

Wood Ducks

Aix sponsa

Some other ducks, like bufflehead, goldeneye and mergansers, also nest in cavities.

During the industrial revolution, trees were cut for cordwood to fire the furnaces that ran machines in US factories. Few ancient forests remain in North America. In fact, Bear Swamp is the only primeval forest in Southern NJ. Because old forests are rare, larger cavity-nesting birds find it especially difficult to find sizable trees to incubate their eggs. Today conservationists have established man-made nesting box programs to mitigate this loss.

Wood ducks were driven to near-extinction by habitat loss and *market hunters* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These waterfowl were especially vulnerable because they roost in groups. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916 has since protected and regulated bird populations. Hunting regulations and conservation measures, spearheaded by hunters, have been helping wood duck numbers to recover.



- One of North America's most beautiful duck species
- The male's plumage is more colorful than the female's
- 19 inches long, wingspan 28-39 inches
- They are monogamous (have just one partner) for a breeding season
- Lifespan: about four years
- Diet: Ducklings rely on invertebrates and small fish. Adults prefer plants, seeds, aquatic and land invertebrates.



- Clutch size 8-15; however, it is common for a female to "dump" her eggs in another wood duck's nest
- Incubation 28-37 days; female does not incubate until all eggs are laid so they hatch on the same day
- Chicks live in the nesting cavity for just one day after hatching
- Wood ducks have been known to leap from heights of 60 feet to exit their nests
- Number of broods — normally one; occasionally two
- They fly (fledge) in 56-70 days

Threats: Habitat loss — *especially wetlands and lack of large tree cavities for nesting;* Predation — *bass and snapping turtles will snatch a chick off the water's surface and snakes, opossums and raccoons will eat eggs.*

You Can Help!

How to play an important role in the recovery of duck populations...

- Support conservation groups' nesting box programs
- When safe, leave dead trees standing
- Buy a duck stamp — this is the easiest way for you to participate in wildlife and habitat conservation
- If you hunt, obey game regulations

Please do not feed wildlife. Foods other than their natural diet cause illness and deformities, and develop unsafe dependencies on people. Feeding also attracts larger numbers, creating an unsanitary and unhealthy environment.

Wood Ducks photos: Stan Tekiela's NatureSmart Images®. Market hunting photo: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



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cumaucriver.org/signs/007s.html