

Those skydancing timberdoodles American Woodcock Survey, 2021

By Gary Sturge

Birds Canada cancelled survey and field data collection activities last year, so it was good to be able to legitimately survey this year with the results to be of use.

And so on the evening of May 6, under good conditions, Connie and I set out to do our American Woodcock Survey along Hwy 534, our usual route since we began this survey a few years back.

For those not familiar with the survey, it involves stopping at 10 pre-appointed stations, 600 metres apart, listening for American Woodcocks for 2 minutes, then travelling on to the next stop. It must occur between May 1 and May 20 at this latitude and must start 15 or 22 minutes after official sunset depending on the amount of cloud cover. It must be completed within 42 minutes. It requires listening for the *peent* call or the fluttering wing sound of the male woodcock as he descends to earth from his courtship flight. Weather conditions, noise levels, traffic and other events are recorded.

Our route starts just over 17 km from our house. We got to Stop 1 and at 8:47 p.m. exited the car, started listening, recorded the data and then motored down the road. We repeated this another 9 times. We heard some birds singing initially and encountered lots of Spring Peepers, but heard just one barking dog. With only a couple vehicles passing us, a kind of Covid19 quiet was over everything.

In summary, this survey tied our last year's "unofficial" event. We encountered 5 American Woodcocks, our most ever. As with many other species, they are declining in numbers, but it seems on Survey Route 020 along Hwy 534, they are doing okay.

Added Note: As Citizen Scientists, we are also involved with the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas 3.

About a week after the American Woodcock survey, we sallied forth at sunset to collect some night bird activity for the Atlas. Wonderfully, we encountered 9 singing woodcocks, 8 of them along a short 3 km stretch of road. And since that night, we encountered a family of them crossing the gravel road near the same area. Great news!

For more information on the American Woodcock Survey (AWS), see:
<https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/american-woodcock-survey/> and
<https://www.citizenscience.gov/catalog/182/#>.



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