

# THE SNIPE HUNTERS GUIDE

## A Manual for Hunt Masters and Unindicted Co-Conspirators

### THE QUARY

This (fig 1) is the Common Snipe. Snipes are little shore birds with small brains and long beaks. Snipe habitat ranges from the forests and marshlands of Canada and



Fig 1

Alaska, through Central America and northern South America.

Snipes do not, as far as we know, communicate with human beings at all, nor do they have any recognition or facility with human speech. Therefore we may assume that they would take no offense at being called *common*. For that matter, they would probably not object to being called chrysanthemums or fire trucks.

Nevertheless, the term sounds somewhat pejorative and out of kindness, sensitivity and the good manners instilled in all of us since birth, we shall refrain from calling them common and refer to them instead in this discussion as “The Snipe of Frequent Occurrence” (SOFO).

SOFOs feed primarily on insects and small aquatic animals as well as plant material but will consume large quantities of pasta salad, cheetos, copper wire, or Styrofoam where obtainable.

Plumage varies with the season but is most commonly distributed through shades of gray and brown interspersed with black and white. Young snipes have light yellow down feathers which darken in adulthood

The beak of the SOFO is almost as long as its body and is used alternately as a rake, comb or spear in foraging for food.

While it might be used as a defensive weapon in desperation, there are no reported human casualties from attack by snipes.

### HABITAT

SOFOs are migratory and are seen in North America mostly in the fall and winter months. For the snipe this is a time of feeding and foraging in preparation for the long flight north to the summer breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska.



### THE HUNT

Snipe hunting is a traditional practice of obscure origin. Why one might choose to hunt a snipe is a mystery. They are neither a challenging game animal nor a highly valuable food source. The practice appears to have developed as a rite of passage in the

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transition from human childhood to adult society.

The hunt site must be carefully chosen. A location away but not too distant from populated areas must be selected in advance. Naturally, the site must be near water. Snipe hunting can only be done at dusk when the snipes are susceptible to the subtle subterfuge of the traps and calls.

In preparation for the hunt, the chosen initiates are issued traditional snipeing gear. (fig2) This consists of a *croaker sack*, (known as a burlap bag to those given to less picturesque speech) and a flail.

In modern times, due to the diminishing availability of authentic croaker sacks, this is sometimes replaced with a standard size grocery store paper bag.



Fig 2

The flail is very important and must be carefully prepared. A skinned willow branch not less than 3/16 inches in diameter is best but other materials may be used by special dispensation at the discretion of the Hunt Master.

The hunting party is lead to the staging area and arranged at a minimum distance from one another (preferably out of line of sight to enhance isolation and anxiety). The Hunt Master then instructs the members of the hunting party to beat vigorously upon the

snipe trap (sack) with the flail while vocalizing their best snipe call. It is best to spend some time coaching these calls before (with seeming reluctance) asking the initiate to simply chant the word "snipe"

at a high volume, pausing only for breath. Each hunter's bag beating technique should be carefully evaluated and corrected if necessary with great care. The hunt party should be informed that slowed, inconsistent, or arrhythmic bag beating will not only fail to attract snipes, but may also unintentionally call "wrong prey" such as bats, snakes and alligator snapping turtles.

When the hunt team has been fully prepared and stationed, the Hunt Master leaves the hunt area and waits out of sight but within audible range of the hunt site. This is the most difficult part of the hunt for the Hunt Master because some initiates may be very patient, very trusting, or have a very high tolerance for boredom. The Hunt Master must listen carefully to the calls of the hunters and be on alert for any screaming or other sounds of distress which could indicate the acquisition of wrong prey or other injury.

The hunt terminates when night falls or when the patience of the last remaining hunter (or the Hunt Master himself) has been exhausted. It may be necessary for the Hunt Master to return to the site to retrieve particularly tenacious (or easily entertained) members of the hunting party.

### THE SNIPE COUNT

This process generally takes no time at all.

### DEBRIEFING

Possible reasons for the record low snipe count of this hunt are examined in this phase. Problems of technique and strategy are discussed. It is also traditional at this point to remind the hunting party of the relatively low intelligence of the snipe, and then to call forth the inevitable comparison with the relative intelligence of the Snipe Hunter.