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## American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*

Known to hunters as the Timber Doodle or Bogsucker, the American Woodcock is the only shorebird in North America classified as an upland game bird. Its nocturnal habits and cryptic plumage keep the American Woodcock from being a widely known or appreciated bird, except by the few who seek it out typically either hunters with dogs or birders who wish to witness the male's late-evening courtship displays. It breeds in forested regions of southern Canada and the United States east of the Great Plains, from Newfoundland and southeastern Manitoba, and south to eastern Texas and northern Florida.

**Habitat.** Prime American Woodcock habitat combines moist, soft earth for feeding, small clearings for courtship displays, and moderately open young deciduous or mixed woodlands for nesting. Earthworms compose the greatest part of the American Woodcock's diet. The bird's long bill has a sensitive, flexible tip used in locating its prey as it probes in moist soil. Other small invertebrates and the seeds of plants make up the remainder of the American Woodcock's diet. The American Woodcock reportedly has a prodigious appetite, capable of consuming more than its own weight in a 24-hour period (Bent 1927).

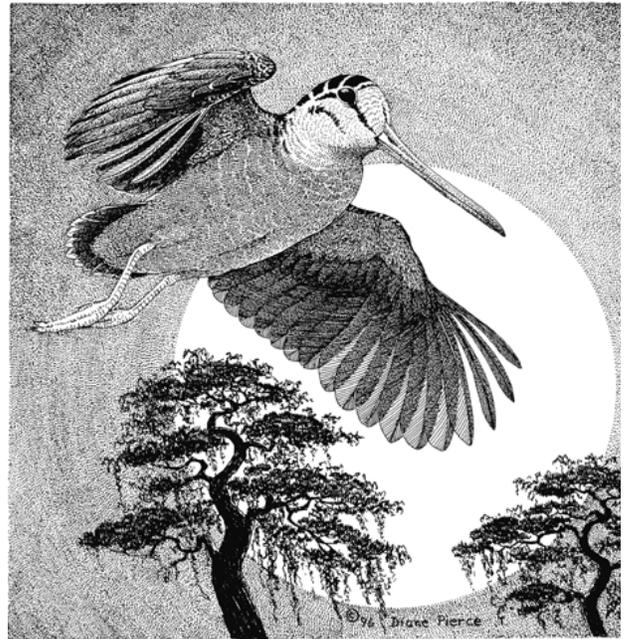


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The nest of the American Woodcock is a slight depression on the ground. It may be rimmed by twigs and leaves which appear to have been pushed to the periphery to allow the hen to incubate the eggs. The average number of eggs in a clutch is 4. The eggs are purplish-buff with soft brown spots and mottling. Incubation, by the hen alone, lasts 20 to 21 days, and the young can fly at 14 days of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988). The American Woodcock is one of the few shorebirds that feeds its young during the first few days after hatching.

**Seasonal Occurrence.** Breeding in Florida begins very early, often in late January, and continues until June. The height of migration occurs November through January (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

**Status.** The paucity of American Woodcock breeding records in Florida may reflect an actual scarcity of the bird in the state or may indicate the difficulty in detecting it.

Information accumulated by the Breeding Bird Atlas confirmed breeding in only 6 widely separated quadrangles: One of these is located in the Panhandle, 3 in north Florida, and 1 each in the central and southern peninsula. Of the 28 "possible" and "probable" records, all but 2 are located in the northern third of the state. The south Florida breeding record, of 2 young accompanying an adult in Corkscrew Swamp (Ogden 1987), is approximately 155 miles south of the nearest breeding record in Sumter County. The southernmost "probable" breeding Atlas record is located in the Hole-in-the-Donut area of Everglades National Park, where courtship displays were observed for consecutive seasons, from 1988 to 1991 (Ogden 1991).

Because the courtship display of the American Woodcock lasts only 30 to 40 minutes and occurs only shortly before dawn and after sunset, it is understandable that so few breeding records exist.

Ted Robinson

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