A WOODCOCK NEST NEAR AUBURN

The American woodcock, **Philohela minor**, is a rare breeder in Alabama, and it is unusual when nesting birds are discovered. Several weeks ago, on March 7, a nest of the woodcock containing a full set of four eggs was found near Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. As I was exploring a swamp near Auburn, I was suddenly surprised to see a woodcock flutter clumsily into the air from under foot. The bird dropped to the ground about four feet away and displayed an excellent "broken wing" act. She flopped about erratically and frantically quivered her half-spread, limp wings. Several times she lay completely on the ground and dragged along on her side. This act was accompanied by many loud, harsh, nasal notes uttered by the bird. Soon after the bird flushed, I looked down in front of me and saw the nest and four light brown, heavily spotted eggs, all of which had their smaller ends pointed toward the center of the nest. The nest itself was a well formed depression in the leaf litter and was lined with loblolly pine needles and weathered dead leaves. It was approximately four and one-half inches in diameter and was constructed against a small decayed loblolly pine limb.

I made a second trip to the nest to examine it more closely and record its exact location. The bird was on the nest and so nearly perfect was her protective coloration that she was extremely difficult to detect, even though I knew exactly where to look. The nest was in a rather open spot surrounded by a dense second growth of sweetbay magnolia and black tupelo. The principal ground cover was a dense growth of switch cane which covered about an acre of the surrounding area. Sweetgum, loblolly pine, and yellow poplar were also scattered through the area. The nest was located on slightly raised ground in the junction of two adjoining hazel-alder swamps. It was approximately ten feet from one of the alder bogs and fifteen feet from the other. These alder thickets evidently served as the bird's feeding grounds. The nest was located 100 yards or less from open fields.

Several days later I flushed the male about forty yards from the nest. It is quite possible that the woodcock is more common in Alabama during the breeding season than is believed. Due to their retiring habits and seclusive ways, it is extremely hard to seek them out. No doubt many stay in Alabama to nest and are never discovered.—C. W. Summerour, Montgomery, Alabama.