



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WOODCOCK SINGING GROUND COUNT NOW UNDERWAY

The annual "singing ground count" of woodcock is nearing completion along 326 established routes in 17 States and in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, John L. Farley, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service said today.

The purpose is to obtain an index of population abundance of the region sampled. Data so acquired will be considered with other information in determining the bag and season limits for the fall hunting season.

The count is made at different times in different States. In Pennsylvania "singing time" is usually the last three weeks in April; to the south it is earlier and to the north later. The time varies from year to year, depending upon the season. While the Fish and Wildlife Service supervises the census because the woodcock is a migratory bird, most of the work is done by cooperators in the respective States.

Courtship behavior of woodcock makes possible the census technique employed. During the breeding season, the male woodcock usually sings for one-half to three-quarters of an hour at sundown. Census routes three or four miles long with stations approximately half a mile apart are laid out in woodcock cover and checked year after year so comparisons are possible. Exactly two minutes of listening is allotted for each stop. The number of male birds heard singing at each station is recorded. It takes about 30 to 40 minutes to cover a route. Variation in the number of birds heard from year to year indicate trends in the level of breeding populations being censused.

Although the woodcock uses a woodland habitat, it belongs to the same family of shore birds as snipes and sandpipers. It is migratory but its pattern of migration is not yet well known. Primarily, it winters in a limited area in the central Gulf Coast States. However, some birds winter in other southeastern States

as far north as Maryland. It breeds in the northern States, east of the prairies and in the cooler portions of Maryland and North Carolina. Because it needs wooded country to supply its wants, the woodcock avoids prairie country and so is limited in its westward distribution by the great open spaces west of a line drawn from eastern Minnesota to east Texas.

The woodcock probes the earth for its food. One of its peculiarities is that its eyes are so placed that it can keep a "weather eye" on the rear while it has its bill in the soil searching for worms. This is an aid in protecting it from its many enemies. It is a prized game bird and hunters take about a quarter of a million of these birds annually.

The singing ground census routes in this country are in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

Federal regulations for the hunting of this species during 1956 will be issued in late summer.

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