

A sportsman's guide to woodcock

Updated for 2017



Game & Wildlife
CONSERVATION TRUST

www.gwct.org.uk/woodcockposition

The British breeding population of the woodcock now qualifies for red-list status. The GWCT estimates around 55,000 male woodcock were breeding in the UK in 2013, which indicates a 29% decline since the original estimate in 2003.

In contrast, between 800,000 to 1.3 million migrant birds typically arrive in the UK from Europe each year and over 95% of the woodcock shot in the UK are migrant birds. There is no evidence that these wintering birds are in decline.

The GWCT does not believe that stopping woodcock shooting would reverse declines in UK resident populations, but advises all those who wish to shoot woodcock to exercise care and improve their knowledge of local populations.

By exercising caution you have a measure of control over the future of woodcock on your shoot. Our research shows that the migrant birds that overwinter in the UK are incredibly site faithful, and, therefore, are likely to return to the same area year on year. This means that overshooting is likely to reduce your breeding stock.

Season opens: Scotland – 1 September
England, Wales and Northern Ireland – 1 October
Season closes UK – 31 January

Yes - woodcock can be shot when:

- ✓ The shoot has a good understanding of local woodcock populations – numbers of both breeding birds and migrants.
- ✓ There have been good numbers of migrant woodcock in the area.
- ✓ Restraint is practised even where resident birds are absent – overshooting might break the migratory link with the shoot.
- ✓ The area has no history of breeding resident woodcock that could be at risk, only migrants.
- ✓ Guns only shoot flight lines with great caution as there is a much higher risk of overshooting.

No – woodcock should not be shot when:

- ✗ Numbers have been low in the area and the impact of shooting may be greater.
- ✗ It's too early in the season and the first migrants have just arrived. Whilst every shoot will be different, generally we recommend not shooting woodcock before 1st December.
- ✗ A statutory cold weather suspension is in force.

Our woodcock research

The GWCT is at the forefront of woodcock research, having produced 36 publications on woodcock since 1974.

Since early 2012, our 'Woodcock Watch' programme has been able to place satellite tags on more than 60 woodcock. This has revolutionised our understanding of the woodcock and shown migrations from as far afield as Sweden, Finland and Siberia and remarkable site loyalty year-on-year.

- Each tagged woodcock provides information on routes, timings, stopovers and weather effects.
- Including stopover sites, woodcock wintering in the UK have visited 18 different European countries.
- The average woodcock migration is 3,000 kilometres.
- The total distance of all tagged woodcock to date is 291,627 kilometres.

We are now studying resident birds. Our pioneering GPS tagging project on resident woodcock will provide more information about breeding behaviour and habitat use to help us understand the causes of their recent decline.

You can donate to the GWCT research on woodcock or sponsor a bird. For more information visit:
www.woodcockwatch.com

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