

GOLDEN PHEASANT

CARD 34

GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Galliformes

FAMILY
Phasianidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Chrysolophus pictus



The golden pheasant is one of the most brilliantly feathered of all the ruffed pheasants. A native of China, it has also been introduced as a game bird in other parts of the world.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: Male, 3-4 ft., Female, slightly smaller.
Wing length: About 2 ft.
Weight: 1-2 lb.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: Female, 1 year. Male, 2 years.
Breeding season: April to May.
Clutch: 5-12 buff-colored eggs.
Incubation period: 22 days.
Fledging period: 12-14 days.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Shy, territorial. Ground dweller.
Diet: Berries, seeds, flowers, shoots, and insects.
Call: Roar, growl, or purr.
Lifespan: Up to 8 years.



RELATED SPECIES

Closest relative is Lady Amherst's pheasant, *Chrysolophus amherstiae*.



Range of the golden pheasant.

DISTRIBUTION

Native to central China, from the edge of the Tibetan plateau in the northwest, east to Hubei, and south to Hunan and Guizhou. Introduced as a game bird in other parts of the world.

CONSERVATION

Native Chinese population believed to be stable. Wild populations have developed from introduced breeds in other countries.

IDENTIFYING THE GOLDEN PHEASANT

Hen (female): Speckled brown plumage; smaller than the male.



Eggs: Large, buff; 5-12 per clutch.

Cock (male): Brilliant crimson and gold plumage, with long colorful tail.

Chick: Creamy yellow and red-brown down.

The male golden pheasant sports

such beautiful plumage that it has

become a popular exhibit in

zoos and aviaries throughout

the world. But the bird is shy and retiring

by nature, so much of its life in the

wild remains a mystery even today.



Left: Two males display their colorful plumage.

HABITAT

The golden pheasant is native to the mountains of central China. It lives at high altitudes in the rocky foothills among bamboo scrub. The pheasant avoids thick woodland, wetlands, or open country. As agriculture spreads into its habitat, the bird also inhabits tea plantations or the edges of terraced fields.

Many of the birds that were imported to England escaped

from captivity and bred so successfully that the golden pheasant is now recognized as a naturalized British bird. Where it has been introduced, the golden pheasant favors a different habitat from its native one. It usually chooses dense forest plantations and may be found in mixed woodland. It moves into more open areas to feed.



BIRDWATCH

In areas where the golden pheasant has been introduced as a game bird, many wild populations have developed.

The male pheasant can be

spotted by his brilliant red or golden plumage. The reddish brown, speckled female is harder to identify. She looks like the common pheasant but has a more reddish back.

FOOD & FEEDING

In China, the golden pheasant feeds on the leaves and shoots of various shrubs—especially those of low-growing bamboos—and on the flowers of the rhododendron. It also feeds on beetles and spiders. The bird forages by day, roosting at night high in the bough of a tree, where it is safe from predators. The golden pheasant tends to feed in the same home range all year. But those birds that inhabit the higher mountain ridges often make daily migrations to lower feeding grounds.

Little is known about the feeding habits of populations outside China. They probably have much the same kind of diet as their Chinese counterparts and feed on new shoots, berries, and seeds.

BREEDING

The golden pheasant lives alone for most of the year. But during spring the male begins crowing loudly in an attempt to attract a mate to his territory. His call is harsh and grating. If a female responds, the courtship dance begins. The male stands still with his head close to the female's so he can display his *ruff* (neck feathers). At the same time, he drops one wing and tilts his body to show off his golden rump and lush tail. If the male's display works, the pair mate.

Little is known about the bird's nesting habits. It is possible that the wild golden pheasant builds its nest in the weeds of a bamboo grove. In captivity, the female usually lays her eggs in a secluded hollow among thick vegetation.

Below: There can be as many as a dozen chicks in the nest.



GOLDEN PHEASANT & MAN

In China, the golden pheasant is hunted with snares, for both its meat and its colorful plumage. In the past, many birds were captured by collectors for export to zoos and aviaries. Despite these pressures, the

golden pheasant remains plentiful, although the actual number of wild native birds is not known for certain.

Thousands of golden pheasants are kept throughout the world as ornamental birds.



The female incubates and cares for the young. During incubation the camouflage of her speckled brown plumage is especially important to hide her from predators.

Below: The female (left) and young golden pheasant are plainer than the male.

The young pheasants fly within two weeks of hatching but remain close to their mother until they are fully grown at about four months of age.

Above: Two cocks fight for a female during the breeding season.



DID YOU KNOW?

- When displaying his plumage, the male golden pheasant utters a loud hiss.
- The golden pheasant will mate with related species. The young that result from the golden pheasant's mat-

ing with Lady Amherst's pheasant, its closest relative, are *fertile* (capable of producing offspring). Mating with the silver pheasant produces fertile males but sterile females.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

CARD 35

GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Ciconiiformes

FAMILY
Ardeidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Nycticorax nycticorax



The black-crowned night heron feeds mainly at dawn and dusk on fish and insects, but it also fishes during the day when it has young to feed.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Height: 23-26 in.
Weight: About 21-25 oz.



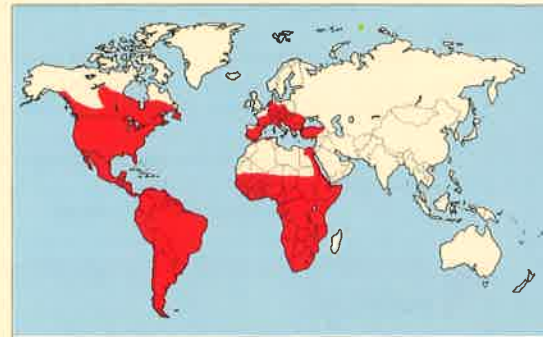
BREEDING
Sexual maturity: 2-3 years.
No. of broods: 1-2.
Breeding season: April to September.
Eggs: 3-5, pale blue-green.
Incubation period: 21-26 days.
Nesting period: 6-7 weeks.



LIFESTYLE
Habit: Sociable. Nests, roosts, and breeds in colonies.
Diet: Fish, aquatic insects, frogs.
Lifespan: 16 years.



RELATED SPECIES
Yellow-crowned night heron
Nycticorax violaceus (North and South America), the Nankeen night heron *N. caledonicus* (Australia), and the white-backed night heron *N. leuconotus* (Central and South Africa).



Range of the black-crowned night heron.

DISTRIBUTION

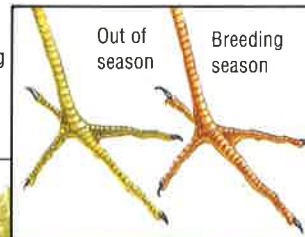
Widespread throughout North and South America, Eurasia, and Africa.

CONSERVATION

The black-crowned night heron is common throughout its range and is in no direct danger of extinction.

FEATURES OF THE BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

Legs: Long, typical of a wading bird. The green legs and feet turn yellow or red in the breeding season.



Nest: Loosely built in a bush or high in a tree.



Eggs: Three to five, blue-green in color.

Social behavior: A breeding pair of black-crowned night herons displays affection by rubbing bills together and by nibbling each other's feathers.



The black-crowned night heron

has a thick bill, short legs, and a black and green back. It has a narrow white band across its forehead and above its large, red eyes. Several slender, white plumes grow from the black crest on the adult heron's head.

HABITAT

The black-crowned night heron is found in wetland habitats throughout the world. It prefers areas of dense vegetation such as the overgrown banks of rivers, ponds, and streams, as well as swamps

and marshes. The heron can also be found near coastal marshes, tidal creeks, and coastal lagoons.

The night heron spends the day roosting in bushes or trees. Several hundred birds

often roost together, preferring trees with dense cover, such as the tropical mangrove. The night heron also shares roosting and feeding grounds with the Squacco heron, since the Squacco roosts at night and feeds during the day.

Black-crowned night herons found in northern regions such as North America and Asia migrate south in the winter.



Left: *This young night heron does not yet have any head plumes.*

FOOD & FEEDING

When the night heron must feed its young, it searches for food throughout the night. At other times the night heron is most active at dawn and dusk. The night heron feeds mainly on fish, frogs, and aquatic insects and their larvae. It hunts for prey by walking slowly through the water, or

by diving or swimming. The night heron is sociable and often feeds in a group with other herons.

The night heron also feeds on land, where it preys on small mammals, birds, and spiders. It sometimes eats the eggs and young of other herons in the same colony.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The night heron's green legs and feet turn a bright yellow or red in the breeding season.
- When it feeds, the night heron holds its head under its outstretched wing. This provides shade for its eyes so that the bird can spot fish more clearly.
- The largest colony of night herons ever recorded was in Virginia. It contained more than 1,200 pairs.
- The heron sometimes lures fish by dropping food scraps, or even feathers, on the surface of the water.

Right and below: *The night heron is very easily distinguished by its full, squat figure, even during flight.*



BREEDING

The male establishes his own territory within the breeding colony. If another bird enters his territory, he defends it by thrusting his neck forward, arching his head, fluffing his head, neck, and breast feathers, and making a hissing sound to frighten off the intruder.

The male greets his mate very differently, however, with affectionate bill rubbing and feather nibbling.

The male gathers twigs and sticks for the female to weave

into the nest. The rather flimsy and messy platform nest is usually built in a bush or reed bed close to the water. Or it may be built in a tree as high as 150 feet above the ground.

The female lays three to five blue-green eggs at 48-hour intervals. Both parents incubate the eggs which hatch three to four weeks later. Because the eggs are laid at different times, some chicks hatch earlier than others. Those chicks that are first to hatch have a greater chance of survival if food is scarce.

The chicks are dark brown with paler spots and underparts. They feed mainly on fish, which is fed to them by both parents. The chicks leave the nest three weeks among the branches of

nearby trees, but they return to the nest to feed. They cannot fly well until they are six weeks old.

Below: *Chicks hatch at two-day intervals, simplifying feeding for the parents.*



OVENBIRD

CARD 36

GROUP 2: BIRDS



ORDER
Passeriformes

FAMILY
Furnariidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Furnarius rufus



The ovenbird gets its name from the unusual nest it builds. This odd-looking structure, made from mud and strengthened with fibers and grass, is shaped like an old-fashioned baking oven.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Length: 7-8 in.
Weight: Up to 2 oz.



BREEDING
Sexual maturity: Not known.
No. of broods: 1 per year.
Breeding season: Late winter; nest building during wettest months of the year.
Eggs: White, 3-5 per clutch.
Incubation period: Up to 20 days.
Fledging period: Up to 18 days.



LIFESTYLE
Call: Musical notes and trills.
Habit: Rather shy. Lives in pairs year-round; pairs often mate for life.
Diet: Ground-dwelling insects, worms, and grubs.



RELATED SPECIES
Over 200 species in the same family, including spinetails, shaketails, and leafscrapers.



Range of the ovenbird.

DISTRIBUTION

Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, in open country and flood plains. Common near human settlements.

CONSERVATION

Although populations have been affected by land clearances in some areas of the ovenbird's natural habitat, conservation measures do not appear to be necessary as this species has adapted well to man's intrusion on its habitat.

THE OVENBIRD'S NEST

The ovenbird's nest is built out of moist clay strengthened with grass and fibers. It may be built in a tree, on top of a fence post, or

even under the eave of a roof. When the finished nest has been baked hard by the sun, it will be strong enough to survive for 2-3 years before

finally being washed away by the rain. The ovenbird builds a new nest every year—often on top of an old nest—and its old nest is used as a home by insects or other birds.



The nest provides warmth and security for the brood of 3-5 chicks, which fledge in 18 days.

In South America, the ovenbird is called el hornero, "the house builder," and belongs to one of the largest families of birds. The ovenbird can be recognized by its distinctive song and is seen in settlements and on the edges of towns.



HABITS

Ovenbirds live in pairs throughout the year, and many stay with the same mate for life. Although rather wary by nature, the ovenbird has adapted to living near human populations, and pairs of ovenbirds have become a familiar sight. They will build their nests on fence posts and under the eaves of houses when a suitable tree cannot be found.

The ovenbird has drab, dull-

colored feathers, or *plumage*, chestnut-brown back, head, and wings, and a pale cream-colored chest. The ovenbird is active by day. At night, it roosts in a tree.

The ovenbird's feet are well adapted for grasping the slender twigs and grass it uses to build its nest. Each foot has four toes in the front and one in back. The bird walks slowly, often holding one foot up in the air between steps.

Below: A species related to the ovenbird is the North American Seiurus aurocapillus, a member of the wood warbler family.



BREEDING

Very little is known about the breeding and nesting habits of the ovenbird, since it is difficult to examine its nest without destroying it in the process.

Still, it is known that during the wet winter months, the male and female work together to build the nest. After selecting a suitable nest site,

usually in a tree or on a fence post, they begin building their hollowed-out nest with clay, strengthening it with grass and plant fibers.

When the clay has been baked hard by the sun, the birds continue to add clay and plant fibers to the edges of the nest and build up the walls until it has a dome-shaped roof. The birds finish the nest by constructing a narrow, curving entrance chamber. The female lines the inner nesting chamber with grass and feathers.

After mating, the female lays three to five white eggs. Because of the warmth trapped inside the clay nest, the eggs hatch very quickly, after approximately 20 days. The chicks grow their feathers, or *fledge*, in 18 days and remain with their parents for up to three months.

Left: A suitable nesting tree isn't always available to homeless ovenbirds. This Brazilian pair is making use of a sturdy fence.

FOOD & FEEDING

The ovenbird pecks at the ground in search for food in the same manner as many bird species. It tends to stay within the same small area when it forages.

The ovenbird spends much of its day searching for the ground-dwelling insects, invertebrates, larvae, and spiders that make up the largest proportion of its diet. During feeding, the bird hides among the scrub and grass.



Top: Remarkably adaptable, the ovenbird will often build its mud and straw nest close to human populations.

Inset: Although it sings a tuneful song, the ovenbird has rather dull-colored plumage.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The ovenbird's nest is made from between 1,500 and 2,000 separate lumps of clay. It weighs 7-12 pounds.
- The warm conditions inside a nest are inviting to a number of insects, including a species of bedbug.
- Other members of the ovenbird family are known by the colorful names of plainsrunner, castlebuilder, leafgleaner, and thistle-tail.

SUPERB LYREBIRD

GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Passeriformes

FAMILY
Menuridae

GENUS & SPECIES
Menura novaehollandiae



The superb lyrebird's name comes from the resemblance of its tail feathers to the shape of the lyre, an ancient Greek musical instrument.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Length: Male, 31-39 in., including tail. Female, 29-34 in.
Weight: Up to 2 lb.



BREEDING
Sexual maturity: Male, 3-9 years. Female earlier.
Breeding season: May to October.
No. of broods: 1; 1 egg.
Incubation: 50 days.
Fledging period: 6-7 weeks.



LIFESTYLE
Call: Loud, high-pitched shriek.
Diet: Insects, worms, and other invertebrates that live in the soil and under the bark of rotting logs.
Lifespan: Up to 15 years.



RELATED SPECIES
There is only one other species of lyrebird, Albert's lyrebird, *Menura alberti*.



Range of the superb lyrebird.

DISTRIBUTION

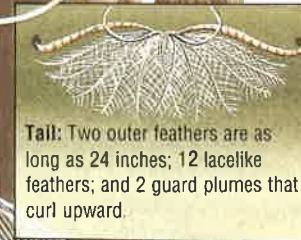
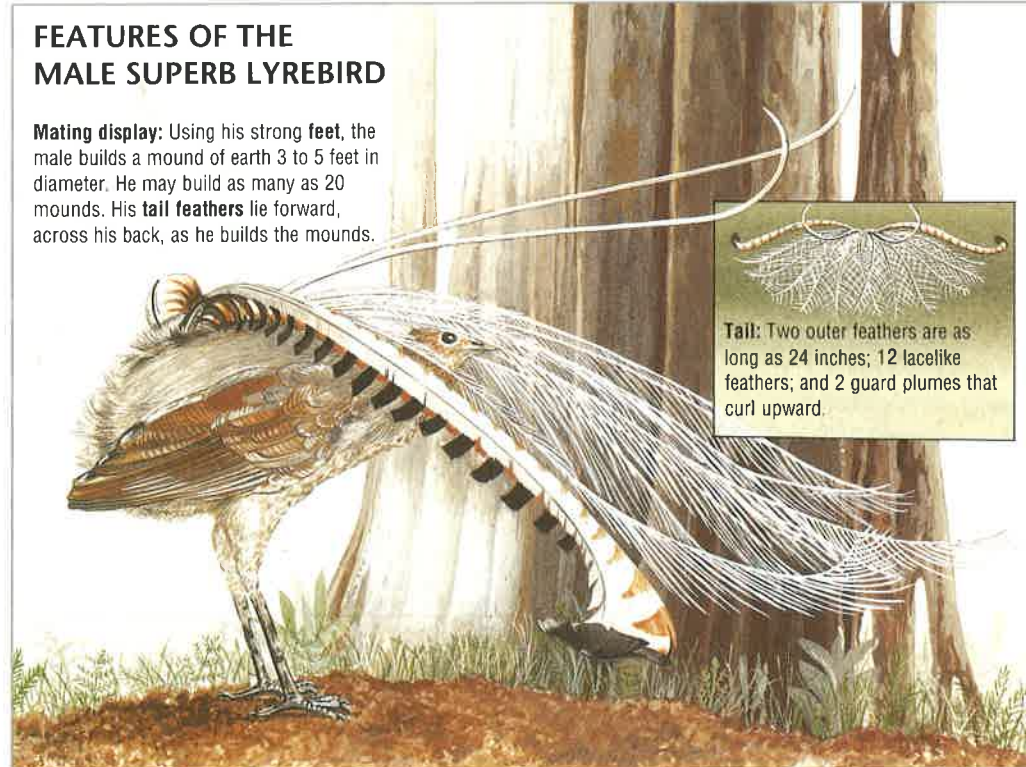
Native only to Australia, from southeastern Queensland south to southern Victoria. Introduced in 1934 to temperate rainforest in Tasmania, where it still survives.

CONSERVATION

The superb lyrebird is now a protected species. The main threat to its survival is the destruction of its forest habitat.

FEATURES OF THE MALE SUPERB LYREBIRD

Mating display: Using his strong feet, the male builds a mound of earth 3 to 5 feet in diameter. He may build as many as 20 mounds. His tail feathers lie forward, across his back, as he builds the mounds.



Tail: Two outer feathers are as long as 24 inches; 12 lacelike feathers; and 2 guard plumes that curl upward.

The superb lyrebird is a large, chicken-sized bird. The male's spectacular tail, which he uses in his dramatic courtship display, consists of 16 feathers that, when spread, resemble a lyre.

HABIT

The superb lyrebird lives singly, in pairs, or in small family groups during the summer. In the fall and winter each male becomes territorial and defends his territory by singing, displaying his feathers, and chasing away intruders. At this time of the year the female lives in a nesting territory, which usually overlaps the territories of several males.

The superb lyrebird is difficult to see in the wild. It stays hidden during the day and roosts high in the trees at night. In some parks the bird has become used to visitors and is quite easy to spot. The superb lyrebird usually runs or walks on the ground. Sometimes it escapes from danger by gliding down from a branch.



FOOD & FEEDING

The superb lyrebird spends much of the day feeding. It uses its strong feet and long claws to rake the ground for soil-dwelling insects, such as earthworms, spiders, fly and beetle larvae, millipedes, and other invertebrates.

The lyrebird has exceptionally powerful claws. It scratches up the earth with them to remove even fairly large objects. It also uses its claws to rip away the bark of rotting logs to expose any insects underneath.

Left: The male superb lyrebird throws its feathers over its head and makes a series of calls. Some calls mimic other birds and even other sounds, such as the barking of a dog.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The voice box of the superb lyrebird is controlled by three muscles, instead of the four found in most birds. This gives the lyrebird a wide vocal range.
- The first known lyrebirds were collected in 1797 in Australia.
- A park ranger reported hearing a power saw in an Australian national park. When he moved closer to investigate, the ranger found only a superb lyrebird mimicking the sound of the saw.
- During the mating season a male superb lyrebird may spend half the day trying to attract females by displaying his feathers.
- The male molts (sheds) his tail feathers every year.

BREEDING

The male superb lyrebird mates with several females after he has attracted them with an elaborate mating display. He plays no part in nest-building, incubation of the egg, or rearing of the young.

The female builds a large, dome-shaped nest of twigs, bark, moss, and ferns, and she lines it with feathers and

small roots.

Throughout the incubation period, the female leaves the single egg for three to six hours each morning. As a result, incubation is much longer than it would normally be for a perching bird: the egg does not hatch for almost two months.

The newly hatched chick is thinly covered with black



Above right: The female superb lyrebird is smaller and less striking than the male.

Left: The nest is built several months before the breeding season begins.



down. The mother broods (protects) it for 10 days, after which it can maintain its own body temperature. During the chick's time in the nest (about 47 days), its weight increases approximately 12 times. It leaves the nest during spring, but it still depends on its mother for some food for another eight months before becoming self-sufficient.

CHARACTERISTICS

The superb lyrebird is unmatched among birds, both in its ability to mimic sounds and in its variety of songs.

The typical lyrebird song lasts approximately five to six seconds. Most of the song consists of accurately mimicked calls of other bird species, including those of the kookaburra and the whipbird. A male superb

lyrebird can mimic the calls of as many as 16 different bird species.

When the male is trying to attract a mate, his song is quieter. Females can also sing and mimic sounds, but they rarely do.

Below: The male's call may be audible up to half a mile away on a clear day.



EUROPEAN COOT

CARD 39



GROUP 2: BIRDS

ORDER
Gruiformes

FAMILY
Rallidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Fulica atra



European coots gather in huge flocks on large freshwater lakes and along the coasts of Europe during winter. The species's high-pitched cry sounds like the word "coot."

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: 14-16 in.
Wingspan: 28-32 in.
Weight: 20-30 oz.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 1-2 years.
Breeding season: Eggs laid March to May.
No. of broods: 1.
Eggs: 6-10.
Incubation: 21-24 days.
Fledging period: 8 weeks.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Feeds in groups, but territorial and aggressive.
Diet: Aquatic plants, small fish, amphibians, and water insects.
Call: Sharp, loud, brief call.
Lifespan: Oldest known, 18 years.



RELATED SPECIES

There are 9 closely related species—8 in North and South America, the other in Africa.



Range of the European coot.

DISTRIBUTION

Primary range is western and eastern Europe. Also found in North Africa and Asia. Some found in Java, New Guinea, and Australia. Birds in far northern areas migrate south in October and return north to breed in April.

CONSERVATION

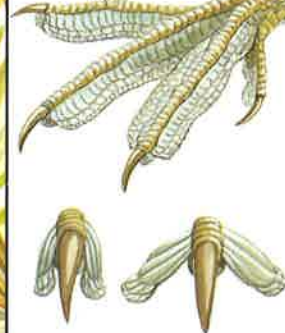
This species's numbers appear to be increasing in many countries.

FEATURES OF THE EUROPEAN COOT

Nest: Built from debris and plant material. Usually floating, but always anchored to reeds or branches on shore. The female hatches the eggs, but because broods often hatch over

several days, the male may care for the first hatchlings on a specially built, floating platform. In time of flood, the parents build high walls around the nest.

Feet: Each toe joint is individually lobed, allowing the coot to spread its feet only on the downstroke while it is swimming.



Upstroke: As the coot pulls its feet up, the lobes collapse, reducing water resistance.

Downstroke: Lobes spread out on the downstroke, giving maximum thrust.

The European coot is an aquatic bird

that swims and dives well, using its specially adapted toes. Although it feeds in a group with other coots, the coot is territorial and aggressive, and splashing fights between coots are frequent during the summer breeding season.



BEHAVIOR

The European coot aggressively defends its breeding territory during mating season. When a coot is challenged, it raises its wings and lowers its head, showing off its bill and *shield* (the white marking on its head) so that it appears large

and threatening to its rival. When a group of coots is threatened by a bird of prey, they frantically fly across the water's surface, flinging up spray with their feet and wings to ward off the attacker.



BIRDWATCH

The American coot is very similar in appearance to the European coot, except that it is slightly smaller and does not have a white shield on its forehead.

The American coot nests in a vast area that extends from

southern Canada to Central America. Coots are also found in the Andes in Columbia and Ecuador.

The American coot winters in the southern part of its range, including Everglades National Park in Florida.

BREEDING

Both the male and female build the nest among vegetation along the water's edge. It is often in danger of becoming flooded during periods of heavy rainfall. During a drought the receding waterline leaves the nest in reach of land predators such as foxes and hedgehogs, which steal the eggs.

The female lays six to nine eggs between March and May. If eggs are stolen or lost, she may lay replace-

ments. Both parents incubate the eggs and feed the nestlings, which leave the nest

within three to four days. The chicks do not become fully independent for eight weeks.

Right: *Chicks are fed by both parents.*

Below: *The coot's nest is anchored securely to the shore.*



Left: *The coot is a common sight on ponds and lakes throughout its range.*

HABITAT

The European coot is found in ponds, slow-moving rivers, flooded gravel pits, reservoirs, and marshes, as well as in lakes in urban parks. Still, the coot usually breeds only in areas that provide dense cover for its nest. Because it does not breed in winter, the need for cover is less important.

Flocks of coots gather on large inland lakes when smaller lakes freeze. During especially cold weather the coot can even be found in coastal areas.

FOOD & FEEDING

The European coot eats a wide variety of food during the summer, including freshwater plants, algae, aquatic insects, tadpoles, newts, and some small fish. It may also eat grain, seeds, and other birds' eggs and chicks.

The coot eats vegetation growing just below the surface of lakes and ponds by upending itself like a duck. Still, it dives completely underwater for much of its food.

In winter, when the birds flock in large numbers, a coot

may occasionally steal its food from others. But usually the coot eats mostly aquatic plant material, always returning to the surface before eating it. Still, it may not get the chance to eat it, since a stronger coot is often waiting to snatch the food.

A coot can become very tame when it lives among people and may even take food from their hands.

Right: *The coot dives down to the lake bed to feed on freshwater plants.*



DID YOU KNOW?

- During breeding season a male coot drives away much larger birds, including geese and swans.
- The coot attempts to attract a mate by puffing out its head feathers and pointing its bill downward. Often this occurs on water, and the bird's head becomes entirely submerged.
- The aggressive coot may slash at its rival's breast with its sharp claws.
- A chick's red head feathers later turn white.