

Why do some birds have different colors?

Here's a question: what does a Red-winged Blackbird look like? If you picture a red and black bird, you're half right. Male Red-winged Blackbirds are red and black, but females are brown.

There are lots of reasons why two birds of the same species can look different. Young birds may be smaller and have duller colors. Male birds are often brighter during breeding season to show off. And female birds can have different colors entirely.

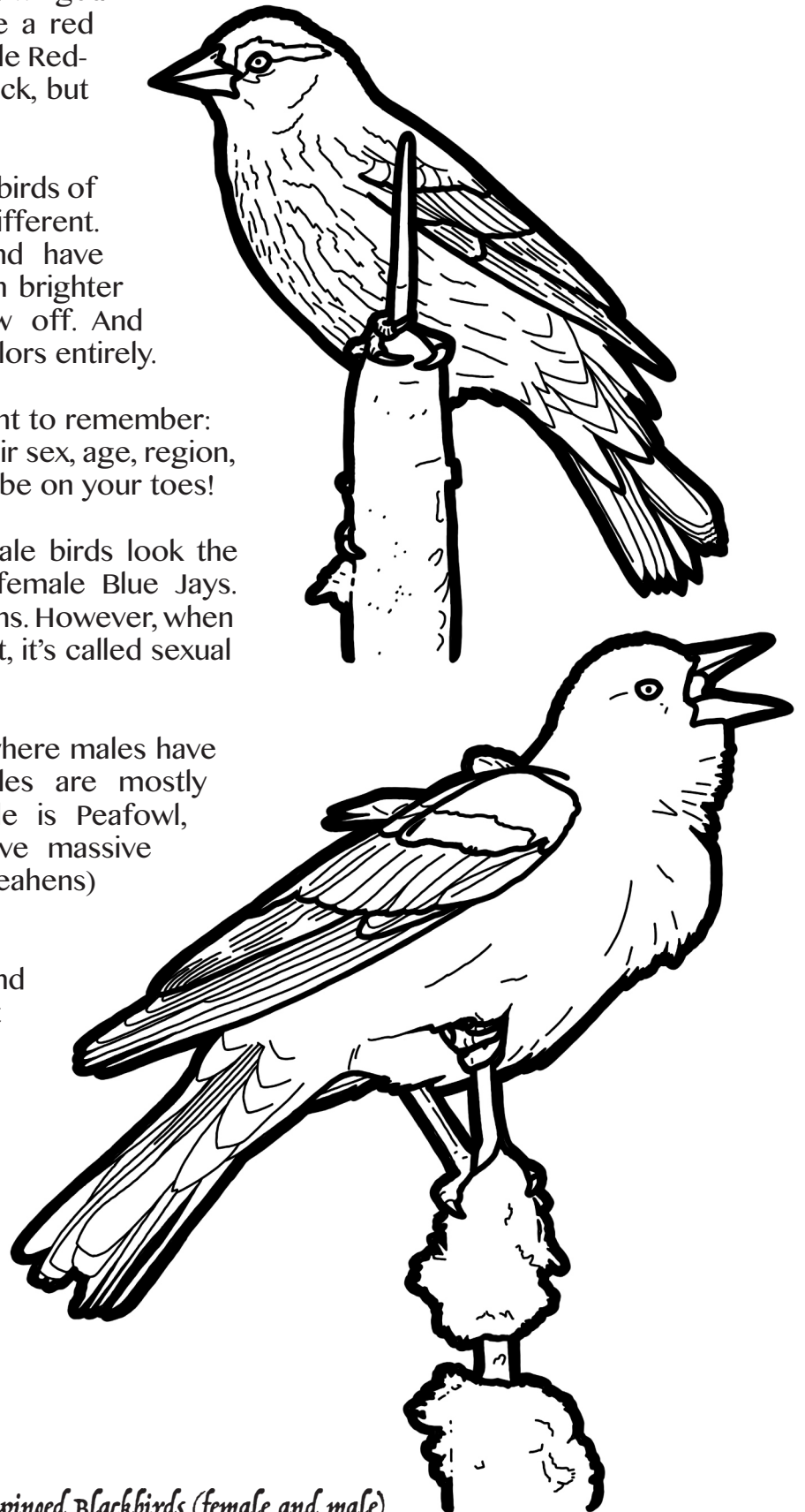
When looking at birds, it's important to remember: bird colors can differ based on their sex, age, region, the time of year, and more. Better be on your toes!

For some species, male and female birds look the same. Male Blue Jays look like female Blue Jays. Female Ravens look like male Ravens. However, when the male and female look different, it's called sexual dimorphism.

A common example is Mallards, where males have bright, glossy colors and females are mostly brown. A more extreme example is Peafowl, where the males (Peacocks) have massive ornate tails and the females (Peahens) have short brown tails.

Typically, male birds' bold colors and elaborate feathers help them court mates or defend their territory. The earthy tones of females are useful for camouflage, helping them avoid predators and blend in when taking care of eggs.

The bird's age and region matter too. The next time you see two birds, ask yourself: are they different species or is there another explanation?



Red-winged Blackbirds (female and male)