

Snipe — Kulic'kiiq

KULIC'KIIT MIKTUT, KESIIN PITURNIRTUT. – SNIPES ARE SMALL BUT THEY TASTE GOOD.



Photo: Common Snipe, coastal Alaska. Courtesy of the USF&WS National Digital Library.

The common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) is a shorebird found around Kodiak's grassy coastal meadows, ponds, and fields during summer. This member of the sandpiper family breeds yearly across northern North America, then heads south to winter in warmer climates.

A small bird, snipes have a long, straight bill designed for pursuing shellfish, insects, and worms in the mud. Mottled brown plumage keeps the shy snipe camouflaged. However, snipes will flush when approached and fly in a zigzag pattern to escape predators. This makes them hard to harvest.

Alutiiq Elders report hunting snipes at low tide in the nighttime. People approach the birds on sandbars, using a spray of pellets from a shotgun to bring down the darting snipes and harvest a number of animals at once. Rather than pluck snipes, people skin them and add their small bodies to soups and stews. They are also tasty roasted.

Harvesting small birds may seem like a lot of work for a small return, but it is a common practice in the Arctic. Like collecting shellfish, or fishing for herring, people take advantage of the abundance of food represented in many small packages to create nourishing meals. This is a strategy many societies use, particularly when large animals like seals or caribou are hard to harvest or not available.