

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

Heather Bleater, Horsegowk (Scots), Naosg (Gaelic)

National Advice Hub
T: 0300 323 0161
E: advice@fas.scot
W: www.fas.scot

Building & Benefitting Biodiversity: Farmland Wading Birds

The Snipe is widespread, though scarce in the more intensive arable areas. The highest numbers are found in Caithness, the Northern and Western Isles (see map overleaf). Population estimate: 42,000-50,000 pairs. Numbers have remained more stable than other waders, with no significant long-term decline in the past 25 years

Characteristics

- Smaller than other farmland waders—a little larger than a thrush
- Very long straight bill
- Streaky brown plumage and secretive nature
- Harsh 'Shkepp' call when it takes flight
- Repetitive, mechanical 'chippa-chippa' song often given from a fence post.
- Aerial display flight produces vibrating 'drumming' noise from outer tail feathers



Habitat preferences

- Favours very wet, rushy areas
- May be found in wetland areas on enclosed farmland or wet flushes on the open hill
- Tolerates denser vegetation than other farmland waders.
- Spends winter at the coast



Nesting behaviour

- Present in breeding areas March—August
- Nest site concealed in dense vegetation
- 4 eggs laid from April onwards
- Chicks hatch from May, but late broods can hatch as late as August



Key Considerations

- Snipe are more exclusively dependent on very wet, rushy areas than other farmland waders.
- A mix of tall rushes and shorter sedges and grass, with shallow pools of water is ideal
- Typically found in open wetland or moorland landscapes but can tolerate a scatter of trees more readily than other farmland waders.
- They tolerate somewhat taller vegetation than lapwings and redshank, but will avoid very dense, tall rushes.

Practical management options

- Retain or create a high water table.
- Create shallow pools or scrapes within wetlands and pasture to hold water from March-June.
- Manage grazing to create a predominantly mosaic of vegetation heights, with tussocks of grass or rush up to 10-30cm tall, but with some shorter vegetation between tussocks.
- Light grazing, especially with cattle, in late summer/autumn can help create this sward structure.
- Topping in late summer may be necessary if rushes become too dense.
- Restrict (<1.0LU/ha) or, preferably, exclude grazing from mid-April to the end of May



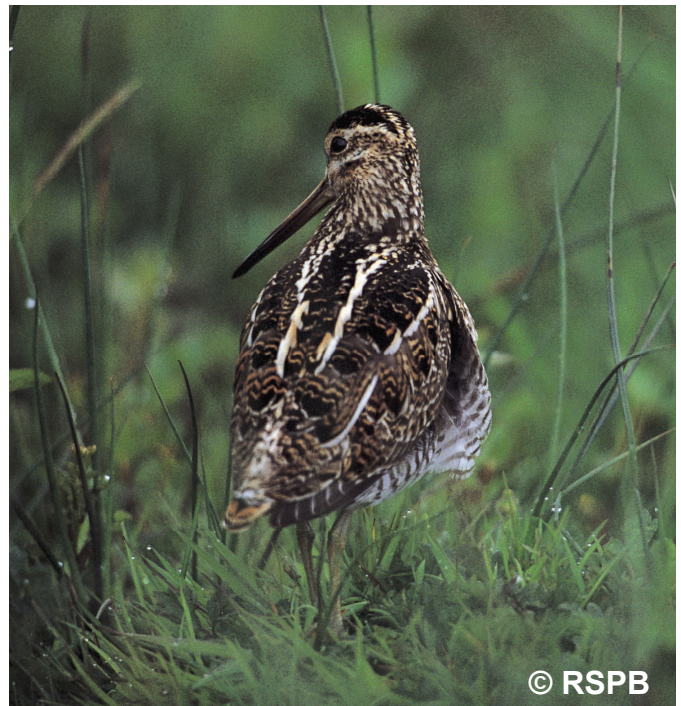
Scan this QR code or use this [link](#) to a recording of the song and drumming of a Snipe.

For further information, search for waders at the following sites:

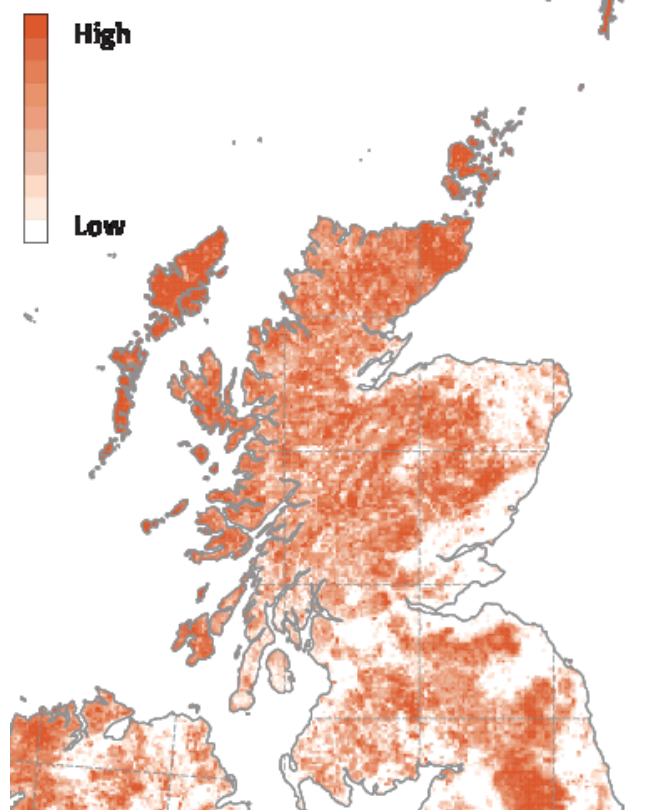
www.workingforwaders.com

www.rspb.org.uk

www.fas.scot



Relative Abundance (Breeding 2008-2011)



Snipe abundance in Scotland during the breeding season. Map reproduced from Bird Atlas 2007–11, which is a joint project between BTO, BirdWatch Ireland and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. Map reproduced with permission from the British Trust for Ornithology.