

Genus FULICA.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* shorter than the head, strong, straight, subconical, compressed, much higher than broad, the culmen of the upper mandible distended into a broad shell-like plate, which extends over a portion of the forehead. *Nostrils* concave, pierced in the membrane of the mandibular furrow near the middle of the bill, pervious, linear, and oblong. *Wings* with the second and third quill-feathers the longest. *Tail* short. *Legs* of mean length and strength; naked above the tarsal joint. *Feet* four-toed, three before and one behind. *Toes* long, united at the base, and lobated, the inner one with two, the outer one with four, distinct round membranes: middle toe longer than the tarsus.

COOT.

Fulica ater, Linn.

Le Folque macroule.

THE Coot is indigenous to our islands, residing on all large sheets of water, whether flowing or stagnant, but giving preference to those overgrown with rushes and margined with a belt of thick reeds and luxuriant vegetation. It abounds in equal numbers throughout the continent of Europe, particularly in Holland, France, and Germany. In the secluded situations above mentioned it prepares early in the spring for the work of incubation, building a large, strong, and solid nest composed of rushes, various grasses, and aquatic plants. The nest thus put together rises above the level of the water, the mass of compacted materials in some cases resting on the bottom, where the shallowness of the water will admit, but is more frequently intermingled with the tufts of vegetation which grow in abundance on the water's edge and partially conceal it from view. On this raft the female deposits her eggs, which are of a brownish white spotted with dark brown, and from seven to ten in number, and there patiently performs her allotted task. The young when first excluded are clothed with a black down, and actively take to the water, attended by their assiduous parent, who may be often seen thus leading her tribe of nestlings in the earnest search for food, which consists of seeds, aquatic plants, insects, and mollusca.

When winter covers the ponds, lakes, and canals with ice, thus cutting off every needful supply, the Coot leaves its secluded quiet haunts of summer, and seeks the wide stream of the larger rivers, venturing even as far as their embouchures in the sea. At Southampton, multitudes annually visit the river during this season, disappearing on the approach of spring; and it is generally observed, that from October the places where they have taken up their summer abode are deserted till the month of April, when they again make their appearance.

It seems almost needless to say that few birds swim more easily or gracefully than the Coot; it also dives with considerable facility: on wing, however, it is slow and embarrassed, and, indeed, seldom rises unless so pressed that no other means of escape present themselves. On land it trips along with great facility, and, indeed, may be often observed reposing on the bank, or, like the Gallinule, traversing up and down in quest of worms and slugs, which it devours with much avidity. If surprised, it immediately plunges into the water and makes its way as rapidly as possible to the dense covert of reeds or rushes, where it is effectually concealed.

No external difference characterizes the sexes; nor do the young of the year exhibit any difference, except that the frontal plate is imperfectly developed.

The general plumage is deep greyish black, with a tinge of blue on the under surface; bill and frontal plate white; irides scarlet; naked part of the tibiae orange; tarsi and toes olive green, the former tinged with yellow.

Our Plate represents an adult bird rather less than the natural size.