

## AGEING AND SEXING SOME WINTER FINCHES

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While some individuals of some species can be aged or sexed readily, overall this is a difficult group to handle, especially for those who don't handle a given species in numbers every year.

Evening Grosbeak (data from Doris Huestis Speirs and Elizabeth Holt Downs)

## Distinctions of sex:

Adult Male: Forehead, abdomen, rump and under tailcoverts, bright greenish yellow. Crown, Tail and primaries of the wings, black. Exposed part of inner secondaries, their coverts and tertiaries, white, forming a conspicuous white patch on the otherwise black wing.

Adult Female: Largely grey, the body plumage tinged with greenish yellow, especially about the nape. Wings and tail, black and white. Three outer primaries of the wings are black; the remaining ones are spotted with white. There is a white area at the base of these primaries forming a white square or rectangle. This is conspicuous in flight and is a good character for determining the sex of an individual of any age.

## Distinctions of Age:

Juvenal plumage: Young in juvenal plumage are easily recognized by their dark bills, tan color of body plumage, lack of distinctive head markings of the adults and the presence of a pale yellow patch formed by the four inner secondary coverts. Sexes differ and are readily distinguishable.

Juvenal male: Largely tan with yellowish tinge. Wings black, with large white patch as in adult male, but with darker inner margins on the tertiaries. Lacks the yellow forehead and black crown of the adult male. Undertail coverts white, instead of yellowish.

Juvenal female: Distinguishable in fall by darkish bill (bill gradually changes from the dark brown to bone color), by the dark margins of the tertiaries (these are sometimes lost through wear) and the rather pale or only partially yellow undertail coverts. The white edgings of the black primaries are also a distinguishing character.

Immature female: Distinguished in fall by the darkish bill, gray body plumage tinged with tan, a decidedly tan rump and some tan in the undertail coverts.

Purple Finch (data from Charles H. Blake)

## Distinctions of sex:

Fully red males are the only individuals unequivocally sexable by plumage characters. Brown first-winter males vs. females up to 2 or 3 years old, and pinkish first-winter males vs. old females are not distinguishable as to sex either by color or wing length.

## Distinctions of age:

The juvenile plumage is darker and less clearly streaked above and less buffy and more finely and closely streaked below than is first winter plumage. Fully red males have had at least one postnuptial molt.

Redpolls

Currently the A. O. U. checklist recognizes two species, Common and Hoary; the Greater Redpoll (rostrata) is considered a race of the Common. Salomonsen and others have questioned this relationship, and believe that only one species is involved for all of these redpolls. Individuals vary greatly, so that it is difficult to separate Common and Hoary in all cases. The best mark is lack of any streaks on the undertail coverts to indicate Hoary (absence of streaks on the rump is less decisive).

Distinctions of age and sex are sometimes difficult. However, in winter plumage (which is how most of us see the birds) the adult female (and first winter males) lack rose color on the underparts. The crimson crown-patch is acquired at the post-juvenal molt, but the pink of the underparts in the male not until after the first postnuptial molt.

American Goldfinch (data from Eleanor Dater)

Adult male: Wing velvety black. One broad white wingbar (tips of greater coverts; lesser coverts always show some buffy.)

Subadult male: Wing dull black. Two broad buffy white wingbars (tips of greater and middle coverts.) Lesser coverts green; no yellow as in adults.

Adult female: All females are difficult to distinguish; it takes practice and good light. Wing dull scorched black (could be called brown.) Two narrow white wingbars. The bar formed by middle coverts may -- and frequently does -- show a tinge of buff. Secondary feathers have a minute banding or fringe of light tan; tertiaries fringed the same.