

What is the name of the black duck with white beaks in the lake?

Surprise; those are not ducks!

Many people think they are ducks because they are similar in many ways; they are in fact Coots (*Fulica americana*). The Coot is a member of the animal family that includes rails, gallinules and moorhens. One of the Coots common names is "Mud Hen."

Coots are fresh water birds and can be found throughout the continental United States almost anywhere there is fresh water, around ponds, lakes, streams marshes (even around water traps on some golf courses).

In many places ducks and coots can be found together, doing similar things, which helps people get them confused.

Ducks tend to have larger, flatter bills, while the coot has a thicker, shorter more pointed bill (very similar to a chicken's beak).

Ducks tend to have more than one color on them, coots are almost entirely black (white on their bill and under their tail).

If you look at a ducks foot, it toes are webbed (to make it easier for the duck to swim), a coots foot has flaps of skin on the sides of each toe (to make it easier for the coot to walk on mudflats or in very shallow water). When a coot is scared it can extend the flaps of skin on its toes and run across the surface of the water, usually accompanied by lots of squawking and frantic wing flapping.

Coots are primarily vegetarians and swim, dive, dabble (dip their heads underwater with just their tails sticking up), wade and even graze on land to find choice bits of plants to eat.