

WOOD DUCK PROJECT By Darold Givens

It is not easy trying to maintain 110 wood duck nesting boxes during the breeding season. It takes dedication and commitment along with some physical agility. I was pleased this last weekend to have Roger Hatin and Pat Stratford along to help me maintain the boxes. The reason for checking the boxes every 3 weeks is to see that the proper residents are using them. We want to make sure that the Inn is open for the wood duck hen only. Some times we have a nesting starling that will make such a large nest that it pushes the wood duck hen right out of the box. We then empty her nest and send her on the way. Incidentally, the starling is not a protected bird and is certainly not protected in our boxes. Other creatures we find in our boxes are mice and rats, wasps, bees, opossums and bar owls. We try to discourage this intrusion and it can only happen if we are there to check.



Although most of the boxes are at eye level, some require using ladders and stools which means climbing up and hanging on. This trip was special as I had 20 leg bands to use on the nesting hens. This takes more time as we have to close the entrance hole and then open a side door and carefully capture the bird. Once captured, she is checked for a previous band and if she has one, is noted for our record. If not, she is then adorned (as Pete Weston would say, with new jewelry). Since this was a two day adventure, Roger worked with Pat and I on the

first day and we had a bonus of having Evan Thodos, a 16 year old club member volunteer to help us the 2nd day.



We had some unusual happenings this trip. Several of the boxes were filled with bees and had honey combs. Since I was not in the honey business, I let them be and put up new boxes. I also found on the Sacramento Refuge, three dead hens with the heads missing. This to me means a ring tailed cat. I thought I saw one when we entered the Refuge. I had only 2 other dead hens in the last 5 years and to have 3 in the same day were unusual. The other unusual event was that I had almost 10 boxes with the side doors open. Sometimes a smart raccoon can open a box but to have 10 was unusual. It makes me think that I should get another type of lock.

The results were still good. Evan was able to capture and band his first wood duck. In fact, the first box he checked, there was a hatch going on and he was able to see the little babies in the nest. The hen was banded and placed back on the nest to finish her job. When we were finished, we had banded 20 hens and found 8 hens with previous bands to record. I have photos of this trip and hope you enjoy them and can join me another time.

