

A Ground Nesting Wood Duck

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Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*) rarely use noncavity nest sites. Unusual nesting sites include a rock fissure (Audubon, cited in Bent 1923, Palmer 1975) and a leaf and twig nest in an oak tree (Hall 1969). Although Forbush (1916) noted reports of Wood Ducks nesting on the ground in the absence of suitable cavities, he never observed one. Herein, we document the occurrence of a Wood Duck using a hummock as a ground nest site.

During early May 1981, a female Wood Duck was flushed twice from a grass-alder hummock on a pond located 9.6 km from the Auburn University campus. No nest or eggs were observed, however, a few weeks later, a hen Wood Duck and three ducklings were seen on the pond.

On 2 May 1982, a female Wood Duck was flushed from a nest located on the same hummock about 10 m from the shoreline of the pond. The nest was lined with down, contained seven eggs, and was located in a shallow depression. The hummock was round and approximately 1 m in diameter. The vegetation consisted of red maple saplings (*Acer rubrum*), a sweetgum sapling (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), alder saplings (*Alnus rugosa*), greenbriar vines (*Smilix* spp.), and grass stems (*Andropogon* spp.).

The nest was observed periodically during the next

3 weeks, and the hen was seen incubating. The female and eggs were present on 23 May 1982, but apparently the nest was destroyed by a snake or avian predator shortly thereafter, because no eggshell fragments were present on 25 May 1982. The selection of this ground nesting site seems even more unusual, because a Wood Duck nest box was available on the pond.

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