

OBSERVATIONS OF AN AMERICAN WOODCOCK NEST AND EGG DATES IN MANITOBA

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I have been fortunate to see three active American Woodcock nests; two, found in our yard near Richer by my father and me, respectively, have previously been reported.² The third nest, containing a full clutch of four eggs, was found 23 April 1986 by John Kaluzny and Wayne Kupiak while clearing out some trees in the Department of Natural Resources compound at Hadashville. I first visited the site and identified the bird on 26 April. The nest was about 6.5 m (20 feet) from the edge of a graveled parking area in a grassy site surrounded by Red-osier Dogwood and Trembling Aspen with a few scattered small White Spruce. It had been fairly wet and there was still a small pool of water close to the nest.

Inasmuch as I work for the Department I was able to visit the nest frequently. On 27 April I took numerous color photos of the incubating bird and the nest and its contents. Later that day Bob Nero inspected the site. When he touched the incubating bird she scurried off, giving distraction display, tail fanned out and wings dragging. The morning of 28 April was cold after a lot of snow and rain so I made no attempt to flush the incubating bird. On 29 April I went to check the nest at 1131 h. I approached the nest and then put my hand next to the bird but she did not flush, so I left her.

In the afternoon of 29 April the sun was out so I thought I could safely check the eggs. I again put my hand beside the incubating bird, then touched her on the wing, but she did not leave. Finally I

stroked her back and then she darted away about 3 m (10 feet) with distraction display. There were still four eggs. I next checked the nest on 2 May at 0740 h and took twenty black and white photos of the incubating bird at different angles. I visited the nest again twice in the afternoon. I noticed that the incubating bird seemed to always keep her back to the sun; that was the case every time I was at the nest. No one else seems to have observed this interesting behavior (pers. comm., R.W. Nero).

On 8 May at 0740 h the eggs had still not hatched. The next day, however, at 0754h I found that all four eggs had hatched. Only one of the four chicks was out of the nest; I guessed that the eggs had hatched about 3 hours earlier. Usually one egg is laid per day and the incubation period for Woodcock is 20-21 days.¹ Thus, this clutch must have been laid about 16-19 April in cold weather.

A nest with three eggs was found by Harold C. Tirschman 8 May 1986 on his property about 6.4 km (4 mi.) east of Steinbach. The nest still contained three eggs 9 May, but on 11 May there were four eggs, giving egg-laying dates of about 6-11 May. On 30 May, three eggs hatched, but there was no sign of the fourth egg (pers. comm., H.C. Tirschman to R.W. Nero). Tirschman reported that he had seen two or three broods annually for the past several years on the same property. Other egg-laying dates for extreme southeastern Manitoba are: 20 April 1970 (egg on top of fresh snow, Piney)², 1-4 May 1979 and 11-14 April



1981 (both at Richer).³ These limited records show that egg-laying dates for the Woodcock in Manitoba are from mid-April to mid-May. In most of its breeding range eggs are laid in April, but occasionally it lays in March as far north as Michigan and Massachusetts.³

A late nest with four eggs was found by Paul E. Long and William D. Leitch near Snake Lake, west of Waugh, Manitoba (south of Falcon Lake) 22 May 1985. Females often renest after losing their eggs. The nest was discovered when the female flushed from it (pers. comm., W.G. Leitch to R.W. Nero). This nest was in a dry site in sedge and grass on the edge of willows.

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¹JOHNSGARD, P.A. 1981. The plovers, sandpipers, and snipes of the world. Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln. 493 pp.

²NERO, R.W. 1977. The American Woodcock in Manitoba. *Blue Jay* 35:240-256.

³NERO, R.W. 1981. Additional American Woodcock notes for Manitoba. *Blue Jay* 39:202-205.

⁴STOUDT, G.D. (Ed). 1967. The shorebirds of North America. (Species accounts by R.S. Palmer). Viking Press, N.Y. 270 pp.

