

Prey in the Diet of the Greater Painted-Snipe

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Introduction

The Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* uses its long bill to probe soft mud and also uses a scything action in shallow water to find food (Kirwan 2020) but no information on their diet is known locally (Wells 1999). Kirwan (2020) mentions invertebrates, including insects, snails, earthworms, crustaceans, and seeds as part of their diet. Overall data on their diet is limited; their crepuscular and shy behaviour makes observations difficult. We share some observations to add to the understanding of the dietary preferences of the Greater Painted-Snipe.

Observations

Feeding on Small Water Snails

On 07 May 2020 at a large overgrown drain/ditch in an urban setting at Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Amar had an opportunity to watch feeding behaviour from 0730 to 0900 hrs, using the car as a hide (Amar-Singh HSS 2022). A pair of Greater Painted-Snipe were feeding together. Foraging behaviour included probing into soft mud, probing with beak closed on the 'stream' bed and sweeping a partly open bill through the shallow water (scything action of bill). Prey was obtained in both shallow waters, where the eyes were kept open, and deeper waters where the eyes were closed. At times the head could be partially or completely submerged under water (Plate 1). Feeding was accompanied, in the female, by frequent tail and body bobbing.

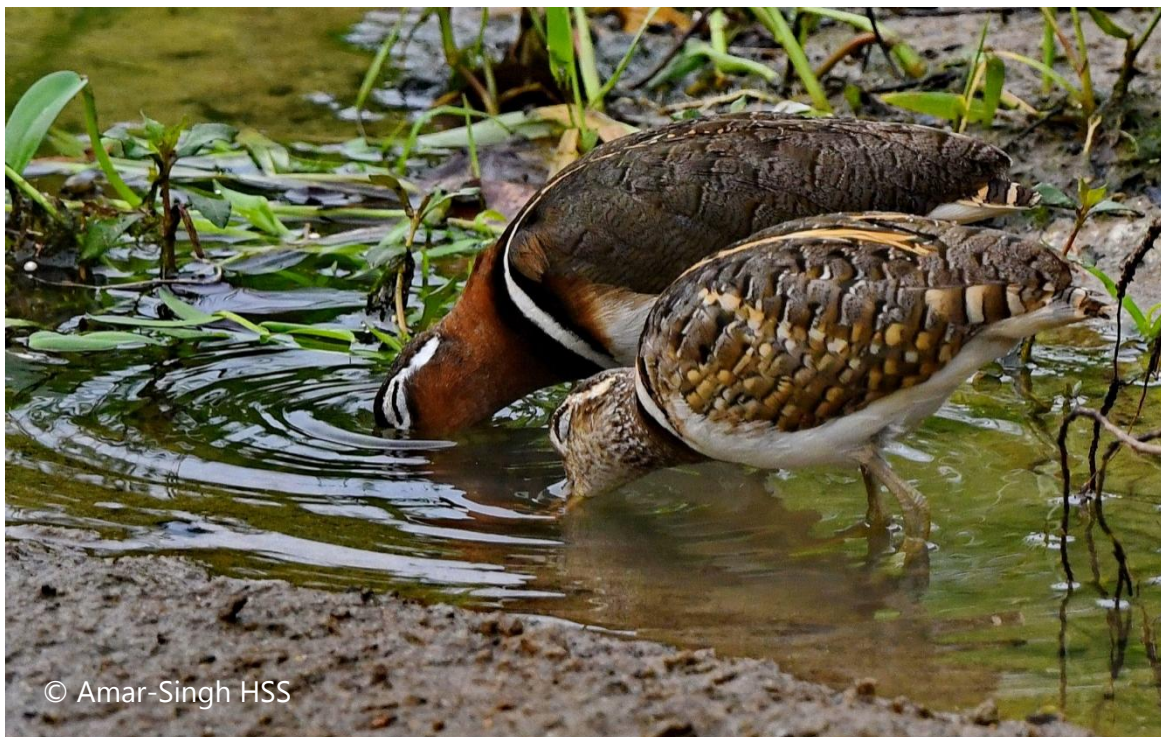


Plate 1: Male (right) and female Greater Painted-Snipe deeper water feeding technique. Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, 07 May 2020.

The primary prey taken, that could be identified, were small water snails (Plate 2 & 3). The bill was run through shallow water, a snail identified and drawn up the beak. A large volume of

these snails were consumed rapidly, almost one every 10-20 seconds. A video recording of the feeding activity can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLVEnn5ncHY>.



Plate 2: Female Greater Painted-Snipe feeding on a snail. Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, 07 May 2020.



Plate 3: Still images from a video of a single, snail feeding episode by a female Greater Painted-Snipe showing surface tension transport mechanism. Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, 07 May 2020.

An evaluation of this and other videos by Fraser (2022) established that the birds' use "*a surface tension transport mechanism to move captured prey from the distal tip of the bill to the oral cavity*". The surface tension transport activity is fast and takes approximately 0.6 seconds. Fraser (2022) also notes that the dominant foraging mode was tactile and receptors in the lower mandible aid in prey detection.

Feeding on Tadpoles

On 19 April 2026 at Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia, Stanley observed a female Greater Painted-Snipe taking a tadpole as prey (Plate 4). The female Greater Painted-Snipe was feeding in shallow water using a probing method. It submerged its bill just past the midpoint, always with its eyes closed (Plate 5). While there were many small pools in the area, the one Stanley photographed for two days seemed to contain only tadpoles. The bird would feed for about five minutes before slowly walking away to rest behind a bush.

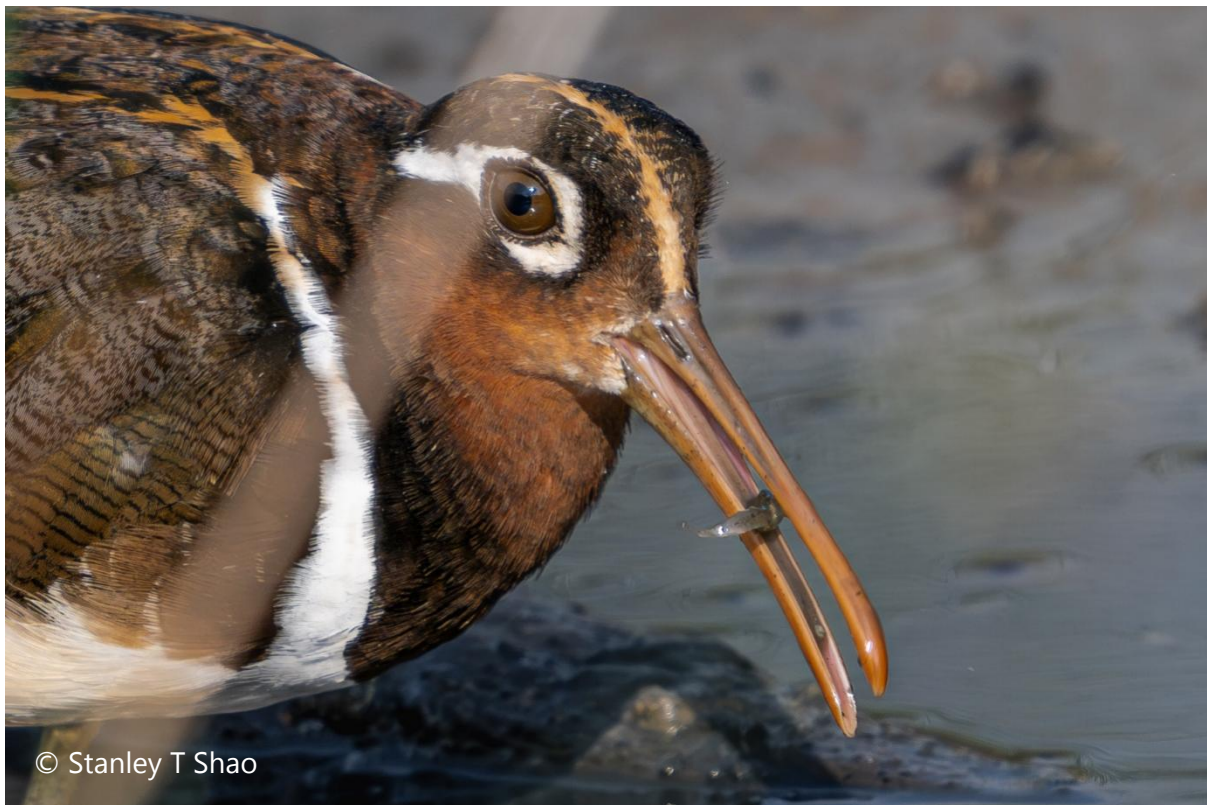


Plate 4: Female Greater Painted-Snipe feeding on a tadpole. Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia, 19 April 2026.

Observations showed that the Greater Painted-Snipe made fewer than ten catches before hiding for about ten minutes and then would peek out from the corner of the bush it was hiding behind. It would then slowly walk out into the open to feed once again.

Images were taken from the car at a distance of four to five meters. It is likely that the bird would have stayed longer during each feed if the observer had not been this close. A Slaty-breasted Rail *Lewinia striata* was also feeding on tadpoles in the same pool but was very shy and hurried away; it was there just once.



Plate 5: Female Greater Painted-Snipe feeding technique (tadpoles). Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia, 19 April 2026.

To our knowledge, there is no prior documentation of tadpole prey for this species, although Peacock (2016) mentions that the diet probably includes tadpoles.

Review of Online Images and Databases

A review of images posted in the Macaulay Library on 06 May 2026 with behaviour filters 'foraging or eating' (n=541), 'feeding young' (n=9) or 'carrying food' (n=4) showed five observations where some food item could be seen in the bill (apart from ours reported here). George Parker (Yilan County, Taiwan, May 2023 ML593567051), Arijit Banerjee (Rajasthan, India, Jul 2022, ML464397681), JingZu Tu (Yilan County, Taiwan, May 2021, ML369652541) and Sunil Singhal (Rajasthan, India, Jul 2017, ML378451681) observed adults with a small snail in the beak. Najmuddin Fakhrudin (Maharashtra, India, Jul 2025, ML639404818) observed an adult male with three juveniles, two of which had a small prey in the beak that could be a small fish or a dragonfly larva. A general Boolean web search for "Greater Painted-Snipe" and "diet" and "Greater Painted-Snipe" and "prey" did not add any additional information for images. One recent video showed an adult feeding two juveniles with a possible dragonfly larva (link: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/aLJy6lAgyGI>).

Fraser's (2022) analysis of many online videos noted that, although "*birds were observed capturing prey*"... "*in many instances the prey item could not be seen*". He noted small snail prey in 16 recordings and worms in two recordings.

In summary, apart from Fraser's (2022) analysis, most diet records are incidental observations rather than any systematic analyses. We encourage colleagues to do video recordings of feeding episodes and report prey taken to help fill this data gap. Notably, the observation of tadpole predation reported here appears to be the first documented instance for this species.

Acknowledgements

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