

# Hawaiian Coot

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**COMMON NAME:** Hawaiian coot

**HAWAIIAN NAME:** 'Alae ke'oke'o

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Fulica alai*

**LEGAL STATUS:** Endangered (Federal and State). Vulnerable (IUCN Red List). MBTA protected.

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**APPEARANCE:** The Hawaiian coot is a small waterbird with a black head, a solid grayish-black body, a white bill, a prominent white frontal shield and white undertail feathers that are easily seen when the bird is swimming or displaying. Feet are lobed (not webbed) and are greenish-gray.

**NATIVE RANGE:** Endemic to Hawai'i, Hawaiian coots occur mainly in coastal plain wetlands below an elevation of 1,350 feet. On the Island of Hawai'i, Hawaiian coots use stock ponds at elevations up to 6,600 feet and on Kaua'i they use ponds up to 4,900 feet in elevation.



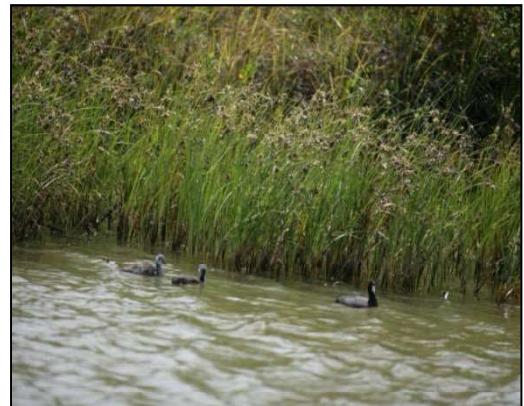
**HABITAT:** Hawaiian coots generally occur in lowland freshwater wetland habitats consisting of a mixture of emergent plant growth with open water. Occasionally they use brackish and saltwater habitats. They typically forage in shallow water (less than 12 inches) but will dive in water up to 48 inches deep.

**DIET:** Hawaiian coots generally feed close to nesting areas in somewhat open water. They are omnivorous, feeding on worms, snails, crustaceans, the adults and larvae of aquatic and terrestrial insects, small fish, and tadpoles. Coots also feed on the seeds and leaves of a variety of aquatic and terrestrial plants, including sedges, grasses, and rushes. They will travel long distances, including between islands, to locate food sources.

**REPRODUCTION:** The coot nests primarily in fresh or slightly brackish shallow water (15-40 inches) interspersed with robust emergent wetland plants. They may construct floating nests with aquatic vegetation in open water or anchored to emergent vegetation. Nesting occurs year-round but mainly between March and September. Clutch size is three to ten eggs.

**ECOLOGICAL THREATS:** Hawaiian coots are threatened by habitat loss, altered hydrology, non-native invasive plants, and introduced predators. Mongooses are especially harmful to ground nesting birds such as the Hawaiian coot. Other predators include dogs, feral cats, rats, and barn owls, which potentially prey on adults, young, or eggs.

**USFWS CONSERVATION STRATEGIES:** Conservation actions are taken to protect current populations and breeding habitats as well as establish additional populations to reduce the risk of extinction. Efforts include restoration of wetland habitat, management of existing habitat, and continued monitoring of populations to assess the efficacy of management.



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**MCBH CONSERVATION MEASURES:** Hawaiian coots occur in wetlands at MCBH Kaneohe Bay, primarily at the Percolation Ditch, the Klipper Golf Course Ponds, Nu'upia 'Ekolu, Kaluapuhi, and Pa'akai ponds. They are also found at MCTAB. Conservation measures that benefit Hawaiian coots include:

- **Habitat protection and enhancement.** Maintaining healthy non-invasive vegetation is important for Hawaiian coots on MCBH.
- **Limiting disturbance.** Hawaiian coots flee from human activity. It is unknown what level of human activity would affect their breeding success and chick survival rates. Established BMPs and conservation measures are employed when a project may disturb or otherwise modify a coot's behavior.
- **Predator control.** Hawaiian coots benefit from the on-going trapping of cats, mongoose, and rats within the WMA and wetlands.
- **Wildlife friendly Lighting.** All exterior lights for new construction, replacement of existing fixtures, and renovations shall meet or exceed light requirements developed in consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which incorporate International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) standards and research focused on identifying wildlife-friendly lighting. Natural Resources staff work with base planners to incorporate wildlife-friendly lighting standards into all projects, which will address seabird fallout concerns. Appendix E defines the requirements for wildlife-friendly lighting.
- **Monitoring to help direct management activities.** Natural Resources staff conduct three yearly waterbird counts as well as periodic and opportunistic monitoring during the rest of the year.
- **Biological monitoring.** Contracted biological monitoring is now being regularly incorporated into all projects whose action areas include MCBH wetlands. The Biological Monitor Roles, Methods, and Survey Standards are presented in Appendix D.
- **Education and outreach.** Development and distribution of informational material, including videos, fact sheets, and briefings for military personnel and civilians on base, including new arrivals, and outreach with volunteers.



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## REFERENCES

- DLNR. 2015. *Hawaii's State Wildlife Action Plan*. Hawaii Audubon Society. 2005. *Hawaii's Birds*. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition.
- Lohr, M. 2010. *Waterbird Monitoring Report at the Percolation Ditch Wetland and Golf Course Wetlands, Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, 7/23/10 to 12/8/2010*. MCBH Environmental Department Internal Report.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2005. Draft Revised Recovery Plan for Hawaiian Waterbirds, Second Draft of Second Revision. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon. 155 pp.

For more information: MCBH Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan. 2022. Sections 6 and 7.1,

## PHOTOS

1. Hawaiian Coot. David Schultz.
2. Hawaiian Coot family at enhanced Percolation Ditch wetland habitat, MCBH Kaneohe Bay. Dr. Diane Drigot.
3. Hawaiian Coot feeding young at enhanced Percolation Ditch wetland habitat. MCBH Kaneohe Bay. Carroll Cox.