

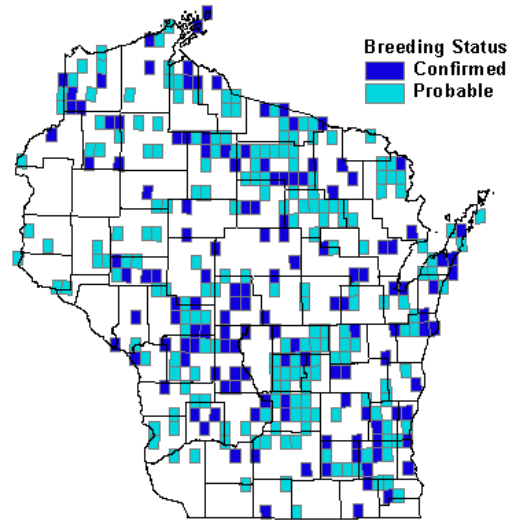


Species Survey Strategies

Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II



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American Woodcock

WBBA I Breeding Range

Unlike most shorebirds, American Woodcock are found in forested habitats. This makes them hard to find most of the year, and they are poorly sampled by regular atlasing and traditional surveys like the federal Breeding Bird Survey. Woodcock are of interest in our state as they are a flagship “Young Forest” species, and may be declining in areas with less early-successional forest. Woodcock are easiest to find in spring when they perform a display flight high in the sky, featuring a whirring noise and a short, buzzy “peent” call.

Region: Entire state. [eBird Range Map](#)

Time of Year: Woodcocks arrive in Wisconsin in mid-March, but some birds displaying in March may be migrants. If you detect a bird in March, visit again at least a week later to help determine if it is a resident or if it has moved on. Peak display period is early April through mid-May. Breeding codes may be recorded into early August.

Breeding Guideline Bar Chart: (Full chart is on [atlas handbook webpage](#))

January				February				March				April				May				June				July				August				September				October				November				December							
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
								M	M	E		B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M											

N = Nonbreeding Season, **M** = Migration, **B** = Breeding Season, **E** = Either (a transition period)

Time of Day: We recommend crepuscular surveys —go out 1 hour after dusk, or one hour before dawn to catch the peak period.

Focal Habitat: The best areas for displaying birds are clearings that are adjacent to forest. Edge habitats, like shrubby/old field areas, can make good display areas. Breeding habitat includes deciduous or mixed forest, especially areas with a dense understory.

Special Methods: Dusk surveys to listen for displaying and peenting males. Walk a likely area or conduct a driving transect. If driving, find a road with limited traffic and good shoulders or pullouts (be safe!), stop every half mile (or when you get to suitable habitat), then get out, turn off the car, and listen for several minutes. If woodcocks are present, they can be readily heard displaying during the hours after sunset or before dawn. They typically give the “peent” call from the ground, and the twittering noise is made by their wings during display flights.

[Audio of Peent and Display Flight](#)

Code Guidance: Use C for males performing their full display, or S for males heard peenting without display. Codes may not be suitable in March because of concerns with displaying migrants; if you have a bird displaying in March, visit again at least a week later to determine if the bird is on territory or just a migrant. This species is relatively difficult to confirm breeding for, unless you incidentally happen upon a nest or young.

Other Species: Dawn and dusk surveys can be productive for detecting a suite of hard-to-detect birds, including Wilson’s Snipe, American Bittern, Ruffed Grouse, owls, and rails. Familiarize yourself with these calls before heading out to search for woodcock, and you may get some bonus observations.

Confusing Species: Wilson’s Snipe also perform display flights at dusk and dawn, but their winnowing is less twittery and is more reminiscent of Eastern Screech-Owl. Common Nighthawks make a vocalization similar to the “peent” call which comes from the air, whereas the woodcock “peent” is given from the ground and generally stationary. Also, nighthawks are later migrants, and do not typically arrive in Wisconsin until May. Woodcocks are similar in appearance to Wilson’s Snipe and dowitchers, but those species are more likely to use open marshes and mudflats.

More information about American Woodcock:

[All About Birds](#)

[Birds of North America Account](#) (subscription required)