breeder, so it is not in any danger.

FEATURES OF THE COMMON MOORHEN

Plumage: Black feathers tinged with dark brown. White flash under tail and stripe on sides. Both sexes alike.

Eggs: Yellowish, speckled with red-brown. Six to 10 in a clutch. Incubated by both parents for about 3 weeks.

Feet: Large fore and hind claws aid movement over marshy or muddy ground. They give the bird a distinctive, high-stepping gait.

Nest: Built among reeds beside a pond or lake. Foundation made of reeds and other marsh plants and topped with more vegetation. May include flowers. Both sexes do the construction.



The common moorhen is usually found by ponds and marshes. Although it is shy, this bird has become used to human company and can be seen in parks and other public places that have bodies of water. With its distinctive high-stepping walk, as well as its bobbing movement when swimming, the common moorhen is easy to recognize.

HABITS

Outside the breeding season, common moorhens gather in flocks of 15 to 30 birds. There is a "pecking order" within a flock. Birds with the largest red shields on their beaks dominate. Usually the leaders are older males.

When disturbed on land, the moorhen runs to water. Young-

er birds dive and swim underwater to safety. But older birds lose the ability to dive.

In North America the common moorhen usually leaves the Northeast in the fall and spends the winter no farther north than the Carolinas. Birds in the West tend to stay in the same place all year.

FOOD & FEEDING

The common moorhen feeds mainly on duckweed, rushes, and the fruit of water lilies. But it will eat almost anything that is available. On land the moorhen eats fallen blackberries, elderberries, and yew berries. It even climbs along thin branches to pick fruit. It

also eats seeds and grains.

About a quarter of the common moorhen's diet is insects and invertebrates such as larvae, worms, slugs, and snails. It will also take the young or eggs of other bird species. A varied diet is one key to the moorhen's success.

Left: The larger the red shield on the moorhen's beak, the more dominant the bird is.

Right: Although it prefers water weeds, the moorhen will eat almost anything.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The common moorhen gets its name from *moor*, an old English word for a swamp.
- A common moorhen was seen walking underwater on the gravel bed of a river.
- In five days a moorhen that was banded in eastern Ger-
- many flew 950 miles to Spain.
- One adult moorhen drove off a stoat that was swimming toward its chicks.
- Some moorhens in eastern Europe cross the Mediterranean Sea and Sahara Desert to winter in equatorial Africa.



Above: The chick can swim soon after hatching.



Left: The moorhen's nest is woven from reeds and other plants. Both sexes take turns at incubation.



BIRDWATCH

The common moorhen can be seen on fresh water, especially where marsh plants are common. The bird is easy to identify, with its dark body, white side stripe, and bright red bill. It swims with a jerk-

ing head movement. Sometimes it walks on land looking for insects and berries.

The black chicks swim with their parents in summer. Each has a bare pink patch on top of its head.

BREEDING

The common moorhen becomes very aggressive in the breeding season. When another bird comes too close, the moorhen extends its neck to present its red frontal shield. It fluffs up its plumage and raises its wings slightly. Then it cocks its tail and swims in circles, showing its undertail patch. If the enemy fails to retreat, the moorhen makes running attacks across the water, beating its wings and legs.

A pair of breeding birds first constructs several platforms among the reeds. They choose the most suitable of these as a nest site. Both birds build the nest, making a foundation of reeds and other plants. They lay more plants on top, then

add flowers or bits of paper. The birds may pull down irises to make a canopy.

A clutch of six to ten eggs is usually laid in April. Both parents share the three-week incubation. The black chick has bare pink patches on its crown. Its bill is red but soon fades to dull yellow. By the time the chick matures, its bill is red again.

The newborn chick is unsteady on its legs, and it is carried to the water in its parent's bill. It swims almost immediately and can feed itself within three weeks. After seven weeks it is able to fly. But it stays with its parents for the summer, helping to raise one or two more broods.