

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE

“A Total Wetlands Experience “

August 25, 2007 Activity Report #22

Updates the May 9 report

1. External Affairs & Education

Most pleased to have formed relationships with Delta Waterfowl and the National Wildlife Federation (see website). Nice Baltimore Sun article in June (Thanks, Candy Thomson), DNR press release went out (we're official!)& Crosswinds Magazine article coming in September (Kudos – Chris Dollar).

Photo Contest

The photo contest was launched. Super thanks to Jim Taylor, winning artist for this year's Maryland Duck stamp contest – Autumn Glory - a pair of woodies !! He has graciously agreed to provide some signed prints as our first prizes. (See website for details). (Thanks to DNR's Doug Wigfield for making the introduction). MWDI needs simple, educational pictures depicting life's good and bad events surrounding WD nesting experiences for the certification program. It does not have to be a museum quality composition!!! Kids and adult categories.

Box Assembly & Youth Events

MWDI & Patuxent State Park officials supervised a 50 box build for the 2008 program as part of a NOAA staff outdoor workshop at Jug Bay (PG County) June 12th. MWDI, with volunteer support from the Maryland Waterfowlers Assoc (MDWFA), supervised a 30 box build for 90+ high schoolers in conjunction with the MD Envirothon competition at U of MD Eastern Shore on June 19th.

Upcoming youth events include a box building session at MDWFA's Gander Mountain (Salisbury) membership drive on Sept 15th, a box building session in conjunction with National Wildlife Federation at MD DNR's National Hunting & Fishing day on Sept 22nd (Bridgeton) and another box building session at the Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition & Sale Oct 20th.

The 10th grade Career & Technology Education class at Parkside High School in Wicomico Co. (Biazzio Giordano) has agreed to assemble 25 nesting structures from re-cycled Freon canisters. Thanks to Aaron Ward for the introduction! Use of Freon canister nesting structures was up favorably in 2007, details to be provided with the September nesting report. MWDI wishes to expand the field trials and Parkside's efforts will facilitate that substantially for the 2008 & 2009 nest seasons.

Website

Website support from DNR's Linda Wiley has been exemplary. Many of the items mentioned above are routinely covered on the site as they occur. Our calendar is also updated in a timely manner. Our Best Practices section and other “meaty” things are still lagging but we are soon to submit the final 2006 and preliminary 2007 statewide nesting survey results. Once this data is completed, the website will be then developed to profile all MWDI projects to include a brief background, location, performance review, plans, contact information and volunteer opportunities.

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Box kits

255+ box kits were cut up in Annapolis in May and July. There are no plans for another cutting session until after the 2008 nest season. Mark Stevens (StevensTools) again welcomed us – sawdust and all – with open arms for which we are most grateful. The après' cut sessions at Davis' Pub have also grown to meaningful numbers. Thanks to many different folks mentioned in the website summaries.

Predator Guards

We are about to finalize our predator guard order for the 2008 season. Due to a steep rise in quoted cost and a substantially higher minimum order size, we are evaluating alternatives. Our current supplier has no inventory for square poles. If you have interested in participating in a predator guard order in the very near term, please contact me so we can determine what economy of scale pricing options we all might have. MWDI does not maintain an inventory of guards, box kits or boxes for sale.

2. Research

The 2007 state wide nesting survey's preliminary results will show project sites rising to over 40 from 25 in 2006 with over 50 planned for the 2008 nest season. Functional box levels rose only moderately to about 1,285 from about 1,217 in 2007 (5%+/-) although production should rise by about 33% to some 4,800 ducklings. 265 new boxes have been installed in 2007 but a few projects reduced their box numbers to de-cluster their placement, to reduce double mounted boxes to singles and to remove unutilized boxes for use in other projects or to increase utilization / reduce inspection time requirements. 89 of the new boxes were also replacements. Production in the first year of participation for certain projects that have existing nesting programs is only an "observation year" for pragmatic or timing reasons. Nest cleaning, minor repairs and nesting behavior perceptions are the primary things accomplished. Details forthcoming in September.

MWDI's hooded merganser survey was submitted for inclusion in the 2002-2006 Breeding Bird Atlas Survey. Very few confirmed nests have been reported in earlier Surveys in Maryland. MWDI has documented and obtained data on 34 such occurrences attributable to the 2006 nest season after inspecting 1,025 nest boxes. The report can be found on the website. Hooded nests are again being documented in 2007 with a new area established at the EA Vaughan WMA in Worchester Co. (Previously indicated as Somerset Co).

Substantially more data has been gathered as part of the Nest Data Quality versus Time Study. Haven't had time to formalize it but results are clear – hatch data is lost increasingly with time. Under-reporting can be substantial after only a couple of months if the insects get involved at an early stage. MWDI has also documented several events where starlings have removed key remnants of a successful nest result before bringing in their materials – all down, unhatched eggs & membranes. Shell fragments are all that usually remain which, in an old box if not fully cleaned, render an accurate nest assessment impossible. Only frequent nest monitoring will define the chronology of events conclusively. Where only one nest monitoring/maintenance visit is possible, MWDI encourages this to happen in the summer instead of the late winter so that nest results are more accurately obtained. Clean nest material for the next season will endure much better than membranes from the prior season!

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3. Operations & Field Activities

Volunteer effort exceeds 11,000 hours since 2005. Project managers have been assembled for several sites, most notably McKee Beshers, Elk Forest, Grove Neck, Bethal, Courthouse, Crownsville and Pocomoke State Park. Pole salvage has grown favorably in 2 new areas. Aaron Ward (MDWFA) is making great strides to source poles this fall in the lower shore and Mark Hooper (MD DNR) has been a dynamo with a nice inventory building in his northern region.

Inspection cooperation and support this nest season has been excellent in spite of the weather and bugs. More than 1,000 boxes have been inspected and numerous habitat sites evaluated since the May report. The increase in public sector projects in both 2007 & 2008 has impeded MWDI's ability to inspect various private sector programs and habitat as requested. As logistics and time permit, we will slot these visits in. One of our goals is to leverage the experiences gained in the various public projects by sharing it with private program sponsors.

Our 2008 project allocations are now pretty well established for replacement boxes and new capacity involving about 200 boxes. However, I hesitate to estimate the number of participating sites & boxes for next year. MWDI is considering various additional projects which have not matured yet but could easily if we are able to align volunteer interests with those of other funding partners. Management of these sites is the critical initial component.

Your continued interest is most appreciated.

Cliff Brown