

# American Woodcock

## *Scolopax minor*

Several factors were responsible for the under-representation of American Woodcocks during the Atlas Project. As a result of their retiring nature and crepuscular habits, this species was not readily detected during daylight hours. Special evening surveys were frequently required to locate woodcocks, and these surveys were not performed in every priority block. Additionally, the timing of their spring passage through Ohio overlaps with the initiation of their breeding activities (Peterjohn 1989a). Since males regularly perform courtship displays during migration, observations of courting woodcocks during March were not necessarily indicative of nesting. In order to preclude migrants, only records after April 15 were mapped.

Despite these problems, American Woodcocks were recorded in 265 priority blocks representing 34.7% of the statewide total. They were found in every county except Logan and Monroe. Since suitable habitats are widely available in these two counties, there is no doubt that nesting woodcocks occur within every county in the state.

The Atlas data indicates that woodcocks were most widely distributed in the Glaciated Plateau and Lake Plain physiographic regions with records from 46.4 and 45.2% of the regional priority blocks respectively. The fewest woodcocks were found in the Illinoian Till Plain region (19.6% of the priority blocks), with intermediate numbers in the Till Plain and Unglaciated Plateau regions. Given their under-representation during the Atlas Project, however, this pattern of distribution may not accurately represent their actual relative abundance in Ohio. Breeding American Woodcocks are currently widely distributed along the entire Allegheny Plateau, being most numerous within Ashtabula and adjacent northeastern Ohio counties. They become more locally distributed within the western half of the state, and are rather scarce in intensively farmed counties where few suitable habitats remain (Peterjohn 1989a).

American Woodcocks exhibited a similar distribution pattern during the 1930s. Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from 84 counties with the greatest numbers in northeastern, central, and southeastern Ohio. On the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau, they were most numerous in Coshocton, Jefferson, and Harrison counties and least numerous south of Belmont, Morgan, and Hocking counties (Hicks 1937). He thought their numbers were declining at that time. Local decreases were also noted in subsequent decades, reflecting reductions in habitat availability resulting from secondary succession in southeastern Ohio and habitat destruction elsewhere (Peterjohn 1989a). However, their nationwide trends have indicated fairly stable numbers despite considerable annual fluctuations in abundance (Sanderson 1980).

Their breeding biology has been summarized by Sheldon (1967). American Woodcocks are occupants of scrub/shrub successional habitats and the brushy edges of woods and fields. Suitable nesting areas vary in age from old fields with just a few scattered shrubs to young woods with several small openings, but

they normally avoid the interiors of mature forests. In Ohio, their nests have also been found in orchards, grassy fields with planted pines, and even a cultivated field (Braund 1939).

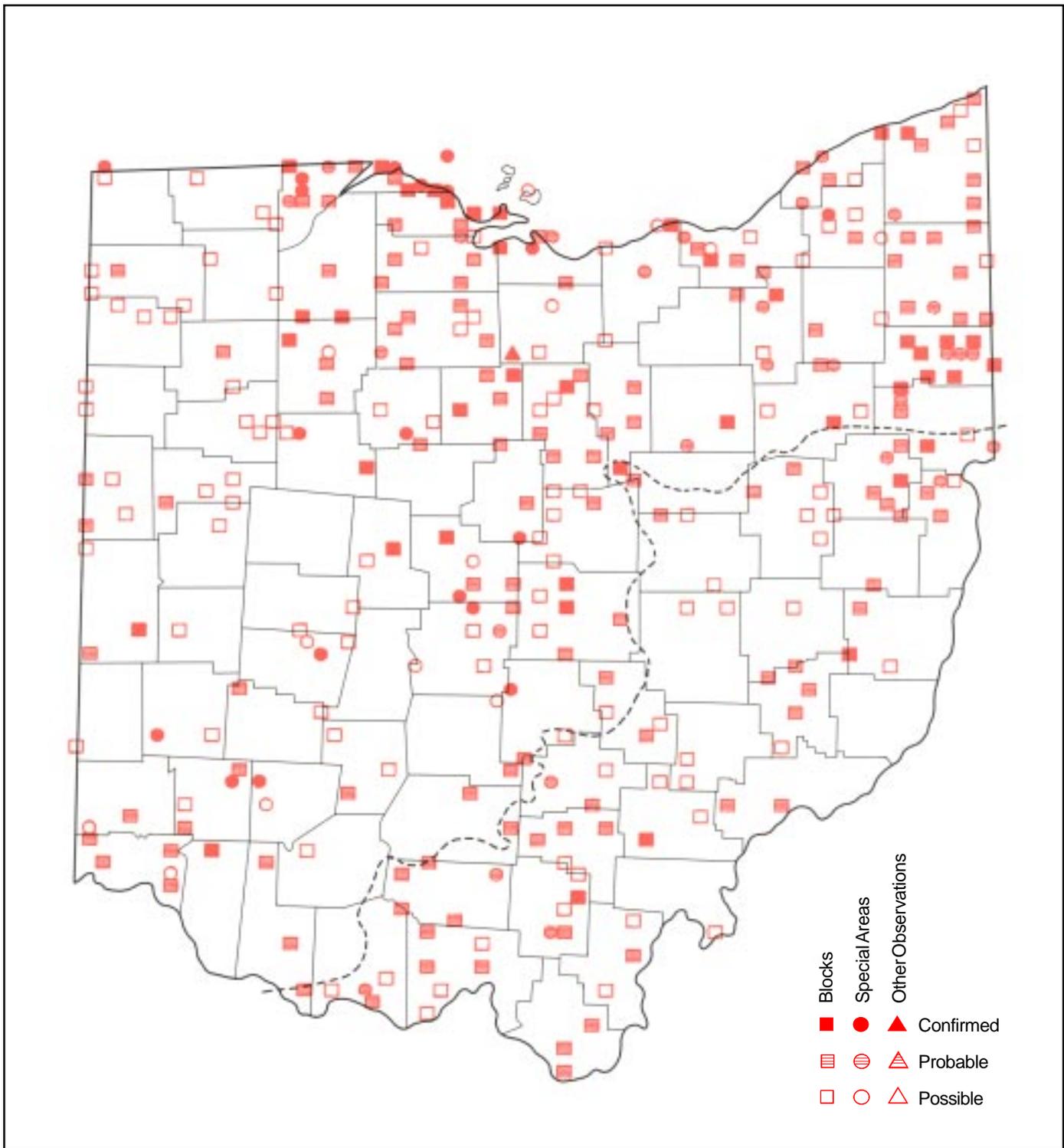
Their territories include damp areas for feeding and dry sites for nesting. Nests are normally placed on the ground but may be found on hummocks and fallen logs. A typical nest site is on dead leaves at the base of a sapling or shrub, but nests may also be hidden in tall grasses. These territories invariably include several small openings with exposed soil where the males perform their courtship displays. Male woodcocks are polygamous and attract as many females as possible into their territories through the use of elaborate courtship flights and displays on the ground (Pitelka 1943).



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Resident woodcocks return to Ohio with the first warm days of late February or early March. The males immediately begin their courtship displays, which will continue throughout spring and have been reported as late as July 14 (Kemsies and Randle 1953). The earliest clutches are laid by March 15–20 and most females are incubating by the first half of April. Renesting attempts will produce clutches through mid-June and nests with eggs have been reported as late as August 7 (Hicks 1933a). Young woodcock may be noted during the first half of April but most have been reported between April 20 and July 15.

As was true for most ground nesters, breeding woodcocks were difficult to confirm during the Atlas Project. The 42 confirmed records in priority blocks were nearly equally divided between active nests and adults accompanied by partially grown young. Displaying males provided most of the reports of probable breeding status.



### Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	43	45.2	16.2	—
Till Plain	271	74	27.3	27.9	—
Ill. Till Plain	46	9	19.6	3.4	<0.1
Glaciated Plateau	140	65	46.4	24.5	—
Unglaciated Plateau	212	74	34.9	27.9	—

### Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>34.7%</b>
Confirmed	42	15.9%
Probable	120	45.3%
Possible	103	38.9%