

Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata*



Folk Name: Moorhen, Red-billed Mud-Hen, Bald Coot, Florida Gallinule

Status: Migrant and very rare Winter Visitor

Abundance: Rare

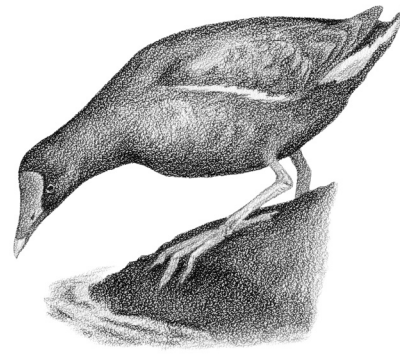
Habitat: Ponds, lakes, marshes

The Common Gallinule (formerly called the Common Moorhen) can be considered a close relative of the Purple Gallinule, but it is nowhere near as colorful in its appearance. This almost duck-like waterbird can be distinguished from the Purple Gallinule and the American Coot by a lateral white line along the flanks which is evident in all plumages. Gallinule breed in the Coastal Plain of both Carolinas and a few occasionally wander inland to the Piedmont during migration. An active nesting site was recently confirmed in May 2016 near the town of Dyers Hill, SC, which is only about 30 miles southeast of Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge. Most of our records are from the spring, but Common Gallinule also migrate through the Carolina Piedmont in the fall, and some have been found here in the winter as well.

Leverett Loomis provided the first report of this species in the Central Carolina region when he discovered one in Chester County: “An adult male bird was taken, on the grassy banks of a small mill-pond, May 19, 1884.” A juvenile Common Gallinule showed up in Charlotte in May 1950 and remained through the entire winter of 1950–1951. Rhett Chamberlain published this report:

A young Florida Gallinule is wintering at Charlotte. This bird was watched at length by most of the group taking the Christmas census. It apparently has settled down on a small privately owned pond within two miles of the city limits. The owner of the pond tells us that it arrived alone in May, last, and that he secured a few domestic mallards to keep it company. The gallinule is still rather shy, but it feeds regularly along the open edges of the pond with the ducks. The frontal plate has not yet taken on the red coloring of the adult bird but the white side fringes and general plumage coloring are clear enough.

Joe Norwood located a Common Gallinule on “River Bend Lake,” a small pond a mile east of Harrisburg in Cabarrus County, on November 17, 1956. A Common Gallinule was an unexpected surprise for local birders on Charlotte’s Spring Bird Count held on May 4, 1963. Another was found at Lake Tillery during the Stanly Spring Bird County held May 15, 1976. Observers noted the bird’s “dark gray color and red frontal shield.” Almost



20 years later, on April 8, 1982, David Wright discovered a Common Gallinule on a small pond at a park in Davidson. The bird was observed swimming slowly “among the reeds and along the edge of open water.” On December 30, 1989, birders participating in the Charlotte Christmas Bird Count found two Common Gallinules. These birds were considered a highlight of the count, and this is the only instance when more than one individual has been seen in the region.

We have six records from the twenty-first century, several of which are of dead or injured birds. The first voucher specimen of this species known from the region was collected in Mecklenburg County on May 9, 2006. Angela Thompson found a dead Common Gallinule in Huntersville which she examined and then turned over to the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences for preservation. John Scavetto sighted a Common Gallinule off Miller Road in Pineville on May 1, 2011. He returned to photograph the bird several times, but it remained so



Common Gallinule in Pineville. (John Scavetto)

well hidden that he was not able to get a photograph of it until 5 May. This Gallinule remained until at least 13 May and was viewed by several other observers during this period.

One Common Gallinule was rescued on Lake Wylie during the second week of May 2011. The bird had been shot, and its legs were immobilized. It was turned over to a wildlife rehabilitator for care. The rehabilitator received another injured Common Gallinule, a juvenile, for medical treatment the following year on September 20, 2012. Tom Sanders sighted one at the ReVenture Plant near Mount Holly on April 10, 2015. Kam Myers

found and photographed a dead Common Gallinule in Fort Mill, 2 miles from Carowinds, on May 2, 2016, and shared this note:

While walking in to work yesterday, I saw a bird who had died in the parking lot and it was quite unusual looking. It was about the size of a pigeon, but had a beautiful red beak and long green legs and non-webbed toes. I had a difficult time determining what it was, but my web searching eventually paid off. It was a Common Gallinule.