



ID guide

How to identify grey partridges

This guide explains how to sex and age grey partridges. To gain experience, practice sexing birds throughout the year before you need to count them.

When determining sex and age, try to look at the full body with a clear view of the head and neck. In the field this is often not possible as birds are commonly found

in cover. Therefore the identification can take place by concentrating on head features.

Common features

Characteristically grey partridges are rotund birds with streaked grey-brown upperparts, grey underparts, chestnut flank bars and rusty tail. Both sexes have

an orange-brown face and a more or less well marked dark brown horseshoe on the belly. From a distance the sexes appear similar to each other; but several features that can separate males and females are listed below.

Head details

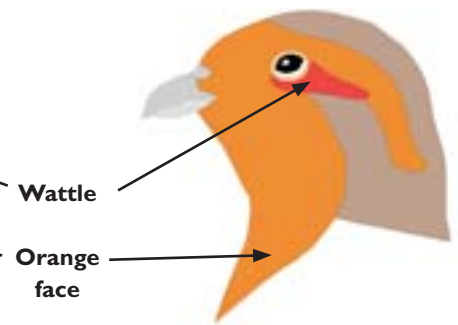
Male ♂

The cock bird's head will generally **appear brighter** owing to its bold orange-brown face and red wattle below and behind the eye (spring). The orange-brown area extends further onto the neck than in female birds.

Autumn



Spring



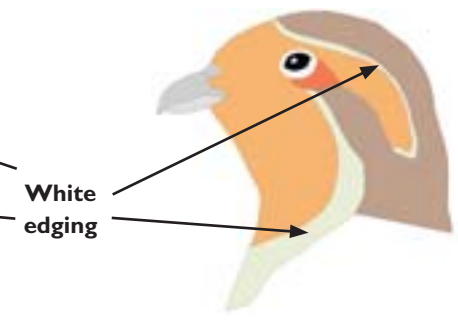
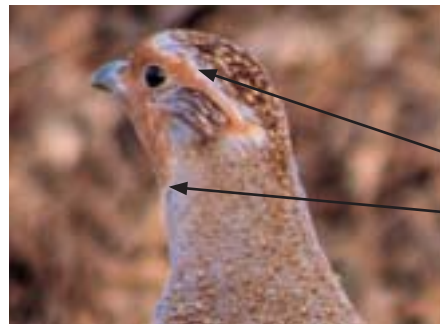
Female ♀

The hen bird's head will generally **appear lighter** owing to a pale, whitish strip of feathers edging the orange/brown face, the colour of which is often less intense than in the male. The pale edging is most prominent across the forehead, around the eyes and around the sides of the face. **The neck and upper breast** will also appear browner in the females.

Autumn



Spring



(Alexis de la Serre)

Body

Male (top)

From the side the male facial pattern appears more defined than in the female or juvenile bird.

A male bird may also readily adopt an alert posture as opposed to the crouching hen.

Female (bottom)

The paler head and browner neck make the females appear less contrasting.

As **many females have horseshoe markings** on the belly, this is not a reliable method of sexing birds.



(Chris Knights)

Shoulder feathers

A further method of sexing grey partridges is to examine the shoulder feathers and look for the 'Cross of Lorraine'. This feature

arises from one or more light transversal stripes present only on the female. The male has a single cream streak overlying

the feather shaft. Although the technique is accurate it is usually **useful only when observing birds at close range.**

Male ♂
Single cream streak along shaft



Female ♀
Transversal stripes 'Cross of Lorraine'

Juveniles (autumn only)



(Alexis de la Serre)

Juvenile birds can be identified up to the age of 12 weeks, by which time the transition to adult plumage is largely complete. In full juvenile plumage, the head, back and under-parts are largely buff or beige, with an obvious size difference in young birds.

The birds also display a darker beak and yellowish legs. As the juvenile moult

progresses, the head and upper neck are often the last parts of the body to retain the buff-beige colour. In poor light, it is not always easy to distinguish them from pale headed adult females.

Other considerations

When examining coveys in the autumn it is important to identify all birds in a covey and not to automatically assume there is one male, one female and the rest are young! Single adults or barren pairs commonly attach themselves to other coveys or group together to form an 'adult covey'.

Sexing and aging is a task which takes time and patience to learn. It is therefore

essential that opportunities are taken to practise whenever possible. Keep a pair of binoculars handy when driving or walking as this may provide opportunities to practise if you come across partridges. Our website will also be hosting a selection of videos and still pictures to test your identification skills. (Details in future Partridge Count Scheme newsletters.)

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

For over 75 years our scientists have been researching why species like the grey partridge, water vole, corn bunting and black grouse have declined. We are continually developing practical measures to reverse these declines.

Our aim is simple - a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife.

We are an independent charity reliant on voluntary donations and the support of people who care about the survival of our natural heritage.