

# Learn about:

## Moorhen



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Scientific name: *Gallinula chloropus*

### What is it?

The moorhen is a common river bird and can be found on ponds, lakes, canals and rivers around the country and it is widespread across Europe.

It can be quite secretive and likes to hide in the reeds at the edge of the riverbank.



### What does it look like?

The moorhen is about 32cm in length and has a wingspan of about 50cm – it's about the size of a pigeon. It is a similar shape to a chicken with a large body and small head.

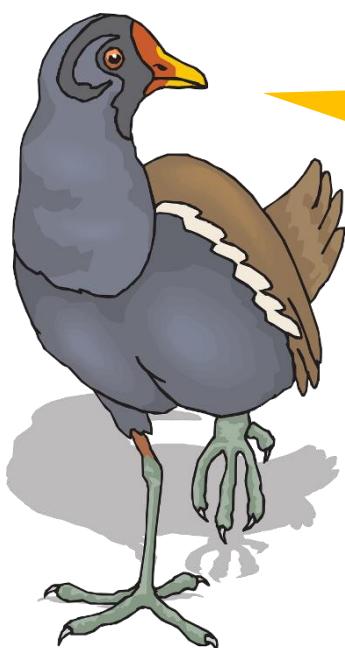


Its feathers are dark grey going into dark brown with a white stripe along the side, and its beak is bright red with a yellow tip. The flesh of the beak goes up between the eyes – this is called the “fore crown”. The moorhen has long yellow legs and big feet with long toes! The large feet help it to distribute its weight so that it can walk on top of floating plants like lily-pads. A similar looking water-bird is a “coot”, but coots have a white beak instead of a red one.

## Where does it live?

Moorhens can be found on freshwater-ways and wetlands throughout Ireland, though they are rarer in the West. They build their nests, which are usually basket-shaped, out of dry vegetation on riverbanks or on plants sticking up out of the water – or even as a floating raft!

In springtime the female moorhen lays about eight eggs, and both parents take turns incubating them. After about 6 weeks the eggs hatch, and the chicks stay with their mother for another few weeks before becoming independent.



Fact: If something startles moorhen chicks they will cling on to their mother with their claws and she will fly away from the danger with them on her back!

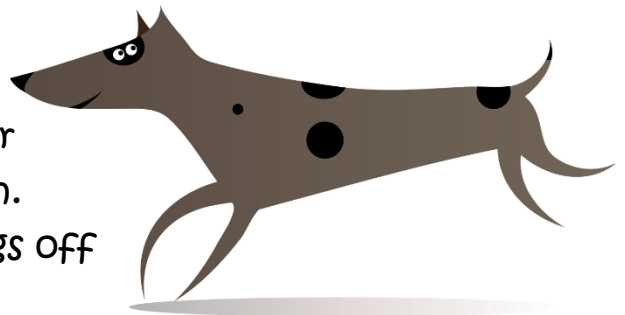
## What does it eat?

Moorhens are not fussy eaters. They eat both plants and animals, this makes them “omnivores”. They usually feed on insects, plants, small fish, tadpoles, seeds and fruit.



## Threats:

Moorhens are common birds, but they are impacted by habitat loss, if suitable nesting sites are built over or degraded through water pollution. Water birds are easily disturbed, dogs off their leashes can disturb nesting moorhens and their chicks, which means they have less opportunity to feed because they have to be alert to danger.



## Links:

Check out the RSPB moorhen fact page, listen to a moorhen's call and watch a video clip:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/moorhen/>



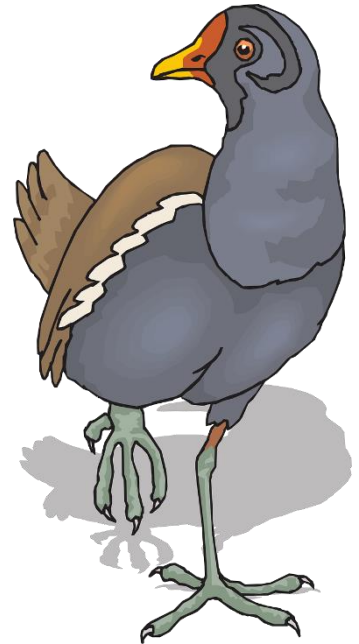
Learn to tell the difference between a coot and a moorhen with this clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbWYHc7GDjY>

## Your Turn!

Get some blank paper and colours and draw your own moorhen. Here are some things to think about for your drawing:

- Remember what colours the moorhen is...
- Remember its colourful red and yellow beak
- It's long yellow legs and long toes
- What's around the kingfisher? Draw the lake or river where it lives, what else might you see there?



## Quick Quiz:

- What colour is a moorhen's beak?
- What is the term used to describe an animal that eats both animals and plants?
- Where do moorhens make their nests?
- How many eggs does a moorhen usually lay?
- True or False: Moorhens have webbed feet?

If you're stuck for an answer, read back over the fact sheet!

