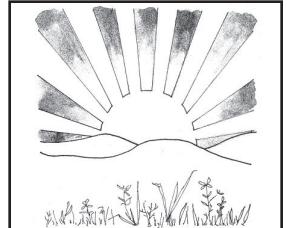
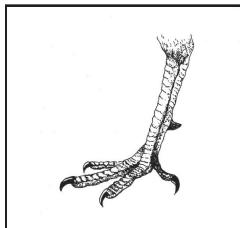
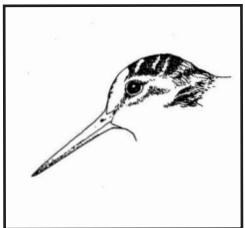
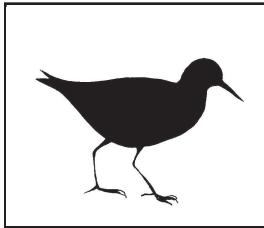


Snipe & Woodcock

Order Charadriiformes
Family Scolopacidae



American Woodcock

Scolopax minor



Snipe

Gallinago gallinago

Woodcocks and snipes belong to the same order as plovers, sandpipers and seagulls. Their plumage is a deep rust and brown with tan breast, back and sides that are mottled with black and browns. **A distinct field mark for the woodcock is a barred head crown** going across their head, **while the snipe has stripes atop its head** going in the same direction as the bill. Their tails are short and their wings rounded. They only stand about five inches high and could be described as chunky, though the snipe is slightly more slender. **Females of both species are slightly larger than males.**

Their long, slender bills are designed to find earthworms. About 2-2 1/2 inches in length, the lower end of the bill is filled with nerve-endings that help the birds “feel” the worms moving through the soil. Special bones in the bill allow them to flex open the tips of their bill underground, while a long, rough tongue enables them to pull the slimy earthworm up out of the soil.

Their eyes are placed on the side of their head, away from their bill. This enables them to keep alert for danger while their bill is down in the soil. Eyesight and hearing are excellent. Their ears are unusual - the openings are placed between the eyes and the bill.

Woodcocks are verbal birds, establishing “singing ground” territories in spring. These sites are clearcuts in wooded lots with lots of low brush. From early March through mid-May males call a nasal “**peent**” from the ground and use their high spiraling maneuvers and warbling calls to attract a mate.

Also known as timberdoodles, they put on an amazing aerial display at dusk, flying upward about 300 feet and then spiraling back down toward the earth while releasing a loud warbling call.

Snipes also climb high into the sky and then dive down with their spread-wings and tail creating a **hu hu hu sound as they descend.** When disturbed, snipes give a rasping call as they erratically flee. They then level off at speeds of up to 60 mph.

The habitat needs of these birds vary with the seasons. In spring they need clearcuts near wooded areas with long grassy runways for their aerial flights. **Nesting cover** must include thicket edges, old brushy fields or clumps of young evergreens. Shrubby areas near springs, marshes or streams provide the moist soil they need for feeding and higher, dryer ground nearby provides a safe place for roosting.

Woodcock nests are simply a dent in the ground with a cushion of dead leaves. Sometimes camouflaged with twigs or pine needles, the site is difficult to find. About four eggs complete a clutch. The eggs are smooth and buff colored with dark blotching or speckling. At about three weeks the **eggs hatch by splitting length-wise – a feature unique to woodcocks.** The chicks are **precocial** and able to follow the hen immediately after drying. Still, like most precocial birds, the hen will brood the chicks with her wings or body in poor weather or when danger is nearby. Within a month of hatching the chick are full-grown and can fly. Woodcocks usually only raise one brood of chicks each year, unlike many songbirds which may raise two to three, so anything that threatens their populations cause lead to a quick decline in their numbers.

Snipes also nest on the ground, but prefer the edge of a bog. Their small cup-shaped nest is lined with grasses. It may be placed down into sphagnum moss and may have a canopy of plants hiding it. After the eggs have hatched **the male and female may split up the precocial chicks and each take several birds to care for.** Snipe are not as common in Pennsylvania as woodcocks and may only nest in the northern portions of the state.

A Simple Review of Snipes & Woodcocks

Snipes and woodcocks are **odd-looking round-shaped** birds found in moist fields and meadows. Their **long bills** slightly widen at their tip and are **designed to probe into soft soil in search of earthworms.** Both are beautifully suited for life on the ground with mottled brown and white plumage helping them camouflage against fallen leaves, upturned soil and various kinds of vegetation.



The **common snipe** puts on a wonderful aerial show during courtship. It's called **winnowing**. The bird circles high into the air, circling as it falls back down toward earth. As it dives a whistling sound is produced as air passes through its short tail feathers.

When snipes raise their young, the **male takes care of the first two eggs that hatch, while the female takes care of the last two hatched eggs**.

The **American woodcock** looks similar to the snipe except the woodcock has black barring across the top of its head from side to side (sort of like a small stack of wood). The snipe has dark barring across the top of its head from front to back. **Both have very large round eyes**. Woodcocks prefer open woodlands a bit more than snipes. Both can be found in damp, overgrown meadows.

When the **woodcock calls** it sounds a bit like a flying nighthawk – kind of a **nasal-like "peent."** Woodcocks are **also known as timberdoodles** and like the snipe, put on an aerial show during breeding season. They are most active at dawn and dusk. This is called being **crespuscular** (rather than diurnal or nocturnal). When their **eggs hatch, they split lengthwise** from end to end. Most other bird eggs hatch open in the middle.