

Utilization of Artificial Nesting Structures by Hooded
Mergansers in Mississippi

by

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The Mississippi Game and Fish Commission began a wood duck nest box program in 1968. Initially nest boxes were erected on Grenada Waterfowl Refuge in Calhoun County and Pearl River Waterfowl Refuge in Madison County. In 1969 the project was expanded to include other areas around the State. Among these areas was Lowndes County and it was here that Commission personnel first recorded a hooded merganser nest in an artificial wood duck nest box.

In 1969 there was a total of 6 nest boxes in Lowndes County. During the same time period, one hooded merganser nest was recorded on the Pearl River Waterfowl Area. Other areas where hooded merganser have been found nesting in boxes include Sardis Management Area, Holmes County near Cruger, Mississippi, Bucatunna Management Area, and Montgomery County.

The most remarkable area for hooded merganser nesting thus far has been on an old river run of the Big Black in Montgomery County. This particular area is located a few miles outside of Kilmichael, Mississippi and has the distinction of being primarily an old tupelo gum slough. In 1970 there was a total of 15 boxes available for ducks. One hooded merganser nest was recorded in 1970 with 13 eggs, 10 of which hatched. An additional 15 boxes were added to the area for the 1971 nesting season and 6 hooded merganser nests were recorded for a total of 76 eggs and a 100% hatching success.

The 1972 nesting season has begun and an amazing thing has happened with the 30 boxes in Montgomery County. There are, as of March 16th, 19 hooded merganser nest starts for a total of 224 eggs. One merganser hen was found to be incubating and was not disturbed so an egg count was not made. The remaining 11 nest boxes are all occupied by nesting wood ducks. Of the 19 hooded merganser nests, seven of them also

contain from one to four wood duck eggs. Another interesting aspect of this particular unit of boxes is the fact that both fox squirrels and gray squirrels are nesting in several of the boxes in which both mergansers and woodies are laying eggs. Four boxes were found to have young squirrels in them (eyes not yet open).

Box competition appears to be fierce in Montgomery County and at this time we do not know whether we are going to raise wood ducks, hooded mergansers, or squirrels, but nevertheless, all three are wildlife and offer both naturalists and hunters many many hours of pleasure.

Table 1. Hooded merganser nests in Lowndes County.

Year	Nest Starts	Success- ful Nests	Eggs in Success- ful Nests	Number Hatched
1969	6	5	61	61
1970	10	3*	42	34

* Seven nests were destroyed by flooding.

Table 2. Hooded merganser nests in Pearl River Waterfowl Refuge.

1969	1	1	8	8
1970	2	2	23	22

Table 3. Hooded merganser nests in Montgomery County.

1970	1	1	13	10
1971	6	6	76	76