

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE

“A Total Wetlands Experience “

August 19, 2009 Activity Report #30

Updates the May 4th report

See www.mwdi.net for prior reports

Preliminary 2009 Nest Results & Observations

Final nest inspections and data collection are 85% completed. Preliminary nest results indicate a potential decline of 8-12% on MWDI's 68 public sites involving some 1,660 functional boxes. The results vary widely. We have reports of growth in several new projects, but also a noticeable and perplexing decline in others.

6,600 + ducklings were hatched in 2008 from about 1,545 boxes. There has been a fair amount of refurbishment, replacement and relocation work in 2009. Box capacity also increased by 100 +/- . This work has helped mitigate the reduction observed in some of the more “mature” projects. Reports from certain private programs also indicate mixed results – some have had excellent years, others not so much so.

Initial band recovery data apparently indicates that more wood ducks were harvested in several southern states – most likely the result of the new federal 3-bird bag limit last fall. Maryland's harvest apparently also declined as migration started before the early fall season. At face value, based on very limited data, the net impact of this harvest regulation may have plausibly resulted in fewer hens returning to Maryland, as nest demand was off in many sites as indicated by lower box use and lower clutch sizes generally. Habitat was in decent condition in early spring so this variable is not regarded as being a potentially negative one. Poor brood survival in prior, drought challenged seasons in 2006-07 could still be a residual factor. Nest failures in generally smaller average clutch sizes were also up - a puzzling variable. A more complete and detailed report is expected to be completed by early October.

The nest season was indeed “delayed” by 1-2 weeks and more late nests were observed than “usual”. Starling challenges were more prevalent this season as the birds were routinely observed nesting in boxes located in woods- field / open water margins – areas where they have tended to be less invasive previously. Predation by pecker type birds (woodpeckers, flickers) was about on par and some programs learned how “assertive” snakes and raccoons can be. Six- inch PVC sleeves will not stop a determined ‘coon.

Box use by certain other songbirds (especially wrens, warblers, bluebirds, tree swallows and great crested flycatchers) was again active. Screech owl use was modest but more winter (pre-WD season) owl nest remnants were observed. Hooded merganser nests were up from last year (a down year) in many areas. (A comparison with prior years has yet to be tabulated). The first hooded nest in Cecil Co was documented. Use of recycled Freon canisters as nesting structures was also up (Details to follow). Habitat was in good shape for brood survival and it is still generally in good to OK shape in many areas, but summer rains have been more localized than the earlier spring rains.

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Preliminary 2009 Nest Results & Observations continued

It will probably take until October to get the statewide report finished so more of the “active” late nests can be checked and other remaining projects checked. Some project results will still be partially estimated as we use winter surveys on some and early spring visits on others to finalize estimated counts for various logistical reasons. 2008 results will also be finalized as part of this process.

Despite reduced production in 2009, compared to the reference year production for each project, aggregate incremental duckling production from MWDI participating public sites will now exceed 13,000 in 5 nest seasons. Annual net gains over base production are expected to range between 4,000-5,500 ducklings from the 75 MWDI sites now defined for the 2010 season with a total production capability in “good” years of 7,500-8,000 ducklings.

Field Operations

Nest inspections are continuing. Private program advice and assistance continues.

The Hagerstown Correctional Facility is once again supporting the MWDI mission in conjunction with our MD DNR partnering agreement by manufacturing a new batch of 300 predator guards. These guards and the old street sign poles we salvage help drive our program, limiting our finding needs to essentially lumber (and some wasp spray!) We have had more than 20 organizational sources for wood purchases over the past few years but we're always interested in developing others for specific projects or sponsored events.

Recent new projects for the 2010 nest season have been developed as follows:

- *Bowen WMA – PG Co. 5 boxes on the Patuxent River. Bob Plunkett, Project manager*
- *Bennett Point Park – QA Co. 5 boxes. Adjacent neighbor to manage with private program.*
- *Anita Leight Estuary- Bosely Conservancy – Harford Co. 50+ box program. Byron Bodt / Fred Gillotte managing.*
- *Harford Glen Environmental Educational Center – Harford Co. 12-15 box program.*

MWDI seeks new public land or river projects where ongoing nest supervision can be provided. Boxes, poles and predator guards as well as installation assistance and training are available.

External Affairs & Education

MWDI debuted on FaceBook today. Please check it out and become a fan!

[Maryland Wood Duck Initiative \(MWDI\) FaceBook](#)

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Maryland-Wood-Duck-Initiative-MWDI/120473468929>

We will be adding more Photo Albums to help teach “Best Practices,” spotlight the work of our volunteers, and depict the “Total Wetland Experience.”

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We continue working to provide video clip modules for our presentations of ducklings hatching, jumping from nests and nest strife activities. These Youtube clips are good examples, which you may find of interest. The first clip is of hens fighting aka "nest strife" in action:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6OWu8SAqJ0&feature=related>.

The second clip is of ducklings exiting the nest. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swBVctzcLIE>

The Bass Pro youth box assembly event at the Arundel Mills store was held August 16th. More than 20 kids assembled and colored 25 boxes. Special thanks to Bass Pro's Norb Wagner for his support and volunteers John Chew, Scott Jasion and Greg Raymond. Next up is DNR's Sept 26th Hunting & Fishing Day and the Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition & Sale on Oct 17th.

The JM Tawes box sale will occur in October, details to follow on pricing. There are 50 cypress boxes being sold but many are now being spoken for. If interested, please advise how many. MWDI cannot assure there will be any supply available. We are seeking another organization (school, scout troop, outdoor exhibition, etc) to also fund and build boxes for private sale like Tawes where the assembly process fits their objectives and a modest profit is feasible. Demand is such that orders are not filled annually. Contact MWDI for more details.

MWDI will likely place its annual wood order in December or January for February delivery. Details to follow soon.

Your continued interest and support is most appreciated. Thank you.

Cliff Brown