

Diurnal Behavior of an Eurasian Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

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Worth (1976) has commented in these pages on body-bobbing and diurnal feeding of the American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*). I have observed similar behavior in the Eurasian Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) in Asia.

On 31 March 1974 in Taiwan (Formosa), I observed an Eurasian Woodcock for more than 4 h, 10–20 m from a blind situated at the upper edge of a small ravine in virgin evergreen hardwood forest between 1,800 and 1,900 m elevation. I first saw the woodcock at 1110 coming down the slope opposite the blind into an area of level terrain about 10 m wide on the ravine bottom. Almost immediately it “froze” and remained motionless for 5 min, after which it squatted on the leaf-covered ground and placed its bill under the scapulars of the left wing. For the next 20 min it rested. Its eyes were partially but not entirely closed during this time. The bird was in full view because the scattered ground vegetation was too sparse for concealment.

At 1140 the bird stood up and stretched by simultaneously extending the left wing and left leg. Then it began probing the ground with its bill, taking one to several steps after each series of probes. Feeding was non-directional and continued for the next 2.6 h, interrupted by periods of rest or immobility. Feeding bouts were prefaced by bobbing behavior in which the body moved (“seesawed”) while head and legs remained stationary. Occasionally the woodcock scratched its head directly, without lowering a wing. It did not vocalize or take flight during this period and remained within an area roughly 10 m in diameter. Local drainage patterns resulted in the ravine bottom being damp and easily probed, which may explain why the bird fed in that site. At 1420 I lost track of the bird for 50 min. I located the bird briefly again at 1510 as it moved out of sight along the mountain slope.

Diurnal activity of the Eurasian Woodcock is noteworthy in that this species has usually been described as crepuscular or nocturnal in its activities (Selby 1833, Whistler 1949, Cheng 1964, Ali and Ripley 1969). Its habit of remaining concealed in dense cover during the day has perhaps led to the notion that it is inactive during the day. Its crepuscular courtship flights have probably reinforced the complementary notion that it is active only at twilight or at night. However Smythies (1953) occasionally saw woodcocks feeding in the middle of the day in streams with little or no overhead cover. Aymas (1930) and Herklots (1967) said they may feed during the day when the weather is drizzly. The weather was clear the day I saw the woodcock in Taiwan and there had been no rain the previous 2 days. The temperature ranged from 10–15°C during the day and was 14–15°C at the time of the observation. Reports like these appear to be rare. I suspect that if woodcocks could be clearly and extensively observed during daylight hours, they would prove to be more active than previously suspected.

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