

# Cupped & Committed

## Wood Duck Banding

**T**HE 2007 WOOD DUCK BANDING season was the best yet for the MDWFP. We banded a total of 694 wood ducks! Many of these banded birds have already been reported by successful hunters as far away as Texas, Louisiana,

more to learn about Mississippi's state duck.

## Waterfowl Program Website

The waterfowl program has a new website that can be found at the following: [www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl](http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl). We have a lot of information to add, but the site currently

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Photo by Joe Mac Hudspeth, Jr.

Arkansas, and North Carolina within a few months of being banded. There were some interesting recaptures this past year. Trap sites in Madison and Itawamba counties both caught wood ducks that had been banded in Kentucky just a couple of weeks earlier. We were surprised to see these birds had migrated over 250 miles in the months of August and September, some of the hottest months of the year. This just goes to show that we have a lot

lists wildlife management area waterfowl harvest reports, waterfowl density maps, habitat management articles, waterfowl

hunting regulations, and contact information for biologists that can help you get the most out of your wetland.

Please feel free to let us know the type of waterfowl articles and information you would like to see added to our growing website. **WI**

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# Boosting Duck Numbers at Home

By Houston Havens,  
Migratory Game Bird Biologist

**F**OR MOST SOUTHERN DUCK HUNTERS, nearly all thoughts about ducks are probably focused on hunting during the winter months, or maybe even managing wetland habitats in the spring and summer. Duck numbers are out of our control since most ducks migrate north to breed and raise their young, right? Well, not entirely. Mississippi's state duck, the wood duck, is one of the few duck species that can be found in the state throughout the year. Even though their contribution to Mississippi's duck harvest is great, the importance of wood ducks to Mississippi is commonly overlooked.

Wood ducks primarily inhabit forested wetland habitats such as sloughs, oxbow lakes, river systems, and beaver wetlands where they forage on a variety of plant materials and aquatic insects. Within these forested areas, wood ducks require tree cavities (hollow openings in trees created by woodpeckers, storm events, etc.) for nesting sites. Because suitable tree cavities are often limited, wood ducks will readily nest in artificial structures, particularly wooden nest boxes. When constructed and placed properly, nest boxes can greatly increase the number of quality nesting sites available, which in turn can potentially boost the local area's abundance of wood ducks.

Boxes should be constructed from wood (preferably cypress) in order to resemble a natural tree cavity; however, boxes made from other materials can

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Every nest box should be paired with a predator guard to keep snakes, raccoons and other nest predators from reaching the box entrance.

Photo by Rob Heflin

also be used by wood ducks. The insides of boxes should have dimensions close to 10" x 10" x 20", with a circular entrance opening of 4" located about 2" down from the roof of the box. Roofs should be removable or hinged to provide easy access for maintenance and monitoring. Apply 4-6 inches of wood shavings and/or sawdust for nesting materials. Insides of boxes should be rough to allow ducklings a way to climb out of boxes when ready. If a smooth wood is used, place a strip of rough material (such as a fine wire mesh) on the inside under the entrance to serve as a "duckling ladder." Drill two small holes in the bottom of boxes for drainage.

Every nest box should be paired with a predator guard to keep snakes, raccoons, and other nest predators from reaching the box entrance and eating eggs or ducklings. Predator guards are typically cone-shaped metal pieces with a 16" radius that are attached to the pole or tree below the nest box. The guards should be attached in an upside-down bowl position so that the top of the guard fits tightly against the pole or tree. Also, over-hanging limbs from nearby trees should be removed if there is a possibility for predators to access boxes from above.

Nest boxes should be made available near wetlands with a mix of open water and emergent plants (commonly called scrub-shrub habitats). This type of habitat provides food and cover needed for brood

rearing. Consideration should be given to where the water levels will be in the spring when eggs are hatched, so that day-old ducklings can quickly and easily move from the nest to water and subsequent cover. Cover is important because there are many predators that will eat ducklings. Predators can come from the air, land, or water (hawks, raccoons, and largemouth bass to name a few). Ponds stocked with fish typically do not make good places for wood ducks to raise their young. Whether mounted on trees or artificial poles, boxes should be placed above flood levels to avoid being flooded when water levels peak. When setting out multiple nest boxes, boxes should be placed far enough apart to spread out nesting efforts and to decrease the likelihood of predators inhabiting one particular area. A general rule of thumb is to place boxes out of sight from one box to the next.

Construction and placement of nest boxes can be done any time of year. They make great summer projects in preparation for use by nesting hens the following winter. At least once a year, usually in early winter, boxes should be inspected and nesting materials should be replaced to promote future use. By spending a little time monitoring nest use and maintaining quality nest boxes, you can easily provide the nesting sites needed for Mississippi's state duck to thrive. For more wood duck nest box information, visit our website at [www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl](http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl). **WI**

## GOT ACORNS?

[Cont. from 3] red oaks every four years. For many oak species, acorn production generally starts at age 25. Acorn production increases as age and tree diameter increase, but acorn production may begin to decline later in life (75+ years of age). Oak trees with well-developed crowns fully exposed to light generally produce more acorns.

As you can see, many different factors can affect annual acorn production. We cannot control Mother Nature, but we can do a few things to help ensure a good number of vigorous oak trees are present in our forests. For timber stands of hardwood or mixed pine/hardwood, thinning to favor dominant and co-dominant oak trees is advised. If your objective is solely to improve acorn production, you can remove other trees from around good acorn producing trees so that oak crowns



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are exposed to light on all sides. It's very important to leave as many different species of oak as possible to minimize year-to-year variation in acorn production. It would not hurt to assess acorn production before thinning. Take a walk through your hardwoods in early fall. With the help of binoculars, count acorns along the last two feet of healthy branches. Bunches of 12 or more acorns indicate a good year for white oaks. Bunches of 20 or more indicate a good year for red oaks. This will also help you identify the best acorn producers in the stand. To do this thoroughly may take 3-5 years because of the previously mentioned factors. If your property does not have many oak trees on it, you may consider planting different species of oak seedlings that are suited to your site that will start producing acorns in 10-15 years. The MDWFP offers enhanced oak seedlings such as these through the Acorns for Wildlife program or you can purchase oak seedlings from numerous nurseries. I hope this article helps you understand and enhance your acorn production! **WI**

Mississippi Waterfowl Program