



COMMONWEALTH of the  
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS

- Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)
- Maug
- Asuncion

● Agrihan

● Pagan

● Alamagan

● Guguan

● Sarigan

● Anatahan

● Farallon de Medinilla

● Saipan

● Tinian  
● Aguiguan

● Rota

\* Distribution in the CNMI

\* Locally Extinct



PHOTOS BY TIM SUTTERFIELD



ENDANGERED • ENDEMIC

## MARIANA COMMON MOORHEN

Pulattat Gherel Bweel  
*Chamorro* *Carolinian*

### IDENTIFICATION

Moorhens are duck-like birds that are slightly smaller than chickens. They are black with very distinct red beaks and shields on their foreheads. Their feet have long toes and lobes that allow them to walk across plants in the water. Moorhen chicks have black, fluffy down and white beaks.

### HABITAT and FEEDING

The Mariana common moorhen is a very shy, wetland bird that is an endemic subspecies in the Mariana Islands. Its preferred habitats are freshwater lakes, marshes and swamps with robust, emergent vegetation. The moorhen inhabits both natural and man-made wetlands. During the dry season when some seasonal ponds dry up, moorhens migrate to other areas or islands where water remains year-round. Moorhen movement between wetland sites and islands is poorly understood. Recently it was confirmed that moorhens from Saipan migrate to Tinian during the dry season. This likely has to do with food availability and habitat.

Moorhens feed on plant and animal matter such as grasses, insects, insect larvae and snails. They forage in and around the water.

### REPRODUCTION

Moorhens build hidden nests on small islands, branches overhanging the water, or floating materials. The nests are built out of grasses and sedges. Parents take turns incubating the eggs. A typical clutch consists of four to six eggs. Once hatched, the chicks will remain close to their parents for several weeks, following them along the muddy shores while foraging for food.

### THREATS and CONSERVATION

A serious threat to the moorhen is the continuing disappearance of suitable wetland habitat. Many wetland sites have been filled or dredged for development. Human activities such as land clearing and construction may cause an increase in sediment build-up in wetlands. Other wetlands have been altered due to agricultural practices. The Chamorro people historically used the moorhen for food. Illegal poaching still occurs today but the effect on the population is not known. Predators such as monitor lizards, rats, cats and dogs threaten this bird by feeding on the moorhen chicks and/or eggs.

The Mariana common moorhen is an endangered waterbird in the CNMI. It is protected by federal and local laws.



*Gallinula chloropus guami*

ARTIST  
DOUGLAS  
PRATT

## ALL TANKED UP

On Saipan, Moorhens nest in a Japanese era water tank 60' in diameter where they are safe from predators.

**FACTOID!**



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