

WOOD DUCK BONUS

By John W. Taylor



Along with efforts to band diving ducks at Cold Spring Harbor, L. I., a trap was placed in a fresh water lake at the head of the harbor.

The water level of the lake had been lowered so that spring rains would not cause flooding, and the trap was placed alongside a gravel bar the top of which was protruding from the water. We baited both the exposed and underwater areas with whole corn. Dabbling ducks, Canada Geese, and Mute Swan fed along the bar and in deeper water by "tipping up". Scaup Ducks dove nearby. As the water level of the lake was raised, we would move the trap to higher ground so there would be no possibility of its being completely covered by water and drowning any ducks that were lured inside. Eventually the trap was on top of the previously exposed gravel bar which was now under about three feet of water.

When the water became too deep for "tipping up", the dabbling ducks began to dive. The previous chain of events had shown them an easy source of food. What surprised me was the aggressiveness and persistence of Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*) in the trapping area. They not only dove frequently but also chased the larger ducks away. Two ducks and a drake seemed to be near the trap most of the time, and on one occasion the drake was very busy feeding and also chasing away a persistent and hungry black duck. The latter kept coming back but was chased away before being able to feed.

Two pairs of Wood Duck, the most observed at any time, were caught and banded, and one repeated in this trap. Although Mallards and Black Ducks were far more numerous on the lake, they numbered only seven trapped plus one repeat. Possibly the Wood Duck were more at home making shallow dives than the other two species, or maybe the drake's aggressiveness was responsible for the small percentage of the others trapped.

As an isolated experience, this may have no significance. However, it does suggest that if one were trapping woodies and found the presence of other species annoying and expensive because of bait consumed, the competition might be eliminated and no harm done to the Wood Duck project by moving the trap to deeper water.