The Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association is interested in installing additional boxes in the proper habitat. We hope to work with local county, state and volunteer organizations to implement this conservation project. We are currently working with the Virginia Department of Forestry at both Zoar Park and Sandy Point. If you have an area which might be appropriate and/or you are interested in installing or monitoring a wood duck box, contact MPRA (MPRA.ORG).

Box installation is just step one of the Wood Duck Nest Box Program. Every year, usually during the winter these boxes need to be checked, cleaned, and repaired before the next nesting period. At the same time a determination is made if a wood duck or some other species used the box. Looking for eggshell fragments and membranes, which may be present, does this.

Other animals may also use these boxes and this information is noted but the wood duck is our primary user of interest. Each year MPRA and volunteers will check for nesting success, (how many eggs hatched) and predator disturbances (such as claw marks or a wider entrance that has been gnawed). The surrounding area is also recorded for its habitat characteristics, types of trees, the other types of vegetation in the area, and the amount of open water present.

These characteristics are all very important in finding the perfect locations to install duck boxes to ensure wood duck nesting success. This information helps provide management tools for increasing the valuable habitat available for the ducks' continued success.

******Please register with MPRA for box placement and data collection. We need as much data as possible. (We will provide data sheets!!)**

MPRA.ORG

MPRA WOOD DUCK PROJECT

Life History and Management Information Pamphlet

If interested! Contact
Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association

MPRA.ORG

Life History

Since the early 1920's, the population of wood ducks (Aix sponsa) in North America has gone from near extinction to the most common breeding waterfowl in the northeast. The wood duck is possibly North America's most elaborate herald of spring. An adult wood duck is 18 to 20inches long and weighs about 1.5 pounds. The male (drake) has iridescent colors of blue, purple, and green and possesses a slick head crest and a white chin strap, all of which make for a distinct appearance?

The female ducks (hens) are white, brown, and gray in color with a white circle around the eyes. All wood ducks have large red eyes during the breeding season, which fades after breeding. The vocalization of these ducks consists of whistles and squeals, but most often heard is a "weent-weent" sound as they fly across the marsh. The wood duck is a very secretive bird, making them very difficult to observe except in the springtime when they are searching for suitable nesting sites. Wood ducks inhabit wooded ponds, swamps, marshes, and creeks where food is available. They feed on aquatic insects, spiders, and vegetation, as well as various nuts and tubers. Woodies are cavity nesters, living in hollowed out trees made by woodpeckers, but they will utilize artificial nest boxes if tree hollows are scarce. Before their return-migration in the spring (late March-April), mating pairs are often formed on the wintering grounds after a courtship. The drake follows the hen on the search flight for the perfect nesting place. The females usually return to the area they were born for future nesting. The process of searching for the perfect tree hollow or nest box can sometimes take days.

Once the female has selected the location she will begin to lay her eggs. Average clutch size is 12 eggs, with a range of 8 to 15 eggs possible. One egg is produced per day until the clutch (total eggs laid) is complete. Soon after all the eggs are laid, the female begins to incubate them. Approximately one month later, the eggs will hatch. The young ducklings are ready to leave the nest cavity or box after 1 or 2 days. Once the hen has called her young from the nest, they begin the most precarious part of their lives. They begin learning to forage for food and trying to avoid predators. At this point it is apparent how important the initial nesting site selection is to their survival.
However, even the young ducklings of the most concealed nesting sites can be taken by such prey as snapping turtles, hawks, mink, otter, and other animals. Due to the high predatory rate, only about 3 or 4 ducklings from each brood will reach the flight stage.

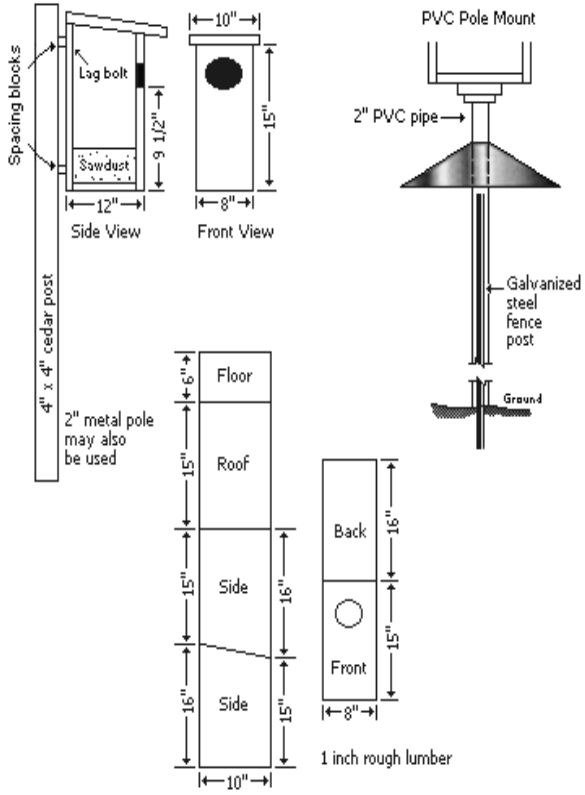
Wood Duck Management

With help from local volunteers and other agencies MPRA hopes to constructed and erected artificial nest boxes in order to compensate for the loss of suitable nesting sites while at the same time educating individuals about this unique animal and the wetlands they call home.

The key components to a successful wood duck box

1. A box design that is easily maintained.
2. Annual maintenance and repairs such as replacing
old nesting material with new wood shavings annually.
3. Locating the box near good brood habitat.

Wood duck nesting box design



Replace Nesting Material in December and January!