

Latin Name *Gallinula chloropus*

### What do they look like?

The Moorhen is probably the most common of British water birds although their numbers have been on the decline since the 1970's. They are very easy to recognise, but it is hard to tell the male from the female, as the two sexes are alike.

Both have red on the forehead, this colour continues on to the bill which ends with a yellow tip. From a distance they seem to be mainly black but in fact their upper body is blackish brown and the under body is more of a grey black colour.

There is a jagged white line down their flank. The legs and feet are a dirty yellowy green except at the top where they have what looks like a red garter. The toes are lobed, not webbed. The eye is red.

The most obvious indication that you have seen a Moorhen is from the way it swims, they have a jerky movement and are constantly flicking the white flashes on the sides of their tails

### Where do they live and nest in Healey Dell?

Moorhens live on the lodges in the Dell. They breed in thick reeds and because they are not strong flyers they seldom move from their breeding grounds.

They are very secretive birds and when alarmed can sink in the water leaving only the bill sticking out and so allowing it to breathe.

They are also extremely territorial and defend their territories very strongly, with males fighting fiercely in the water. This sometimes ends with them being quite badly injured.

### What do they eat?

They feed on both vegetation and animal matter and will even take chicks and eggs from other birds.

### What do they sound like?

Moorhens make a loud croaking call. To hear the sound they make follow the link from the button or copy

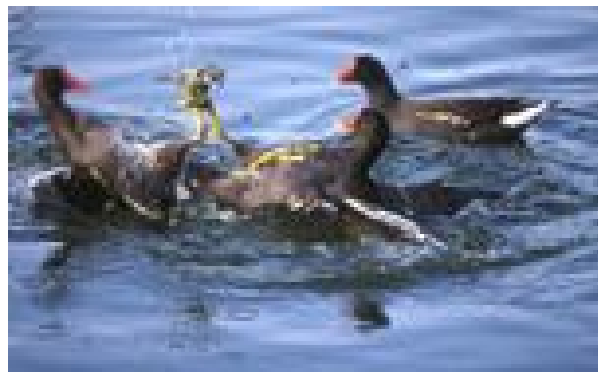
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds/guide/m/moorhen/gallery.asp>



Photograph © Paul Burrows

#### Vital Statistics

Eggs: April May 5-11  
Incubation: 21-22 days  
Maximum lifespan: 11 years  
Length: 32-35cm  
Wingspan: 50-55cm  
Weight: 250-420 g  
UK breeding: 260,000 pairs



Moorhens fighting



### What are their eggs like?

The eggs are about 43 mm by 31 mm. They are green with redish brown or grey markings  
Both parents incubate the eggs and when they hatch they are looked after for a couple of days in the nest before swimming with the parents.



Newly Hatched Chicks



Moorhen eggs

### Sources

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

<http://www.garden-birds.co.uk/>

<http://www.bto.org/birdtrends2004/>

above pictures from <http://www.moorhen.demon.co.uk>