

# IDENTIFICATION : 'Green' finches

*An identification article on 'green finches' might seem a little odd, as there are really only two green finches that regularly occur in gardens within the UK. These are the Greenfinch and the Siskin. However, if we dig a little deeper, things might not be as straightforward as they seem. Even if you think that you are able to identify Greenfinch and Siskin, can you age or sex them?*

Greenfinches can be found throughout the year within gardens, with numbers increasing during the winter months. Depending upon where you live, you may find that Siskins are either year-round visitors or just appear for a period during late winter. The chances are that you will get the opportunity to view these two species alongside one another, providing the ideal conditions to really work out how to separate the two in their various plumages.

## Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

This is the largest of the 'green finches' to visit our gardens and is similar in size and proportions to a House Sparrow but sports a larger beak.

**Call.** A fast, closely repeated, dull 'Drup', 'Drup-drup-drup-drup'.

**Adult male (right):** Should be unmistakable and a more apt name would be Yellow-green Finch. The large pale beak, greeny-yellow underparts, bright yellow wing edge, bright yellow edges to the tail and large pale beak, all add up to a very distinctive bird.



**Adult female (below):** The adult female can be more tricky as she is nowhere near as bright as the male. Although the female can be slightly smaller, she is still a large finch and shares the large pale beak. The overall appearance of the female is that of a dull, browner, streakier version of the male. The yellow wing edge is still prominent but less extensive than on the male. The yellow on the male bird extends onto the front edge of the folded wing, this stops well before this point on the female. There is also much less yellow in the tail compared with the male.



**Juvenile (right):** If the female is a duller, streakier version of the male, then the juvenile is a duller, streakier version of the female! Again, the young bird is still a large finch and shares the large bill. Whilst being overall grey-brown in colour, the juvenile still shows the yellow wing edges. The underparts are extensively streaked.



Images by Neil Calbrade, Edmund Fellowes, Steve Round

**Next issue: Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush**

## Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

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The Siskin is our smallest finch (similar in size to a Blue Tit). Siskins of all ages can be readily identified from other 'green finches' by two prominent black wing-bars that are separated by a wing-bar of varying shades of yellow, brightest in the adult male and palest in the juvenile. All Siskins have heavily streaked underparts. **Call.** A high-pitched disyllabic ringing 'tilu'.

**Adult female (right):** As in the Greenfinch, the female is a duller, streakier version of the male. However, female Siskins lack the distinctive black cap and bib and show much less yellow in the face, underparts and tail.



**Juvenile (left):** The juvenile is streakier than the adults, both above and below, and can often appear grey and white with only a hint of yellow. Some juveniles have buff tones. Young birds have more pointed tail feathers than adults, though these may sometimes be replaced.

**Adult male (right):** The black cap and bib of the male is unique amongst the 'green finches' and makes it the easiest to identify. Alongside the black cap and bib, males are also the brightest and have bright yellow in the face, upper-breast, wings and tail. The yellow is much more extensive than that found on a male Greenfinch.



## Other 'finches'

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**Serin** could occur in east and south coast gardens during the spring, when a small number 'overshoot' on migration from southern Europe. In all ages, Serin is a very heavily streaked, small, bull-necked finch and most closely resembles the Siskin in colour and size. Although Serins show two wing-bars these are much less obvious than those on Siskins, and the yellow is never as bright. Serins of all ages never show yellow sides to the tail. Serin is slightly smaller than Siskin.

Whilst the wild **Canary** (pictured) has never been recorded in the wild in the UK, escaped cage-bred Canaries are often encountered. These can be of the typical bright yellow type or more streaky like the wild bird. Wild Canary resembles Serin but is a much larger bird, being nearer in size to Greenfinch than to Siskin.



With only two 'green finches' to identify it shouldn't be too difficult to practice the differing age identifications. However, it is worth being aware of the possibility of other 'green finches' (see box).

It is also worth being aware of the possibility of aviary escapes, involving either foreign finch species or hybrids reared by bird fanciers.

Hybrids from crosses between Greenfinch and Canary, Goldfinch and Canary, and Redpoll and Canary have all been reported. These are known as Mules and the parentage can be quite difficult to determine, as different birds will show varying degrees of each parent's plumage.

## TEST YOUR SKILLS

Try to work out what these birds are (answers on Page 22).



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