

Wonders of the American Woodcock

The American woodcocks have been serenading us with their wonderful sounds since March 14. It's certainly not an early record for Wisconsin, but it's an amazing event. And more amazing to step outside the backdoor and enjoy it! Many people have traveled distances to witness their flight dances only to find they weren't performing. Their sounds involve a "peeeeent" call note, ground strutting displays, and the spiraling flight dance, which is a twittering created by their wings and vocalizations. These performances are given at dusk and dawn.

Woodcocks migrate at night from southern US states. They also go by the name Timberdoodles. They usually nest further north but they will perform their mating ritual dances in route. (A wonderful thing for us!!) They nest in open and young woods by creating a slight depression in the ground or leaf litter typically at the base of a tree. Their colorations disguise them well. In fact, if you flush one, you'll still be hard pressed to find the eggs for their colorations camouflage them equally as well!

These birds are very unusual! They are considered a shorebird and a game bird. Their long beak, used for prying out earthworms, is flexible and while they are digging in the ground they can be on the lookout for predators because their eyes are at the upper portion of their heads. Their brains are on the back underneath side (where our nape is) and their ears are between their eyes and brain.

Unfortunately, their numbers are declining and many states have them listed as "species of greatest conservation need." Like other critters on the decline, loss of habitat is the

number one reason. Incredibly, it remains legal to hunt them. The good news is that listing them with a “conservation need” status prompts more research, more awareness, and more efforts to reverse this downward trend.



Print by Bruce Taylor

The photo is some artwork that we have. It was painted by Bruce Taylor in Mt. Horeb, WI. It shows how camouflaged the woodcock and their eggs can be.

