

Wood Ducks in Winnipeg!

continued

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER...

Cavity nesting ducks do not carry nesting material so it is important to add six inches of wood shavings, chips to the bottom of your duck nesting box.

Nest boxes placed over water may be more prone to dump-nesting. The urge to parasitize a nest is triggered by the sight of another female entering the nest cavity to lay eggs. When nesting boxes are placed over water, nearly every female that enters a box to lay an egg is easily seen by others. Nest boxes in forests are less visible. In some areas it has been found that nesting boxes placed

in marshes have higher rates of dump-nesting and about one third the hatching success as those placed in forests.

To discourage dump-nesting, we recommend that you place your nesting box in woods near water. The box should be mounted between 12 and 20 feet above ground, preferably with the entrance facing the water. Choose a spot where the canopy is open and no branches will overhang the entrance.

Although wood ducks will choose nest sites up to one mile from water, a box placed within 200 meters may have a better chance of being occupied.

PREDATOR PROOFING

Raccoons and squirrels are frequent nest marauders. Although these animals are quite cunning, there are a few ways that you can try to outsmart them.

- Houses with 7.5 cm by 10.0 cm elliptical entrance holes prevent access by adult raccoons.
- A wooden tunnel entrance 25 cm long by 10 cm wide is also effective, but is preferred by starlings which compete with wood ducks for nest sites.
- If wooden posts are used to support boxes, an inverted sheet metal cone encircling the post can deter predators.

MORE THAN JUST DUCKS!

There is a surprising variety of critters that enjoy the cozy abode of a duck nesting box just as much as wood ducks do! Other common residents include screech owls, kestrels, flickers, tree swallows, squirrels and the occasional raccoon. Consider your nest box an invitation to any creature that chooses to use it!

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Wood Ducks in Winnipeg!

Suzanne Thornton

A duck that perches in trees, nests in tree cavities, and eats acorns? This may not sound like your ordinary duck, but it's just what you would expect from a *Wood Duck*! Wood ducks are a common sight along Winnipeg's waterways. Drake wood ducks are the "pretty boys" of the waterfowl world, with their swooping white-patterned crests and stunning metallic green, blue and bronze plumage. Hens are less striking, but are recognizable by their smaller crest, white eye markings, and brownish-grey plumage.

A FOREST FOR A DUCK

Wood ducks can be found in open woodlands surrounding lakes, rivers, and wetlands, and even within city and town parks.

These birds are well-suited to life in the forest. Swift, agile flyers, they travel easily between trees. Long claws allow them to perch in tree branches and help the ducklings make their way up the wall of the tree cavity to the outside world. With their light weight and thick fluffy down, nestlings can jump from the nest several meters above ground and not be harmed.

NUTTY DUCKS

Wood ducks eat more nuts and fruits than any other duck and sometimes travel inland looking for acorns, grapes and berries. One Minnesota wood duck drake is known to have eaten 56 bur oak acorns!

Although wood ducks do eat nuts and seeds, they also dabble in shallow water eating submerged plants and insects. Their favourite food is a tiny green plant that floats on the surface of swampy water, called duckweed. Overall, about 90% of the wood duck diet is plant life.

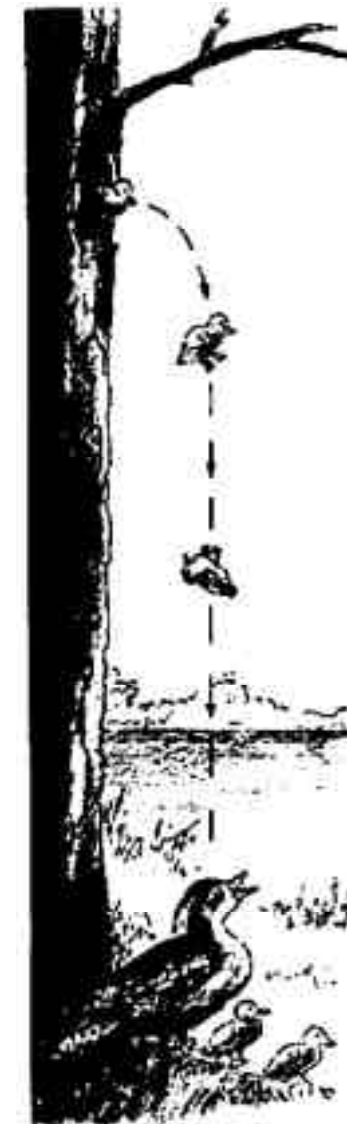
NESTING WOOD DUCKS

In the spring, wood duck hens return to the place where they learned to fly to choose their own nest site. The wood duck hen will lay 11 to 14 eggs, one each day until the clutch is complete. Eggs are incubated for 27 to 30 days and will all hatch within a few hours of each other. One day after hatching, the ducklings leave the nest cavity and begin feasting on aquatic insects.

TOO MANY EGGS IN ONE BASKET

Sometimes female wood ducks will lay eggs in the nests of other females, producing clutches of more than 30 eggs! Known as dump-nesting, the explanation for this behaviour is a hot topic of debate. One possibility is that a wood duck improves her chances of producing at least a few ducklings by distributing her eggs in several nests.

More is not necessarily better, since very few eggs in a dump nest ever hatch. Incubation requires good contact between the hen's warm belly and every egg. The more eggs there are, the less contact each one receives, and some may not be incubated at all. Often a hen will just give up on hatching the entire clutch and will abandon the nest altogether.



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continued

A GOOD CAVITY IS HARD TO FIND

Wood ducks can't excavate or even enlarge a tree cavity, so they have to make do with what they find. Only flickers and pileated woodpeckers make holes that are big enough to accommodate a wood duck hen and her eggs. For cavities to form naturally from rotting, trees must be very old. As a result, young forests and those without large woodpeckers will not have nesting sites for wood ducks.

In Winnipeg, many ideal wood duck nesting sites are removed every year in an effort to control dutch Elm disease. It is particularly important that we provide alternative nest sites if wood ducks are to thrive here.

WINNIPEG WOOD DUCK PROJECT

In 1971, members of the Wildlife Foundation of Manitoba launched the Winnipeg Wood Duck Project, with the release of a few wood duck ducklings to Winnipeg's riverbanks. Within a few years, 60 duck nesting boxes were in place and project volunteers were recording use of nearly half of these artificial nest sites.

The Fort Whyte Centre assumed responsibility for the project in 1983 and today maintains over 100 nest boxes within Winnipeg. All city residents living along the river can become involved in the Winnipeg Wood Duck Project by purchasing a Fort Whyte Wood Duck Watcher Membership.

The Wood Duck Watcher Membership includes all Fort Whyte membership benefits, including free admission to the Fort Whyte Centre, *Branta* newsletter subscription, discounts on merchandise and more. In addition to this, a staff member will set up a wood duck nest box in a suitable location on your property.

Each spring, staff and volunteers will return to record evidence of nest success, clean out your nest box and prepare it for the next breeding season.

INDIVIDUAL WDW MEMBERSHIP
\$75 for the first year;
\$50 for subsequent years

FAMILY WDW MEMBERSHIP
\$95 for the first year;
\$70 for subsequent years



A SPECTACULAR COMEBACK

At the turn of the century, wood duck populations were critically low, the result of overhunting and clearing of the mature forests that wood ducks call home.

Protection was the first step in increasing wood duck numbers. The creation of the Migratory Birds Act in 1918, completely protected wood ducks from hunting for 23 years. A limited hunting season was granted beginning in 1941.

Artificial nest box programs did their part by providing much needed nest sites for wood ducks. The first nest box program was started in the 1940s in Massachusetts at the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.

Closer to home, the Winnipeg Wood Duck Project began in the early 1970s and has resulted in the establishment of over 100 nest boxes along the city's waterways. This project is largely responsible for the return of wood ducks to our vicinity.

Wood duck populations have now fully recovered in Winnipeg and throughout North America.



Easy-to-Make Wood Duck Nesting Box

TOOLS YOU'LL NEED:

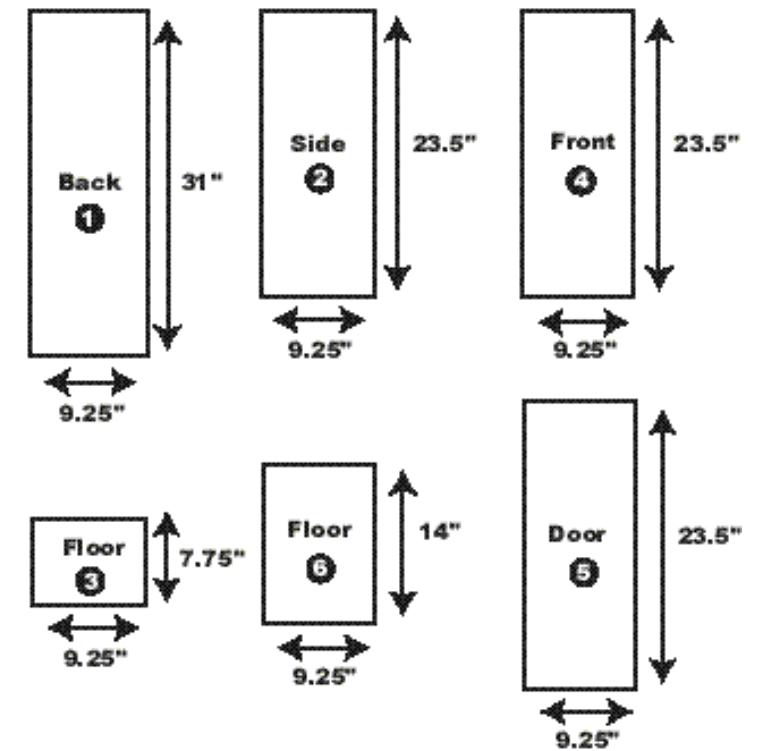
- handsaw or table saw
- drill and 1/2" bit
- jigsaw
- screwdriver
- sandpaper
- pencil

PROCEDURE:

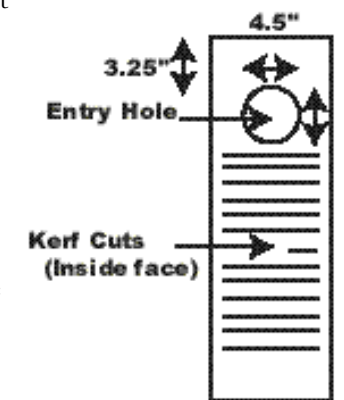
1. Measure and cut the wood to produce the six pieces. Number the pieces as shown.
2. Attach the back (1) to the side (2) using four screws fastened from the back of the box.
3. Drill five 1/2" drainage holes in the floor (3). Attach floor by fastening two screws through the back and two through the side.
4. Draw the entry hole on the front (4) using a pencil. Drill a pilot hole and cut out the entry hole using a jig saw.
5. Score the inside face of the front (4) using a saw.
6. Attach the front (4) using six screws.
7. Round the top outside edge of the door (5). Fasten the door at the top with one screw from the front and one from the back. The two screws form the hinge and allow the door to open. Pin the door shut with a nail from the front.
8. Attach the roof (6) using four screws from the top and three screws from the back (be careful not to screw into the door). The box is now ready to install.

Material Measurements

(Not to Scale)



Detailed Front View 4 (Not to Scale)



Exploded View (Not to Scale)

