Photographic guide to assessing sex and age in rodents
Featuring UK Rodents but applicable worldwide

Adult male bank vole

Penis
Testicles
Anus

Adult Male

Adult male bank vole
While testicles are obvious in most of the pictures included here, they are normally only visible during the breeding season, and are held internally for the rest of the year. This, along with the fact that the female genitals resemble a pseudo penis, means the distance between genitals and anus are the most reliable indication to learn to recognise.
Adult Female

- Nipples
- Genitals
- Anus

Adult female bank vole (pregnant)

Adult female bank vole (heavily pregnant)
Possible female conditions (not all shown)

Non-breeding: (also sometimes called imperforate) where a thin layer of skin forms over the vagina,
Perforate: where the vagina is open
Pregnant: indicated by a clearly distended abdomen
Has bred: Milk production indicates recent litter. Hairless halos around nipple mean she’s suckled a litter at some point (but not necessarily recently).

Juvenile female
Other indications for assessing age

Juvenile rodents have disproportionately large feet and heads.

See how the juvenile female in this picture appears to be half head? In an adult rodent, the head will be more like a third to a quarter of the head-body length.

Juveniles commonly have greyer fur, but, as discussed below, there is large variation within rodents.

A more subjective indication is that juveniles have shorter, softer, neater fur. They can still give off a very fluffy appearance, but the fur is a more smooth and uniform in length.

Older animals are also more likely to have injuries and scars, such as nicked ears and tail damage.
Variation

I have put together this guide to help those new to small mammal trapping, but there is no substitute for experience. Try to get out as much as possible and make the most of any guidance offered by more experienced trappers. That said, even after handling thousands of individuals, it is still as much of an art as a science due firstly to juveniles of both sexes presenting similarly, but also because of the massive natural variation in individuals which mean size and colour are not particularly good indicators of sex.

Both adult wood mice

Both adult bank voles

All photos and wording by Holly Langridge. Intended as a guide only. Permitted for personal and non-commercial use only. Please contact me if you would like to reproduce all or part of this work for courses, classes or voluntary projects.