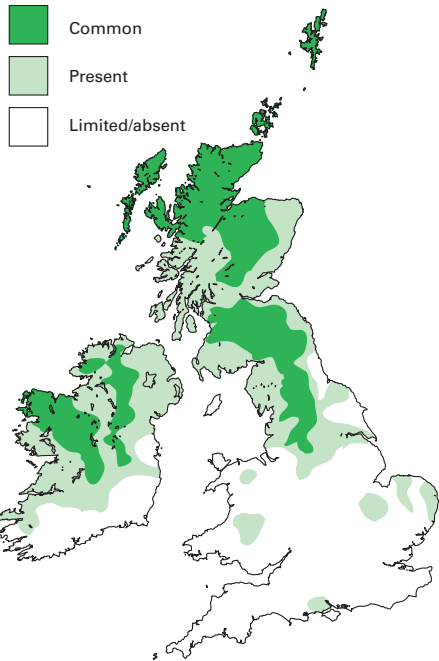




for birds
for people
for ever

FARMING FOR BIRDS

Snipe



Distribution map showing the relative abundance of snipe in Britain and Ireland 1988-91



Snipe by Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

The snipe is a small wading bird with a very long, straight beak. In spring, the male makes a drumming noise with its tail feathers as it flies.

The snipe breeds in wet flushes on moorland, damp pasture and at the edge of watercourses. The population has declined substantially on lowland sites (61% decline between 1982 and 2002 on lowland wet grassland sites in England and Wales) although this decline is not evident in upland areas. The main reason for the decline on lowland farmland sites has been the drainage of grassland together with the general intensification of grassland management.

WHAT DO SNIPE NEED?

Nesting habitat:

Snipe breed in wet areas with tussocky vegetation 10–30 cm tall. Even small, wet field corners can be used. Ideally, the sitting bird likes to walk off the nest to feed nearby, without the need to fly. If the ground dries out, then the

bird has to fly, and the nest location is advertised.

Food:

Snipe feed mainly on earthworms, leatherjackets, beetles and caterpillars. Young chicks generally eat earthworms

collected by the parents around the nesting site. The brood of four chicks tends to split so that two go with the male and two with the female.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE OF A SNIPE

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
	Wintering grounds; feeding mainly on soil invertebrates.			They nest in fields with a mosaic of tall and short vegetation, on bogs, wetlands and poorly drained pastures and meadows. They feed mainly on soil invertebrates.			Leave breeding grounds to winter in lowland and coastal areas of the UK and Ireland.					
Breeding season				Main nesting period. One brood, but may re-lay if eggs are lost.			Main chick rearing period					

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SNIPE?

Nesting habitat

Feeding habitat

MOORLAND

- Breeds on wet moorland habitats, particularly around the hill edge.
- Avoid burning large patches of moorland for grazing.

PASTURE

- **ELS** **HLS** Retain and restore wet pasture.
- Extensively graze to provide a mosaic of taller vegetation (10–30 cm) for nesting, interspersed with short vegetation (< 10 cm) for feeding.

- Aim to go into the nesting period with the sward structure as above so grazing can be minimised. Graze with quiet stock that are used to their surroundings.
- Cattle often create the best conditions for snipe as they produce a tussocky vegetation structure. But sheep, horses or a combination of livestock types can also be used effectively.

MEADOWS

- **ELS** **HLS** Snipe nest in meadows, particularly wet, unimproved fields. Snipe need around three weeks to incubate their eggs, with chicks fledging around three weeks after hatching.
- Leave wet hollows/corners uncut, as unfledged chicks are most likely to use these areas.

MECHANICAL OPERATIONS

- Mechanical operations, eg muck spreading and harrowing, should be timed before or after the breeding season in areas used by snipe.

MOORLAND

- **HLS** Restore wet areas by blocking grips.

MEADOWS AND PASTURE

- Snipe require soft, damp soil to be able to probe for food. Ideally, it needs to be soft enough to penetrate easily with a 6-inch nail. Snipe will continue to attempt to nest well into July as long as the ground remains sufficiently soft.
- **ELS** **HLS** Retain boggy ground.
- **HLS** Create wet areas by blocking drains and small ditches in suitable areas. It may be necessary to raise water levels using structures such as sluices.

KEY

ELS = Entry Level Stewardship **HLS** = Higher Level Stewardship

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



Agricultural Adviser, The RSPB,
UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy,
Bedfordshire SG19 2DL
Tel: 01767 680551
www.rspb.org.uk/farming



Farming and Wildlife Advisory
Group, NAC, Stoneleigh,
Kenilworth, Warwickshire
CV8 2RX Tel: 024 7669 6699
www.fwag.org.uk



The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge,
Hampshire SP6 1EF Tel: 01425 652381
www.gct.org.uk

PRIORITY ACTION

- Retain and restore patches of wet ground in both grassland and moorland areas.
- Extensively graze wet grasslands to provide a mosaic of tall and short vegetation. Minimise grazing during the nesting period.

See also the **RSPB** advisory sheets on:

- Grazed pasture
- Grip blocking
- Hay and silage meadows
- Heather moorland management
- Managing water levels to benefit birds
- Moorland grazing

For answers to all of your farm wildlife enquiries, visit www.farmwildlife.info