

IDENTIFYING, AGEING & SEXING THE RED BISHOP & THE CAPE WIDOW

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In areas where the Red Bishop Euplectes orix and the Cape Widow Colliuspasser capensis are found together, the correct identification of females and non-breeding males may prove difficult. Most Red Bishop males do not breed until they are two years old and thus do not assume full breeding plumage in their first year. The following hints should help any ringer to correctly identify, age and sex both species.

Red Bishop Euplectes orix

Adult male in breeding plumage : unmistakable.

Adult male in eclipse plumage : wing length 75 - 80mm (maximum chord), culmen is slightly heavier and larger than in females (8.15 - 10mm, = 13.5 - 14mm according to Roberts).

♂♂ male : these cannot be distinguished from adult males in eclipse plumage, but in the breeding season they are best identified by the longer wing length as compared with females (67-75mm and over) and by their larger culmen.

Females : except when very young, these birds cannot be aged. When newly fledged the young birds retain traces of the yellow gape for a short period. Wing length of females - normal range from 68 - 72mm.

Birds do occur with intermediate wing measurements and these cannot usually be sexed with any certainty.

Cape Widow Coliuspasser capensis

Adult male in breeding plumage : unmistakable.

Adult male in eclipse plumage : wing length from 80 - 85mm is longer than for the Red Bishops, birds retain some yellow feathers on shoulder and rump.

Female : has shorter wing length than males, usually from 73 - 75mm, but wing is longer than Red Bishop females. Sometimes has yellowish feathers on shoulder which the Red Bishop never does. Culmen is larger and more heavily built than in the Red Bishop (σ 17.5 - 19mm, ϕ 16.5mm per Roberts).

The above information applies to birds in the Cape Peninsula, I have no information on birds in other parts of their range.
