

## Rainbow River Conservation Wood Duck Project

The male Wood Duck is considered one of the most colorful ducks that produces “wows” from many visitors to the Rainbow River. Wood Ducks are cavity nesters and look for spaces in dead trees. They are one of the few duck species equipped with strong claws that can grip bark and perch on branches. Wood Ducks pair up in January and look for appropriate nest sites. The Rainbow River provides an ideal habitat for Wood Ducks with open water and natural vegetation along the edges of the river. This marsh and emergent vegetation allows them to forage and hide from predators.

Wood Ducks eat seeds, fruits, insects and other arthropods. When aquatic foods are unavailable they may take to dry land to eat acorns and other nuts from forests and grain from fields. Plant materials make up 80% of their food source. They often have up to 10 chicks that leave the nest box on a single day and, while growing, stay very close to the female for protection.

In 1994 Rainbow River Conservation installed the first 35 Wood Duck boxes along the river and the number has now grown to 50. Each fall RRC members clear out the old bedding in the nest boxes and replace it with new cedar wood chip bedding. Repairs are also made where required. This requires navigating a pontoon boat along 4 miles of the 5.3 mile river and standing on a step ladder on the front of the boat to access the pole mounted boxes. The project has been led by Jerry Rogers for many years and he brings spare lids, hinges, new boxes, cedar wood chips and tools to service the boxes as they are cleaned and prepared for the next brooding season. Dr. Ellen K. Rudolf recently accompanied the box maintenance crew and photographed their efforts to make these boxes suitable for another breeding season. Her photo essay on the effort is quite interesting and can be viewed at [http://www.drellenrudolph.com/wood\\_ducks.html](http://www.drellenrudolph.com/wood_ducks.html)

The project has been very successful. The first year 17% of the nests were productive in having successful broods. Each year the success of each box is recorded and in recent years the productivity of the nest boxes has been between 94% and 98%. Since each nest produces up to 10 young ducklings, 50 nests have the potential for 500 young a year. It is likely that over 5,000 young wood ducks have come from this Wood Duck project over its life span. RRC will continue to maintain these boxes and monitor the productivity of this program.



Wood Duck box on Rainbow River



Male Wood Duck



Female Wood Duck with ducklings