



The Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Resources Division
WOOD DUCK FACT SHEET



The wood duck (*Aix sponsa*) is the most common duck in Georgia. It is the only species that traditionally nests here, and it is one of only a few species of waterfowl that nests in a cavity rather than on the ground. Considered by many to be the most beautiful of all North American waterfowl, the wood duck is certain to enhance any location in which it appears.

BIOLOGY

About half the size of a mallard, the wood duck (woodie) is a type of dabbling duck, meaning it forages on the water's surface for food as opposed to diving for food on the bottom. During the fall and winter, woodies need foods such as acorns that are high in fat to carry them through the harsher months and to prepare them for breeding and laying eggs. Spring requirements shift towards higher protein foods like insects to promote growth. Wood ducks begin courtship rituals several months before the nesting season, which usually begins in February and lasts through June. Pair bonds normally last through the brood-rearing season. A hen will lay one egg each day until she reaches an average clutch size of 10-15 eggs. If something happens to the nest, hens will reneest in an effort to hatch a successful brood. Incubation begins after the last egg is laid, and hatching occurs about 30 days later. About 24 hours after hatching, the hen begins calling the chicks out of the nest to explore their new world on water. By the time the chicks are 5 weeks of age, they are quite independent from the hen. As maturity progresses, ducks will begin the courtship ritual and breed at one year of age.

HABITAT

Wood ducks are closely associated with forested wetland habitats throughout North America. Woodies seldom venture far from woodlands and associated water areas. Their distribution is essentially confined to riparian corridors and other areas of lowland forest interspersed with freshwater ponds, lakes, marshes, and swamps. Beaver ponds form some of the finest wood duck habitat around. Flooded emergent vegetation that protrudes above the surface of the water provides good brood-rearing cover. Buttonbush, alder, or other shrubs that grow out of the water provide protection from aerial predators. Other emergent vegetation such as sedges and rushes also provide places for young ducklings to hide.

NEST BOX MANAGEMENT

Erecting wood duck nest boxes can help raise local populations in your area. For maximum benefit, proper placement of wood

duck boxes is extremely important. Farm ponds may not be a good place for duck boxes as most have steep sides, deep edges and no emergent vegetation. Without emergent vegetation, the ducklings have no place to hide, and rapidly fall prey to various predators, such as snapping turtles and largemouth bass.

NEST BOX CONSTRUCTION

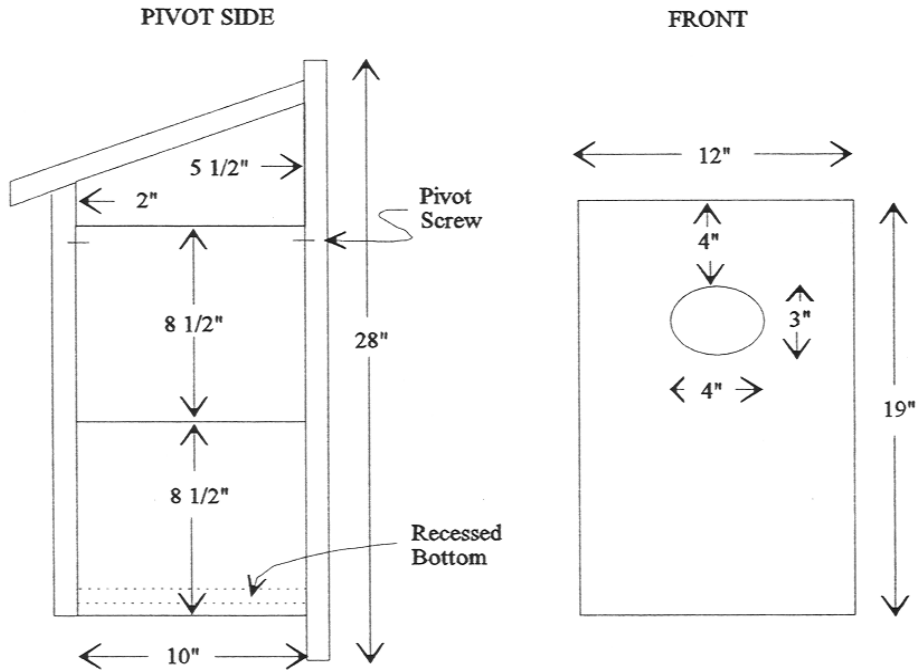
There are several different designs for wood duck nest boxes, however all boxes should be between 20-27" in height and 10-12" square. The preferred lumber for building wood duck nest boxes is rough-cut 1" thick cypress, however cedar or yellow pine is acceptable. **DO NOT** use treated lumber. The box should be held together with 1 1/2" zinc coated or galvanized wood screws. To allow ducklings to climb up and escape, 1/2" wire mesh should be mounted to the inside of the box under the front hole. See the reverse side for instructions on building a wood duck box and predator guard.

GUIDELINES FOR MOUNTING NEST BOXES

1. Boxes should be placed so there is a 40' flight line in front of the box that is free from obstructions such as tree limbs or bushes.
2. Wooden 4"x4" or 2" diameter metal posts can be used to mount boxes. Post should be 10-12' long. No box should be mounted without a predator guard around the post.
3. Position the box as nearly vertical as possible, with a very slight tilt forward. The tilt will enable ducklings to climb out more easily.
4. Boxes should be placed one per acre of suitable brood-rearing habitat.
5. Boxes should be placed so that the bottom of the box is at least 4' above the high water mark.
6. Do not place more than one box per post, as this may increase the possibility of "dump nesting."
7. When attaching the box to the post, use 3-5" lag bolts instead of nails. Bolts make it easier to remove boxes in the future for replacement or repair as necessary.
8. Wasps can be kept out of the boxes using a small piece of no-pest strip stapled or tacked inside the box.
9. Once erected, boxes should be lined with about 4" of wood shavings, not sawdust. Cedar shavings are acceptable to use.
10. Boxes should be checked and cleaned annually during December or January, prior to the nesting season.



WOOD DUCK BOX SPECIFICATIONS



PREDATOR GUARD SPECIFICATIONS

