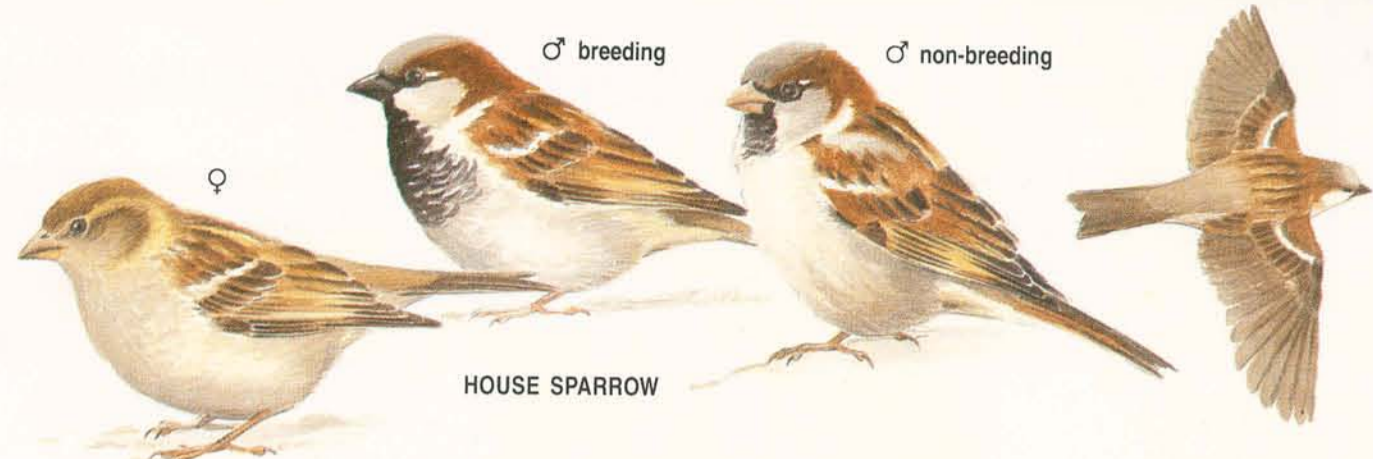


Passerines are the largest group of birds. They are small to medium sized land birds found worldwide, except on Antarctica. All species have four toes, three pointing forward and one back, well-adapted for perching. Most species are song-birds, with complex musical calls, but there are exceptions (e.g. crows). They show great diversity of form, behaviour and breeding biology.

REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

Common European introduction

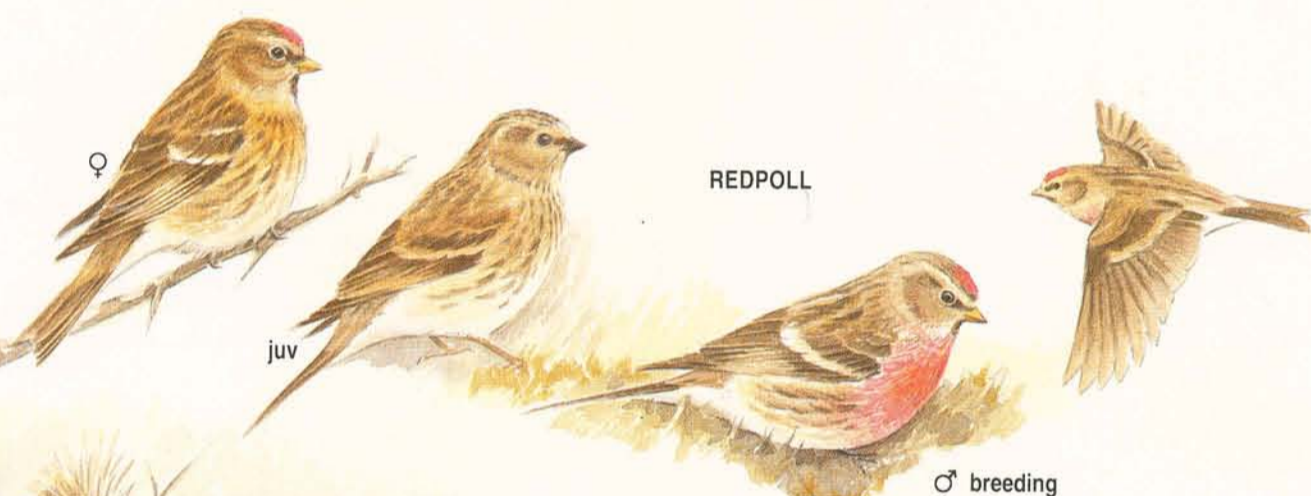
12 cm, 12 g. Small dull brown-streaked finch, but seen closely *forehead crimson and chin black*. Male in breeding season develops a pink to crimson flush on its breast, varying in intensity with individual and region. Juvenile lacks the crimson and black on the head and can look pale-headed. Often seen feeding or flying in large flocks, especially near weed-infested crops. Flight erratic and undulating; *flight call a fast harsh rattling metallic 'chich-chich-chich'*, sometimes followed by a 'bizzzzz'. Main call a plaintive, questioning 'tsooeet?'. **Habitat:** Farmland, orchards, tussockland, forest and scrub margins, parks and gardens. **Breeding:** Oct–Feb. [Sp 317]



HOUSE SPARROW



CHAFFINCH



REDPOLL



GOLDFINCH

FINCHES

153 species worldwide, except Australasia; 4 introduced to New Zealand.

Small, often colourful birds of open country with short, stout, conical bills and powerful gizzards for breaking up seeds. They have 9

Fringillidae

instead of the usual 10 primary flight feathers. Most have small, neat, cup-shaped nests. Their songs are varied and musical.

Reading: Newton, I. 1972. *Finches*. London: Collins.

317. REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

Plate 71

Size: 12 cm, 12 g
Distribution: Natural range is northern parts of North America, Europe and Asia; many migrate south to winter in lower latitudes in the United States, around the Mediterranean and in southern Asia. About 500 Redpolls were liberated in New Zealand by the various Acclimatisation Societies in 1862–75, including over 200 near Auckland in 1872. They quickly established and were widespread by 1900. They are now throughout the mainland and offshore islands, although much more common in the South Island than in the North Island. They have colonised the Kermadecs, Chathams, Antipodes, The Snares, Auckland and Campbell Islands, and also Macquarie Island. Vagrants have been recorded on Lord Howe Island. Redpolls are in farmland, orchards, tussock-

land, coastal dunes, forest and scrub margins, and subalpine scrub and herbfields from sea level to 1750 m, more common at higher altitudes and in less intensively developed areas. There is no evidence of regular migration in New Zealand, but there is some local movement and flocking in winter.

Population: Common, especially in higher and drier parts of the South Island.

Breeding: Pairs form in flocks in late winter, and males establish territories and start singing in September. The female builds the nest, which is a small, neat cup of dry grass, fine twigs, moss, wool and cobwebs, lined with feathers, willow catkins, wool and hair. It is usually placed in a fork in a low shrub such as gorse, matagouri, briar or lupin, 0.2–2–7 m from the ground. Laying is from mid-October to early February, during which

most pairs probably raise two broods. They lay 3–4–6 bluish-green eggs (15 x 11.5 mm) with light brown spots and streaks. The female incubates for 10–11–15 days and is fed on the nest by the male. The chicks are fed infrequently by regurgitation by both parents and fledge at 12–13–15 days old. They continue to be fed for 1–2 weeks after leaving the nest. The oldest Redpoll recorded in New Zealand lived c. 8 years.

Behaviour: Gregarious in autumn and winter, sometimes forming huge flocks of several thousand birds. One flock in the King Country was estimated to be of 100,000+ birds. In the breeding season, they defend a small area around the nest, and sometimes they form loose colonies where breeding sites are limited. From late September to early February, males sing from a perch near their nest a short, rippling trill. The most common and distinctive call is the harsh, rattling flight call: 'chich-chich-chich', sometimes followed by a 'bizzzzz'. The alarm note is a plaintive, 'questioning' 'tsooeet'.

Feeding: Diet is mainly small weed and grass seeds, supplemented with invertebrates and

fruit buds; unlike most birds, Redpoll chicks are fed only seeds. The preferred seeds are grasses, sedges, clovers, brassicas, dock, red-root, fat hen, thistles and evening primrose. Redpolls sometimes cause serious economic damage by destroying fruit buds of apricots and peaches during a brief period in spring, and also damage strawberries when they peck seeds from the outside of ripening fruit.

In the hand: Males are slightly larger than females: wing 64–69.5–75 mm cf. 62–67.5–72 mm. In autumn and winter, adult males have pinkish-red breast, flanks, rump and sides of head, whereas adult females have pinkish red on the head only. In spring and summer, females develop a brood patch, and birds with pinkish-red breast and flanks are adult males, but birds lacking these pink markings, and without a brood patch, cannot be sexed. Adult males and females can have similar head markings. In autumn, adults moult all wing and tail feathers, while juveniles may moult only a few tail feathers, and so in winter juveniles have distinctly worn wing and tail feathers.

Reading: Fennell, J. et al. 1985. *Notornis* 32: 245–253. Fennell, J. & Sagar, P.M. 1985. *Notornis* 32: 254–256. Stenhouse, D. 1962. *Notornis* 10: 61–67.