GENUS VII.—MICROPTERA, *Nutt.* WOODCOCK OR BOGSUCKER.

Bill double the length of the head, straight, slender, tapering, sub-trigonal, and deeper than broad at the base, slightly depressed towards the end; upper mandible with the ridge narrow, towards the end flattened, the sides with a narrow groove extending to near the tip, the tip blunt, knob-like, and longer than that of the lower. Head rather large, oblong; eyes large, and placed high; neck short; body full. Feet rather short; tibia feathered to the joint; tarsus rather short, compressed, scutellate; first toe very small, the third much longer than the tarsus. Claws very small, arched, acute. Wings short, rounded, the fourth and fifth quills longest, the first three extraordinarily attenuated. Tail very short, cuneate, of twelve feathers.

 THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK, OR BOGSUCKER.
+MICROPTERA AMERICANA, *Aud.*

PLATE CCCLII.—MALE, FEMALE, AND YOUNG.

There is a kind of innocent simplicity in our Woodcock, which has often excited in me a deep feeling of anxiety, when I witnessed the rude and unmerciful attempts of mischievous boys, on meeting a mother bird in vain attempting to preserve her dear brood from their savage grasp. She scarcely limps, nor does she often flutter along the ground, on such occasions; but with half extended wings, inclining her head to one side, and uttering a soft murmur, she moves to and fro, urging her young to hasten towards some secure spot beyond the reach of their enemies. Regardless of her own danger, she would to all appearance gladly suffer herself to be seized, could she be assured that by such a sacrifice she might ensure the safety of her brood. On an occasion of this kind, I saw a female Woodcock lay herself

down on the middle of a road, as if she were dead, while her little ones, five in number, were endeavouring on feeble legs to escape from a pack of naughty boys, who had already caught one of them, and were kicking it over the dust in barbarous sport. The mother might have shared the same fate, had I not happened to issue from the thicket, and interpose in her behalf.

The American Woodcock, although allied to our Common Snipe, *Scolopax Wilsonii*, differs essentially from it in its habits, even more than in form. The former is a much gentler bird than the latter, and although both see at night, the Woodcock is more nocturnal than the Snipe. The latter often, without provocation or apparent object, migrates or takes long and elevated flights during the day; but the Woodcock rarely takes flight at this time, unless forced to do so to elude its enemies, and even then removes only to a short distance. When rambling unconcernedly, it rarely passes high above the tree tops, or is seen before the dusk or after the morning twilight, when it flies rather low, generally through the woods; and its travels are altogether performed under night. The largeness of its eyes, as compared with those of the Snipe, might of itself enable one to form such a conclusion; but there is moreover a difference in the habits of the Woodcock and Snipe, which I have been surprised at not finding mentioned by WILSON, who certainly was an acute observer. It is that the Woodcock, although a prober of the mire, frequently alights in the interior of extensive forests, where little moisture can be seen, for the purpose of turning up the dead leaves with its bill, in search of food beneath them, in the manner of the Passenger Pigeon, various Grakles, and other birds. This the Snipe, I believe, has never been observed to do. Indeed, although the latter at times alights on the borders of pools or streams overhung by trees, it never flies through the woods.

The American Woodcock, which in New Brunswick is named the Bog-sucker, is found dispersed in abundance during winter over the southern parts of the Union, and now and then, in warm and sequestered places, even in the Middle Districts. Its stay in any portion of the country at this period, seems to depend altogether on the state of the weather. In the Carolinas, or even in Lower Louisiana, after a night of severe frost, I have found their number greatly diminished in places where they had been observed to be plentiful the day before. The limits of its northern migrations at the commencement of the breeding season, are yet unascertained. When in Newfoundland I was assured that it breeds there; but I met with none either in that country or in Labrador, although it is not rare in the British Provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia during summer. From the beginning of March until late in October, this bird may be found in every district of the Union that affords places suited to its habits; and its numbers, I am per-

suaded, are much greater than is usually supposed. As it feeds by night, it is rarely met with by day, unless by a sportsman or gunner, who may be engaged in pursuing it for pleasure or profit. It is, however, killed in almost incredible numbers, from the beginning of July until late in winter, in different parts of the Union, and our markets are amply supplied with it during its season. You may at times see gunners returning from their sports with a load of Woodcocks, composed of several dozens; nay, adepts in the sport have been known to kill upwards of a hundred in the course of a day, being assisted by relays of dogs, and perhaps a change of guns. In Lower Louisiana, they are slaughtered under night by men carrying lighted torches, which so surprise the poor things that they stand gazing on the light until knocked dead with a pole or cane. This, however, takes place only on the sugar and cotton plantations.

At the time when the Woodcocks are travelling from the south towards all parts of the United States, on their way to their breeding places, these birds, although they migrate singly, follow each other with such rapidity, that they might be said to arrive in flocks, the one coming directly in the wake of the other. This is particularly observable by a person standing on the eastern banks of the Mississippi or the Ohio, in the evening dusk, from the middle of March to that of April, when almost every instant there whizzes past him a Woodcock, with a velocity equalling that of our swiftest birds. See them flying across and low over the broad stream; the sound produced by the action of their wings reaches your ear as they approach, and gradually dies away after they have passed and again entered the woods. While travelling with my family, in the month of October, through New Brunswick and the northern part of the State of Maine, I saw the Woodcocks returning southward in equal numbers late in the evenings, and in the same continuous manner, within a few yards or even feet of the ground, on the roads or through the woods.

This species finds itself accommodated in the warmer parts of the United States, as well as in high northern latitudes, during the breeding season: it is well known to reproduce in the neighbourhood of Savannah in Georgia, and near Charleston in South Carolina. My friend JOHN BACHMAN has known thirty young ones, not yet fully fledged, to have been killed in the vicinity of the latter place in one day. I have never found its nest in Louisiana, but I have frequently fallen in with it in the States from Mississippi to Kentucky, in which latter country it breeds abundantly. In the Middle Districts, the Woodcock begins to pair in the end of March; in the southern a month earlier. At this season, its curious spiral gyrations, while ascending or descending along a space of fifty or more yards of height, in the manner described in the article on the Snipe, when it utters a note dif-

ferent from the cry of that bird, and somewhat resembling the word *kwauk*, are performed every evening and morning for nearly a fortnight. While on the ground, at this season as well as in autumn, the male not unfrequently repeats this sound, as if he were calling to others in his neighbourhood, and on hearing it answered, immediately flies to meet the other bird, which in the same manner advances toward him. On observing the Woodcock while in the act of emitting these notes, you would imagine he exerted himself to the utmost to produce them, its head and bill being inclined towards the ground, and a strong forward movement of the body taking place at the moment the *kwauk* reaches your ear. This over, the bird jerks its half-spread tail, then erects itself, and stands as if listening for a few moments, when, if the cry is not answered, it repeats it. I feel pretty confident that, in spring, the female, attracted by these sounds, flies to the male; for on several occasions I observed the bird that had uttered the call immediately caress the one that had just arrived, and which I knew from its greater size to be a female. I am not, however, quite certain that this is always the case, for on other occasions I have seen a male fly off and alight near another, when they would immediately begin to fight, tugging at and pushing each other with their bills, in the most curious manner imaginable.

The nest, which is formed of dried leaves and grass, without much apparent care, is usually placed in some secluded part of the woods, at the foot of some bush, or by the side of a fallen trunk. In one instance, near Camden, in New Jersey, I found one in a small swamp, on the upper part of a log, the lower portion of which was covered with water to the height of several inches. The eggs, which are laid from February to the first of June, according to the latitude of the place selected, are usually four, although I have not very unfrequently found five in a nest. They average one inch and five and a half eighths in length, by one inch and an eighth in breadth, are smooth, of a dull yellowish clay colour, varying in depth, and irregularly but pretty thickly marked with patches of dark brown, and others of a purple tint.

The young run about as soon as they emerge from the shell. To my astonishment, I once met with three of them on the border of a sand-bar on the Ohio, without their parent, and to all appearance not more than half a day old. I concealed myself near them for about half an hour, during which time the little things continued to totter about the edge of the water, as if their mother had gone that way. During the time I remained I did not see the old bird, and what became of them I know not. The young birds are at first covered with down of a dull yellowish-brown colour, then become streaked with deeper umber tints, and gradually acquire the colours of the old. At the age of from three to four weeks, although not fully fledged, they are able to fly and escape from their enemies, and when they are six

weeks old, it requires nearly as much skill to shoot them on wing as if they were much older. At this age they are called *stupid* by most people; and, in fact, being themselves innocent, and not yet having had much experience, they are not sufficiently aware of the danger that may threaten them, when a two-legged monster, armed with a gun, makes his appearance. But, reader, observe an old cock on such occasions: there he lies, snugly squatted beneath the broad leaves of that "sconk cabbage" or dock. I see its large dark eye meeting my glance; the bird shrinks as it were within its usual size, and, in a crouching attitude, it shifts with short steps to the other side. The nose of the faithful pointer marks the spot, but unless you are well acquainted with the ways of Woodcocks, it has every chance of escaping from you both, for at this moment it runs off through the grass, reaches a clump of bushes, crosses it, and, taking to wing from a place toward which neither you nor your dog have been looking, you become flustered, take a bad aim, and lose your shot.

Thousands of persons besides you and myself are fond of Woodcock shooting. It is a healthful but at times laborious sport. You well know the places where the birds are to be found under any circumstances; you are aware that, if the weather has been for some time dry, you must resort to the damp meadows that border the Schuylkill, or some similar place; that should it be sultry, the covered swamps are the spots which you ought to visit; but if it be still lowering after continued rain, the southern sides of gentle hills will be found preferable; that if the ground is covered with snow, the oozy places visited by the Snipe are as much resorted to by the Woodcock; that after long frost, the covered thickets along some meandering stream are the places of their retreat; and you are aware that, at all times, it is better for you to have a dog of any kind than to go without a dog at all. Well, you have started a bird, which with easy flaps flies before you in such a way that if you miss it, your companion certainly will not. Should he, however, prove as unsuccessful as yourself, you may put up the bird once, twice, or thrice in succession, for it will either alight in some clump of low trees close by, or plunge into a boggy part of the marsh. As you advance towards him, you may chance to put up half a score more, and *stupid* though you should be, you must be a bad shot indeed if you do not bring some one of them to the ground. Aye, you have done it, and are improving at the sport, and you may be assured that the killing of Woodcocks requires more practice than almost any other kind of shooting. The young sportsman shoots too quick, or does not shoot at all, in both which cases the game is much better pleased than you are yourself. But when once you have acquired the necessary coolness and dexterity, you may fire, charge and fire

again from morning till night, and go on thus during the whole of the Woodcock season.

Now and then, the American Woodcock, after being pursued for a considerable time, throws itself into the centre of large miry places, where it is very difficult for either man or dog to approach it; and indeed if you succeed, it will not rise unless you almost tread upon it. In such cases I have seen dogs point at them, when they were only a few inches distant, and after several minutes seize upon them. When in clear woods, such as pine barrens, the Woodcock on being put up flies at times to a considerable distance, and then performs a circuit and alights not far from you. It is extremely attached to particular spots, to which it returns after being disturbed.

Its flight is performed by constant rather rapid beats of the wings, and while migrating it passes along with great speed. I am inclined to think its flight is greatly protracted, on account of the early periods at which it reaches Maine and New Brunswick:—I may be wrong, but I am of opinion that at such times it flies faster than our little Partridge. In proceeding, it inclines irregularly to the right and left at the end of every few yards; but when it has been put up after having settled for awhile, it rises as if not caring about you, and at a slow pace goes a few yards and alights again, runs a few steps and squats to await your departure. It is less addicted to wading through the water than the Snipe, and never searches for food in salt marshes or brackish places. Rivulets that run through thickets, and of which the margins are muddy or composed of oozy ground, are mostly preferred by it; but, as I have already said, its place of abode depends upon the state of the weather and the degree of temperature.

The food of the Woodcock consists principally of large earthworms, of which it swallows as many in the course of a night as would equal its own weight; but its power of digestion is as great as that of the Heron's, and it is not very often that on opening one you find entire worms in its stomach. It obtains its food by perforating the damp earth or mire, and also by turning the dead leaves in the woods, and picking up the worms that lie beneath them. In captivity, Woodcocks very soon accustom themselves to feed on moistened corn meal, bits of cheese, and vermicelli soaked in water. I have seen some that became so gentle as to allow their owner to caress them with the hand. On watching several individuals probing mud in which a number of earthworms had been introduced, in a tub placed in a room partially darkened, I observed the birds plunge their bills up to the nostrils, but never deeper; and from the motion of the parts at the base of the mandibles, I concluded that the bird has the power of working their extremities so as to produce a kind of vacuum, which enables it to seize the worm at one end,

and suck it into its throat before it withdraws its bill, as do Curlews and Godwits. The quickness of their sight on such occasions was put to the test by uncovering a cat placed in the corner of the room, at the same height above the floor as the surface of the mud which filled the tub, when instantly the Woodcock would draw out its bill, jerk up its tail, spread it out, leap upon the floor, and run off to the opposite corner. At other times, when the cat was placed beneath the level of the bird, by the whole height of the tub, which was rather more than a foot, the same result took place; and I concluded that the elevated position of this bird's eye was probably intended to enable it to see its enemies at a considerable distance, and watch their approach, while it is in the act of probing, and not to protect that organ from the mire, as the Woodcock is always extremely clean, and never shews any earth adhering to the feathers about its mouth.

How comfortable it is when fatigued and covered with mud, your clothes drenched with wet, and your stomach aching for food, you arrive at home with a bag of Woodcocks, and meet the kind smiles of those you love best, and which are a thousand times more delightful to your eye, than the savoury flesh of the most delicate of birds can be to your palate. When you have shifted your clothes, and know that on the little round table already spread, you will ere long see a dish of game, which will both remove your hunger and augment the pleasure of your family; when you are seated in the midst of the little group, and now see some one neatly arrayed introduce the mess, so white, so tender, and so beautifully surrounded by savoury juice; when a jug of sparkling Newark cider stands nigh; and you, without knife or fork, quarter a Woodcock, ah, reader!—But alas! I am not in the Jerseys just now, in the company of my generous friend EDWARD HARRIS; nor am I under the hospitable roof of my equally esteemed friend JOHN BACHMAN. No, reader, I am in Edinburgh, wielding my iron pen, without any expectation of Woodcocks for my dinner, either to-day or to-morrow, or indeed for some months to come.

SCOLOPAX MINOR, Gmel. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 661.

WOODCOCK, *Scolopax minor*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vi. p. 40.

SCOLOPAX MINOR, Bonap. Syn., p. 331.

LESSER WOODCOCK, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 194.

AMERICAN WOODCOCK, *Scolopax minor*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 474.

Male, 11, 16. Female, $11\frac{7}{12}$, $17\frac{1}{4}$.

Distributed throughout the country. Extremely abundant in the Middle and Eastern Districts, as well as in the interior, where it breeds, as far as Nova Scotia. Equally abundant in winter in the Southern States, though many migrate southward.

Adult Male.

Bill double the length of the head, straight, slender, tapering, sub-trigonal and deeper than broad at the base, slightly depressed towards the end. Upper mandible with the dorsal line straight, the ridge narrow, towards the end flattened, the sides nearly erect, sloping outward towards the soft obtuse edges, the tip blunt, knob-like, and longer than that of the lower mandible. Nostrils basal, lateral, linear, very small. Lower mandible broader than the upper, the angle very long and narrow, the dorsal line straight, the back broadly rounded, the sides marked with a broad groove, sloping inwards at the base, outwards towards the end, the edges soft and obtuse, the tip rounded.

Head rather large, oblong, narrowed anteriorly; eyes large, and placed high. Neck short and thick. Body rather full. Feet rather short; tibia feathered to the joint; tarsus rather short, compressed, anteriorly covered with numerous scutella, laterally and behind with sub-hexagonal scales, and having a row of small scutelliform scales along the outer side behind. Toes free, slender, the first very small, the second slightly shorter than the fourth, the third much longer and exceeding the tarsus in length; all scutellate above, marginate, flattish beneath. Claws very small, arched, acute, that of hind toe extremely small, of middle toe with a thin inner edge.

Plumage very soft, elastic, blended; of the fore part of the head very short, of the neck full. Wings short, rounded; the fourth and fifth quills about equal and longest, the first three extraordinarily attenuated, being in fact sub-linear, narrower beyond the middle, the inner web slightly enlarged towards the end, the first as long as the seventh; secondaries broad, the outer a little incurved and rounded, the inner tapering and elongated. Tail very short, wedge-shaped, of twelve narrow feathers, which taper towards the rounded point.

Bill light yellowish-brown, dusky towards the end. Iris brown. Feet flesh-coloured; claws brownish-black. The forehead is yellowish-grey, with a few dark mottlings in the centre; on the upper part of the head are two broad blackish-brown transverse bands, and on the occiput two narrower, separated by bands of light red; a brownish-black loreal band, and a narrow irregular line of the same across the cheek and continued to the occiput. The upper parts are variegated with brownish-black, light yellowish-red, and ash-grey; there are three broad longitudinal bands of the first colour, barred with the second, down the back, separated by two of the last. The inner wing-coverts and secondary quills are similarly barred; the outer pale greyish-red, faintly barred with dusky. The quills are greyish-brown, tipped with dull grey, the secondaries spotted on the outer web with dull red. Upper tail-coverts barred; tail-feathers brownish-black, their tips grey, their

outer edges mottled with reddish. The sides of the neck are grey, tinged with red; the lower parts in general light red, tinged with grey on the breast, on the sides and lower wing-coverts deeper; the lower tail-coverts with a central dusky line, and the tip white.

Length to end of tail 11 inches, to end of wings $9\frac{1}{2}$; wing from flexure $5\frac{1}{4}$; tail $2\frac{4}{12}$; bill along the ridge $2\frac{8}{12}$, along the edge of lower mandible $2\frac{5\frac{1}{2}}{12}$; tarsus $1\frac{2}{12}$; middle toe $1\frac{5}{12}$, its claw $\frac{1}{4}$. Weight $6\frac{1}{4}$ oz.

Adult Female.

The female, which is considerably larger, has the same colours as the male.

Length to end of tail $11\frac{7}{12}$, to end of wings $10\frac{5}{12}$, to end of claws $13\frac{4}{12}$; wing from flexure $5\frac{4}{12}$; tail $2\frac{4}{12}$; bill along the ridge $2\frac{10}{12}$; along the edge of lower mandible $2\frac{6\frac{1}{2}}{12}$; tarsus $1\frac{2}{12}$; middle toe $2\frac{5}{12}$, its claw $\frac{1}{4}$. Weight $8\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

Young fledged.

The young, when fully fledged, is similar to the old female.

GENUS VIII.—RECURVIROSTRA, *Linn.* AVOCET.

Bill twice the length of the head, very slender, much depressed, tapering to a point, and slightly recurved; upper mandible with the dorsal line straight for half its length, then a little curved upwards, and at the tip slightly decurved, the ridge broad and flattened, the edges rather thick; nasal groove rather long and very narrow; lower mandible with the angle long and very narrow, the dorsal line slightly curved upwards, the point very slender, extremely thin, and a little curved upwards. Nostrils linear, basal. Head small, rounded above, rather compressed; neck long; body compact. Legs very long, slender; tibia bare for half its length, and reticulated; tarsus very long, compressed, reticulated with hexagonal scales; toes rather short, the first extremely small; outer toe a little longer than inner; anterior toes connected by webs of which the anterior margin is deeply concave. Claws very small, compressed, rather acute. Plumage soft and blended. Wings long, pointed, the first quill longest; inner secondaries elongated and tapering. Tail short, even, of twelve rather narrow

American Woodcock.

1. Male. 2. Female. 3. Young in Autumn.

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon. F. R. S. F. L. S.

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