

## DUAL NESTING BY FEMALE WOOD DUCKS

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This report involves the observation of 15 Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) boxes on a 28.3 ha lake in southern Jones County, Mississippi. The boxes are constructed of wood and mounted on 2.4 m landscape timbers near the edge of the lake. The inside measurements of each box are about 28 X 28 X 59 cm.

Egg laying began on 25 April, 1995 in Box No. 13. On 9 May the same box contained 31 eggs, about twice the normal 11-15 egg clutch size of one female Wood Duck as reported by Semel and Sherman (1986). Apparently this was a dump nest in which at least two birds were contributing eggs. The eggs were cool to the touch, indicating that incubation had not yet begun. On 19 May the same box contained 34 eggs that were being incubated. As the box was approached on 28 May, one female flew out followed by another female, suggesting that both were incubating the 34 eggs in the nest. On two other occasions (2 and 7 June) both females were observed incubating side by side in the box. On 10 June, 26 ducklings fledged from the box. Both females called the brood from the box, but darkness prevented the observer from determining the number of ducklings that accompanied each.

Dual nesting by female Wood Ducks has been reported by Bellrose (1943), Fuller and Bolen (1963) and Clawson (1975), but this behavior is rare. Females frequently share nest boxes while laying eggs; this is a type of intraspecific nest parasitism called dump nesting, but they are quite intolerant of each other during egg incubation (Clawson, et. al., 1979). Among the factors contributing to dump nesting are increased nest densities (Clawson, et.al.,1979), conspicuousness of location (McCamant and Bolen, 1979), and relatedness between females (Andersson and Eriksson, 1982). All the boxes in the area are located in prominent locations around the edge of the lake, in easy view of the

ducks. The female cohabitants in the nest box apparently dump nested in the box and might have been related (sisters or mother-daughter), although information regarding these inferences is inconclusive.

Morse and Wight (1969) and Heusmann et al. (1980) presented evidence that dump nesting contributes to the Wood Duck population by increasing the production of young. The relatively large number of hatchlings (26) suggests that dual nesting might also be beneficial to the population in the same manner. This is more than twice the average number (12.1) of ducklings hatched from a dump nest by a single female (Morse and Wight 1969).

### Literature Cited

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