

Snipe, mis

A SPIRIT-SUGGESTING BIRD / SOUND

"As soon as the dark begins," said Thoreau, "you hear this peculiar spirit-suggesting sound...." He was writing about snipe winnowing in the air over Walden Pond, [] and he might have added that the sound is a wake-up call to nature. When snipe winnow, you can count on it that mayflies are hatching, trout are rising, pheasants are looking for spilled barley in the stubble, and deer are moving out of the brush. I would rather consort [] with these creatures than work for a living. When the spirit-suggestion comes to me through the screen door, it is time to chase the better things in life.

All things considered, I know too much about snipe. Once on a gray [] spring day I glimpsed one winnowing in Washington, D.C., and got claustrophobia for my pains. The bird was a quarter-mile away and I was in a plastic, climate-controlled world behind locked windows. I bought a sandwich and hiked to the Potomac River for my lunch. A run of white perch was swimming upstream within inches of the bank and my totem bird was still overhead, sending down the call. I spotted him (for he was almost certainly a male []) courting the clouds, then diving into sight, an arrowhead. The sound reached me after a moment's delay -- a fluttering of air channeled by rigid wings over two stiff, protruding tail-feathers. "Told you so," they tattled, and the perch splashed in their eagerness to be caught. I should have brought one of those collapsible fishing rods. Cars roared by on the Parkway. No one else in our nation's capital was getting the message.

According to my recent unscientific survey, 88.7% of all Americans believe snipe to be a figment, 6.3% are teen-agers [] who will spend one night next summer holding a gunny sack over the end of a culvert, and the rest of us are hunters who can't see the birds, let alone hit them. Snipe are perhaps the most widespread game birds [] in North America -- and for that matter the world -- but we have lost the knack of them. Upstanding male citizens even ask me what I was banging at, out in the swamp. This, mind you, is in Montana, where all upstanding male citizen are hunters, but they giggle when I tell them the truth. My devotion to the snipe becomes a burden.

[If I am obsolete, however,]

I knew a little about snipe before moving to Ireland and meeting Ned. They are perhaps, the most widely distributed game birds in North America and the world. I had shot at them east and west, but only when I stumbled into them. After that I hunted them north and south, because my job took me south of the equator. In Brazil, there were lots of snipe that had never been hunted. I educated them but they did not educate me. Ned did that.

Irish pheasants.

~~Had~~ just felt, I think,
that hunting was ~~was~~
done with a dog and
that any ^{proper} dog would
of course point.

Not needed a pointing
dog because he would not
move fast. But he would
have used one anyhow. He

Snipe - A different reality.

People don't believe in snipe

Snipe hunts - will o' the wisp.

I live among snipe. Hear them winnowing,
watch them swimming across my lawn, see
them sitting on a muddy point in the creek
behind the house.

It means, I suppose, that I live in a
different reality. ~~The public does not believe~~
More people believe in Santa Claus than
the Easter Bunny than snipe. We knew // green?
about snipe in America, once, & then forgot
about them — or worse, made them into
a cartoon character.

They don't believe in snipe anymore

NED'S WAY
By Datus Proper

SOME TIME AGO, I WAS MOVING around the continents so often that I would scarcely have known I'd touched the ground, except that there were always marshes near the airports, and in the marshes there were always snipe—the most widely distributed of the world's gamebirds. I was under the impression, therefore, that I knew something about the species even before my work took me to Ireland. There, I met Ned Maguire in his home at the foot of the Wicklow Mountains. Ned had things to teach me. Snipe were a destination for him, not a diversion. His was a boggy land, a state of wetness. What other nation would put a snipe on its coins? I think Ned saw the bird as a soul on wings, and the soul was Irish.

Ned was thin and fragile from his various operations. After I knew him awhile, my hand wanted to touch his skull—to remember its bony lines through my fingertips—though of course I did not do that. I wanted to learn the part of Ned that went beyond talking, beyond the smoky smell of his vintage tweed jacket. He knew everything that mattered. He could gauge worthless dogs within seconds and good ones within minutes. He could spot a fine old gun in the distance and tell me that the man carrying the gun did not deserve it. He was not the fount of all knowledge, exactly, but he specialized in its best parts, the relics that had come down from other old men forever. And it was Ned who showed me how snipe ought to be hunted.

We drove up into the hills. Midge, Ned's English setter, thumped her tail softly against the seat, her eyes burning bright, her body quiet. Midge lay still even when we pulled on our rubber boots and put our guns together. Then Ned gave a low command and she was off through the bog, hunting upwind, a white flash in the heather.

Too fast, I thought. She'll bounce every snipe off Calary Bog. But she didn't. She stopped all at once and lowered her body slowly, careful not to frighten the bird she had smelled. Setters were bred to drop like that, once upon a time, and Midge still had the knack. I would have rushed to her point, 300 yards away, but Ned could

not walk fast, and I kept pace with him. Midge did not twitch. Her snipe flushed to my side, squeaked 'escape,' and then did so. I opened my gun, removed two empty shells while they were still hot, and stood there, rueful.

Ned told me why I had missed. I had failed to get my head down on the stock, he said. It's a problem that people have with snipe. (I was glad that he did not narrow the people down to, say, one impetuous Yankee greenhorn.) Snipe are the same color as their marshes, by no coincidence, and they fly off low so that you cannot get them silhouetted against the sky. You lift your head for a better look, and that makes you shoot high.

We worked through more of the bog, stepping from tussock to tussock, and Ned lamented the scarcity of snipe. There used to be multitudes, he said. I guessed that he was talking about the years before World War II, which were as far back as I could imagine, but Ned had in mind an older set of good old days. He told me of a priest who had hunted Calary Bog in the 19th century, followed by a horse cart heavy with powder and shot. Ned showed me the book when we got back to his house. The priest had written that Saint Peter might chide him, when the time came, for not getting out snipe shooting more often.

Before we left the bog, however, Ned and I did shoot snipe, plural. I missed one while it was still twisting and squeaking 'escape,' then dropped it with my second barrel. Midge brought the bird to Ned and he rested it on his hand, the bird's long beak hanging down. He lifted a small feather and plucked it. That's the one I wanted for tying a fly, he said. He told me to have a half-dozen Snipe-and-Purples ready for next spring, when the squalls would come and brown trout would start taking iron blue duns. I should use a Partridge hook in true size 16, Ned said, with a body of Pearsall's silk and a few turns of the snipe's feather.

I listened. The advice was practical, thrifty. It was also the core of a good life: bog, setter, gun, snipe, dinner, river, squall, mayflies, trout, another dinner. The loop opened and closed, opened and closed, all within Ned's scope. He could have sent off for fantasy feathers from a catalog, like I do. Instead, he tied real things together. He did not explain. He just kept me standing there in the heather, dark clouds drifting in, and showed me how

12/92

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Please call Jean McEwen with corrections ASAP.
(800) 227-2224, ext. 5290 or (212) 779-5290

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Ned got the next snipe, followed by a duck from a tiny pond ~~that had~~ hidden in the heather. Midge even pointed the duck. Sometimes a snipe heard the setter coming and flushed before Midge got wind of it, but she felt bad about that. A hare scampered off and Midge raced to chase it, then looked back at Ned, who was frowning. Midge forgot about the hare.

I was relaxed when I moved up for the next point. Two snipe flushed but I concentrated on just one, lifting my gun slowly and squeezing the trigger when the muzzles passed the bird. The snipe collapsed, and there was still time to make the second shot count. I don't make doubles often on anything, let alone snipe.

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I did not worry about finding the downed birds, either. If you don't have a sharp dog, you must not let yourself think of doubles. You must keep your eye on a tuft where the snipe tumbled and head for it, unwavering. Otherwise, you lose your bird, which is a disgrace. We lost no birds with Midge.

A mist was drifting down from the clouds. I'd have called it rain but Ned ignored it, so I must have been wrong. We had flushed every snipe on Canary Bog by then, and most of them had flown to other marshes, far away. I thought we'd head for home but Ned told me to drive up the road. There was no point in asking for reasons because he was hard of hearing at any time, and deaf when he wanted to be. We drove till Midge had been blown dry by my car's heater, and then Ned told me to turn off the paved road. We pulled in between a hawthorn hedge and a boggy brook. Ned started peering under the hedge for firewood, groaning a little when he bent down. I got the message and rustled up sticks.

Ned built a fire—a fine hot blazing fire—which seemed to me miraculous, considering that rain had been falling every day for the last century. Then I sneaked up on the brook, scared some tiny trout, and dipped water. Ned boiled it in an old black billy can and dropped in a fistful of tea leaves. The tea was almost as black as the billy can. We poured the steaming brew into tin mugs, diluted it with milk, and drank

it right down to the leaves, by which time I had perceived that the contents of the clouds were, in fact, no more than mist and edging toward sunshine.

Ned removed our birds from the game pockets and laid them on the grass, which was dark green with tiny flowers between the blades. We took turns recounting the last seconds of each snipe's life as if we had not seen it clearly enough already. We gave structure to our memories, and though we did not actually deliver eulogies, we recalled the birds as individuals. Ned's was a jacksnipe, smaller than the rest. Mine were common snipe, exactly like the ones back home in America. (We do not have jacksnipe in America, though we use the term sometimes for decoration.)

Mind you, Ned's is not the only way of hunting snipe. It is not even the most efficient method, unless you have an exceptional dog. But Ned's way is the one that changed my thinking. He's gone now, and I have not been back to Ireland, but I still pour cups of black tea from my billy can, and I still offer toasts to bogs and dogs and birds and one skinny old Irishman.

I trust that Saint Peter is writing all this down.

About 1,825 words

First version - returned
for comparison.

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Belgrade. MT 59714
(406) 388-3345

NED'S WAY

My old friend taught me
how to hunt snipe

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Ned was thin and fragile from his various operations. I realized after I knew him awhile that my hand wanted to touch his skull -- to remember its bony lines through my fingertips -- though of course I did not do that. I wanted to learn the part of Ned that went beyond talking, beyond the smoky smell of his

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Too fast, I thought. She'll bounce every snipe off Calary Bog. But she didn't. She stopped all at once and lowered her body slowly, careful not to frighten the bird she had smelled. Setters were bred to drop like that, once upon a time, and Midge still had the knack. I would have rushed to her point, three hundred yards away, but Ned could not walk fast and I kept pace with him. Midge did not twitch. Her snipe flushed to my side, squeaked "Escape!", and did. I opened my gun, removed two empty shells while they were still hot, and stood there, rueful.

Ned told me why. I had failed to get my head down on the stock, he said. It's a problem that people have with snipe. (I was glad that he did not narrow the people down to, say, one impetuous Yankee greenhorn.) Snipe are the same color as their marshes, by no coincidence, and they fly off low so that you

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Before we left the bog, however, Ned and I did shoot snipe, plural. I missed one while it was still twisting and squeaking "'scape!", then dropped it with my second barrel. Midge brought the bird to Ned and he rested it on his hand, long beak hanging down. He lifted a small feather and plucked it. That's the one I wanted for tying a fly, he said. He told me to have a half-dozen Snipe-&-Purples ready for next spring, when the squalls would come and brown trout would start taking iron blue duns. I should use a Partridge hook in true size 16, Ned said, with a body of Pearsall's silk and a couple of turns of the snipe's feather.

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I was relaxed when I moved up for the next point. Two snipe flushed but I concentrated on just one, lifting my gun slowly and squeezing the trigger when muzzles passed bird. It collapsed and there was still time to make the second shot count. I don't make doubles often on anything, let alone snipe.

"You didn't waste time rushing," Ned said.

I did not worry about finding the downed birds, either. If you don't have a sharp dog, you must not let yourself think of doubles. You must keep your eye on a tuft where the snipe tumbled and head for it, unwavering. Otherwise you lose your bird, which is a disgrace. We lost no birds with Midge.

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Ned built a fire, a fine hot blazing fire, which seemed to me miraculous, considering that rain had been falling every day for the last century. Then I sneaked up on the brook, scared some tiny trout, and dipped water. Ned boiled it in an old black billy-can and dropped in a fistful of tea leaves. The tea was almost as black as the billy-can. We poured the steaming brew into tin mugs and diluted it with milk and drank it right down to the leaves, by which time I had perceived that the contents of the clouds were, in fact, no more than mist and edging toward sunshine.

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There were other hunting trips for Ned and me, but we never needed a horse-cart to carry our loads of snipe and ammunition. Perhaps he had been interested in big bags once upon a time, when he was young, but he did not admit to a change of heart. There is just no point in shooting many snipe, he explained, because freezing ruins them. I tried it to be sure, and of course Ned was right. Their fat goes rancid in the freezer, turning one of the tastiest of birds into a reproach. You have to shoot enough for a meal, hang them in a shady, breezy place, then pluck them and roast them when you're ready.

There is another thing that needs to be made clear. When I said that Ned showed me how snipe ought to be hunted, I did not mean that everyone ought to use a pointing dog. Unlike other game birds, snipe are adapted to thin ground cover -- often in marshes grazed by cattle -- and in such places they can be counted on to jump when you come within twenty or thirty yards. You don't need a dog to find game. A cautious pup like Midge can help you to prepare for the shot, but most pointers put the birds up out of range.

Usually, then, the most practical route to a snipe dinner is downwind -- breeze at your back -- in a good, wet bog. Your dog, if you have one, should stay at heel till released for retrieving, because the best of dogs working downwind would have little chance of smelling a snipe in time to point it. Birds will

flush toward you, into the breeze. Next they will make U-turns and be gone with the wind. During the pivot, a flash of pale under-wing feathers will help you to see what you are supposed to shoot at, and hitting it may be just a little easier.

No matter how you go about it, however, you have to work for a snipe dinner. You have to value the qualities that Ned was looking for. If a man in his condition could wobble through the marsh, I reckon that I can still hunt the way he showed me -- especially when there is a dog to train. A pup that learns to handle snipe has, for sure, a nose worth celebrating.

The toast afterwards is poured from a billy-can, of course, and offered to bogs and dogs and birds and one skinny old Irishman.

I hope that St. Peter is writing all this down.

* probably needs a short transition into the last 2 graphs

August 3, 1992

Mr. Duncan Barnes, Editor
Field & Stream
2 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Dear Duncan:

Here's the revised version of "Ned's Way." I prefer it. Had put a little more how-to-do-it in the original, at the expense of unity.

Send it back if it needs more work. I like to fiddle around.

Yours,

Enclosed: "Ned's Way"
Diskette

About 1,500 words
Revised August 3, 1992

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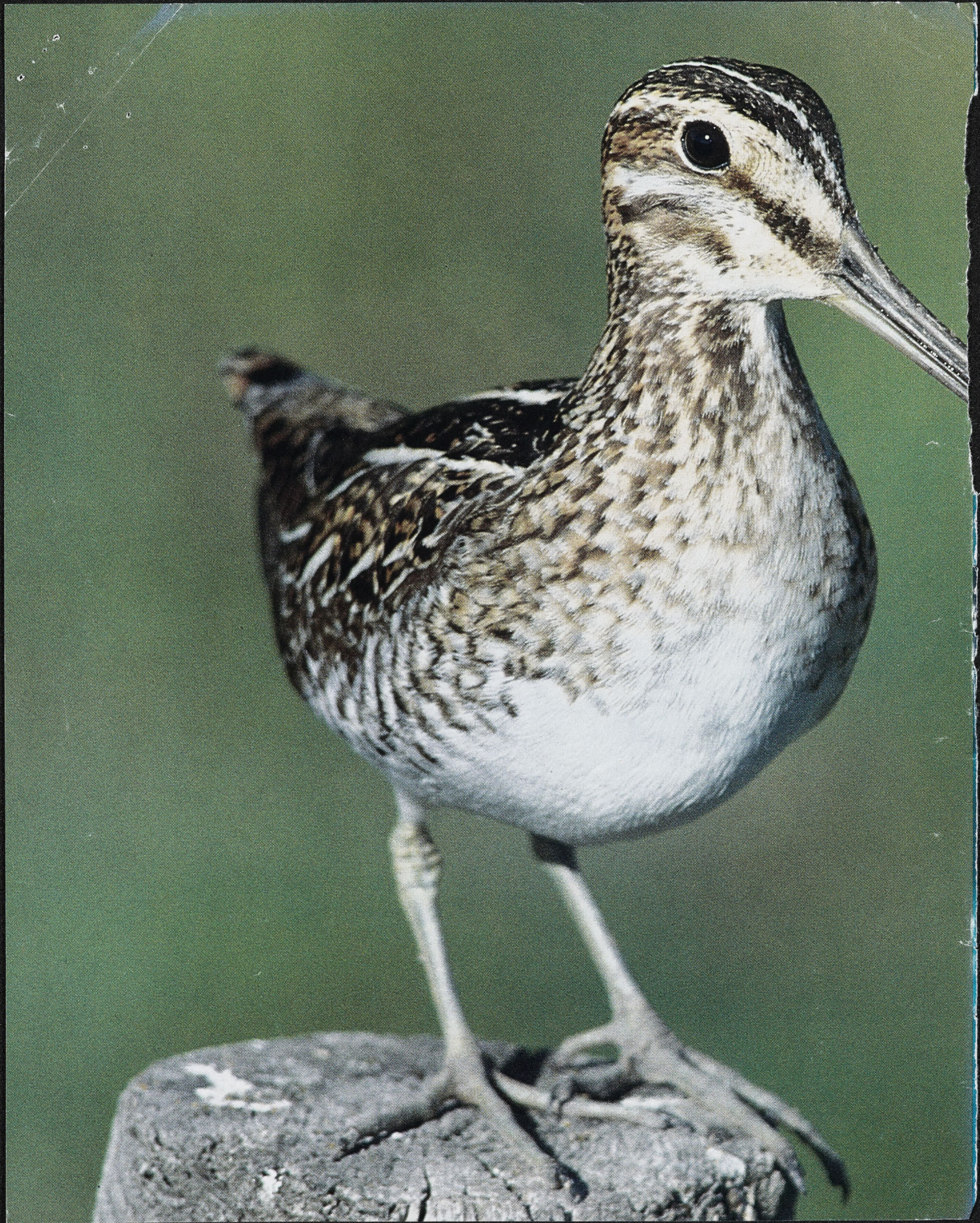
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application required a minimum of ten trees per block.

Undaunted, Kerzner canvassed the area and within months, he was enjoying the shade of 137 new trees in his old neighborhood. But that was only the beginning. With help from other volunteers, he went on to raise more than \$70,000 in the years that followed, and the result was some 3,500 new street trees were planted during that period in Queens.

New York City's fiscal crisis in the late 1970s put a halt to its tree-planting program. However, it didn't stop Kerzner, who by then had earned a degree from a local law school.

"I had noticed that after new trees were planted on a block, all of a sudden there was scaffolding going up, new cement work, people fixing up their houses," he says. "There were no block associations, no organized efforts. The only common component seemed to be tree planting." Kerzner surmised that for every \$1 that went into the planting of new trees, there was a \$10 investment in homeowner improvements.

Soon, he helped secure federal grant funds to improve neighborhoods with tree plantings. At local budget hearings, he promoted the ability of street trees to filter city air and help keep summer air-conditioning bills down by providing shade. He also spoke of their significance to real estate values and their aesthetic appeal. And, as an attorney working for Consolidated Edison, he became director of a company program designed to bring back failing neighborhoods by helping restore buildings and making affordable units available—a program that included street tree planting.

In all, the 39-year-old Kerzner has been instrumental in the planting of more than 9,000 new trees throughout Queens. Today, he owns a home on the same block where he grew up; the street has more than twice as many trees as it did when he was young, including a recently planted maple that rises up from the sidewalk in front of his house. You might say, commented Queens Borough President Claire Shulman last year, that "he's our own Johnny Appleseed."—Lisa Drew

Do you know individuals who have gone beyond the call of duty to protect wildlife or the environment? Tell us about them. Send their names, addresses and phone numbers (if possible), and any pertinent background information to: Mark Wexler, Editor, National Wildlife, 8925 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, Virginia 22184.



ROBERT HOLLAND

Miami letter writer Pat Suitor is one of some 31,000 Alliance members.

How you can make a difference

BY DAY, Pat Suitor teaches school in Miami, Florida. By night, she is a determined letter writer who doesn't hesitate to let politicians know when she is concerned about issues involving wildlife or the environment. Last year alone, she wrote dozens of letters to local and federal legislators.

"I'm just an ordinary citizen," says Suitor. "Anyone can do what I do—and everyone should. It's one way each of us can take an active role in influencing decisions that can affect our lives. I've learned that people in government do take letters from constituents seriously."

Suitor is one of more than 31,000 National Wildlife readers who take their letter writing seriously. As members of the National Wildlife Federation's Resource Conservation Alliance, they are making a demonstrated difference in influencing decisions about environmental legislation, wildlife and other natural resource matters in this country.

"The Federation created the Alliance in 1980 in response to the election of Ronald Reagan, and to fears that the environment would take a back seat to economic development in the United States," says Sharon Newsome, NWF's acting vice president for resources conservation. "We had no idea how truly effective the effort would be."

Through regular "Action Alerts," the Federation's Legislative Affairs staff lets Alliance members know about important issues in federal agencies and Congress, and what they might do to help influence administrators and lawmakers. Twice each month, Alliance members also receive Conservation


89, a publication that offers more information about those issues.

"The Alliance not only has become the largest conservation network of its kind in this country, but also more of our members write when asked than any other conservation group," notes David Michaud, a NWF membership action coordinator. "And they tend to react quickly to our alerts."

A 1980 independent study revealed that senators and congressmen consider the mail they receive in their Washington, D.C., offices to be the most important means of communication with constituents. And the Alliance efforts seem to bear that out.

Last summer, for example, conservationists learned of some behind-the-scenes bargaining by members of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee that would seriously erode local control over billboard size and visual pollution. The proposal, which included an amendment to the Highway Beautification Act, never got off the ground. Reason: committee members were deluged with mail from the Alliance. "Those letters definitely helped kill the plan," says Hal Hiemstra, a legislative analyst for the Coalition for Scenic Beauty. "They let committee members know there are citizens out there watching what they do."

If you receive National Wildlife, you can become an Alliance member free of charge. Just send a note, along with your magazine mailing label (if possible), to: Resource Conservation Alliance, National Wildlife Federation, 1400 Sixteenth St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036-2266.



NEVER SNICKER AT A SNIPE

*Though people poke fun
at the common snipe, there is nothing silly
about the behavior
of this remarkable game bird*

By Douglas Chadwick

YOU KNOW what a snipe is, don't you? To French farmers, the bleating bird is *le chevre celeste*—the “celestial goat”—while to Eskimos, it's *avikiak*, which means walruslike. To Swedes, the snipe is the whinnying horse of the air, and elsewhere, the snipe is the storm-bringer.

No, I'm not trying to take you on a word-lover's version of a wild goose chase. And I wouldn't dream of leading you on that summer-camp prank, the snipe hunt: the trek to the boondocks, with a naive newcomer

Probing personality: a common snipe's long bill is perfect for poking into marsh mud, with a flexible upper half that helps the bird pluck insects from below ground. For many people, the snipe is an almost mythical bird—the elusive quarry of summer-camp hunts in the night.

carrying a bag he's been told is just the thing for nabbing one of these mysterious creatures; and then the butt of the joke realizing he has been left in the woods at night—alone, lost, feeling like a chump, and maybe even bleating like a snipe.

No, my intentions are honorable. I mean to introduce an authentic but no less mysterious creature—the bird with the “singing” feathers.

Snipe, from the Old English *snyte* or *snite*, is the name for 18 very real species of birds. Our North American representative, long known as Wilson's snipe, was reclassified not long ago and is now considered a race of the common snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*. The species breeds throughout the northern hemisphere and winters in the subtropics, touching every continent except Australia and Antarctica.

Although *gallinago* means chick-

enlike, or fowl-like, the common snipe is a long-billed, long-legged wader belonging to the sandpiper family. On the other hand, this marsh-and-bog-loving bird does taste at least as delicious as chicken. Ask a sniper—as snipe hunters were originally known. The common snipe, in fact, is the only North American shorebird besides the closely related woodcock that is managed as a game species.

It's odd that a bird as widespread and abundant as the common snipe has always been surrounded by an air of mystery. This



The narrow ends of four mottled snipe eggs (above) tend to point inward, thus keeping the eggs safely inside the nest. A hatchling peers from beneath its mother (opposite). Snipe parents often divide a brood, caring for chicks separately.

is partly because the snipe's prime breeding grounds lie beyond the northern fringe of most human settlement, in the peaty bogs and fens of subarctic spruce forests. I have even seen them in tundra at the very edge of the Arctic ice pack. And in areas where snipes do nest farther south, as in the beaver-dammed marshes around my Montana cabin, their secretive, largely solitary ways still make them hard to get to know.

To begin with, these slim, jaysize birds prefer swampy ground with dense cover rather than such typical shorebird habitat as open beaches or river banks. Further, snipes usually land by flying straight into a tangle of vegetation, where they instantly disappear. When disturbed, they crouch motionless, their brown and white stripes blending into the general pattern of grass and sedge stalks. On top of all this camouflage, the common snipe has large eyes that are placed far toward the rear of its head. Thus, the bird can see what is going on directly behind itself while facing forward—and thus hardly anyone sneaks up on a snipe. If you do somehow creep close enough to tell bird from bog, the snipe usually flushes with a startling rasping cry—"sca-a-aip"—while rising on a zig-zag course of evasion that can build to a speed exceeding 60 miles per hour.

That razzle-dazzle blast-off is fairly effective for confusing the snipe's chief

predators, marsh hawks and other birds of prey. The snipe's tricky exit also makes the bird one of the most challenging targets imaginable for sportsmen. But sometimes snipes compound the confusion: instead of rocketing skyward, they dive underwater, stroking away with their strong tapered wings, much as penguins do.

Perhaps the snipe's strangest aspect is the sound it sends forth throughout the spring breeding season, particularly in the half-light of dawn and dusk. A hollow, haunting, disembodied sort of tune made during flight, it carries a remarkably long distance—like the voice of the walrus, *avik*, across the icefields; hence the snipe's Eskimo name *avikiak*. Farm folk in Europe tended to hear the sound as a goatlike bleating, which spawned the French peasant's *le chevre celeste*. The naturalist Henry David Thoreau wrote of Massachusetts snipes in spring that "persons walking up and down our village in still evenings at this season hear the singular winnowing sound in the sky over the meadows and know not what it is."

This "spirit-suggesting sound," as Thoreau also called it, is heard as the snipe drops through the air in a wide spiraling dive. But how is the sound produced? Are those tremulous snipe notes sung? Could they be some effect of air rushing by the bird's open mouth? Do they arise from vibrations of the wings? The snipe debate set nineteenth-century naturalists to whirling feathers on the ends of strings and puffing at stuffed birds through blowpipes.

But it was not until 1907 that the Englishman Philip Manson-Bahr peered through a microscope at the common snipe's outer tail feathers and noticed extra hooks holding the filaments in place. These hooks, he correctly reasoned, help keep the feather edge taut enough to oscillate like a plucked bowstring in the rush of air. As a snipe dives, its two outermost tail feathers separate from the others and are spread to either side. There, almost perpendicular to the body, the feathers begin to hum.

The snipe's wings quiver as well—but not to make sound, as was first suspected. Instead, the wings help control the amount of air streaming over the two musical tail feathers; otherwise, the tail feathers might fray from the force of air passing over them.

The snipe's tail feathers "sing" at air speeds of from 25 to 50 miles per hour. As the bird dives, plummeting faster and faster, the notes rise in pitch. Then the



snipe pulls out, strokes back up to a higher altitude, and repeats its musical performance.

Although these territorial display flights normally take place during morning or evening twilight, they may be seen and heard at odd intervals throughout the day when barometric pressure is falling. This is how the common snipe earned such titles as "storm-bringer" and "rain-bird." Yet for people familiar with snipe habits, the bird can predict fair weather as well, since it begins to display at much higher altitudes as a high-pressure system arrives.

Of course these tuneful flights that so mystified early scientists and that still tell tales about the weather are actually meant for wooing females. After a female snipe has been attracted to a male's territory and has mated with him, she builds a shallow nest from bog debris, often sphagnum moss. For extra concealment she may



beak from the ground? As it turns out, a snipe can flex the very tip of its upper mandible—the top half of the bill—curving it back to make a pincer that grabs and tears. From there, a long tongue with bristles at its base helps work food up the still-buried beak.

Juvenile snipe begin to fly after three weeks and reach adult size seven to eight weeks after hatching. Although adults are seldom very sociable and show aggressive displays when crowded together, the young begin to flock together in late summer, sometimes forming groups of 200 or more in preparation for the fall migration. By October, most common snipe have reached their wintering grounds. For our North American race, that means marshlands of the southeastern United States, as well as of Mexico, Central America and the West Indies, with some populations continuing on as far as Venezuela.

It has been estimated that in the old days, American hunters may have harvested more snipe than any other game bird, including waterfowl. In 1867, one Louisiana plantation owner, a certain J.J. Pringle, set up “sniperies”—hunting camps run by freed slaves. Over the next 20 years, Pringle personally shot 78,602 snipe, according to his own careful records. One year, he averaged 158 snipe per day, hunting with a double-barreled muzzle-loader, a dog, a wagon and a servant to keep track of kills.

In our own time of seasons and bag limits, the welfare of snipe populations has been tied to habitat changes, not hunting. Key winter range has been lost in a number of regions where the birds are found. For example, in the Bahamas, snipe have gone from being the most popular game bird to a rare visitor. However, in other places, notably Louisiana and Florida, conversion of low-lying savannas to flooded ricefields has partially offset the widespread draining and filling of natural swampy areas formerly used by snipe.

Overall, the common snipe remains in good health as a species. Bleating goats and whinnying horses may never really learn to fly, and summer-camp first-timers may still end up holding the empty bag on snipe hunts. But with luck—and with good wetland conservation—we will always hear the twilight sky come alive with the singing feathers of a most common, yet most unusual bird. ■

Montana writer-biologist Douglas H. Chadwick sometimes savors snipe music from his cabin near Glacier National Park.

loosely weave overhanging plant stems into a canopy. The usual nest holds four eggs which are mottled brown and olive with occasional flecks of lilac.

While both sexes will put on a dramatic wing-flopping show, feigning injury to draw predators away from the nesting area, the male plays no role in brooding. However, toward the end of the 18-to-20-day incubation period, as the young at last begin breaking out of their shells, father snipe arrives at the nest's edge, attracted by his offsprings' peeping. The male then leads off one or, more often, two of the earliest hatchlings and rears them himself a short distance away from the female and remaining chicks.

Why the two-household family? Because developing snipes, in order to fit inside the egg, come with a bill that is quite short compared to the two-and-a-half inch probing tool of the adult. As a result, the chicks must be fed for a longer

period than are most other, typically precocious shorebird offspring. During this vulnerable time, the snipe's unique parenting style of dividing up the young presumably reduces the risk of losing the entire brood to a predator.

Once its bill grows, a snipe's feeding technique is nearly as curious as its mating call. Plunging the closed bill to the hilt in mud and muck, the bird searches for fly larvae—those of the crane fly are its staple—along with other insects, small crustaceans, snails, earthworms, leeches and occasional larger prey such as amphibians. (John James Audubon, in 1861, was the first to describe snipe food habits, saying the bird ate “groundworms, insects, and the juicy slender roots of vegetables, all of which tend to give its flesh that richness of flavor and tenderness for which it is so deservedly renowned.”)

But how does the bird manage to eat its morsels without removing its long tubular



WARNING!

**EATING THESE FISH COULD
BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH**

Not really supernatural,
I suppose. Right supinate,
+ high intensity.

Skib happens in early Sept,
sometimes, but not of much
help to a hunter.

Not woodscock (from McLean)

Hold in the brush, sometimes.
Reese Creek.

Not Maguire + Settle
skinning a snake.

Swipe have a great old
literature — older than
roasted grouse

Suipa

Hard thing about
hitting them is seeing
them. I know that 'it'
a suipa, always - escape-escape
- + glimpse it vaguely,
till ~~my eye~~ I have to
see down over Ianch.

Snipe (woodcock)

Nice thing about
snipe is that they
don't taste like the
place they live. Ducks
do. Trout do. Snipe
live in the same fen
and are delicious.

Winning

According to a recent unscientific poll, 88.7% of all Americans do not believe that snipe exist, 6.3% are teenagers who will spend one night next summer ~~and~~ holding a gunny sack over the end of a culvert, and the rest of ~~the~~ us are gunners who can't hit the things.

(Never the less they've grown smarter since the last 100[?] years. Like old second.)

Size

Title - "A spirit-suggesting Sound"
Bird

Swipe

"... as soon as the dark begins... you
hear this peculiar spirit-suggesting
sound...."

Thoreau, Walden

p. 75 - big shrikebird look.

Swipe. Not jacksnipe (exp.), not
Wilson's snipe. Common snipe OK
but sounds insulting.

Most efficient

~~Best~~ way to hunt snipe is like Thornton -
w/ dog at heel. (He uses better; today a lab.)

Most exciting way is w/ a pointing dog.
He won't hold them - just show you where
they are. They have a strong smell, &
dog w/ decent nose will often point from
far away. (Maybe dogs are good for smell,
too).

How strong? Like Huckle pointing from
paced 300 yards. Maybe a flick of smell.
Maybe pointing shows no a 1/2 per cent of
snipe had been there - but not likely,
in winter. I'm not telling the story
because it makes sense but because it
doesn't, and it happens.

~~Don't~~ W: now: my snipe = rising trout.

The ~~gosh~~ giant snipe in Bog: 1.

Sarge n Woodward -

"Birds of section" (Thomson)