

American Coot

Fulica americana

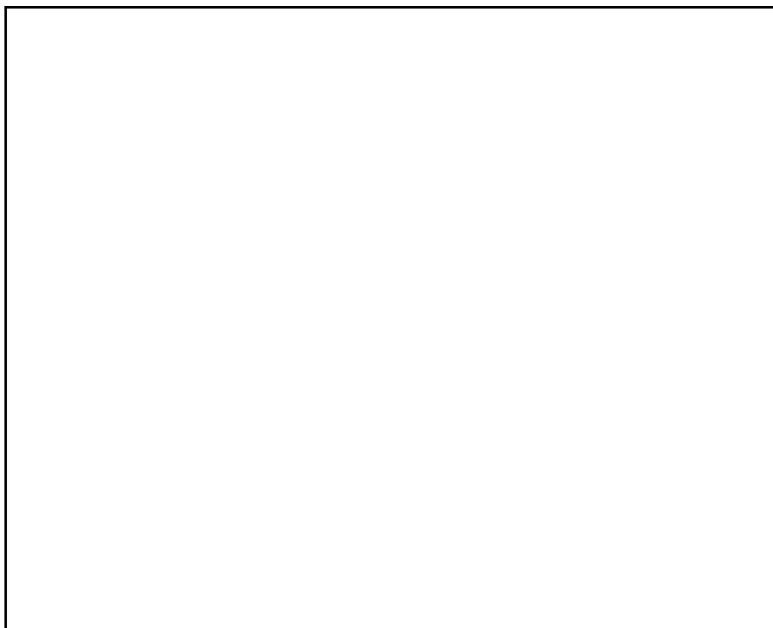
The preferred breeding habitats of American Coots are similar to those of Common Moorhens. Both species occupy large undisturbed wetlands where water depths are normally 1–3 feet and open water habitats are interspersed with dense patches of cattails and other tall emergent vegetation. Habitats with approximately 50% open water are ideal (Sanderson 1980). While coots normally avoid wetlands where open water is absent, they will inhabit marshes with only 10–20% vegetative cover.

Unlike moorhens whose North American breeding range is centered in the southern United States, the breeding range of American Coots is centered in the Prairie Pothole region of the north–central United States and Canada (Sanderson 1980). This range extends eastward through the Great Lakes region to the maritime provinces of Canada (AOU 1983). Despite similarities in their preferred breeding habitats, differences in their continental breeding ranges are reflected in their dissimilar distributions within Ohio.

During the Atlas Project, American Coots were reported from 17 priority blocks, 11 special areas, and 3 other locations within 23 counties. Breeding coots were most numerous within the marshes bordering western Lake Erie and Sandusky Bay as indicated by sightings from 7.4% of the priority blocks in the Lake Plain region. In the other physiographic regions, they were represented in 3% or less of the priority blocks. American Coots occupied every suitable wetland along western Lake Erie, and undisturbed marshes may host numerous breeding pairs. In addition to the Lucas, Ottawa, and Sandusky county locations shown on the accompanying map, coots also regularly nest in several Erie County marshes that were not surveyed during the Atlas Project.

Away from western Lake Erie, American Coots are accidental to rare and irregular summer residents. Very few inland locations were occupied during each year of the Atlas Project. Most records were scattered across the northern portion of the Till Plain region south to Marion and Morrow counties. Few coots were noted in the Glaciated Plateau region, a marked contrast to rails and moorhens that were more numerous within this region. Coots were also scarce within the southern half of Ohio. Of the five records from this area, pairs occupied suitable habitats at Spring Valley Wildlife Area (Warren County), Baker Swamp in Jackson County, and an unnamed marsh in northeastern Ross County, but nesting was not confirmed at any of these locations.

The size of Ohio's Coot population has never been estimated. Coots are generally fairly common residents along western Lake Erie (Peterjohn 1989a), where they are probably more numerous than Common Moorhens. Away from western Lake Erie, only Big Island Wildlife Area (Marion County) regularly hosts numbers of nesting pairs, although they may occasionally be numerous in marshes near Barberton (Summit County). Despite their fluctuating numbers, this inland population probably totals fewer than 100 pairs during most years. Recent trends in the number of breeding pairs are uncertain, although declines have been indicated along western Lake Erie and some inland marshes.

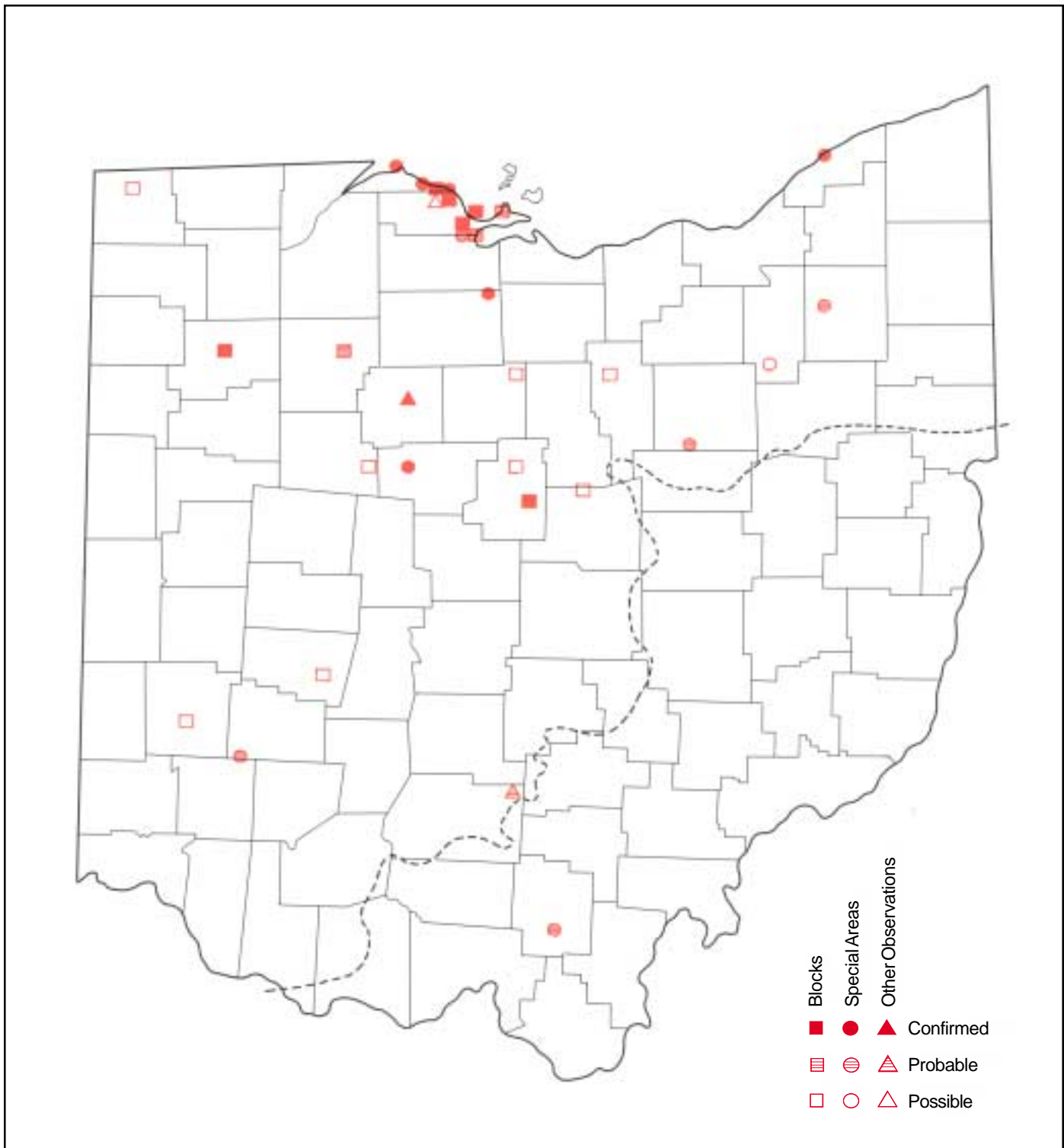


Picture to be added

Their statewide distribution has not markedly changed since the 1930s. Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from 15 counties, noting that they were fairly common along western Lake Erie but very local and irregular elsewhere. These breeding records extended south through Mercer, Logan, Franklin, Fairfield, and Columbiana counties. In addition to the Atlas Project records and those cited by Hicks (1935), coots are irregular breeders in southwestern Ohio where there are nesting records from Brown County (Kemsies and Randle 1953), Hamilton County (Kleen 1973), and Butler County (Peterjohn 1989b).

Coot nests are invariably built over water within dense emergent vegetation, preferably cattails. These nests may be floating, but are usually anchored to vegetation (Peck and James 1983). Within Ohio, nest construction may begin during April and continue through May. Nests with eggs have been reported as early as April 15. However, most clutches have been found between May 10 and June 20. Renesting attempts may produce clutches into July. Newly hatched chicks have appeared by May 11, but most adults accompanied by partially grown young are noted between May 25 and August 5. An exceptionally late brood was discovered on September 19, 1978 in Mahoning County (Peterjohn 1989a).

During the Atlas Project, breeding coots were confirmed at 12 locations. These records were nearly equally divided between active nests and adults accompanied by young. The possible records pertain to summering coots whose breeding status was uncertain. Some may have been nonbreeders, but only records between June 1 and July 31 were mapped to preclude migrants.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	7	7.4	41.2	—
Till Plain	271	8	3.0	47.1	—
Ill. Till Plain	46	—	—	—	—
Glaciated Plateau	140	2	1.4	11.8	—
Unglaciated Plateau	212	—	—	—	—

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	17	2.2%
Confirmed	6	35.3%
Probable	3	17.7%
Possible	8	47.1%