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CORPS' HABITAT FOSTERS WOOD DUCKS

MAHONING CREEK LAKE – Wood ducks are interesting waterfowl that inhabit forested wetlands and pool-laden areas. Actually wood ducks are the most colorful ducks in North America and one area that provides a perfect habitat for them is at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' [Mahoning Creek Lake](#).

The drake, or male, wood duck is unmistakable with its complex face and bold body patterns of iridescent maroon, green, purple, white. Wood ducks, sometimes referred to as squealers, range in size from 17 to 20 inches from the tips of their beaks to the tips of their tails. They are an average-sized duck that loves to feed on beetles and other insects, but especially like fruits and nuts of woody plants.

A wood duck, as its name implies, means “duck of the woods.” Their habitat is wooded swamps and bottom land forests in the eastern and western U.S. and Canada and western Mexico.

Because of loss of habitat and over-hunting in the early 1900s, the wood duck was nearly brought to extinction. But with good conservation management and thousands of nesting boxes built by concerned citizens, the wood duck was saved and allowed to make a remarkable recovery.

Wood ducks are unique because they are cavity nesters, which means they nest in old woodpecker holes or other natural cavities of a dead standing or dying tree near water. Mahoning Lake has taken the initiative to enhance “woody” populations by constructing 16 artificial wood duck nesting boxes throughout the project.

Most of the wood duck boxes at Mahoning are the circular metal-type, 30 inches high with a cone point top. One little known fact is that wood ducks prefer to nest over water so that their babies have a soft place to land when they leave the nest. Another little known fact is that baby wood ducks can fall 50 feet without getting hurt.

The 2003 nesting season survey revealed that 87 young wood ducks fledged from these nesting structures, the highest success rate for young fledglings since the wood duck box program began at Mahoning in 1991. By comparison, the 2002 nesting season produced 66 wood duck fledglings.

If you would like more information on the wood duck nesting program or activities at Mahoning, stop by their park office or call 814-257-8811. Mahoning is only 12 miles southeast of New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and seven miles northwest of Dayton, Pennsylvania. Follow the brown Mahoning Lake directional signs to the project.

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Adult male wood ducks, such as this one, can be seen along Big and Little Mahoning Creeks in Armstrong County.

Visit Mahoning's web site at www.lrp.usace.army.mil/rec/lakes/mahoning.htm