

# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Look for it now in Southwest Ohio!

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## American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*)

By Dave Woehr, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

The American Woodcock may be just about the strangest bird in Ohio. Although not as plentiful as in the past (primarily due to habitat loss), we still can find them in young forests, fields, and wetlands much of the year. Most of us never see them because of their secretive behavior. They spend most of their time on the ground in dense cover. When they fly it is usually under the cover of darkness. You will never see one perched on a tree limb, telephone wire, or rooftop.

Many woodcocks spend the winter months along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi where the ground does not freeze and probing for food is easy. As spring approaches, flocks of woodcocks migrate back north in waves of night flights following the thawing of the soil. In our area, woodcocks have returned to their usual haunts by mid-February to early March. By then it is breeding season and their courtship activities are quite observable at dusk. Just as darkness sets in the males begin calling to the females from the fields and wetlands sounding somewhat like a duck quack. Then, from the ground the males spiral high into the night sky twittering melodically to impress their lady friends below. This antic is immediately followed by a downward dive with whistling feathers back to their starting point where the scenario repeats long into the night.

March is a good time to make an evening venture to woodcock habitat to observe the courtship displays. **Hisey Park**, **Gulley Park**, and **Keever Trails** would be likely places to observe woodcocks at this time in Warren County.

To learn more about this species, visit [page 53 of Ohio Division of Wildlife's Waterbirds of Ohio Field Guide](#).

### FUN FACTS

- The woodcock is a plump little bird about the size of a Mourning Dove.
- Its flecked brown feathers make it a well-camouflaged species.
- It sports a beak about two inches long which it uses to probe soft, damp soils for worms, grubs, and other subterranean insects. Fruits and seeds are not on this bird's menu.
- Long considered to be a migratory game bird, woodcock hunting is declining in popularity.
- In New England hunters referred to the woodcock as the "Timberdoodle" or Bogsucker."
- When the woodcock walks he seems to fancy himself as a 1970's disco dancer. Watch a video and see if you can do the dance!  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O5lekhqTyQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O5lekhqTyQ)