

WILDLIFE TRENDS

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Nest Boxes: A Key to Wood Duck Success

by Dana K. Johnson

Wood ducks are very popular as a game species in the Southeast. Their colorful plumage and fast flight make them a worthy quarry to even the best wing shooters. During the early 1900's, though, the wood duck nearly became extinct. Unregulated hunting and habitat loss, both feeding and nesting, led to a drastic decline in the population. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 gave the wood duck population a chance to recover. With the help of nest boxes, the wood duck has made a comeback and is a common target during the hunting season. It ranks second only to the mallard in total harvest each year.

Wood ducks are cavity nesters. They use many different trees to nest in if a cavity is available, but prefer one located near a water source. The amount of nesting sites will have a direct bearing on the total population of wood ducks in an area. In many places there are too few suitable nesting cavities to sustain a high number of ducks. Research has shown that wood duck nest boxes placed in the proper habitat will afford protection from predators and, if maintained throughout the year, will produce more offspring than nests in natural cavities.

Wood duck nest box implementation in quality brood rearing habitats has been one of the many success stories in wildlife management. Wood ducks were forced to use natural tree cavities that were subject to nest predation and competition from other wildlife species. Since their implementation, nest boxes have helped wood ducks' reproductive success. Research has proven that hens will use the boxes during nesting season two or three times per year if they are located in a quality habitat and maintained throughout brood rearing times.

The first factor that should be



Nest boxes are usually mounted over water but they don't have to be over water to be used. They do have to be elevated in trees or on posts.

In this Issue

- **Game Management**
Nest Boxes: A Key to Wood Duck Success
by Dana K. Johnson
- **Game Management**
Habitat Management for the Whole Year
by BASF
- **Game Management**
Talking Turkey with Dr. Dan Speake
by Wallace Whatley
- **Pond Management**
A Simple Way to Improve Your Fishing
by Kedric Nutt

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