

Snipe

Gallinago gallinago

Bird · Resident · winter visitor



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With a body barred and streaked in shades of brown, buff and black, and an extraordinarily long, straight bill for probing deep into soft mud, the snipe is built to disappear into the marshy ground it feeds on. It's easily overlooked until flushed, when it explodes upward in a fast, zigzagging escape flight accompanied by a harsh, rasping call. Snipe breed on damp rushy pasture, bog and marsh across Dumfries and Galloway, though a resident population here is joined by far larger numbers of winter visitors from Scandinavia and Iceland, and boggy fields and estuary-fringe wetland can hold sizeable flocks between autumn and spring. The species is best known for its breeding display: in spring, males fly high over the territory and dive steeply, spreading their outer tail feathers so the wind vibrates through them, producing an unmistakable bleating or drumming sound that gives the bird its old name of 'heather bleater'.

BEHAVIOUR

Feeds by pushing its long, sensitive bill deep into soft mud to find worms and insect larvae, often without moving the rest of the body. Extremely well camouflaged and reluctant to flush, preferring to freeze until almost trodden on. In spring, males perform steep diving display flights that produce a throbbing 'drumming' sound through the tail feathers rather than the voice.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Sandpiper (Scolopacidae)
SIZE	Length 23–28cm, wingspan 37–43cm
UK STATUS	Amber list

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