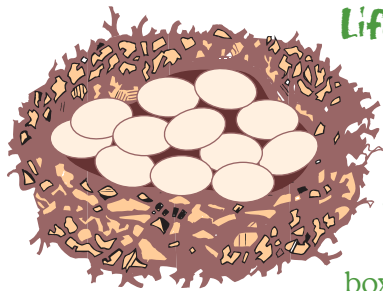


# Houses for Wood Ducks



**Life Skill:** Wise use of resources

**Project Skill:** Increasing potential nesting sites for wood ducks

**Objective:** Collect used materials, and construct and strategically place nest boxes for wood ducks

**Success Indicator:** Participants build usable nest boxes for wood ducks

## Provisions Needed

- 10' plank of 1" x 12" scrap lumber\*
- mounting bolt: 3/8" x 6" lag bolt and 3/8" washer
- 2" screen door hooks and eyes
- Wood shavings for nest material
- backing: 2' of creosote-treated 2" x 4" lumber
- 10 penny and 20 penny galvanized nails
- Wood screws
- Supporting bracket 3/16" x 1" x 12"
- 3' x 4' piece of sheet metal
- 1/4" roundhead stove bolts or roundhead rivets
- Metal or wooden posts for mounting



## Trailhead

Have you ever passed a wet or flooded area and noticed a lot of standing dead trees, many without limbs? What appears stagnant and lifeless is actually a welcome home for many types of wildlife. Birds like woodpeckers, ducks, and songbirds depend on standing dead trees—also known as **snags**—as a source of insect food, shelter, and breeding places. **In the South, the wood duck is the most common cavity-nesting duck.** Because they can't excavate their own nesting sites, the ducks use holes in dead trees created by woodpeckers. Nature is a model of constant renewal and reuse of materials. You can learn a lot from a wood duck.

As recently as the early 1900s, wood ducks faced extinction because of over-hunting and loss of habitat. Restrictions on hunting helped stabilize the populations, but lack of nesting sites was still a problem. Wildlife managers discovered that ducks would nest in specially constructed boxes. Construction and erection of hundreds of thousands of these boxes have allowed wood duck populations to rebuild.

snags



## Trailblazing

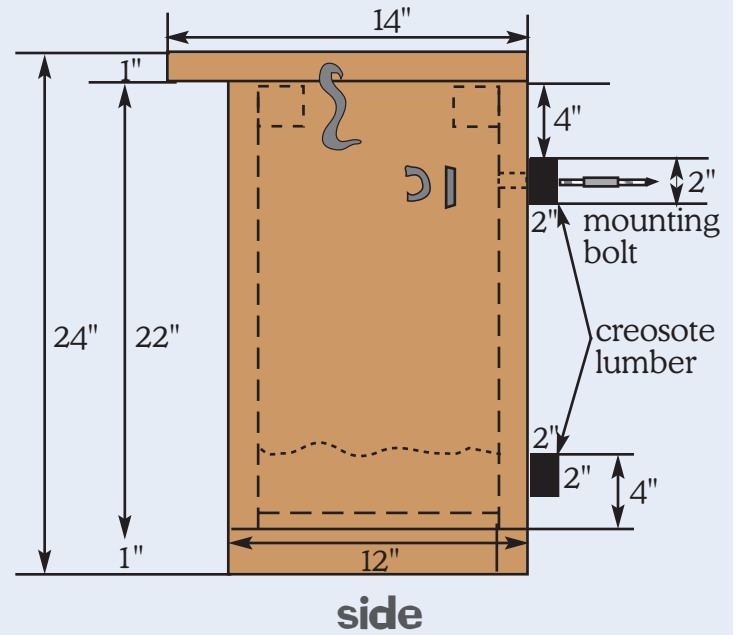
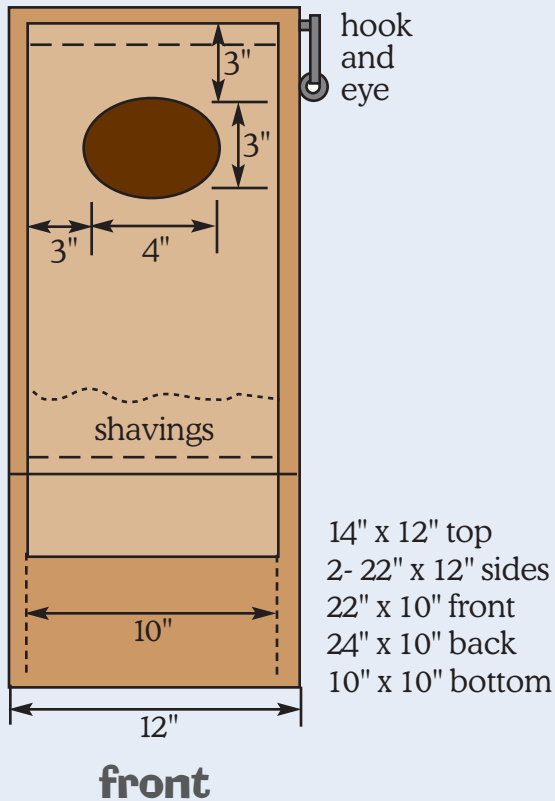
You can increase available nesting sites for wood ducks by building nest boxes and erecting them at suitable sites. **Check with the manager of a local park or natural area to see if you can place nest boxes in or adjacent to bodies of water there.**

\* To use resources most wisely, collect used or scrap lumber and sheet metal for this project. You might visit a sawmill and ask if you can have scrap material to build your nest boxes. The best wood to use, in order of decay resistance, is heartwood from the following species: black locust, red mulberry, bald cypress, eastern redcedar, black cherry, American chestnut, chestnut oak, post oak, white oak, sassafras, black walnut. Using any wood, however, is better than not constructing boxes at all.



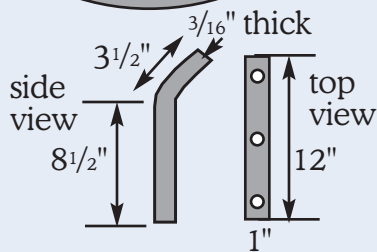
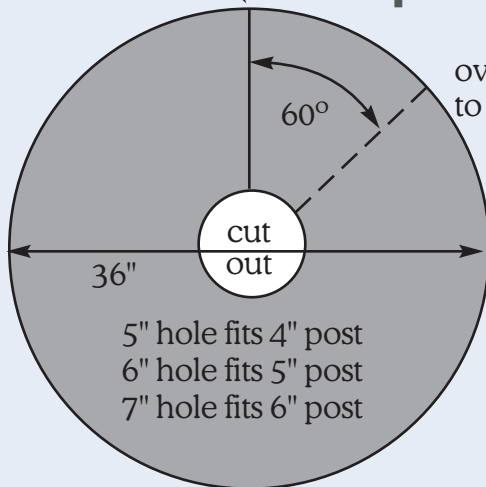
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## plan for wood duck nest box

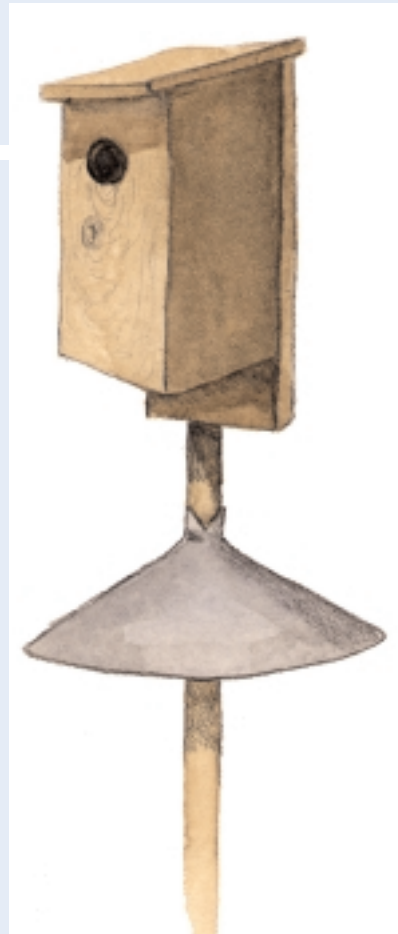
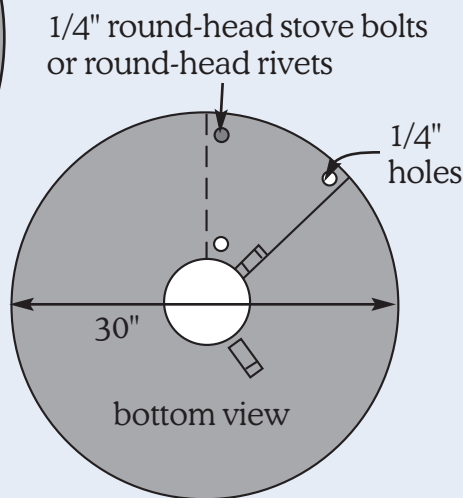


cut on this line

### predator guard



supporting bracket  
3/16" x 1" x 12" strap iron



**mounted, finished box with predator guard**

# Houses for Wood Ducks

**Using the accompanying design and dimensions as a guide, construct one or more wood duck boxes. Follow the next suggestions to increase the chances that wood ducks will find and use your boxes.**

☞ Wooded creeks, rivers and swamps, flooded bottomlands, and beaver ponds are excellent locations for boxes. Wood ducks may nest as far as 1 mile from water but prefer to be closer.

☞ Place only one box per 100 yards of shoreline. Erect nest boxes 6 to 10 feet above ground or 4 to 6 feet above water. This height will allow you to inspect boxes easily with a stepladder.

☞ Add 3 to 4 inches of fresh wood shavings to the bottom of each box for nesting material.

☞ Place nest boxes at least 10 feet from tree limbs. This should deter raccoons and rat snakes, which love to eat wood duck eggs. Attach **predator shields** of galvanized sheet metal to the post or tree below all nest boxes. You can obtain sheet metal from heating and cooling companies that have scrap pieces left over from completed jobs.

**6 to 10 feet  
above  
ground**

**3 to 4 inches of  
fresh wood shavings**



## Field Guide

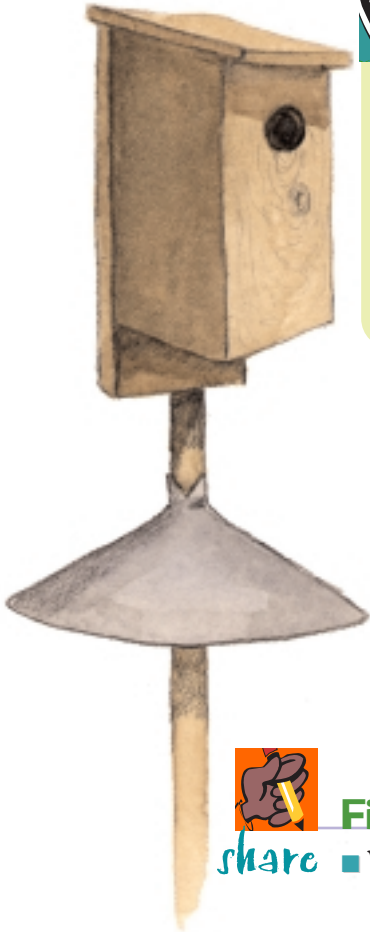
■ Wood ducks may seek **nest sites** as early as late January in the deep South, but most begin in February and March in the Southeast. Look for the hen (female) and drake (male) flying together as they search for suitable cavities. Typically, the hen will inspect the cavity while the drake waits for her, perched on a nearby limb. The hen will initiate her nest within a couple of weeks of selecting a cavity.

■ The average nest contains a **clutch** of 12 eggs that the hen incubates for 30 days. The day after the eggs hatch, the hen flies out of the cavity and calls to her **ducklings**. Upon hearing her call, the ducklings climb out of the cavity using their sharp toenails and leap unharmed to the water or ground below.

■ Young wood ducks are **precocial**, that is, born with feathers and able to feed themselves (unlike songbird chicks, such as robins or sparrows, which are born naked and must be fed by their parents in the nest for a couple of weeks). Wood ducks cannot fly until they are **8 to 10 weeks old**. In the meantime they swim about, following the hen wherever she goes. Young wood ducks eat primarily **aquatic invertebrates** (water bugs) but begin to eat more plant material as they get older. By the time fall rolls around, young wood ducks eat what the adults eat—acorns, seeds, and the occasional aquatic invertebrate.



# Houses for Wood Ducks



## The Extra Mile

Check your nest boxes at least once a year for signs of wood ducks or other wildlife species like squirrels, screech owls, bluebirds, and wrens. Mid-summer and mid-winter are good times. Carry a pocket notebook to record what you find. In summer, look through the wood shavings for eggshells and membranes—the leathery, white lining of the eggshell. See if you can determine how many eggs hatched by assembling and counting the membranes. During a mid-winter inspection, you can clean out the boxes and replenish them with fresh wood shavings.



share

## Field Notes

- What were some of the challenges you encountered in building, erecting, and monitoring the boxes?
  - What did you find out about wood duck preferences and behavior from building and placing the nest boxes? What did you observe about the behavior of other cavity-nesting species and predators?
- process**
- If boxes were placed in more than one wetland area, which boxes were used more frequently? Why do you think that happened? How were the areas different?
  - What are the positive and negative impacts of additional animals in one area? What about additional humans?
- generalize**
- How much money did you save by using scrap material instead of buying new lumber?
- apply**
- In what other ways can you use natural resources more wisely at home, work, or school?
  - In what ways might people, especially land managers, reduce the need for manmade wood duck nest boxes?