



## Chatham Island snipe *Coenocorypha pusilla*

20 cm

CHATHAM ISLANDS ENDEMIC, RANGE RESTRICTED



Chatham Island snipe,  
Rangatira.  
Photo: Colin Miskelly.



### Identification

The Chatham Island snipe is a small squat bird with a long bill, and rich dappled brown, rust and black plumage. The lower breast and belly are pale and unmarked. Snipe are usually seen as singles or pairs, quietly probing for invertebrates on the forest floor. When startled, they erupt into flight with whirring wings, but generally do not fly far.

### Distribution and ecology

The different forms of New Zealand snipe were formerly distributed throughout New Zealand and the Chatham Islands, but are now confined to remote islands free of introduced mammal predators. Chatham Island snipe are currently restricted to Rangatira, Mangere, Tapuaenuku, and Star Keys, but are occasionally seen on Pitt Island. The total population is estimated to be about 1000 pairs. Snipe inhabit a wide range of vegetation types, including forest, scrub and tussock. They prefer sites with moist soils and dense ground cover, as all food is obtained by probing. The two well-camouflaged eggs are laid in September–March in a nest constructed among dense vegetation on or near the ground. Chicks leave the nest on the day of hatching; the brood is split between the parents, who each feed one chick until it becomes independent.



Chatham Island snipe at  
nest, Mangere, October  
1980.  
Photo: Rod Morris (DOC).

Zealand and many offshore islands, including Chatham Island. Rat invasion of their remaining island habitats is the greatest ongoing threat to snipe populations in the Chatham Islands.

The protection of Rangatira and Mangere as Nature Reserves, the removal of stock, and the implementation of quarantine measures to prevent the arrival of mammalian predators to the islands, have all benefited snipe. In the 1980s there were two attempts to establish Chatham Island snipe in captivity at the National Wildlife Centre, Mount Bruce. Eggs and live birds were both transferred. However,



Chatham Island snipe chick,  
Rangatira, February 2004.  
Photo: Don Merton.

problems were experienced getting the birds to eat artificial food, and none survived to breed.

In the future it is intended that snipe be established on Pitt Island, inside the predator-proof fence built at Ellen Elizabeth Preece Conservation Covenant.

In the long term other predator-free sites may be created in the Chatham Islands, allowing snipe to be returned to more of their historic range. Chatham Island snipe may also be used to replace the extinct North Island snipe at predator-free sites.



Juvenile Chatham Island  
snipe, Rangatira, January  
1984. Photo: Colin Miskelly.