

# WatchList Focus: American Woodcock

By Julie Hart

DESPITE THE EXCITING recovery of endangered birds like the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, more than one-quarter of America's birds are in trouble or decline. Released in October 2002, the Audubon WatchList (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/watchlist>) identifies 201 species of birds of continental conservation concern. WatchList birds are considered vulnerable due to combinations of decreasing populations, restricted ranges, and significant threats.

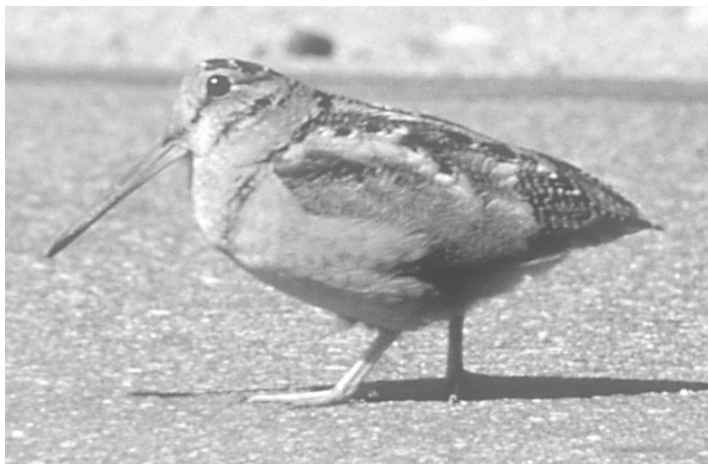
One WatchList species, the American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*), is an anomaly within its taxonomic group. Classified as a shorebird, it is anything but your typical shorebird. American Woodcocks prefer a mix of open fields and early-successional forest. A chunky bird with short legs, American Woodcocks have large eyes set far back on their head, and a long, straight bill, which is used to probe the soil for invertebrates. The plumage is an intricate pattern of light and dark colors that provides excellent camouflage against the forest floor.

American Woodcock is most often identified by the "peent" call of males given during the spectacular courtship display. Males take flight, rising high into the sky in a spiraling flight before eventually dropping downward, somewhat leaf-like, and returning to the ground. While in the air, the male gives a variety of twittering sounds, which are produced both vocally and by the rushing of air over modified wing feathers.

The American Woodcock is essentially a bird of eastern North America, with its breeding range stretching from the Maritime Provinces to eastern Manitoba in the north, and from southern Georgia to eastern Texas in the south. This species is a permanent resident in many southern states, but northern populations are migratory; wintering grounds include the southern part of the species' breeding range, as well as large parts of Florida, the entire Gulf Coast, and a swath of eastern Texas stretching to the Rio Grande Valley.

American Woodcock is listed as a WatchList species because of a decreasing population trend and threats on its breeding and non-breeding grounds. Habitat

loss is a major factor in the decline of American Woodcock across its range due to a reduction in farmland abandonment and succession of early-successional habitat into mature forest. Other WatchList species that share early-successional habitat with American Woodcock also suffer from loss of habitat, including Golden-winged, Blue-winged, and Prairie Warblers. Protection of natural shrub communities and creation of successional habitats through forest management are important strategies for their conservation.



American Woodcock

LOGO/ILLUSTRATION BY WALTERS © JLOTTIE/ONYX

## YES, THAT'S RIGHT, THE MILLIONTH RAPTOR!

By Jillian Liner

THE HAWK WATCHERS at Derby Hill knew this would be the year. This would be the year that the millionth raptor would fly overhead at the Derby Hill Bird Observatory. Located on a bluff overlooking the southeast corner of Lake Ontario in Mexico, Oswego County, the observatory is one of the highest points in the area, funneling thousands of raptors every spring. Raptors migrating along the southern shore of Lake Ontario turn and follow the shoreline instead of flying out over the lake. Derby Hill has become a well-known spring migrating raptor site and has been recognized as one of New York's Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The site is owned by the Onondaga Audubon Society and has been monitored annually since 1963.

In anticipation of the big moment (when the millionth raptor would fly over) the Onondaga Audubon Society planned two, yes two, weekend celebrations on April 26-27 and May 3-4. Evidently there had been some miscommunication as the millionth raptor made its appearance during the middle of the week. However, that did not dampen either of the weekend celebrations. The combination of Cindy Page's live birds of prey program, guided bird walks, and the running commentary by

4 Gerry Smith and Gerard Phillips over a snazzy PA system, attracted visitors and enticed them to stay awhile.

On Thursday, May 1 at 12:43 pm the millionth raptor, a Broad-winged Hawk, flew over Derby Hill with nineteen witnesses to appreciate the moment. "There is little to compare with being at Derby during hawk season when a front comes through,"

said Dorothy Crumb, a dedicated hawk watcher who has frequented Derby for the past 30 years. "Gerard Phillips and Gerry Smith between them kept tabs of what was coming and the present count. We were down to 200 birds, then 100, and then, number 1

million. A cheer went up. Everything became confusing and a bottle of champagne appeared. A great moment at Derby Hill."

For more information on Derby Hill, including directions, visit [www.derbyhill.org](http://www.derbyhill.org).



The nineteen dedicated and fortunate observers who witnessed the millionth recorded raptor, a Broad-winged Hawk, fly over Derby Hill.

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