

Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

Bird · Resident · here all year



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Moorhens are the scruffy, everyday bird of vegetated pond edges and slow rivers across Dumfries and Galloway — a sooty-black bird with a bright red-and-yellow bill, a red frontal shield, and a flash of white under a constantly flicking tail. Unlike the related coot, moorhens are just as happy picking their way across waterside grass and lily pads on those oversized greenish feet as they are swimming, jerking their head with every step. They're resident here all year, holding territory on even quite small ponds and ditches, and can be surprisingly aggressive, chasing off rivals with splashing, wing-flapping confrontations. Pairs often raise two or three broods across spring and summer, and it's not unusual to see older chicks from an earlier brood helping to feed their younger siblings, a rare bit of family cooperation among British birds.

BEHAVIOUR

Moorhens swim with a distinctive jerking head-bob and flick their white-edged tail almost constantly, a visual signal to others nearby. On land they pick their way through waterside vegetation on long-toed feet built for walking on floating leaves rather than for speed. Territorial disputes are noisy and physical, with rivals rearing up in the water to strike at each other with their feet.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Rails, crakes and coots (Rallidae)
SIZE	32–35cm
UK STATUS	Amber-listed

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