

Well, with the Christmas Bird Count nearly upon us and redpoll flocks being seen, I thought I'd provide a run-through of some of the things to look for when attempting to separate Hoary Redpoll from Common Redpoll. I've attached two photos (which I snatched from the internet) that show some of the differences between these two species quite well.

Hoary Redpolls average paler than Common Redpolls, but an identification should not be based solely on overall tone.

Note how the Hoary in the photo appears thicker-necked than the Common and has a bit of a ruff on the nape. This is due to Hoary's greater feather mass.

The bill of this Hoary is shorter and relatively thicker-based than that of the Common. The shortness of the bill is emphasized by extensive "nasal" feathering.

Both the Hoary and the Common in these photos have a slight buff wash about the head. This buff wash is much more noticeable on the Hoary however, as its head lacks the extensive, dark streaks shown by the Common.

The streaking on the sides and flanks of both of these birds is comparable. This just goes to show that not all Hoaries are going to differ from Commons in the extent and quality of streaking in these areas.

Looking at the undertail coverts of the two birds, those of the Hoary appear immaculate while those of the Common show at least one dark, arrowhead-shaped feather center. Any redpoll with undertail covert marks this heavy is almost certainly a Common.

Hope this helps!

Regards,
Jason Rogers
Banff, AB
hawkowl@hotmail.com

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