

# California Federal Junior Duck Stamp Winner 1998-99

Wood ducks are part of a small group of ducks from the tribe *Carexini*, commonly called perching ducks. These ducks have sharp claws that help them perch in woody cover along their preferred habitat—forested wetlands and waterways. The trees, stumps, and bushes along these riparian habitats provide food, shelter, and nest sites.

There are two populations of wood ducks in North America, eastern and western. In the East, riparian areas are widespread, and wood ducks can be found in most states east of the Mississippi River. In the West, wood ducks are most numerous in the coastal states (California, Oregon, Washington) and in the Canadian province of British Columbia. Prairies, mountains, and forests separate eastern and western populations, and little interbreeding occurs.

Historically, wood ducks used tree cavities as nest sites. However, fewer old-growth trees with cavities have been available in recent years due to habitat loss. To help, hunters put up nest boxes made specifically for wood ducks. These boxes simulate ideal natural cavities, and wood ducks take to them readily. Whether nesting in a natural cavity or a box, a wood duck hen lines her nest mostly with her own downy feathers. When the hen needs to leave the nest, she will often cover her eggs with a "blanket" of down to keep them warm.



Summer past at the Sacramento, at Decker High School in El Dorado, and California Fed of Birds with the drawing of a male wood duck.

## Wood Duck

A wood duck's average clutch size is 12 eggs. She will lay one egg each day until her clutch is complete; the weight of her full clutch of eggs is nearly equal to her own body weight. Sometimes, more than one female will lay eggs in the same nest, creating what is called a "dumpy nest." Nests with 14 or more eggs found in areas where nest sites are in short supply are usually dumpy nests. Wood duck ducklings hatch after 28 to 32 days of incubation and leave the nest within the first 24 hours after hatching. The hen does not feed her ducklings. Instead, she leads them to food, and they instinctively begin feeding on invertebrates and eventually on seeds, nuts, and berries. The ducklings grow quickly and are able to fly within two months of hatching.

In the 1930s, waterfowl biologists began building nest boxes for wood ducks in Illinois. As the effort expanded, it greatly benefited eastern wood ducks. The eastern population is now much larger than in the early 1930s because of nest box programs, hunting restrictions, and habitat improvement.

In the West, nest box projects were conducted by the California Department of Fish and Game in the 1950s. In 2004, the California Wood Duck Program became the first large-scale wood duck box program in the West and is coordinated by the California Waterfowl Association in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Game, the University of California at Davis, and others. The boxes benefit not only wood ducks, but also other species of wildlife, including owls, herons, flickers, and squirrels.

For more information about the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Program, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento Stamp Company, 712 County Road 99A, Willow, CA 95698, (530) 874-0883, or California Waterfowl Association, 4438 Santiago Boulevard, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95814, (916) 948-1414.

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