

## Mergansers

Both hooded and common mergansers are more commonly found in northern Pennsylvania. They prefer larger streams, rivers, lakes, beaver ponds and swamps.

The beautiful hooded merganser will use a wood duck box. Heights above 20 to 25 feet seem to be preferred. Boxes should be placed above water, or if on land, the entrance should face water.

The common merganser sometimes nests in tree cavities. Boxes successful in attracting this species were placed 15 to 17 feet high in aspen trees on land adjacent to water. This species will nest in a wood duck box if the entrance is enlarged to 5 inches in diameter.

As with wood ducks, nest boxes can be liabilities for these species if no effort is made to predator proof the boxes. If raccoons are numerous, boxes should not be placed along the water's edge, where chances of predation are highest. Either place boxes over water or at least 30 feet from the water's edge on land. Boxes along the water's edge must be predator proofed.



common merganser by J. Dingel



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### Caution

When conducting nest box checks, make sure the box is empty prior to reaching your hand inside. You can knock on the side of the nest box, try to look inside, or use a digital camera to double check. Squirrels, owls, and other critters often use nest boxes for cover.

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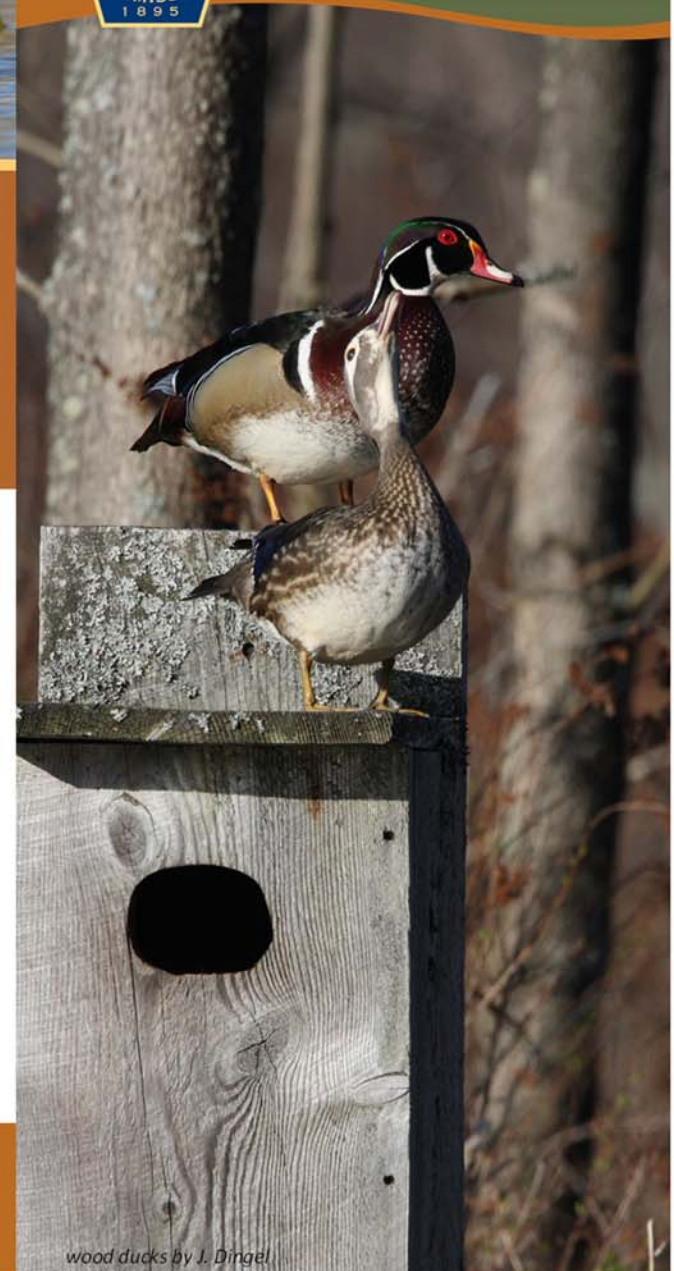


Hassinger, J. (2008) *Woodcrafting for Wildlife: Homes for Birds and Mammals* (rev., 4th Ed.) Collingdale, PA: Diane Publishing.

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## Wood Duck Boxes



wood ducks by J. Dingel





Manage and protect wildlife and their habitats while promoting hunting and trapping for current and future generations.



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## Wood Duck

The traditional wood duck box has helped the beautiful wood duck make a remarkable recovery. Early in this century some people believed the wood duck was becoming extinct.



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Now it is one of our most abundant waterfowl species.

Do not treat, paint or stain the inside of the box. An exterior finish will prolong the life of the box. The right color will also blend the box into its surroundings and reduce vandalism.

Houses can be erected on an isolated tree, a pressure treated 4-inch by 4-inch post or a metal

post. Box entrances should be at least 7 feet above the ground or water surface. If trees are on land, boxes should be at least 8 feet high, the higher the better.

The top of the box should be fastened to its support (pole or tree) so that it leans forward a couple of inches. This helps rainwater drain off and lengthens the life of the box.

Females are most actively nest searching in the morning, so placement of boxes to face the rising sun will, in some situations, provide good visibility and help females to find new nest sites. Box entrances near water should face water. Otherwise there is a slight preference for southerly facing entrances.

Place one box per five acres of brood rearing habitat (wetland, flooded trees). Straight line distances between boxes should be at least 100 yards, or far enough apart so one is not visible from the other. Competition for scarce nesting cavities (e.g., squirrels, screech-owls and starlings) and predation (by snakes and raccoons) must be considered. Boxes over water are less likely to be used by squirrels. Boxes under tree canopies will reduce use by starlings. Boxes on trees should be 30 to 100 feet away from the water's edge, which is frequented by raccoons and snakes. Otherwise an aluminum or tin sheet



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should be nailed around the tree to prevent access by raccoons.

Boxes on posts need predator guards. Though not so effective for snakes, a 3-foot section of 6-inch diameter PVC pipe placed around a mounting post will deter raccoons.

Place a 4-inch deep mixture of wood chips and sawdust in the bottom of the box. The inside of the box front (below the opening) must have a wire ladder so all ducklings can leave the nest in a timely manner.

If boxes are cleaned and sealed between nesting seasons, they will last longer, and there will be greater use of the boxes by wood ducks. In Pennsylvania, boxes should be ready for occupancy by March 1.



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