

Aelred D. Geis Woodcock Habitat Management Area

Dedicated to Aelred D. Geis, Ph.D for his vision and perseverance in championing the creation and protection of the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (MPEA)

Woodcock in the MPEA

In the early years of Columbia's development, Al Geis, a wildlife biologist and local resident, took Columbia founder James Rouse out to a clearing in the woods to impress upon him the value of preserving this beautiful natural area. Reportedly, Rouse lay in a field in jacket and tie as the two men watched the elaborate courtship display of the male woodcock.

Extent of the Woodcock Habitat Management Area

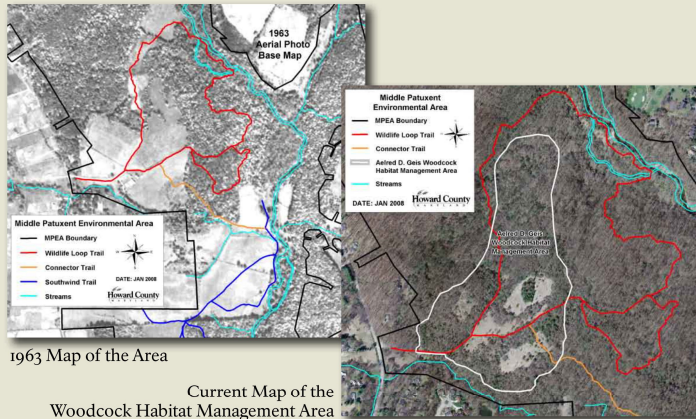


Photo Credit - Grah McElroy
Woodcock Courtship

Woodcock Populations

Breeding populations of woodcock were once as high in this area as those observed anywhere in the United States. This was due to an increase in abandoned fields as agriculture declined. Through natural succession, old fields revert to forest, and the woodcocks leave. Further habitat is lost with the change in land use from agriculture to urban areas. According to Geis, woodcock use of the MPEA was at its peak in about 1966.

Courtship Displays

Courtship activities occur at dusk and dawn from mid February until late April. The male woodcock's display begins on the ground with a series of nasal "peent" calls. He then bursts into flight, spiraling above the singing ground with twittering wings, and then chirping as he descends in a zig-zag dive.



Photo Credit - Eric Dreweze
Woodcock and Chicks

Preservation and Management

Geis, who died August 2007, will be remembered as a driving force behind the preservation of the MPEA. The environmental area is one of the largest undeveloped tracts of natural landscape in Howard County, and is highly valued for its diversity of flora and fauna. This high level of diversity is

possible because of a rich array of habitat types that occur along the river valley. However, this area must be managed in order to maintain this rich diversity and the associated wildlife.

Funded by the Middle Patuxent Environmental Foundation