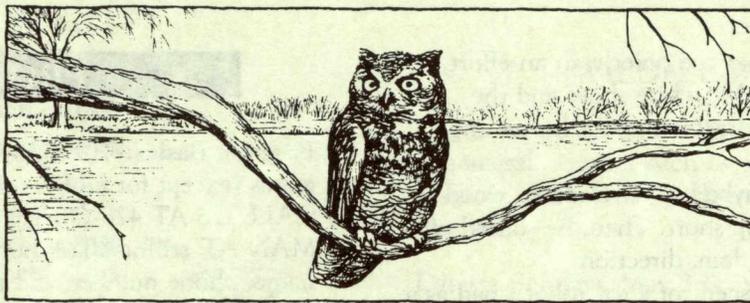


# STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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## WOODCOCK OBSESSION

-- Mark Spreyer

You got to love a bird with monikers such as timberdoodle and bogsucker. Of course, it is most commonly known as the American woodcock and, each spring, it goes through its amazing mating ritual.

While researching this article, I found some old journal entries describing my earliest excursions into the woodcock's world here at Stillman. As you'll read, I also kept an eye and ear out for our local owls.

A woodcock, by the way, is a portly inland sandpiper with a long beak and short legs. It is a migratory species that does not return to the area until March.

Also, its mating displays are generally limited to the low-light conditions found on either side of sunset and sunrise. With these facts in mind, here are some edited journal entries from 1986.

### March 23

There is still some ice on the pond. Two drakes and one hen mallard are paddling in the open spots.

Friday night, between 11:00 and 11:30, the moon was bright enough to inspire a male woodcock. His "peent, peent" calls were the first I heard this season. Also heard my first flicker yesterday.

### March 24

The horned owls and screech owls are hooting tonight! I haven't heard the horned owls be so vocal in a couple of weeks. The screechers have been doing most of the calling. I wonder if the full (or almost so) moon has something to do with it.

### March 30

Hepatica blooming today.

I went out shortly after sunset to sneak up on the woodcock. On my way, I watched the big horned owl through binoculars as he left the willow from the northwest corner of the pond and dropped low over the area where the woodcock was. The owl paid little attention to the woodcock.

I, on the other hand, did watch the woodcock for quite some time. I got much closer to his "peenting" ground than the binoculars could focus.

It was quite therapeutic to watch him strut back and forth, pumping his head a bit as he called. He took off low on his display flights and I generally lost him behind bushes blocking my view.

He was working hard for an unseen (to me) mate.

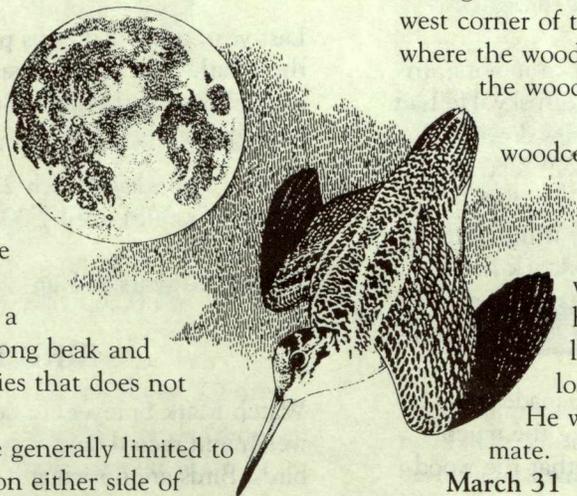
### March 31

Another night of woodcock watching. Got out earlier tonight, before the bird started calling. I was looking down for woodcock hangouts instead of looking up. When I did look up at a familiar dead tree, I noticed that one of the branch stubs looked a bit different. Perhaps, it cracked in a strong wind.

I took a closer look just in time to notice that it was the great horned owl, perched and looking like part of the tree. In a silent second, the owl headed off for an elm across the pond. As he sat in plain view, the sun finished setting.

While walking back to the main trail, I heard the "peent, peent." Tonight, the woodcock was just a bit south from where I had found him the night before.

In an effort to blend in, I chose dark corduroys and a sweatshirt to wear. Looking at my white tennis shoes and socks, I realized I hadn't really thought it through.



# STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

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I moved carefully, but not too quietly, in an effort to get closer to the woodcock. My white shoes and the crunching leaves did not distract him from his mating show.

He took short steps (maybe long strides to a woodcock) and suddenly pulled up short. Then, he started off in another, seemingly at random, direction.

His actions were reminiscent of a toy robot I had as a kid. When confronted with a wall or other obstacle, the robot turned and proceeded in a different direction. The woodcock moved as if he was hitting invisible obstacles.

Every now and then the bird would make a longer than average run, maybe eight to ten feet, and then turn and start again. He would often take wing after one of these longer rushes.

He started north, curved to the east over the pond and out of my line of sight. As he was whistling and twittering overhead, I moved closer to where I thought the woodcock would land.

When the bird stopped calling, I stopped moving. In sailed the woodcock from the lighted western sky. He had a bat-like quality as he turned his wings flaps down and the sun shown through his brown translucent feathers.

#### April 3

Estimating distance at night is a funny thing. Judging by the sounds, I was very close to the woodcock this evening. Right before each call, I could hear a brief water-drop sound. I cupped by ears to focus on this subtle whoop/whistle just before each "peent."

It was as if he was clearing his beak or made the noise as he breathed in just prior to making the much louder "peent." I was listening so intently that the woodcock's take-off startled me.

Once again, I adjusted my position in hopes of an even closer viewing or, should I say, listening. By this time, stars were visible overhead and the ground was quite dark.

I spot him low in the western sky as he returns in near silence. He lands so close that I can hear his feet hit the ground. Perhaps, I am too close as I can hear him walk quickly away.

The woodcock's calls diminish in intensity and regularity. I am suddenly aware of a variety of itches that, just minutes ago, wouldn't have dared present themselves.

Minutes pass. Darkness has completely enveloped the scene. I wonder where he went.

Slowly, I step towards home when I hear that characteristic whirring/whistle of the woodcock's wings. No nuptial display this time; just a sudden start to some secluded spot. At sunrise, the dance begins anew.

## PROGRAMS

**Program Basics:** TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs (except for bird banding open houses), PLEASE CALL US AT 428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@flash.net. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

### WOODCOCK WATCHES

Last year, the woodcocks put on great show. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate and will have another good nuptial display this year. Bring you binoculars and come join the fun!

Date: Saturday, March 27 & April 3  
Time: 5:00PM until 7:00PM  
Fee: None  
Age: 10 years and up



### BIRD BANDING

Watch Mark Spreyer, a licensed bird bander, measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Birds are not caught in a predictable manner, so come prepared to hike the trails. With luck, you'll see a bird in the hand and two in the bush. If it is raining, the banding open house will be cancelled.

Dates: Sundays, April 4 & May 2  
Time: 9:00AM to Noon  
Fee: None

### SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Migration will be under way and you never know what we might find. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.

Date: Sundays, April 25 & May 9  
Time: 8:00AM  
Fee: None  
Age: 10 years and up

## SEASONAL SCIENCE - SPRING

A Class for Educators  
1 Hour Graduate Credit

### Course Description

This course will provide participants with the opportunity to experience a variety of science activities which explore spring. Topics include: bird banding, woodland wildflowers, pond life, migratory birds, and seasonal environmental changes. These activities will be appropriate to a variety of grade levels and will emphasize content background, concept development, and process skills.

Friday evening activities will be conducted in both the classroom and on the grounds at the District 54 Nature Center in Schaumburg. Much of Saturday will be spent in the field at the Stillman Nature Center and will take place rain or shine.



Days	Dates	Times
Friday	4/30	4:00 - 9:00 PM
Saturday	5/1	8:30 AM - 5:00 PM

**Instructors:** Susan Allman, 4th grade teacher, Fox School; Mark Spreyer, Director, Stillman Nature Center

**Fees:** \$35.00 materials fee which includes meals (dinner, breakfast, lunch). \$75.00, 1 hr. graduate credit from Aurora University.

**Materials:** To be provided. Outdoor dress required.

**Min/Max:** 10 Minimum/20 Maximum

## FRIDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer, former Director of Chicago's peregrine falcon release project, will lead the walks. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. *Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.*



Date: Fridays: April 30 & May 14  
Time: 8:00AM  
Fee: None  
Age: 10 years and up

## WILDFLOWER WALKS

Join us as we explore Stillman's woodlands in search of ephemeral beauties such as white trillium, may-apple, Virginia bluebell and jack-in-the-pulpit. Bring your camera!

Dates: Sundays, May 2 & 9  
Time: 2:00PM  
Age: 10 years and up  
Fee: None

### SUMMER HOURS BEGIN IN APRIL

In March, Stillman will be open to drop-in visitors on Sundays from 11 AM to 4 PM. Starting in April, Stillman will be open Sundays from 9 AM to 4 PM.

Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is available, by reservation, during the week to school classes, Audubon chapters, garden clubs, and other organized groups. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call 428-OWLS or check our website: [www.stillmannc.org](http://www.stillmannc.org).

### CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS

Daria Sapp and her indefatigable landscape volunteers need help. Duties include buckthorn clearing, prairie burning and wildflower planting.

Stillman has the tools. We need healthy, outdoor-loving bodies to wield them. Thursday mornings are our usual work times. We start at 9:00 AM and wrap up around noon. Questions? Call 428-OWLS(6957) or email us at [stillnc@flash.net](mailto:stillnc@flash.net).

## THE TRIBUTE TREES

Tribute trees are planted to honor or celebrate persons or events that have touched our lives. Call or check our website, [www.stillmannc.org](http://www.stillmannc.org), for the list of tribute trees currently available.

The dedication for the latest tribute tree appears below.

• A red maple will be planted in memory of Peary A. Nelson.





www.stillmann.org  
 Email: stillinc@flash.net  
 (847) 428-OWLS  
 South Barrington, IL 60010  
 33 West Penny Road  
 NATURE CENTER  
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*If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.*

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- Please send a gift membership from \_\_\_\_\_ to the name and address listed below.

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