

ROCK PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus muta*)

IDENTIFICATION

35-39 cm. In **breeding** plumage, **male** with head, breast and upperparts with black-brown streaked; white underparts; white flight feathers; bare red spot over eye. **Female** with brown blackish plumage; white underparts; bare spot over eye small and red. In **winter**, both sexes similar, with white plumage and dark tail.

AGEING

4 types of age can be recognized:

Juvenile with black grey crown and neck, spotted and barred pale yellow; breast and flanks barred grey and yellow; underparts pale grey; primaries pale brown, mottled off-white on outer webs; the two outermost primaries white, dusky at shafts; outer secondaries pale brown; inner secondaries and wing coverts barred black and ochraceous.

1st year autumn like **adult female** in **autumn** but with coarser vermiculation and with some retained **juvenile** body feathers; the retained two **juvenile** outermost primaries are more dusky than the moulted ones.

1st year/2nd year winter similar to **adults**, but with the two outermost unmoulted **juvenile** primaries more eroded and dusky than the moulted inner ones.

Adult with body feathers as described in **SEXING**; white underparts; white flight feathers except inner secondaries; primaries without moult limit.

SIMILAR SPECIES

This species is unmistakable

SEXING

This species has three types of plumage: In **breeding** plumage (May-July), **male** with dark brown crown, barred rufous; sides of neck broadly barred black brown; upperparts, inner secondaries and inner wing coverts dark grey brown, vermiculated grey; with a black line between the eye and bill; eyebrow vermilion to deep scarlet. **Female** with black crown, spotted yellow; sides of neck dark grey brown, densely spotted yellow; upperparts, inner secondaries and inner wing coverts black, barred pale yellow; without a black line between the eye and bill; eyebrow orange to vermilion.

In **non-breeding** plumage (July-October), **male** with grey or olive upperparts, finely vermiculated black brown; dark brown line between the eye and bill, sometime speckled white; retained **breeding** body feathers with **male** pattern. **Female** with upperparts coarsely patterned, often fringed white; yellow buff line between the eye and bill; retained **breeding** body feathers with **female** pattern.

In **winter** plumage (November-March) both sexes with similar white plumage, but **male** with a black streak behind the eye which is absent or very small in **female**.

For **adult** birds, size can always be an useful character for extreme birds: **male** with wing longer than 198 mm; **female** with wing shorter than 196 mm. **Juveniles** cannot be sexed using plumage characters.

MOULT

Nearly complete **postbreeding** moult in autumn changing flight and tail feathers but only part of the body feathers; usually finished by September. Partial **postjuvenile** moult including part of the body feathers and wing feathers, except the two outermost primaries which are retained. Both types of age have another moult in winter, till December, acquiring the whole white plumage and a **prebreeding** moult in spring, May-June, involving body feathers except lower breast and belly.

PHENOLOGY

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII

- Summer visitor
- Wintering
- Resident
- On passage