

Coot

Regno: fauna

Birds

 [folaga2.jpg](#) [1]

Coot - *Fulica atra*



[2]

The least conformist rail of the Italian fauna. Its uniform black colour and white plaque on its forehead make the coot unmistakable.

A little smaller than the Mallard, it is often mistaken for a duck because of its marked swimming habits.

Its legs are long and strong, but its wings are short and the coot has to take a long run over the water before it manages to take off in flight.

It changes its behaviour drastically depending on the time of year: it is territorial and quarrelsome during the breeding season, yet gregarious during the other periods. It follows a very varied diet, often feeding on plant material it gathers from the water bottom, as it can dive several metres deep.

The nest is formed of a large cup made out of plant material, usually floating on the surface and anchored to the plants on the bank. It lays from 5 to 10 eggs. Both adults dedicate themselves to carefully building the nest, incubating the eggs and feeding the young. The chicks are easily recognised by their red down on their heads.

It prefers more open habitats like lakes, lagoons, sheltered bays etc. for its over-wintering sites. A flock of about 500 individuals regularly over-winters in the Fucecchio Marshes Nature Reserve.

Because it is so adaptable, the species is very widespread and for the moment does not run any risks. It nests in the Natural Reserve of the Lama di Fuori of San Rossore, at Sibolla Lake, in the Fucecchio Marshes and at the Quarrata and Sesto Fiorentino ANPIL Reserve.

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