



SNIPE

Gallinago gallinago

1. INTRODUCTION

Snipe are secretive, highly camouflaged birds, that spend much of their time in the cover of the wet, rushy meadows and tall, marshy grass in which they nest. Snipe like to roost on muddy banks or islets of bare earth among like-coloured vegetation. In the sub-region, they formerly bred in small numbers, mostly in the north and east, but there have been no breeding records in recent years and they are no longer considered a breeding species here. In winter, when their numbers are swollen by immigrants from Europe, they frequent lakes, pools and gravel pits that have lush, rushy shorelines as well as wet meadows. The diet consists primarily of aquatic invertebrates, fish and plant matter.



© Steven Falk

2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

	Target
A. Increase the range by restoring the snipe as a breeding species in the sub-region.	2005
B. Increase the population size to restore the breeding population to its 1980 level.	2010
C. To increase the extent of suitable habitat for breeding and wintering birds at 6 sites or more.	2010
D. Raise awareness of the species and its habitat requirement	2003-2015

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Reedbeds
- Rivers & Streams
- Ponds, Lakes & Reservoirs
- Quarries & Gravel Pits
- Canals
- Field Margins
- Lowland Neutral Grassland
- Fen & Swamp

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Lapwing

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

This is not a National BAP species.

4. CURRENT STATUS

Within the UK, snipe has declined markedly, especially in the lowlands. BTO data points to a fall in the breeding population of 90% between 1972 and 1996.

In Warwickshire, past surveys in 1966-68, 1968-72 and 1988-91 recorded snipe in 50%-75% of the 10- km squares. There is little reliable data on numbers but the population in 1980 was thought to be around 40 pairs. Since then there has been a further marked decline and breeding has not been confirmed since 1984, though displaying birds and suspected breeding continued to be reported until the mid-1990s and local farmers said a pair had nested at a former favoured haunt near Kenilworth in 1997.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

The snipe is not fully protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is listed on Schedule 2 (part 1) as a bird which may be killed or taken outside the close season (1 Feb – 11 Aug).

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Species

During the breeding season, snipe rely on the soil in the vicinity of their nest site remaining moist enough for them to probe for earthworms and crane-fly larvae. For this reason they favour bogs and poorly drained pastures that are subject to winter flooding, as these generally remain damp until mid-summer. If soils dry out in May or June, there is little opportunity for successful breeding. Factors contributing to their decline therefore include:

- **Drainage of wet grassland**, which reduces the time during which invertebrates are available.
- **Disappearance of wet grasslands** and their conversion to other uses.
- **Early spring grazing** (often as a result of drainage) and higher stocking rates, which increase the risk of nests or broods being trampled and predated.
- **Climate change**, especially the shift in rainfall from summer to winter and some very dry summers in the 1990s.
- **Physical disturbance.**

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Current survey work nationally includes sample plots within Warwickshire.

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

- The Habitat Biodiversity Audit provides detailed information on the extent of suitable breeding habitats (e.g. wetlands) and monitoring is revealing new sites, such as the Leam Valley Wetland.
- The current Warwickshire Breeding Bird Tetrads Atlas will provide an up-to-date and more detailed baseline for future monitoring.
- Creation of habitat suitable for snipe is being undertaken at some sites e.g. Brandon Marsh and Kingsbury Water Park.
- Various Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements in Warwickshire, where over-wintering snipe are known to be present (or have been present in the recent past), have an objective to manage and create habitat attractive to snipe.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended - Core Steering Group - Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant species policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9).	LBAPSG	WMBC WWT NWBC RBC	2005	A, B, C
PL2. Actively promote management agreements under agri-environment schemes (e.g. Countryside Stewardship) that are sympathetic to the snipe's requirements.	FWAG	NE WM RSPB	2003-2015	A, B, C
PL3. Oppose further drainage of wet meadows and encourage seasonal inundation of flood meadows.	NE	RSPB FWAG EA	2003-2015	A, B, C
PL4. Promote take-up of incentive schemes for sensitive farming options that will benefit snipe.	FWAG	NE RSPB	2003-2015	A, B
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Prepare and implement site management plans that fulfil the requirements of nesting and wintering snipe, where they are known to occur.	FWAG	LOs	2003-2015	A, B, C
SM2. Create /re-instate 6 suitable sites for breeding snipe.	FWAG	WWT RSPB	2010	A, B, C

Advisory				
A1. Alert landowners and users to presence, or potential presence, of breeding and/or wintering snipe.	FWAG	WM WWT	2003- 2015	A, B, C
A2. Advise landowners and farmers about appropriate management regimes, such as introducing stock later in the season and reducing stocking rates.	FWAG	RSPB NE	2003- 2015	A, B, C
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Maintain the Habitat Biodiversity Audit to monitor provision of suitable habitat for breeding and/or overwintering snipe.	HBA	WM	2003- 2015	A, B
RM2. Support the current Breeding Bird Survey, which will provide up-to-date and more detailed distribution data.	WMBC		2005	A, B, C
RM3. Establish effective monitoring of the range and populations of snipe in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull.	WBRC	WMBC BTO WWT RSPB	2003- 2015	A, B, C
Communication & Publicity				
CP1. Raise the profile of the snipe as a characteristic bird of wet grassland.	BTO	WM RSPB	2003- 2015	A, B, D

Abbreviations: BTO – British Trust for Ornithology, EA - Environment Agency, FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, HBA – Habitat Biodiversity Audit, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, LO – Landowner, NWBC – North Warwick Borough Council, RBC – Rugby Borough Council, RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WBRC – Warwickshire Biological Record Centre, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WMBC - West Midland Bird Club, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES (see LBAP Bibliography web page)

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate Links web page for links to web sites)

RSPB: *'Management Guide to Birds of Lowland Farmland'* (2005) and *'Farm Wildlife Handbook'* (2007), from Publications, RSPB, Unit 17, St Martin's Business Centre, St Martin's Way, Bedford MK42 0LF, tel. 01234 263616 or email: publications@rspb.org.uk

9. CONTACT

Graham Harrison, 'Bryher', Hatton Green, Hatton, Warwick CV35 7LA.