

brood may remain together for six to eight weeks. Females will tenaciously sit on their nests and may be touched before bolting. Females with young perform distraction displays, and chicks tend to "freeze" when approached. A brooding female may make a labored flight with feet dangling to decoy off a dog or other predator, and they have been reported to carry away young between their feet, although the documentation on this reputed behavior is suspect.

Woodcocks are largely nocturnal and solitary feeders. They prefer a diet of earthworms but will eat a wide variety of invertebrates. They forage by probing their long beak into the soil and have evolved a remarkable set of adaptations for this foraging mode. Their upper mandible has high concentrations of nerve endings, which presumably aid the bird in foraging by touch. The upper bill is also flexible, with the distal half capable of movement, making the bill prehensile, and capable of grasping worms even when the bill is fully immersed in soil. Their legs are short, their bill is long, and the woodcock's eyes are set far back on the head and are large, presumably an adaptation to its crepuscular feeding habits. They stamp their feet, which may elicit earthworm activity, and hearing may play a role in their foraging behavior.

Woodcocks are a popular game bird. Their numbers decreased precipitously in the nineteenth century, largely due to overhunting, where a bag of one hundred a day was not uncommon. The woodcock population seems to have stabilized following passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918, which placed the hunting of woodcock under federal regulation. During the DDT era, pesticides may have affected populations, but habitat alteration may pose the greatest threat today. Wise management should, however, ensure the continued presence in our fields and forests of this strange-looking and enigmatic bird.

MEET OUR COVER ARTIST

Gordon Morrison's last cover portrait for *Bird Observer* appeared on the December 1992 issue. Gordon illustrated the recently released *Ecology of Western Forests*, part of the Peterson Field Guides series and authored by John Kricher. Gordon continues to write and illustrate a series, "Birds in the Garden," appearing in *Horticulture Magazine*, and recently featuring Cedar Waxwing, Western Meadowlark, and Blue Jay. Gordon also illustrates for *Horticulture Magazine* a series on native American plant species. In addition, the October 1993 issue of *Country Journal* includes a special section on birds, illustrated by Gordon. Portraits in the special section include birds in various habitats, birds in profile, and eggs in nests. Gordon can be reached at 52 Bulfinch Street, North Attleboro, MA 02760.