



# Wood Duck

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## *Aix sponsa*

During the early 1900s, the wood duck was threatened with extinction due to unregulated harvest and habitat loss. Through conservation efforts, research, and the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the wood duck now thrives in 42 states and five Canadian provinces.

### DESCRIPTION

Many consider the wood duck the most beautiful and colorful bird in the world. The male has a purple and green crested head with bright red eyes. His bill has a red base with white parallel lines along the top. The head also has a white parallel line that runs from the back of the eye to the crest of the head. Its chest is a burgundy color with white specks and the back is purplish-black. The breast and belly are white. The female is gray-brown with a white teardrop-shaped eye ring.

### DIET

Because they are dabblers, wood ducks prefer shallow water of 18 inches or less for feeding. These areas are preferred because they provide a variety of insects, emergent plant material, and acorns that are readily accessible in the shallow water.

Insects are an important source of protein for wood ducks. Emergent plants such as cattails, smartweed, sedge, and pickerel weed, and mast-producing trees such as water oaks, Nuttall oaks and white oaks provide high-energy food.

### HABITAT AND REPRODUCTION

The wood duck occupies a variety of habitat types, including bottomland hardwood swamps, marshes, wooded sloughs, beaver ponds and other areas with flooded timber. These habitat types are vital to its survival. These birds require hollow tree cavities for nesting, as well as areas with ample cover, food, and rest sites.


In areas where nesting cavities are limited, artificial nest boxes can be constructed and installed near or in areas that have water and suitable brood-rearing habitat. Nesting boxes should be built from seasoned woods, such as cypress, cedar or hemlock. Nesting boxes made of plastic, fiberglass or metal should not be placed in areas of full sunlight due to the high temperatures that can be generated in these boxes. The high temperatures can overheat the eggs and kill the embryos.

Nesting boxes need to have a strip of hardware cloth that stretches from the bottom of the box to the entrance hole to provide traction for the ducklings to climb out of the box. Boxes should have 3 to 4 inches of wood chips in the bottom to serve as nesting material. Erect boxes by mid December, prior to the time when females start searching for suitable nest sites. Nesting boxes should be cleaned out and wood chips replaced once a year.

The primary factor that leads to mortality of eggs and young ducklings is predation. Predator control can be accomplished

by providing a predator guard beneath the nesting box. The predator guard should be constructed of metal flashing or other types of metal wrapped around the tree. Overhanging limbs should be trimmed back from nearby trees. The predator control devices deter predators such as raccoons, snakes, and squirrels from climbing to the box and destroying the nest.

### CONSERVATION STATUS

Wood ducks are one of the many wildlife management success stories of a species that has made a tremendous comeback from the brink of extinction. These birds thrive today due to the work of wildlife professionals, effective wildlife management practices, game and fish laws, and support of the public. 

## FACTS ABOUT WOOD DUCK

- ▶ Unlike most other ducks, the wood duck has sharp claws for perching.
- ▶ It is not uncommon for a female wood duck to deposit eggs in nests besides her own, a behavior called "egg dumping."
- ▶ Wood ducks use natural cavities for nesting sites and do not create their own. They will readily use man-made nest boxes.
- ▶ Wood ducks are the second most commonly hunted duck in the United States, second only to the mallard.