

## THE WOODCOCK'S LOVE SONG.

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The woodcock so much admired by sportsmen as a game bird, has traits of character which have never been read either by the sportsman or the naturalist. His habits being principally nocturnal perhaps to some extent account for this.

His peculiar shape and make up, so different to that of the grouse or partridge family, or to any other game bird, mark him as a strangely unique specimen. His long bill, peculiarly shaped head, in which his large black eye is set so far back, his breast-heavy body, and short excuse for a tail, all mark him as a delightfully curious and uncommon bird. His color is beautiful, velvet and russet; none of our game birds is clothed in richer plumage.

The haunts of the woodcock are in keeping with his general character. Our deeply shaded swales and glens are the places he loves to make his home. He is seldom found unless in a spot so beautiful that the sportsman-naturalist could imagine he is the companion of "wood nymphs"; no other birds frequent and live in such lovely sylvan retreats.

"The woodcock's love song" is a strange performance and is known to comparatively few. Any fine warm evening about the middle of April, if you take your stand at dusk, by the side of a good piece of woodcock cover, and remain perfectly still for a few minutes, you will soon hear a sound, perhaps not twenty yards from you, from some bird on the ground. If you never heard the same before you would be inclined to think it was a nighthawk, for the sound is a sort of drawn-out "pâte" very similar to the night-hawk when on the wing. The bird will emit this note "pâte," "pâte," several times at short intervals, and then take wing, when you will at once recognize the author of the weird notes, for no one who has ever heard the wing-whistle of the woodcock as he rises in cover can mistake him for any other bird. The bird mounts in the air by a circular flight; you can easily keep track of him, although he is not visible to the eye, by the incessant twittering noise he is making with his wings. When he arrives at the summit of his flight, he commences a sharp twittering whistle and after describing a few circles he commences a rapid descent, and pitches to the ground very close to the spot he rose from two or three minutes before. He soon commences his "pâte," "pâte" again and repeats his aerial gymnastic flight over and over again. By listening very attentively you will hear a low guttural note just preceeding the pating note; a note very similar to the crowing note of a hen made just as she is getting her chicks nestled snugly beneath her for the night. How long on a fine spring night he will keep his antics up I cannot say, but quite long enough for you to get the whole performance thoroughly engraved on your senses, so that at any subsequent time you would not possibly mistake it for that of any other bird.