

A Woodcock Encounter

Arlyn W. Perkey

While brush hogging a road in my woods on April 29, 2022, I noticed two small birds scurrying out of the way of the noisy equipment. I didn't immediately recognize them, but they reminded me of woodcock chicks. Sure enough, I soon spotted the hen.

I don't carry my good camera and telephoto lens on the tractor for obvious reasons. Considering the limited mobility of the young chicks, I reasoned that the hen would not be moving very far



away from that location anytime soon. At the end of the work day, I returned in the truck with my camera, stopping well before the area of the previous encounter. With camera & 400 mm telephoto lens in hand, I cautiously walked forward. I was pleased when the hen did not fly away, but gave me a distress call along with a fake broken wing maneuver in an attempt to lure me away from the chicks.

The dense, dead-leaf ground cover provided excellent camouflage for her feather coloring, and I struggled to get the lens manually focused on her. Fortunately, she eventually moved toward the mowed road, giving me a less obstructed view to distinguish her shape and plumage.



Woodcock
4-29-2022

54



9-20-2011

54

As I reflected on the location, I realized how ideal it was for this mother and her chicks. At the edge of an approximately 1 acre opening of grasses, seedlings, and saplings, it was a site I had planted in hopes of reclaiming a recent, severely disturbed old oil well site. Because of a complete absence of top soil, the results have been slow and disappointing to me. Now, however, I got an unexpected payback from my slower than expected reclamation progress.

Woodcock populations have struggled with the loss of early successional vegetation habitat. I feel good knowing that some of my management work had resulted in a positive outcome. Besides the reward of a nice woodland memory, I now have a few photos in my collection to share with other nature lovers.

Copyright © 2022 by Arlyn W. Perkey