Ageing and Sexing
EASTERN FLYCATCHERS, THRUSHES, VIREOS, and MIMIDAE

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These families are "wolves" as far as ageing and sexing go. The sexes are nearly always alike in plumage and the first winter plumage is hardly different in any case from later plumages. The first or juvenal plumage may be quite distinct.

In passerine birds generally the juvenal plumage is of a softer texture than that of adults. This is particularly noticeable on the back and underparts. The undertail coverts are soft, with loose, open webs (decomposed). Before the adults have undergone postnuptial molt, the unworn tips of the primaries (particularly primaries 4 to 7) are definitive for juvenals. If the bird is in molt it may not always be possible to find enough remaining juvenal plumage to be positive that it is in post juvenal molt. In thrushes and vireos symmetrical replacement of wing quills is diagnostic of postnuptial molt.

FLYCATCHERS

Age

Molts. Except for the Eastern Phoebe and Great Crested Flycatcher, the post juvenal and postnuptial molts of eastern flycatchers occur after migration and outside the United States. The Kingbirds replace their wing quills at the post juvenal molt, as do two or three other species.

EASTERN KINGBIRD The juvenal Eastern Kingbird has the wing quills and tail tip browner than in adults and lacks the crown patch.

OTHER SPECIES The juvenal plumage of other eastern species has buffy, light brown, or rufous wing-bars. The Eastern Phoebe and Eastern Wood Pewee also show more yellow below in this plumage than do adults.

Sex

EASTERN KINGBIRD The inner vanes of the 9th and 10th primaries of the Eastern Kingbird are strongly emarginate in the male for about 10 mm. Usually only the 10th primary is emarginate in the female.

OTHER SPECIES The other eastern flycatchers show no usable plumage differences between the sexes.

THRUSHES

Age

All our thrushes retain the juvenal wing quills and usually some or all the greater secondary coverts in first winter plumage. The Bluebird replaces the tail quills in the post juvenal molt. The juvenal plumages are spotted above and below. In most cases the dorsal spotting is pale and the ventral spotting dark. (Good descriptions in Roberts.)

ROBIN and BLUEBIRD The identification of the first winter plumage in Robin and Bluebird is uncertain.

HYLOCICHLAS The "Hylocichlas" usually retain some greater secondary coverts with pale terminal spots in first winter plumage.

Sex

Only in the Bluebird will the plumage (duller and grayer above, paler below) distinguish female from male. In the breeding season the vent should show a sex difference in all species.

VIREOS

The heavy, slightly hooked bill is positively diagnostic. In the juvenal plumage the upper parts are rather browner or grayer than in adults, head markings less distinct.

Species

	Wing	Weight
Two prominent wing-bars and eye ring:		
Solitary Vireo, head slate gray	71-76	14-19
Yellow-throated Vireo, throat and breast bright yellow	72-80	17-23
White-eyed Vireo, short wing	56-65	10-15
One faint buffy wing-bar, eye ring and line over eye:		
Warbling Vireo, outer primary not more than half as long as the adjacent one	66-74	12-17
No wing-bars:		
Philadelphia Vireo, short wing, outer primary nearly as long as the adjacent one, partial eye ring	62-69	10-17
Red-eyed Vireo, long wing, line over eye	74-85	14-25

Age

The irides of immature vireos are brown, or, in White-eyed, gray-brown to gray. Juvenal and first winter birds will not usually have wing lengths in the upper couple of mm. of the range given.

WHITE-EYED VIREO White iris in adult, gray-brown to gray in immature.

RED-EYED VIREO Red iris in adult, brown in immature.

The Red-eye and White-eye do not appear to complete the change of eye color until after they leave the United States in fall.

OTHER SPECIES At present there is no certain way to tell first winter plumages in fall from later plumages. However, undescribed characters may exist in wing and tail, perhaps usable in spring.

Sex

During the breeding season sex can be told by examination of the cloacal area.

MIMIDAE

Molt much as in the thrushes, except that some (but certainly not all) thrashers and mockingbirds replace at least part of the tail at the end of the postjuvenal molt. (Observed in North Carolina.)

BROWN THRASHERS Juvenile and adult plumages alike except for texture. Sequence of eye colors in independent young: whitish, pale yellow, light yellow, yellow, orange-yellow. The orange-yellow adult color is probably first acquired fairly late in the first winter.

MOCKINGBIRD Juveniles streaked below and rather brownish above. Sequence of eye colors after independence: gray, brown, dull yellow. The last color is achieved about the time postjuvenal molt begins and some individuals retain it for at least a year. Some adults of unknown age have the iris more orange.

CATBIRD Juveniles have the tail coverts very decomposed and usually mostly gray rather than rufous. Cap and tail grayer than in later plumages.

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