



TASMANIAN THREATENED SPECIES LISTING STATEMENT

Gallinago hardwickii

Latham's snipe

Gallinago hardwickii © Peter Allen

- Scientific name:** *Gallinago hardwickii* (Gray 1831)
- Common name:** Latham's snipe, Japanese snipe, New Holland snipe, Australian snipe
- Previous names:** *Capella hardwickii*
- Group:** Vertebrate animal, Class bird, Family Scolopacidae
- Status:** *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995: Vulnerable (2025)*
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999: Vulnerable (2024)
IUCN Red List: Near threatened (2022)
- Distribution:** Biogeographic origin: **Not endemic to Tasmania**
 Tasmanian NRM Region: **North, South, Cradle Coast**
 Tasmanian IBRA region: **Central Highlands, Northern Midlands, Northern Slopes, South East, Southern Ranges, Ben Lomond, West, Furneaux, King.**

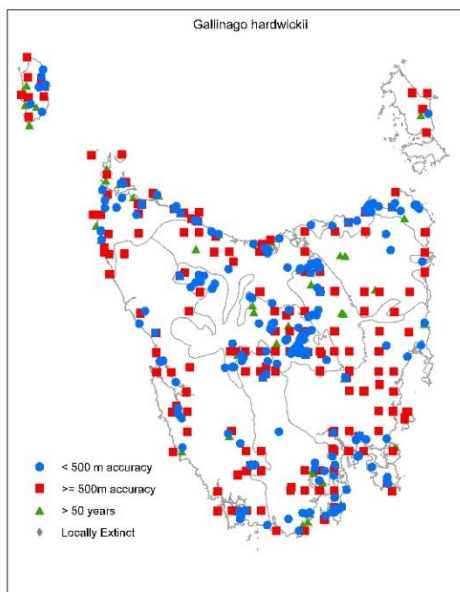


Figure 1. The distribution of *Gallinago hardwickii*, showing IBRA regions (from Natural Values Atlas), within Tasmania.



Plate 1. *Gallinago hardwickii* © Peter Vaughan

SUMMARY: Latham's snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) is a migratory shorebird which breeds in Japan and far eastern Russia in the boreal summer before migrating to southeastern Australia for the boreal winter. A proportion of the population migrates to Tasmania. Latham's snipe is a medium-sized shorebird, with cryptic brown plumage, a long, straight bill, a long tail and short legs. Latham's snipe is the largest of three snipe species in Australia, and the only snipe species to spend its non-breeding season in Tasmania. Latham's snipe typically uses thickly vegetated freshwater and brackish wetlands although it may occur in a range of other habitat types. Within Tasmania, the species is generally widely dispersed in low numbers but may occur in larger numbers (>100 birds) where habitat is suitable. The species has likely undergone a decline of over 30 percent over the last three generations, attributed primarily to loss of wetland habitat throughout the species' range resulting from direct human activity, and as a result of climate change.—. The primary conservation objectives for species in Tasmania are the management and protection of key habitats.

This Listing Statement was informed by the Commonwealth Conservation Advice for *Gallinago hardwickii* (Latham's snipe) (DCCEEW 2024). Specific information regarding the Tasmanian context has been added to supplement the information of the Conservation Advice.

IDENTIFICATION AND ECOLOGY

Latham's snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) is a medium sized shorebird, and the largest snipe species in Australia. Latham's snipe has a long, straight bill, short, broad and pointed wings, and thick yellow-brown legs. Adults are 29–33 cm long, have a wingspan of 50–54 cm, and weigh 150–230 g (Frith et al. 1977).

Latham's snipe has cryptic, predominantly brown plumage. It has black-brown crown plumage, pale on the sides of the head and face, with a distinctive narrow black eyestripe running from the eye to the bill. Adults also possess a thin white eye ring.

Body feathers are mostly light rufous (reddish-brown), finely barred darker and with white tips light-brown and coarsely streaked black (Plate 1). The species shows limited sexual dimorphism and only demonstrates slight seasonal variation in plumage (Higgins and Davies 1996). Juveniles are indistinguishable from adults after six months. The generation length of Latham's Snipe is estimated to be approximately three years (Bird et al. 2020).

Latham's snipe is omnivorous and feeds predominantly on invertebrates including insects, earthworms, spiders, and occasionally snails, isopods and centipedes, although it will also consume seeds and other plant material (mainly from common wetland plants including sedges, grasses, lignum, reeds, and rushes) (Frith et al. 1977, Todd 2000). The species feeds by thrusting its long bill into mud with an up and down 'sewing machine' action.

Latham's snipe is a migratory species. It breeds in Japan and far eastern Russia during the northern hemisphere summer (Nechaev 1994) and then migrates to south-eastern Australia in August where it spends its non-breeding season, before departing on northward migration in late February to March (Hansen et al. 2025).

Survey techniques

Latham's snipe's reclusive behaviour and their cryptic plumage makes it difficult to detect them whilst they are on the ground. The species is extremely shy and may remain motionless when approached by an observer (Hansen et al. 2025). Latham's snipe has been surveyed by performing daytime area searches via 'flushing surveys', whereby surveyors walk along a transect line, pausing every 5–30 seconds and counting snipe as they flush out of the vegetation (Hansen et al. 2024). In Tasmania, surveys are typically undertaken between October and February.

Confusing species

In Tasmania, Latham's snipe has no confusing species. In northern Australia, Latham's snipe is difficult to distinguish from the pin-tailed snipe (*Gallinago stenura*) and Swinhoe's snipe (*G. megala*). All three species are very similar in size, shape, appearance, behaviour and habitat preferences (Higgins and Davies 1996).

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Distribution

Latham's snipe is a non-breeding migrant to south-eastern Australia and is a passage migrant through northern Australia (Higgins and Davies 1996). During migration from its breeding ground in the northern hemisphere (mainly on Hokkaido, Japan), Latham's snipe transits through New Guinea before reaching Australia, and has also been recorded as vagrant in New Zealand (Higgins and Davies 1996). In Australia, the species has been recorded along the east coast of Australia from Cape York through to south-eastern South Australia. Tasmania is the southern extent of the species' range (Plate 3). In Tasmania, Latham's snipe is generally widely dispersed in low numbers (Figure 1; Naarding 1983, Barrett et al. 2003), with most sightings occurring in coastal areas in the southeast northwest and west coasts, and in the Central Highlands (Figure 1).

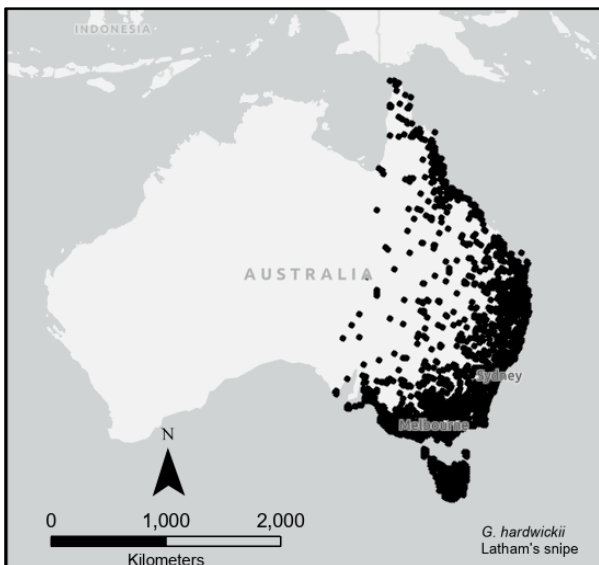


Plate 3. Distribution of *Gallinago hardwickii* in Australia (map from Atlas of Living Australia).

Habitat

Latham's snipe shelters during the day, usually in thickly vegetated wetlands with suitably "gappy" structures in which snipe can hide (Hansen et al. 2024). It can also shelter in crops and pasture. The species can also inhabit saline or brackish water habitat, in modified or artificial wetlands, and commonly occur in urban areas (Frith et al. 1977, Naarding 1983). Latham's snipe tends to

disperse from its roosting habitat after dusk to forage in nearby open, muddy areas, with most birds returning to the same roosting site after foraging (Hansen et al. 2024). Snipe have been observed foraging during the day near roosting habitat, although this behaviour is less common (Hansen et al. 2024).



Plate 2. Habitat of *Gallinago hardwickii* © Ramit Singal

POPULATION PARAMETERS

Number of subpopulations: 1

Number of locations (as per IUCN definition): > 10 in Tasmania (>10 across Australian distribution).

Extent of occurrence: 66,343 km² in Tasmania (3,430,000 km² across Australian distribution).

Area of occupancy (as per IUCN definition) = 1,516 km² in Tasmania

(13,000 km² across Australian distribution).

Number of mature individuals: Unknown in Tasmania

(19,000 throughout the species range).

The Latham's snipe population has likely undergone a decline of over 30 percent over the last three generations (Hansen et al. 2020).

There were estimated to be 20,300 Latham's snipe on Hokkaido, Japan, in May 2020 based on counts of displaying males at a stratified sample of sites (Ura and Tajiri 2020). Hokkaido is the main breeding location for the species. The population estimate in Hokkaido in 2020 was 42% less than the estimate of 35,000 in 2018 (Ura and Tajiri 2020).

Monitoring in Australia tends to be biased toward urban areas where (sometimes) large aggregations of birds are counted. However, the scattered nature of this species' distribution means that many birds are likely going undetected during surveys, meaning that monitoring data are not suitable for Australian population estimates at this time. The official flyway estimates of 35,000 mature individuals (Hansen et al. 2022) remains largely unchanged from the previous population estimate of 36,000 (Bamford et al. 2008).

Trend data from near Newcastle shows a decline of over 30 percent maximum flock sizes between the 1980s and 2010s (Maddock and Newman 2018). The most recent analysis by Rogers et al. (2023) estimated the mean change in population was -3.8% annually (1993–2021) for an estimated total decline of 16% (95% CI: -85.2,

404.3) over three generations. The mean annual change in the last 10 years (2012–2021) was -0.3% (95% CI: -18.3, 22.3), suggesting the decline may have stabilised (Rogers et al. 2023). This decline is lower than previous reports from Hokkaido. However, given the substantial reduction in population size estimated by these studies, a listing of vulnerable is appropriate until population stabilisation can be confirmed over coming years.

Within Tasmania, the population trend of Latham's snipe is unknown, but is suspected to be declining in line with observed declines across its global distribution (Hansen et al. 2020).

As the southernmost non-breeding habitat for Latham's snipe, Tasmania may in the future serve as a potential climate refuge if mainland Australia's wetland areas continue to diminish due to ongoing climate change. However, it is also possible that the deterioration of habitat along the species' migration pathway may result in fewer birds being capable of migrating as far south as Tasmania. Therefore, future population trends for Tasmania are difficult to predict and may not reflect the wider trends in Latham's snipe population (Hansen pers. comm. 2025).

Table 1. Population summary for *Gallinago hardwickii* within Tasmania. This population summary table reflects the best available knowledge at the time of publishing but does not represent a complete summary of important Latham's snipe subpopulations. Other important subpopulations are likely to exist but have not been included in the below table due to a lack of available monitoring data.

	Subpopulation or sites	Tenure	NRM region
1	Smithton	Public reserve; private freehold	Cradle Coast
2	Tamar estuary region: Legana Marsh, Grindelwald dam and White Gum Rise dam	Tamar Conservation Area; private freehold	North
3	Interlaken / Central Plateau: Silver Plains, Lake Sorell and Five Rivers Reserve	Crown land; private freehold; private freehold under conservation covenant	South
4	Huon estuary region: Burton's reserve and Egg Islands	Local government land; Egg Islands Conservation Area	South
5	King Island	Sea Elephant Conservation Area; Lavinia State Reserve; Counsel Hill Conservation Area; Permanent Timber Production Zone Land; Seal Rocks Conservation Area; private freehold; private freehold under conservation covenant	Cradle Coast

RESERVATION STATUS

Due to the low precision of many database records, it is difficult to provide a clear indication of the reservation status of Latham's snipe in Tasmania. The species is commonly observed on private land, including in urban wetlands and in agricultural areas. Overlaying species records with the Tasmanian reserve system indicates that sightings are associated with the following formally reserved land: Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Arthur Pieman Conservation Area, Rocky Cape National Park, Seal Rocks Conservation Area, Waterhouse Conservation Area, Tamar Conservation Area, Maria Island National Park and the River Derwent Marine Conservation Area. Observations have also been recorded in several Ramsar wetland sites: Lavinia Ramsar site on King Island, Flood Plain Lower Ringarooma River Ramsar Site and Little Waterhouse Lake Ramsar site in northeastern Tasmania. Some larger subpopulations of the species occur on land with no formal reservation. (Table 1).

CONSERVATION STATUS

Latham's snipe was listed as vulnerable on the Tasmanian *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995* in 2026, meeting Criterion 1 (A2b) of the *Guidelines for Eligibility for Listing under the Threatened Species Protection Act 1995* based on the extinction risk at the national scale, in line with the Common Assessment Method. Specifically:

A2: an observed decline in population size of at least 30% over the last three generations based on:

- b) an index of abundance appropriate for the taxon.

Latham's snipe is listed as Vulnerable under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, and as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List. The species is also listed on the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) and the Republic of Korea-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (ROKAMBA).

THREATS, LIMITING FACTORS AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The primary threat to the Latham's snipe is the loss of wetland habitat throughout its range (Hansen et al. 2020). Disturbance or loss of habitat in the species' Australian range (and at stopover sites throughout its migratory route) can mean that birds may not be able to store sufficient energy reserves for the migratory flight, thus failing to arrive at their destination, or failing to reproduce or survive at their breeding destination (Hua et al. 2015).

Habitat loss caused by urban and commercial development and maintenance:

The loss of wetland habitat is the primary threat to the Latham's snipe throughout its range. Land development on, or in proximity to wetland areas eliminates or reduces habitat suitability for migratory shorebirds, including stopover sites during migration (Lee et al. 2006), with likely major consequences for the survival of the species. In Tasmania, direct clearing and alteration of wetland vegetation has occurred historically and continues to occur in some areas (Coughanowr 2024).

Increased frequency or severity of drought:

Climate modelling for Tasmania indicates that periods of both drought and prolonged rainfall are likely to increase in duration and intensity (White et al. 2010). Changes to normal precipitation patterns may impact the quality and availability of habitat for Latham's snipe in Tasmania, and the species' survival in drought years may be considerably lower than in years of extensive and copious rainfall due to increases in physiological stress, fewer food resources, and a reduction in roosting site availability (Lindenmayer et al. 2018). Increased frequency or severity of drought presents a moderate but increasing threat to the species across part of its Tasmanian range.

Increase in frequency, scale or severity of fire:

Approximately 12% of Latham's snipe Australian habitat burned during the unprecedented 2019/20 bushfires (Legge et al. 2020). The recently observed sudden decline in the Latham's snipe population is largely attributed to Australia's large-scale fires during 2010 and 2019/20 (Ura and Tajiri 2020).

In Tasmania, fire can have wide-ranging impacts on wetland communities (Coughanowr 2024) and has the potential to irreversibly alter suitable habitat. Model projections for 1961–2100 indicate a general increase in fire danger across Tasmania, though with notable regional and temporal variations: Fire danger is predicted to increase more in the east of the state, while the west will increase to a lesser extent (Fox-Hughes et al. 2014). Changes to fire risk in autumn, when Latham's snipe have mostly departed, sees minimal change, while springtime fire danger predictions show steady increases into the future (Fox-Hughes et al. 2014). This threat is increasing across part of the Latham's snipe range with minor consequences to the species.

Habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation – renewable energy infrastructure or production:

Both the installation and operation of onshore windfarms potentially pose an inferred threat to Latham's snipe, predominantly through habitat loss and fragmentation, and through turbine collision risk where turbines intercept with their daily commuting pathways between day time roost sites and night time foraging sites, and with migratory pathways (Farfán et al. 2017). Literature indicates that for shorebirds, collision risk is secondary to habitat disturbance, as shorebirds tend to avoid approaching turbines (Pearce-Higgins et al. 2009; Bai et al. 2021). In accordance with the threat risk matrix developed by DCCEEW (2024), in Tasmania, this threat is increasing and is estimated to have a moderate consequence due to the cumulative impact from existing renewable infrastructure and the potential subject to future developments (including proposed renewable infrastructure development) to the Latham's snipe population.

Predation: In Tasmania, Latham's snipe may be susceptible to predation by cats and raptors particularly in wetland habitats in urban areas (Legge et al. 2017). This threat has been observed in some parts of Tasmania, with likely minor consequences to the population.

Habitat degradation caused by inappropriate grazing: High intensity grazing in wetlands can physically damage plants, cause soil disturbance, increase water turbidity, compact the soil, and create bare ground (Laroche & Taylor, 2024), often producing environmental conditions that are unsuitable for Latham's snipe roosting sites (Morris & Reich 2013). These conditions may increase exposure to predation and reduce feeding efficiency (impacting migration fuel reserves). In Tasmania, this threat has been observed across part of the species' range, with minor consequences to the population.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Management objectives

The main objectives for the recovery of Latham's snipe in Tasmania are to maintain existing Latham's snipe habitat in Tasmania, and to ensure that nationally significant sites (those with a count of 18 or more birds) are adequately protected and, in accordance with appropriate guidelines, to restore areas of important habitat that may have been heavily affected by human development (DCCEEW 2024). Birds using Tasmanian sites during the non-breeding season have the greatest distance to travel to their breeding grounds and therefore need to maximise their feeding opportunities to ensure they are in adequate condition to complete migration. Tracking of Latham's snipe has indicated that birds typically return to the same non-breeding sites and do not readily shift to new habitat (Hansen et al. 2024), making the conservation of existing feeding and roosting grounds essential to the recovery of the species.

What has been done?

- **Conservation advice:** The Conservation Advice for *Gallinago hardwickii* (Latham's snipe) was published by DCCEEW in January 2024 and details the species ecology, conservation status, threats, and recovery actions for ensuring long term survival (DCCEEW 2024).

- **Targeted surveys and monitoring:** In Tasmania, Latham's snipe have been surveyed annually since the 2015–2016 non-breeding season as part of national population surveys coordinated by the Latham's Snipe Project (Hansen et al. 2022b).
- **Guidelines for habitat restoration:** Hansen et al. (2024) have developed 'Guidelines for restoring and managing wetland habitat for Latham's snipe', which outlines key actions for managing and restoring the species' habitat.
- **Conservation on private land:** Buck's Marsh on the Tasmanian Land Conservancy's Silver Plains property was added to the national snipe surveys in September 2020. Since then, nationally significant numbers (at least 18 birds) of Latham's snipe have been recorded in the majority of surveys.

What is needed?

Agencies, groups or individuals may assist with some or all of the following recovery actions (coordinated efforts may achieve the best and most efficient results):

- To improve understanding of the distribution and density of Latham's snipe populations throughout Tasmania:
 - Continue to survey Latham's snipe populations and identify important habitats in Tasmania.
 - Assess adequacy of the existing survey and monitoring effort and extend if needed.
 - Consolidate monitoring databases and raw data collected by relevant stakeholders.
 - Undertake an analysis of historical and contemporary Tasmanian Latham's snipe data to determine the population size and trends.
 - Undertake research to understand the movement ecology of Latham's snipe whilst in Australia, including how birds respond to drought and
- fire that removes habitat patches for variable lengths of time.
- Investigate the significance of cumulative impacts of development on Latham's snipe habitat and populations in Australia
- To protect and manage important Latham's snipe habitat in Tasmania:
 - Work with landholders to better protect Latham's snipe wetland habitat on private land.
 - Identify important day time roosting and nighttime foraging habitat for Latham's snipe in Tasmania and improve site protection and management.
 - Restoration of wetland habitat where residential and industrial activities have degraded the quality of snipe feeding and roosting habitat.
 - Quantify the significance of increased frequency or severity of drought and flood on Latham's snipe feeding and roosting habitat within Tasmania.
 - Investigate whether fire poses a significant threat to the Latham's snipe, particularly in areas with sensitive native marshland habitat.
 - Quantify and predict changes to important habitat due to climate change, identify potential shifts in distribution of the species, and identify and protect habitat in drought and flood refuges areas.
 - Investigate the potential impacts and mitigation methods of renewable energy development on Latham's snipe populations.

- To reduce potential impacts of agricultural practices on the Tasmanian Latham's snipe population:
 - Increase the awareness of local landholders/farm managers of the importance of retaining wetland habitat on their land.
 - Support appropriate grazing regimes to avoid wetland drainage.
 - Investigate the impact of changing grazing regimes on Latham's snipe habitat use.
- To reduce the effects of recreational disturbance on migratory shorebirds:
 - Develop and implement a community education and awareness program to help the community understand the impacts of disturbance from human activity on migratory birds.
 - Work with councils and land managers to design and manage wetland reserves that promote snipe habitat while accommodating recreational needs.
 - Increase capacity for monitoring through targeted training programs for personnel in government, private industry and community sectors.
- To reduce predation threat to Latham's snipe in Tasmania:
 - Increase measures to control feral cat populations.
- Provide information and extension support to relevant Natural Resource Management committees, local councils, government agencies, the local community and development proponents on the locality, significance and management of known subpopulations and potential habitat.
- For additional information on conservation and recovery actions at the national scale, refer to the Conservation Advice for Latham's snipe (DCCEEW 2024, p 13–14).

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Prepared by the Threatened Species Section in 2025 under the provisions of the Tasmanian *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*.

Cite as: Threatened Species Section (2026). *Listing Statement for Gallinago hardwickii* (Latham's snipe). Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Tasmania.

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Permit: It is an offence under Tasmanian legislation to collect, catch, damage, injure, destroy, or kill a threatened species listed under the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*, without a permit.

Version history

Version	Date	Author	Purpose/Change
1.0	June 2026	Threatened Species Section	Drafted by the TSS (Evie Simpson and Karen Blake, with significant input and review provided Dr. Birgita Hansen). Informed by the <i>Conservation Advice for Gallinago hardwickii</i> (Latham's snipe) (DCCEEW 2024). Reviewed and endorsed by the Threatened Species Scientific Advisory Committee at their Meeting 92.