



Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)



Snipe are secretive wading birds of wet grassland, marshy areas and raised bogs in the lowlands and rush pasture, flushes and mire communities in the uplands. They are partial migrants, with the UK receiving an influx of birds from the continent during the winter, with local resident breeding birds often moving to coastal areas then.

Snipe use their long bill to probe soft mud for invertebrate food. Suitable wet soil conditions are therefore a critical requirement. Their well-camouflaged plumage and secretive nature means that their presence is often overlooked. During the breeding season, they nest in wet fields with rank and tussocky grass or rushes. Snipe perform a diving display flight that includes a drumming sound made as air rushes through their tail feathers.

Breeding snipe numbers have declined dramatically in the UK as the wet habitats they depend on have been drained and as farming has intensified.

The Shropshire Targets for 2005 set in the previous edition of the BAP (2002) have not been achieved, and many of the Actions were not implemented, so concerted action is needed to achieve the targets set for 2010. The County population is now estimated at only 20-25 breeding pairs.

1 Objectives and Targets

1.1 Objectives

- A. In the short term, maintain the current snipe population in Shropshire.
- B. In the longer term, increase numbers of snipe in Shropshire to their early 1970s level, and increase the number of sites that hold breeding snipe.
- C. Establish and maintain a comprehensive understanding of snipe distribution, status and ecological requirements in Shropshire through research, survey and monitoring.
- D. Promote communication, education and awareness of the status and needs of snipe.

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1.2 Targets

- Ensure that breeding populations on all current sites are retained.
- Increase populations on these sites by 2010.
- Provide suitable breeding conditions on an additional 10 sites (outside the existing nature reserve and designated site network) by 2010. Sites to be targeted include the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence, Weald and Strine Moors, and sites in the Shropshire and Clun Hills ESAs identified by the 2004 survey.
- Increase the current population of snipe in Shropshire by 50% by 2010.
- Provide suitable breeding conditions on a further additional 10 sites by 2015
- Reverse the decline, and increase the population to half of the 1990 estimate by 2015
- Extend the range back to the distribution published in 1992 (58 Occupied Tetrads) by 2015
- Subsequently, increase it further, back to the 1970s level

2 Current Status

2.1 Importance

The snipe is considered a Species of Conservation Concern in the UK Biodiversity Programme. It is currently listed as 'Amber' in the *Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007*.

2.2 Trends

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) estimate that numbers of snipe declined by 74% between 1970 and 1998.

The *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Shropshire* confirms that a serious decline has also been evident in Shropshire, and attributes the decline to drainage, increased grazing pressure in the uplands, and conversion of grassland to arable.

A survey carried out in 2004 confirms that this local decline has continued, and estimated the County population at only 20-25 breeding pairs.

2.3 Population and Distribution

The snipe population was estimated to be 200 to 300 pairs in Shropshire in the early 1990s. The population has declined significantly since this date. For example, the 1998 *Shropshire Bird Report* by the Shropshire Ornithological Society quotes only 18 pairs present on the Long Mynd, a site generally considered to be one of the species' strongholds. Records show a marked concentration of snipe in the Weald Moors north of Telford and in the uplands of the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd, with other scattered records from various river valleys in Shropshire.

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A survey in the South Shropshire hills in 2004 found only 13-15 pairs, only 3-4 of which were on privately owned land. The remaining 10-12 pairs were on Long Mynd and Rhos Fiddle. The Long Mynd population has declined by around 60% since 1998, and the range has contracted. The Stiperstones population has disappeared since 1996. Breeding season reports submitted to SOS in recent years have come from only two other sites, and the County population is now estimated at only 20-25 breeding pairs.

3 Current Factors Affecting the Species

The main factor affecting snipe is the widespread loss and drainage of wetlands, especially lowland wet grassland, due to:

- Agricultural improvement through increased and more efficient land drainage, resulting in more intensive sward management or conversion to arable;
- Intensive flood alleviation and pump drainage schemes resulting in less frequent inundation of lowland wet grasslands or the quick removal of floods which do occur;
- Lowering of the water table and base river flows due to abstraction of water;
- Fragmentation of habitat resulting in isolated snipe populations that are more vulnerable.

However, there have been no apparent changes to the extent and quality of wetland on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, and recent substantial declines here are attributed to an increase in the numbers of several predators

4 Current Action

4.1 Policy and Protection

- Snipe receive protection under the UK Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.
- The RSPB has a snipe species action plan.
- Snipe is a Target Species in four (Shropshire Hills, Shropshire Plain, Oswestry Uplands & Clun and West Herefordshire Hills) of the five Joint Character Assessment (JCA) statements which set the priorities for the Defra / RDS Environmental Stewardship. They provide guidance on the land management options that should be included in ES applications.

4.2 Management, Survey and Research

- Defra's Environmental Stewardship (ES) is available across Shropshire and includes measures such as management of wet pastures which can benefit snipe.
- The Shropshire Hills and Clun Hills are covered by Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) schemes. These include options for the management of wet pastures and a provision for rush management plans, both of which can benefit snipe.

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- Ruralscapes, an independent Company which promotes the rural economy by assisting, supporting and building the capacity of persons and organisations who live, work or operate in rural areas, has succeeded the Countryside Agency's Land Management Initiative in the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence. This project, part-funded by SWT and the Environment Agency, is continuing to promote the restoration of areas of lowland wet grassland for nesting lapwing, and monitor the number of lapwing in the area, and their breeding success. Ruralscapes now assists farmers manage their land for the benefit of Lapwing, and (to a lesser extent) Curlew and Snipe, and secure financial support from Agri-environment agreements with RDS, and, in the short term, Farm agreements with SWT
- The Environment Agency has a programme of habitat creation, through construction of shallow scrapes.
- A survey in the South Shropshire hills in 2004, covering the Clun ESA and the western half of the Shropshire Hills ESA, identified four privately owned sites with "drumming" snipe, three more with excellent potential and requiring little improvement, and 15 that had potential, but which require improvement.
- Apart from this survey, there is no recent baseline information for this species. Records submitted to SOS include very few breeding season records, and the only evidence of breeding since 2000 has come from a couple of sites around Newport.

5 Key Habitats

- Lowland wet grassland
- Marshes, mires and raised bogs
- Wet rush pasture, flushes and mires in the uplands

6 Complementary Plans

Shropshire Floodplain Grazing Marsh HAP
Shropshire Rivers and Streams HAP
Shropshire Standing Open Water HAP

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

Habitat/Species	Action Code	Action text	Location of action	Start Date	End Date	Lead	Assisting
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 01	Prepare Action Plan to increase area of wetland and suitable breeding habitat for Curlew and Snipe at Rhos Fiddle by 2015.	Rhos Fiddle	2006	2015	SWT	SOS
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 02	Establish monitoring arrangements to record the population, population change, breeding success and habitat usage for all BAP and PSA Target Bird Species on all farms covered by any Agri-environment scheme in Shropshire, and measure the effectiveness of such schemes.	Shropshire	2006	2007	NE	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 03	Monitor population, population change, breeding success and habitat usage for all BAP priority bird species on all CSS & ESA Farms in Shropshire until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	NE	FWAG, RS, AONB, SOS, SWT, UOWG
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 08	Develop an Action Plan to monitor population, population change and breeding success of all BAP ground nesting birds on sites not explicitly identified in the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan by 2008.	Shropshire	2006	2008	SWT	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD CA 09	Promote agricultural practice that minimises risk to the nests and broods of all BAP ground-nesting birds until 2015.	AONB	2006	2015	AONB	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD CP 03	Produce general publicity and education materials, to raise the profile of Lapwing, Curlew & Snipe, and publicise their habitat requirements amongst farmers in the area by 2015.	AONB	2006	2015	AONB	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD FR 06	Seek the necessary resources to implement all the above actions.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SC	SWT
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD HC 01	Create 9 new wetlands / scrapes for Lapwing, Snipe and Curlew annually until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	EA	RS, AONB, SWT, UOWG
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD HS 02	Manage existing wet flushes & ponds, and create new shallow ponds, to ensure suitable habitat is maintained on a rotational program with some work occurring every year for Curlew and Snipe on the Long Mynd until 2015.	Long Mynd	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD HS 03	Manage the open moorland on Wild Moor as a tree-free zone for BAP ground nesting birds (area to be defined in NT Long Mynd Property Conservation Plan) until 2015.	Long Mynd	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP

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Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD SM 01	Introduce and maintain predator control operation for benefit of BAP ground nesting birds where appropriate at Rhos Fiddle and Long Mynd (SSSI) until 2015	Long Mynd, Rhos Fiddle	2006	2015	SWT	NT, LMBBP
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD SU 07	Monitor the vegetation and water levels in the wet flushes utilised by Curlew and Snipe on the Long Mynd every 3 years until 2015.	Long Mynd	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP
Snipe	SHR SNI AP 01	Ensure that Water Level Management Plans for SSSI's are in place for all sites that have, or have the potential for, snipe by 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	EA, NE	SWT
Snipe	SHR SNI CA 01	Make use of existing literature to promote conservation measures for snipe.	Shropshire	2002	On	RSPB	FWAG, SOS
Snipe	SHR SNI CP 01	Increase public awareness of the decline in snipe populations and the reasons for this.	Shropshire	2002	On	RSPB	SOS, SWT
Snipe	SHR SNI HC 01	Examine the feasibility of re-wetting sites in conjunction with landowners to allow targeting of agri-environment scheme payments such as ESS, ESA & CSS by 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	NE	FWAG, RSPB, SWT, EA
Snipe	SHR SNI HS 01	Develop and implement Action Plan to re-establish a breeding population of Snipe, or double baseline population, by 2010, and double it again by 2015 at a number of sites across Shropshire.	Whixall Moss, North Shropshire, Severn Vyrnwy Confluence Area, Shropshire Hills AONB	2006	2015	NE, SWT	AONB, SOS
Snipe	SHR SNI HS 02	Visit the 10 farms with breeding Snipe, or the potential to create suitable breeding habitat, identified in the 2004 Survey Report, to encourage owners to utilise existing or new agri-environment schemes to safeguard and increase such habitat, and safeguard nests and chicks from agricultural operations and trampling by livestock by 2007.	South Shropshire	2002	2007	NE	AONB
Snipe	SHR SNI HS 03	Use important mechanisms such as Ruralscapes Project to promote land management to benefit snipe until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	RS	RSPB, FWAG, NE
Snipe	SHR SNI ID 01	Compile an inventory of sites and potential sites suitable for breeding snipe by 2008.	Shropshire	2006	2008	RSPB	NE, SWT, FWAG
Snipe	SHR SNI SP 01	When developing flood defence schemes, ensure that floodplain grassland is recognised as natural flood storage and seek to re-designate as 'washlands' by 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	EA	NE
Snipe	SHR SNI SU 01	Initiate and continue the breeding wader survey and monitoring programme	Shropshire	2002	on	RSPB	SOS, SWT

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Snipe	SHR SNI SU 02	Repeat 2004 Survey for Snipe on a number of sites across Shropshire in 2009 and 2014.	Shropshire	2009	2014	NE, SWT	NT, LMBBP
Snipe	SHR SNI SU 03	Monitor Snipe population at Rhos Fiddle and Long Mynd annually until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	LMBBP, NT, SOS
Snipe	SHR SNI SU 04	Establish a population baseline for Snipe at Whixhall Moss, Severn Vyrnwy Confluence Area, Weald Moors, North Shropshire, East Shropshire and Shropshire Hills AONB by 2010.	Fenn's, Whixall, Bettisfield, Wem and Cadney Mosses, North Shropshire, East Shropshire, Severn Vyrnwy Confluence Area, Shropshire Hills AONB	2002	2010	SWT	RS, SOS, NE

Key to Organisations

NE	Natural England
NT	National Trust
LMBBP	Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
RS	Ruralscapes
SOS	Shropshire Ornithological Society
SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
AONB	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
UOWG	Upper Onny Wildlife Group
SC	Shropshire Council
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
EA	Environment Agency

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Plan last revised: November 2008 by Fran Lancaster (Biodiversity Support Officer, Shropshire County Council).

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