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Snipe (heather bleat)



A Hay / (rspb-images.com)

The snipe is a small wading bird with a very long, straight bill. In spring, the male makes a drumming noise with its tail feathers in flight.

CALENDAR

Breeding season:

Early April to July.

Nest:

On the ground, in a tussock of grasses, sedges, rushes or heather.

Winter:

Some birds leave the breeding site for the coast. Others form small flocks on freshwater marshes and lake margins.

HABITAT

From April onwards snipe breed on bogs and mosses, pastures with rushes, tussocky grasses and the marshy edges and callows of streams and rivers. Even small, wet field corners can be used.

In winter, they are found mainly on wet grassland, bogs, marshes and estuaries.

DIET

Snipe use their long bills to probe for earthworms and leatherjackets. Other insects taken include beetles, larvae and caterpillars. Young chicks are generally fed on earthworms collected by the parents around the nesting site.

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SNIPE?

- Retain wet or damp areas of grassland as these provide nest sites and feeding areas for adults and chicks. Where feasible, create damp soil conditions by blocking drains.
- Around open water create a mosaic of vegetation heights. Tussocky rushes, sedges and grasses provide valuable breeding sites, though rushes should not be allowed to become too dense.
- Avoid cultivating or re-seeding permanent pasture. Unimproved pasture should be managed with no, or limited, use of fertiliser.
- In areas of damp grassland, graze with cattle to produce a diverse and tussocky sward. Snipe will select areas with tussocky vegetation between 10–30 cm tall. This creates suitable conditions for nesting.
- Reduce stocking numbers during the peak nesting season (early April to the end of June) in order to avoid trampling of nests and young.

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



The RSPB,
Northern Ireland HQ,
Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 7QT.
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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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Snipe distribution

Data provided by *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland 1988–1991*. British Trust for Ornithology, Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now known as Birdwatch Ireland).



Filled dot = breeding

Open dot = present during the breeding season