

GREAT SNIPE | *Gallinago media*

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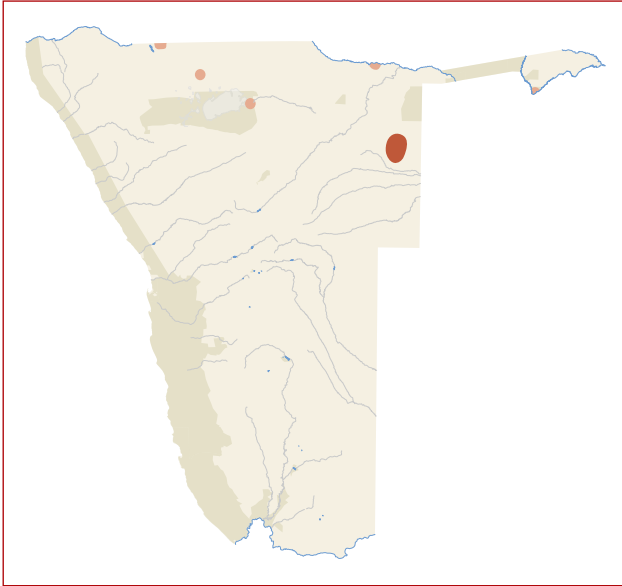
Conservation Status:	Near Threatened
Southern African Range:	Northern Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique
Area of Occupancy:	4,000 km ²
Population Estimate:	Fewer than 200 individuals
Population Trend:	Declining
Habitat:	Grassy lake edges, marshes, grasslands
Threats:	Loss of breeding and wintering habitat due to agriculture and draining of wetlands



DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

This migrant breeds in two separate areas and consists of a western population in Scandinavia, and an eastern population that extends from Poland to western Siberia (Kålås 2004). The global population numbers between 500,000 and 1,050,000 individuals (IUCN 2012a). The Great Snipe spends its entire non-breeding period in sub-Saharan Africa. In southern Africa it is mostly restricted

to northern Namibia, where it has occupies an area of roughly 4,000 km², and Botswana, Zimbabwe and central Mozambique, with scattered records from southern and eastern South Africa (Hockey & Tree 2005). It has become increasingly rare in southern Africa, particularly in South Africa, with a northward shift into Zimbabwe since 1955 (Hockey 1997, Hockey & Tree 2005). Few birds have been recorded from Namibia (Hockey *et al.* 1986) where it co-occurs with the Ethiopian Snipe *G. longipennis* (Maclean



1997e) in ephemeral wetlands. Fewer than 200 birds are likely to be present in Namibia at any one time, but may be locally common at the Nyae Nyae Pans when they are partly flooded after good rains (Komen 1988, Hines 1993), with up to 30 birds being counted in an afternoon, together with both African Snipe *G. nigripennis* and Greater Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* (Hines 1989). They have also been recorded as rare on the ‘Pannetjies Veld’ wetlands of Bushmanland and on perched wetlands alongside the Okavango River in the Mahango area of the Bwabwata National Park (Hines 1989). There are records from the Rundu Sewage work (Ryan 1987c), from Fischer’s Pan in Etosha National Park and from Lake Oponono in north-central Namibia (CJ Brown pers. obs.). Numbers might be under-reported because its cryptic plumage and behaviour can make it difficult to detect, particularly in dense ground vegetation.



ECOLOGY

The Great Snipe currently holds the world record for the fastest non-stop long-distance flight, after a tracked individual covered nearly 7,000 km in 84 hours without resting, thanks to its ability to nearly double its weight before starting its migration (Klaassen *et al.* 2011). It leaves its breeding grounds from early August (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996), arrives in southern Africa between September and November, and departs again in March (Hockey & Douie 1995). In southern Africa, it usually occurs singly or in small scattered flocks (Hockey & Tree 2005), where it frequents sedge marshes, short grass on lake edges, abandoned fields, golf courses, sports fields and drier grasslands (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). It probes soft mud or pecks at the surface for worms, gastropods, insect larvae, crustaceans and occasionally feeds on seeds of marsh plants (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Hockey & Tree 2005).



THREATS

The Great Snipe has fairly specific habitat and food requirements (Løfaldli *et al.* 1992, Kålås *et al.* 1997). The loss of breeding habitat and resultant contraction of its range, particularly in Russia and Ukraine, due to agricultural expansion and draining of wetlands (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Kålås *et al.* 1997) probably poses the greatest threat to the species. Its northward range contraction in southern Africa is probably linked to the draining of wetlands and to wetland siltation caused by soil erosion due to poor land management (Zaloumis & Milstein 1975, Hockey & Tree 2005). It is hunted in parts of its non-breeding range (Stattersfield & Capper 2000, Debayle 2003), but this is unlikely to occur in Namibia. Global climate is predicted to impact parts of its breeding range (Kålås 2004) and may reduce its incidence in southern Africa further, as projected declines in rainfall (Midgley *et al.* 2001) would decrease the availability of flooded ephemeral wetlands (Simmons *et al.* 2004).



CONSERVATION STATUS

The rapid decline of the population between the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century (Kålås 2004), coupled with the species’ breeding range contraction and disappearance from much of Europe caused it to be categorised as globally *Near Threatened* (IUCN 2012a). Although its western breeding population appears to be stabilising, the eastern population continues to decline (Kålås 2004). Despite being a relatively rare visitor to Namibia, its global conservation status and decline in southern Africa during the last century justifies its local listing of *Near Threatened*. The species is listed in Annex 2 of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), in Appendix II of the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and needs to be accorded *Specially Protected* status under Namibian Parks and Wildlife legislation.



ACTIONS

An international single species action plan, with the aim of improving the Great Snipe’s conservation status and improve knowledge about this species, lists a number of conservation management recommendations (Kålås 2004). The action plan specifically considers countries where the Great Snipe breeds, but also takes countries visited during migration into account, including Namibia. Recommendations detailed for southern Africa include the maintenance or enhancement of key habitats, the mapping of the distribution and determination of population size, as well as the monitoring on wintering habitat use and diet. The action plan identifies the Bushmanland (Tsumkwe) Pan System as a key Important Bird Area (IBA) for the Great Snipe in Namibia. A monitoring programme should be established for this IBA, with emphasis placed on a number of Red Data species, including the Great Snipe.