



## REVISED PLAN APRIL 2019

### 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, tussocky grass in which they nest. Snipe like to roost on muddy banks or islets of bare earth among similar coloured vegetation. They favour ground with water tables to within 20cm of field level throughout the breeding season as the soft damp soils allow them access to worms and other invertebrates (Archer, 2013). The diet also includes fish and plant matter.



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Only when they begin 'drumming' in mid-March as part of their courtship display flights, are they easily seen. A whirring sound is produced mechanically (rather than vocally) by the vibration of the modified outer tail feathers, held out at a wide angle to the body, in the slipstream of a power dive.

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.

| 2.  | OBJECTIVES  | TARGETS     |
|---|---|-------------|
| Associated Action Plans are: 'Lowland Neutral Grassland', 'Lakes & Reservoirs', 'Marsh & Swamp', 'Quarries & Gravel Pits', 'Farmland Birds', 'Lapwing' and 'Wading Birds' |   |             |
| <b>PLEASE CONSULT THE '<i>GENERIC SPECIES</i>' ACTION PLAN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT FOR OBJECTIVES COMMON TO ALL SPECIES PLANS</b>                               |   |             |
| A.  | <b>Increase the range by restoring the snipe as a breeding species in the sub-region.</b> | <b>2020</b> |
| B.  | <b>Increase the extent of suitable habitat for breeding snipe at 8 sites or more.</b>     | <b>2020</b> |

#### 3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

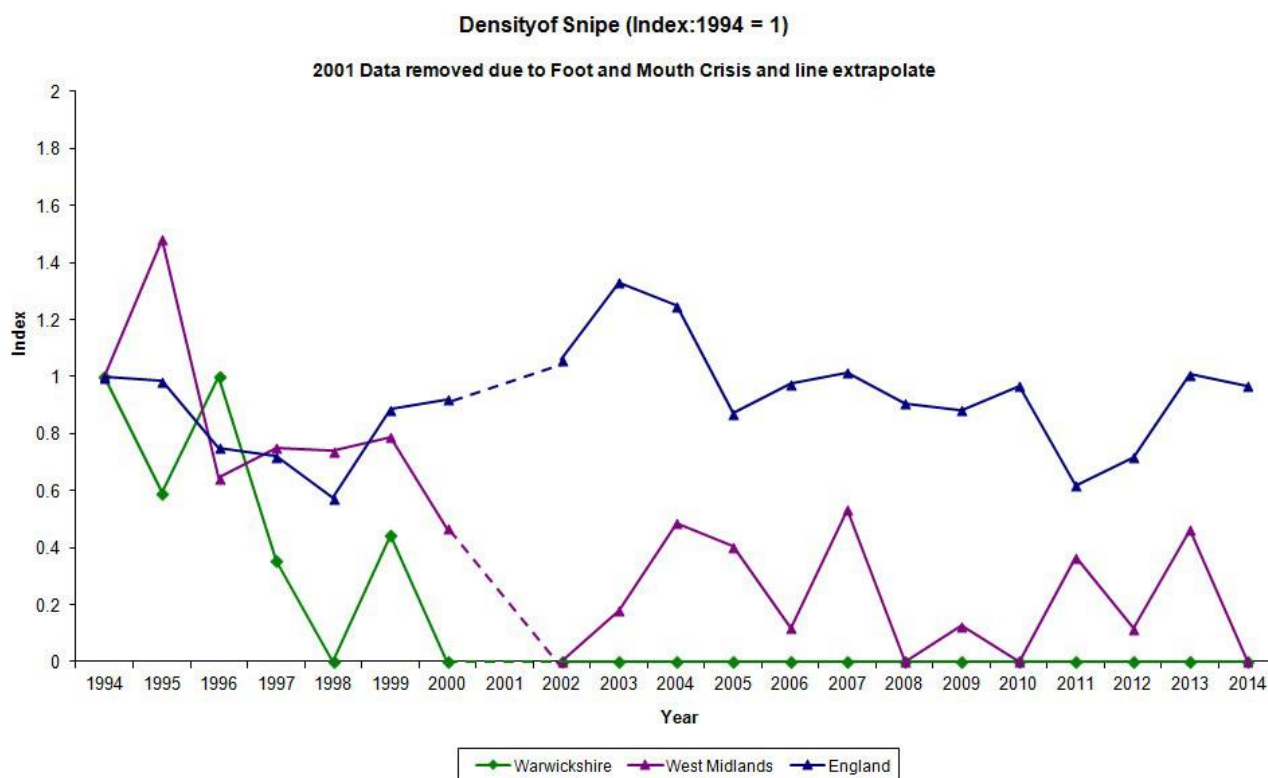
The snipe is on the UK Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern. It is not a UK Priority Species ([Joint Nature Conservation Committee](#), 2007)

#### 4. CURRENT STATUS

Within the UK, snipe has declined markedly, especially in the lowlands, with a 28% decline in England between 1994 – 2012 and an 88% decline in the West Midlands

(Smith, 2014). The [Breeding Bird Survey](#) reports particularly low numbers of snipe during the spring of 2011 (British Wildlife, August 2012).

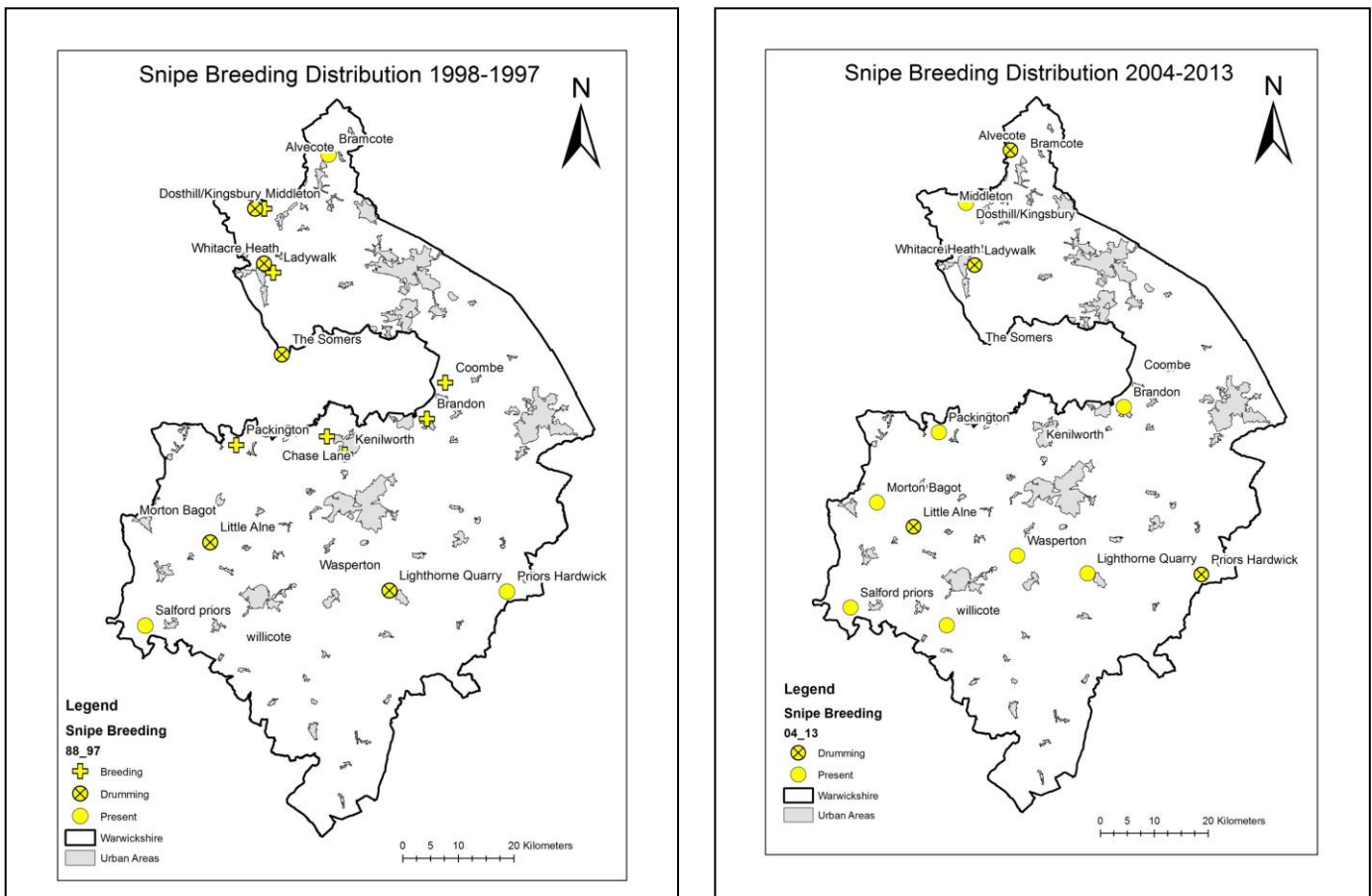
In the sub-region it formerly bred in small numbers, mostly in the north and east, with the population in 1980 thought to be around 40 pairs; past surveys in 1966-68, 1968-72 and 1988-91 had recorded snipe in 50%-75% of the 10- km squares. Displaying birds and suspected breeding continued to be reported until the mid-1990s. The decline continued until very few were left by the 1990's, with the last pairs probably nesting in old wet meadows at Packington until 1995 and near Kenilworth until 1997. There was a further marked decline with no breeding records after 2000; by 2013 the snipe was no longer considered a breeding species in Warwickshire.



Despite no breeding being recorded the species does over-winter in the county in good numbers but it is unlikely that there is sufficient breeding habitat to take advantage of this and establish a breeding population.

Key sites with a consistent over-wintering population and recent past breeding (last dates in brackets) are: [Alvecote Pools](#) Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI (1987)), [Brandon Marsh](#) SSSI (1990), Dosthill / [Kingsbury Water Park](#) (1994) and [Ladywalk Reserve / Whitacre Heath](#) SSSI area (1989). Other sites to hold good-sized winter flocks on a regular basis include Lighthorne Quarry Local Wildlife Site (LWS), Priors Hardwick, [Draycote Water](#), Knightcote, [Marsh Lane Nature Reserve](#), Morton Bagot and Napton Reservoir LWS. Drumming or display have been noted on rare occasions at the first-named two sites, as they have also been heard at former breeding sites at Kenilworth and Packington. Two birds also summered at Morton Bagot in 2015. At both Salford Priors gravel pits and Wasperton, areas of wet grassland which consistently held concentrations of over 100 Snipe for many years were destroyed in 2016 and 2009 respectively, but on the positive side the new [Bubbenhall Meadow](#) NR/LWS is becoming more attractive

The maps below (Smith, 2016) indicate a wide spread distribution across the county up to 2013. When individuals were still recorded breeding, this occurred around the Tame Valley and noticeable in a band south of Coventry from Packington and Kenilworth to Brandon Marsh. More recent records show that display and drumming behaviour take place but that these do not necessarily translate into breeding success.



#### 4.1 Legal and Policy Status

A wide range of species and habitats are protected under international and domestic laws, including the [Wild Birds Directive](#) (1979), the [Wildlife and Countryside Act](#) (1981), the [Conservation Regulations](#) (1994) and [EC Habitats Directive](#) (1992). Protection of sites is afforded nationally through SSSI designation, [Special Areas of Conservation](#) (SAC) and [Local Nature Reserve](#) (LNR) statutory status. Other sites are offered recognition of their value through Local Wildlife Site status (LWS), Local Character Areas and identified Landscape Scale Areas. The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (2012) chapter/section 11 states conditions with regard to any development negatively affecting biodiversity, including protected sites, ancient woodland and other irreplaceable habitats (paragraph 118). The Wildlife & Countryside Act and schedule 2 of the [Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations](#) (2010) make it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, take, possess, sell, buy or transport a range of species.

The snipe is on Appendix 2.1 of the Wild Birds Directive but is not fully protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act; listed on Schedule 2 (part 1), it 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 (*Tipulidae*). 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; however, populations may be limited by cold winter weather and are anticipated to increase (BTO, 2013)
- **Physical disturbance.**
- **Predation of eggs and young birds.**

## 5. LOCAL ACTION

- The Warwickshire Breeding Bird Tetrads Atlas provided data on the species in parts of the county until 2006 when survey work ceased (pers.comm. Jon Bowley, 2012).
- 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 take-up of [agri-environment scheme](#) agreements where over-wintering snipe are known to be present (or have been present in the recent past), administered by [Natural England](#) and having the objective to manage and create habitat attractive to snipe. Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) options for breeding waders are:
  - HK9/HK11/HK13 - maintenance/restoration/creation of wet grassland.
- The restoration and creation of some 50ha of habitat suitable for snipe, by grazing, scrub control and the wetting up of grassland and creation of scrapes, is being achieved through the work of:
  - [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#): at [Middleton Lakes](#) with the creation of new wetlands and the wetting up of Fishers Mill Meadow.
  - Warwickshire County Council at [Kingsbury Water Park](#): with scrapes in the area of new wetland created in 2013 and the later improvement of community wetland around Leys Brook.
  - [Warwickshire Wildlife Trust](#) at Guphill Brook (Coventry), Wolston Fields, and Whitacre Heath flood meadow: all examples of wet grassland creation.
  - on the [Packington Estate](#): the wetting up of meadows.

- Coventry City Council at [Coombe Country Park](#) : restoration of degraded marsh by scrub control and grazing.

## 6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS

| ACTION  | Lead | Partners                          | By      |
|---|------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| <b>PLEASE CONSULT THE '<i>GENERIC SPECIES</i>' ACTION PLAN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT FOR ACTIONS COMMON TO ALL SPECIES PLANS</b>  |      |                                   |         |
| <b>Site / Species Safeguard &amp; Management</b>  |      |                                   |         |
| <b>SM1.</b> Restore wetland habitats at Brandon Marsh, Ladywalk Reserve, Middleton Lakes, Lighthorne Quarry, Toft Farm and at other sites with large overwintering populations, to suitable condition for breeding snipe. | WWT  | NE RSPB<br>CCP LOs<br>WMBC<br>WCC | 2018    |
| <b>SM2.</b> Ensure wet grassland options for breeding waders within HLS are tailored to breeding snipe where appropriate at 4 additional sites.   | NE   |                                   | 2015    |
| <b>Advisory</b>   |      |                                   |         |
| <b>A1.</b> Alert landowners to presence of breeding snipe and seek to minimise disturbance.   | RSPB | WCC NE                            | ongoing |
| <b>A2.</b> Advise landowners and farmers about suitable management regimes for breeding snipe where appropriate.  | NE   | WWT<br>RSPB                       | ongoing |
| <b>Research &amp; Monitoring</b>  |      |                                   |         |
| <b>RM1.</b> Develop survey format to identify sites with large overwintering populations, which hold the greatest potential for breeding birds in the future.   | BTO  | WWT HBA<br>WMBC                   | 2020    |
| <b>RM2.</b> Conduct wetland assessments at Brandon Marsh, Ladywalk, Middleton Lakes and Lighthorne Quarry and identify any criteria limiting suitability for breeding snipe.  | WWT  | NE RSPB<br>LOs<br>WMBC            | 2015    |

**Abbreviations:** **BTO** – British Trust for Ornithology, **CCP** – Coombe Country Park, **HBA** – Habitat Biodiversity Audit partnership, **LOs** – Landowners, **NE**– Natural England, **RSPB** – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, **WCC** – Warwickshire County Council, **WMBC** - West Midland Bird Club, **WWT** – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

## 7. PROGRESS WITH ACTIONS

From 2015–2020 there will be a rolling programme of reporting on progress, of 10 action plans per year with an annual summary of results. Progress with this plan up to 2018 can be seen at [www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/LBAP](http://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/LBAP).



## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Tucker, G.M. & Heath, M.F. (1994). Birds in Europe: their conservation status. Cambridge. BirdLife International (BirdLife Conservation Series no.3).

UK Biodiversity Steering Group (1995). Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, Volume 2: Action Plans. HMSO, London.

Mead, C. (2000). The State of the Nation's Birds. Whittet Books, Stowmarket.

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Lawton, J.H. (2010) [Making Space for Nature](#): a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network. Report to Defra, advocating a landscape-scale approach guided by four key principles, summarised as '*more, bigger, better and joined*'.

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Archer, R. (2013) Farewell to the silver meadows? The story of breeding waders on the Somerset Levels. British Wildlife vol.25, no.2, pp77-84.

BTO (2013) [Bird Atlas 2007-11](#): The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland - a comprehensive overview of bird distribution and change in Britain and Ireland, giving national level trends which will place local issues in the national context.

Smith, M.C. (2014) Update on the status of Bird Local Biodiversity Action Plans in Warwickshire. 'Wild Warwickshire' Wildlife Information & Consultancy.

BTO (2014) The latest [Bird Trends](#) report, bringing together the latest BTO survey data for 120 breeding bird species across Britain & Ireland, shows that it is bad news for backyard biodiversity. Long-term population trends for each species are presented by country and by habitat.

Smith, M.C. (2016) Updated analysis of Local Biodiversity Action Plan Bird Species 2013-14.

RSPB (2016) [State of Nature](#) – a stocktake of all our native wildlife by over 50 wildlife organisations.

Natural England (2016) [Conservation Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#). Sets out how NE will help deliver DEFRA's ambitions for the environment to reverse biodiversity loss, sustain distinctive landscapes and enhance engagement with nature.

RSPB, BTO & Wildlife & Wetland Trust (2017) [The State of the UK's birds](#) - since 1999, these reports have provided an annual overview of the status of bird populations in the UK and its Overseas Territories. They include trends for as many of the UK's regularly occurring species as possible.

Worldwide Fund for Nature (2018) [The Living Planet Report: aiming higher](#). Published in collaboration with the Zoological Society of London.

## 9. FURTHER INFORMATION

Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) for Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull – mapping data set and associated information. Phase 1 ([JNCC](#)) 1996-2002 and Phase 2 (Local Wildlife Sites) ongoing.

RSPB [Management Guide to Birds of Lowland Farmland'](#) (2005) and [Farm Wildlife Handbook](#) (2007) Available online or tel. 01234 263616.

## 10. CONTACT

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