

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE

“A Total Wetlands Experience “

March 10, 2007 Activity Report #20

Updates the January 31 report

1. External Affairs

Website “hits” are rising as are inquiries for volunteer opportunities, advice on box placement and program strategies, startling deterrence, predator guard plans, materials procurement and a range of other WD related matters. (2-3 daily). PR is growing – Wildfowl magazine article, Wood Duck Society newsletter coverage of Atlantic Flyway News, CBEC newsletter plug. A press release is planned before long, ideally once we get a bit more website content development on the public sites profile. A photo contest will be announced shortly. A presentation was given to the Ducks Unlimited MD State Convention March 3 which allowed MWDI to thank publicly many of our most active volunteers. (The participation by the Loch Raven/ Liberty Reservoir and the pending assessment of the Allegheny Co DNR sites immediately resulted from this presentation, thanks to DU volunteers’ James Petry and Sam Lane, respectively.) The River Hill Honor Society presentation (Howard Co) and box build was rescheduled for April 11.

2. Education & Research

Scout and high school involvement continues. Max Adagio, Eagle Scout leader of Troop 913 in Great Falls, coordinated the building of 30 boxes from kits provided by MWDI. Site inspection in Frederick Co was completed w/ DNR’s Donnie Rohrback & Scoutmaster Joe Hafner. A plan to monitor & assess the project site this season was agreed upon. At Ft. Meade, Bob Shaw has involved Scouts to install the new 6 box program there. Bill Schultz, handling the upper reaches of the Jug Bay (PG) project area on the Patuxent, has routinely involved several Girl Scouts in spring cleaning & maintenance and this year was no exception. Also at Jug Bay, Mark Ryon built 12 boxes for his community service requirement. The River Hill high school 10 box build will occur in April.



*Intern Brad Kirby in action
at Chesapeake Farms*

Brad Kirby (Kent) is interning with MWDI as part of his community service requirements. He has been initially active in this year’s Chesapeake Farms optimization & expansion program. A two box installation with grade school kids at Radcliffe Creek School (Kent) at the school’s wetland was completed in February. A nest monitoring tour is now being developed.

MWDI is especially interested to develop niche service projects for high schoolers. We are also interested to identify and publicize the wildlife programs of other schools and educational centers that have a wood duck component. We are aware of certain programs (eg. Harford Glen, Sudlersville School) but want to make this a special website section eventually to help foster the development of other programs where project sponsors can share experiences and provide advice directly to new candidates. Help welcomed. Please continue to take pictures and forward them for MWDI use but I must have parental approval to use them.....sorry, the times we live in.

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On the research front, progress is expected on our Starling Deterrence – Horizontal Nest studies. We now have a second site in Talbot Co (private) utilizing horizontal nests along with our Chesapeake Farms (Kent) site. Box ends have been darkened which should help use although the 50% use and 100% hatch result in 2006 with no starlings was a good start albeit with a small sample of 6 horizontals. 9 are in place now in Kent.

Nest data quality versus time study – approximately 75 of the successful nests that were evaluated last summer are involved. The unhatched eggs were removed but membranes left so that the impact of time can be evaluated re: its impact on data quality & productivity estimation. Results should be known in 45 days.

Double box versus single box productivity study – much data was gathered in 2006 but not analyzed fully. 2007 results will be included and a preliminary summary developed by fall. There are many influencing variables to consider. General literature and contemporary thinking suggests doubles are no longer preferred as they may contribute to nest dumping and abandonment due to their “clustering” impact. Installation cost and maintenance efficiency were the primary factors behind the use of double boxes mounted on a single pole / guard.

Freon canisters – I’m negligent for not publishing the final heat research yet. (Apologies to Donnie McKnight, Harford Christian School, the primary researcher!) The results basically show that if mounted in the shade the canisters are fine w/ vents and light color paint. Field results suggest that the ducks do not prefer them over vertical wood boxes but we’ll have a third year of nest data and a more effective test as several did not have nest material in them until late in the season.

3. Field Activities – MWDI Public Project Areas

With field work partially completed, we are now projecting 1,180 functional boxes involving 32 sites during most of the 2007 nest season. In 2006, 25 sites had 1054 boxes. 36 boxes have been removed & 79 new ones added as part of ongoing optimization work. 7 new project sites are being initiated involving 83 new boxes, a net capacity increase of 126 boxes. However, 453 new boxes have been built and 303 are being installed in 2007 on these sites with the balance slated for 2008-09. Box material funding from 18 different sources has been obtained while APG has allowed the use of a portion of their box inventory to start 2007 projects in a timely way ahead of MWDI boxes being built. 322 new predator guards are also being installed on these same sites. Thus, housing quality, strategic placement and protection (aka “Best Practices”) are being significantly upgraded and productivity enhanced well beyond that suggested by the moderate net capacity increase.



Dave Godfrey, Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center (CBEC) volunteer, has published his initial results from a “south facing” box study. Check out the Wildfowl Trust of North America newsletter at www.BayRestoration.org for details.

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Installation of boxes at the Conquest Farms (QA Co), a Corsica River watershed public wetland project which MWDI helped initiate, may not occur until the nest season is well underway and final construction of the wetlands occurs. Site reviews are pending although box potential may range between 15-30.

Existing box programs at 3 other public & quasi-public sites have agreed to participate involving 139+ boxes bringing the total MWDI Public Sites to 35 and 1,317 boxes without Conquest. The new projects are the Pickering Creek Audubon Sanctuary (12+/- Talbot Co), the Loch Raven / Liberty Reservoirs (30+ Baltimore Co) and a portion of the Chicamicomico River involving boxes originally placed by Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage (85 - Dorchester Co). An initial assessment of DNR's former program sites in Allegheny Co is pending and these may be included this season (Green Ridge Park, Billmeyer WMA and Warrior Mountain WMA).

At current count, MWDI has facilitated the installation or construction of at least 239 private sector boxes in 2007 as part of our wood ordering, kit cutting process and general advisory efforts. Since the 2005 nest season, MWDI has now conservatively helped to initiate, build or install a total of 1,266 boxes used on public sites & in privately sponsored programs.



Harford County Ducks Unlimited members (Scott & Ron Jason, Jason Schlosser, FJ Stetson) with Cliff Brown at Chesapeake Farms.

Field Activities - General

We are trying to keep an updated work program calendar posted on the website but final scheduling is such that it is best used as a reference for near term activities. New site visits and projects have evolved in such a rapid manner that things are "fluid" week to week. Prospective volunteers are emailed directly for pending project work once we narrow down the scope and timing. The schedule of nest monitoring activities will become more rigid from late April-June. Volunteer interest has risen substantially and we have made great strides in securing not only timely field assistance but also ongoing project management responsibilities.

The Maryland Waterfowler's Association, in particular, is becoming quite active in working w/ MWDI to help initiate certain new project areas, provide support in other project areas as well as provide boxes for certain of them. The Frederick Co scout project was developed from their initial interest. 25 funded box kits will be assembled March 17th in Centreville (Jeff Plummer's) and the guards provided by MWDI formed into cones with mounting block made up. The boxes are slated for installation at the Fairmount, EA Vaughan and Cypress Swamp WMAs in the lower Eastern Shore. MDWFA volunteers will assist in the installation and provide ongoing project management. Many thanks thus far! to Jeff, Joe Hafner, Jonas Davis, Aaron Ward and David Barnes as well as Bob Plunkett (also an official with the Maryland Sportsmen's Association) for providing assistance at Jug Bay (PG) and Paul Bramble for helping initiate the Taylor's Island (Dorchester) project and managing it.

Details of each MWDI project site are being developed for a map based, "click on" website posting which will expand to cover the project profile, 2006 results, 2007 plans, contact information, a summary of volunteer work and bird watching - inspection opportunities and a website link where available for further data, directions, etc.

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ANY VOLUNTEER NICHE CAN BE ACCOMODATED – CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE FOR ACTIVITIES NEAREST YOU.

The number and diversity of waterfowl seen the past 2-3 weeks has been mind-boggling as spring migration is well underway. Have you ever seen 10 flying squirrels shoot out of a 3” x 4” hole in rapid succession? A mature eagle dive after and chase a drake woodie? Talk about a “Total Wetland Experience”! Come on out.

Other news

MWDI will be ordering more cedar lumber in for the Maryland Envirothon box kits in May and then again in early July for our 2008 program. Anyone wanting to “piggy back” on our wholesale purchases is invited to participate. Assuming we can still get volunteers and do not wear out our welcome at Steven’s Tools in Annapolis, MWDI will also cut your lumber into kits. The last price for an un-assembled box kit was \$17.93 each; MWDI’s

direct cost. Prepayment is required. Contact us if interested.

Your continued interest and support is most appreciated.

Cliff Brown