

► An exciting element of nocmig is hearing waterbirds such as Wigeon far from the nearest waterbody.



FIELD CRAFT

How to... Witness migration (part 2)

Whilst many think of migration as a phenomenon best appreciated visually, some of the most impressive movements occur after dark. Training Manager, Nick Moran, explains how to tune into nocturnal migration this spring.

WHAT AND WHEN?

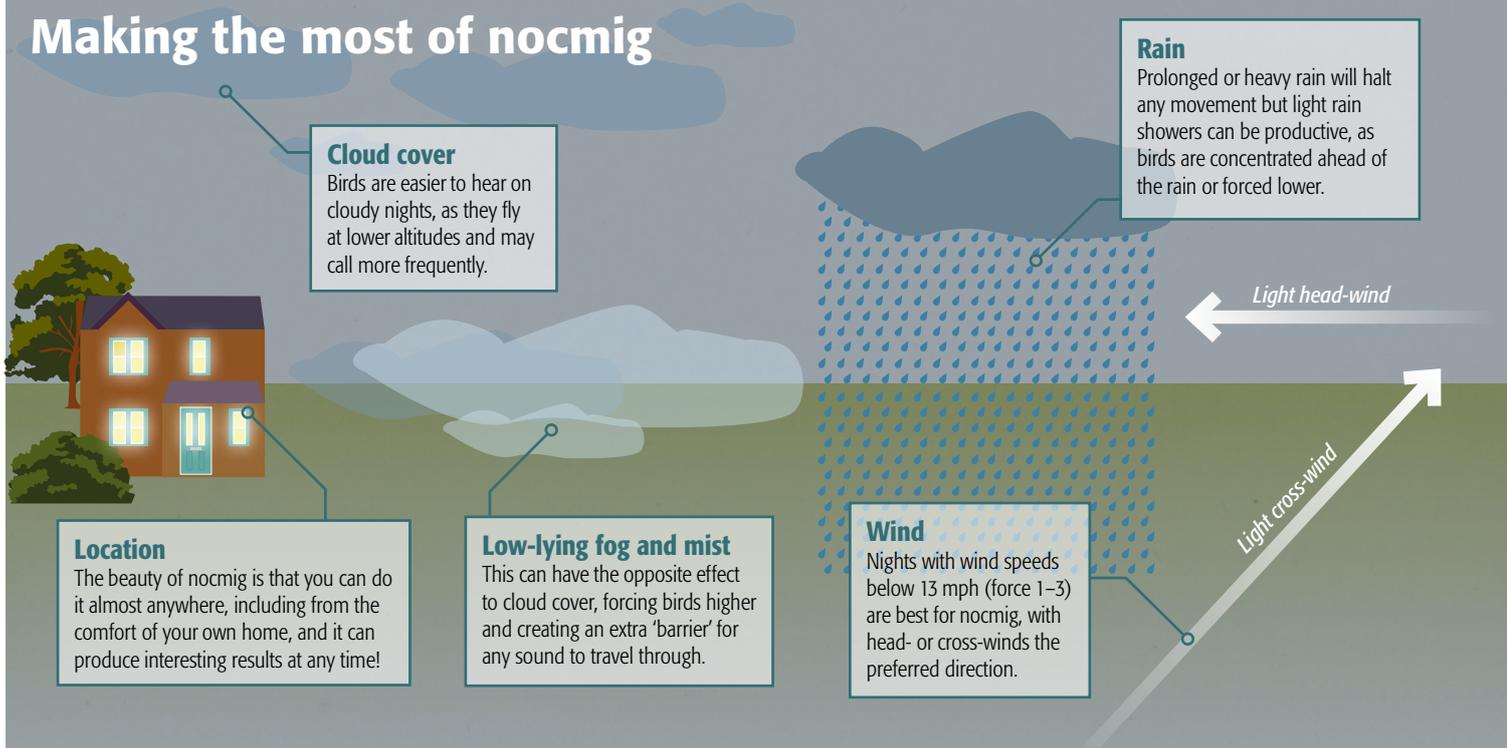
Listening to the flight calls of nocturnal migrants, or 'nocmig', is the night-time equivalent of watching and counting birds on visible migration during the day ('vismig', see *BTO News* 332). One of the most evocative sounds of spring nights is the high-pitched 'tseep' flight call of departing Redwings. With a bit of patience, you might also hear the calls of other thrushes, various waterbirds including Coot, Moorhen and Little Grebe, the 'frank' of a Grey Heron and perhaps even a wader or two. These calls can be sampled live – an electrifying experience on a busy 'thrush night' – or by running sound recording equipment overnight and checking the recordings later.

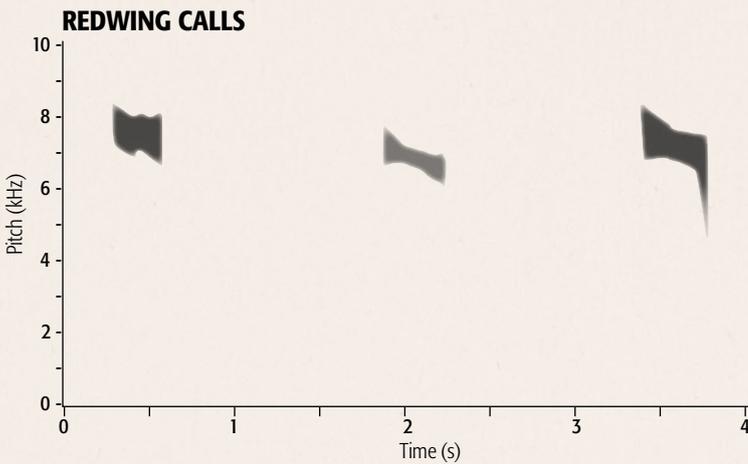
As with vismig, certain weather conditions and landscape features

encourage birds to move and increase the likelihood of being able to hear them at night. Time of year is important, too: in spring, nocmig can be productive from early March – as wintering wildfowl and thrushes depart – into April and May, as waders pass through. Classic autumn movements of wildfowl and thrushes

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Making the most of nocmig





◀ Spectrograms are often used to analyse overnight recordings. This short sequence shows three Redwing calls recorded as the birds flew over the microphone.

usually occur September to November, returning waders can be on the move as early as June, and other passerines start dispersing from July. Resources such as the BTO Migration Blog and the BirdTrack reporting rates can help you target your listening efforts on the peak periods of movement for particular species, and searching #nocmig on social media is a great way to hear about notable migratory movements as they are happening.

As nocmig relies on detecting the flight calls of birds as they pass overhead, nights with wind speeds below 13 mph (force 1–3) are best. Cloudy skies are better than clear ones, as the birds will tend to be lower, though low-lying mist/fog can have the opposite effect and thus be counterproductive. Prolonged or heavy rain will halt any movement but light rain showers can be productive as birds are concentrated ahead of the rain or forced lower to aid navigation. As with vismig, light head- or cross-winds are probably best, though the ideal wind direction will depend on various factors, including the time of year (i.e. which direction birds are travelling) and any local barriers. This is still an inexact science though, so don't be put off if a promising overnight forecast fails to yield a large movement of birds. ■

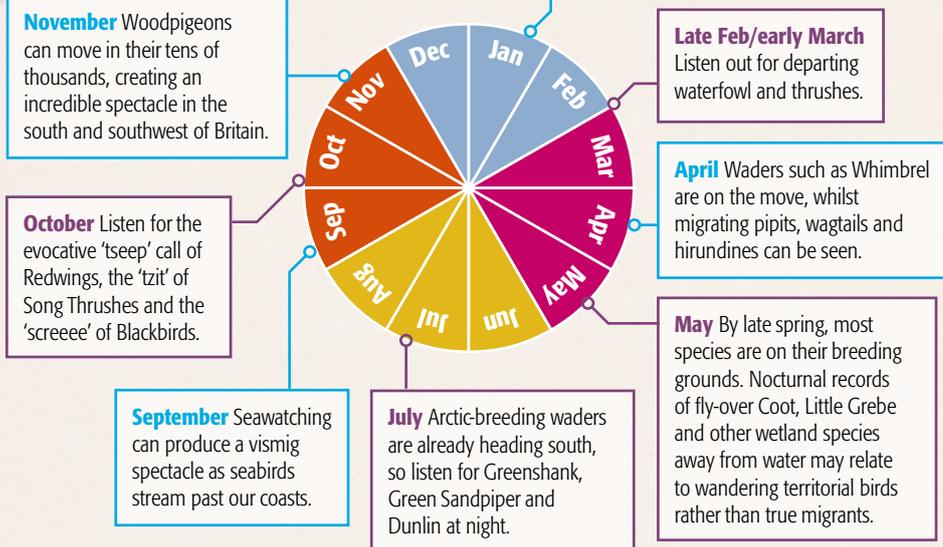
HOW CAN I EXPERIENCE NOCMIG?

Although some spots are undoubtedly better than others, you can experience nocturnal migration in most places, so it's certainly something to try from your own doorstep. Doing so can reveal movements of species that would go undetected by the daylight-limited birder.

Migration calendar

What to expect when watching or listening for migrant birds.

■ Nocmig ■ Vismig



Nocmig: get involved

CAN I ATTEND A DEMONSTRATION OR TASTER SESSION?

► Some bird observatories run nocmig equipment on a regular basis. Check the observatory's website or contact the warden to find out if your nearest one does this.

► Bird clubs and other local organisations may also offer nocmig-based talks or activities that you can attend to learn more. Check #nocmig on social media to find out more.

SHOULD I SUBMIT MY DATA SOMEWHERE, AND WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD I COLLECT?

► Records of any birds positively identified by sight or sound can be logged in BirdTrack: www.birdtrack.net

► If you 'catch the bug' and start recording nocturnal flight calls on a regular basis, consider using Trektellen. This Dutch website has been designed to accommodate the various types of structured migration counts, and data from the UK flow into BirdTrack: www.trektellen.nl

► Trektellen provides guidance on the information to record for different types of migration monitoring. BTO led the development of a standardised protocol for nocturnal flight call monitoring, which sets out a consistent approach and is available online: nocmig.com/2018/08/30/standardised-nocturnal-flight-call-monitoring

Find out more

Identifying birds by their nocturnal flight calls can be a challenge. Fortunately there are an increasing number of resources that can help:

- For a huge collection of sound recordings (filter by e.g. 'type:flight'), visit: www.xeno-canto.org
- For a growing number of flight call recordings, visit: birds-in-flight.net
- For information about the practicalities of using sound recording kit to record nocturnal flight calls, try: nocmig.com

WIGDON: SARAH KELLMAN/BTO