

Sexing Some Finches *Fringillidae sp.* And Buntings *Emberizidae sp.* On Winglength.

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Svensson notes that, among passerines, males are generally larger than females. For a number of Finches *Fringillidae sp.* and Buntings *Emberizidae sp.* he gives ranges of wing lengths for each sex, but, for many species, these are of limited use for sexing individual birds because; many samples are based on museum skins; many of the samples are of a small number of birds; measurements are of birds from various populations which may show geographical variations in size.

In the last six years I have computerised the measurements of all the Finches and Buntings that I have caught in the Tayside area. These consist of known breeding birds caught through the summer and also numerous birds caught during the winter which include an unknown proportion of immigrant birds that originate from elsewhere in Scotland and, quite possibly, from Continental Europe.

This has allowed me to compile tables of wing length size for birds of known age and sex and I have found these measurements very useful in determining the sex and age of “difficult” individuals. It is possible to use these measurements to age and sex some birds, especially if either the age or sex is known from other characteristics. I have also included measurements that will apply to most of one sex class. These can be useful in providing a supporting criteria to other evidence of age and sex.

It should be noted that these tables should be used with care and it is not advisable to base ageing or sexing solely on size unless there is little or no overlap between categories. Measurements can vary between populations. Feathers which are still growing, or are abraded, may give misleading readings. There will always be birds that exceed the usual limits.

European Greenfinch. *Carduelis chloris*

All	>90=male(n.151) <85=female(n.158)
Most (90%)	>88=male(n.151) <89=female(n.158)
All Adults	>90=male(n.44) <85=female(n.41)
All Juv.s	>88=male(n.101) <85=female(n.116)

Useful for sexing the very occasional “ambiguous” bird and for helping to age some males.

Common Chaffinch. *Fringilla coelebs*

Most Juv.s (95%) >85=male(n.351) <84=female(n.470)

Useful for helping to sex juveniles before post juvenile moult in late summer. After post-juvenile moult, the sexes are easy to separate on plumage.

European Goldfinch. *Carduelis carduelis*

All >82=male(n.60) <79=female(n.59)

Most (80%) >79=male(n.60) <80=female(n.59)

All Adults >82=male(n.24) <78=female(n.26)

All Juv.s >80=male(n.36) <79=female(n.33)

Svensson gives the range as 76-82 (n.12) for males of the British (*britannica*) race and 76-89 (n.27) for the Continental European (*carduelis*) race. Sizes for females are not given.

I find this distribution very useful in helping to age and sex individual birds.

Common Reed Bunting. *Emberiza schoeniclus*

All >78=male(n.235) <75=female(n.215)

Most (85%) >77=male(n.235) <77=female(n.215)

All Adults >78=male(n.58) <75=female(n.48)

All Juv.s >78=male(n.117) <75=female(n.167)

Svensson gives the range as 74-84(n.29) for males and 70-77(n.79) for females and this is a species that many ringers sex with the aid of winglength. Note that there is no difference in the “overlap” range between adults and juveniles. However, in my experience, juvenile reed buntings tend to have shorter winglengths than adults.

Yellowhammer. *Emberiza citronella*

All >87=male(n.165) <82=female(n.144)

Most (80%) >86=male(n.165) <87=female(n.144)

All Adults >87=male(n.65) <86=female(n.56)

All Juv.s >87=male(n.107) <85=female(n.92)

I find this distribution very useful in helping to both age and sex individual birds.

Reference.

Svensson L. (1992) Identification Guide to European Passerines. Svensson, Stockholm

