

**RECENT NESTING OF AMERICAN WOODCOCK  
(*Scolopax minor*) IN CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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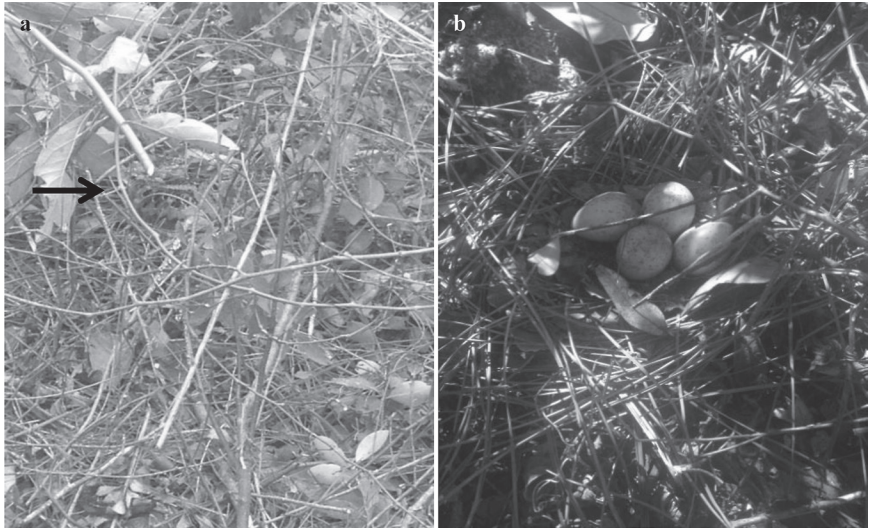
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The American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) is a migratory game bird found throughout eastern North America. Although American Woodcock are a member of the shorebird family, they inhabit forested uplands comprised of a mosaic of early successional and mature forests. They are managed as two regional populations, the Eastern and Central Management Units (Owen et al. 1977). Since 1968, American Woodcock populations have experienced declines of 2.1% per year in the Eastern Unit and 1.8% per year in the Central Unit; these declines have been attributed to a loss and degradation of early successional forest habitat (Dwyer et al. 1983, Kelley 2004).

American Woodcock breeding primarily occurs in the northeastern U.S. and Canada, although some individuals breed in the southeastern states (Kelly et al. 2008). In Florida, breeding has been confirmed as far south as Collier County, but most records are from the northern one-third of the state (FWC 2003). Overall, there is a paucity of woodcock breeding data in Florida, with approximately 24 confirmed records from 1877 to present, ranging from January 17 to April 26 (Stevenson and Anderson 1994, FWC 2003, BBS 2014). It is unclear whether so few records in Florida are the result of an actual scarcity of breeding, or because breeding is difficult to confirm (FWC 2003). In Florida, breeding begins during winter, often in late January, making it difficult to differentiate breeding birds from late-winter migrants (Stevenson and Anderson 1994, FWC 2003). Furthermore, this overlap is compounded by the difficulty of observing non-nesting breeding behavior, such as courtship displays which occur for only 30 – 40 minutes shortly before dawn and after sunset. As a result, many reports from Florida are considered possible and probable breeding, but not confirmed.

From 28 Feb to 4 Mar 2014, I observed a nesting female American Woodcock on 4 eggs (Figure 1a and 1b, respectively) at the Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area in Clay County, Florida (FWC 2003). The nest was located at 17 R 402987 m E 3319150 m N within mesic flatwoods (FNAI 2010) in an approximately 2 x 2 m thicket of a vines and shrubs. The nest was near the edge of a nearly closed canopy loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) forest and located in an area with minimal canopy cover, sparse pines, and mixed hardwoods. The nest was constructed from dead pine needles and twig litter, and the eggs were placed in shallow depression. The site was damp, with pools of standing water up to 25 cm in depth. The pine trees around the nest (+/- 100 m) averaged 37 cm DBH, the shrub cover (defined as 45 cm–2 m in height) and the ground cover (<45 cm in height) within 10 m of the nest consisted almost entirely of gallberry (*Ilex glabra*). I was unable to follow-up to determine the fate of the nest.

This is the second breeding record for American Woodcock in Clay County, Florida. Although the timing, habitat type, and nest site for this occurrence are consistent with those described in the literature, it should serve as a reminder to carefully assess winter and spring observations to increase our understanding of the frequency and distribution of American Woodcock courtship behavior and nesting in Florida.



**Figure 1. a) Female American Woodcock on a nest b) of 4 eggs at Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area, Clay County, Florida.**

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