

## THE VILLAGE BIRDING LIFE

“Wood Ducks”

*by HSV Audubon*

The next time you walk the Magellan Beaver Dam Trail you might notice that the two old, worn-out Wood Duck nesting boxes have been replaced. HSV Audubon thanks our member, and expert bird house builder, Adolph Juarez for taking this project on. I'm sure that the Woodies would thank Adolph even more if they could.

Wood Ducks are special. Many birdwatchers would agree that the male Wood Duck is one of the most beautiful birds in all of N. America. Their bright blue, green, lemon and magenta colors are unmatched in the duck world. In addition, they have a head crest that would do an ancient Roman warrior proud. Even though the female Wood Duck is a mundane brown color, she is just as special with her own gladiator head crest and bright white eye ring.

Ducks found in the Village are divided into two groups. Wood Ducks are in the group known as “dabbling ducks”. Dabblers feed on the surface and typically don't dive under the water. The well recognized green headed Mallards are the most common of the “dabblers”. “Diving ducks” feed under the water. A variety of species of “divers” are here in the winter but they all migrate north for the summer. Even though Wood Ducks are present year around; they too are migratory; the ones we see here in the winter probably aren't the same ones that nest here in the summer.

Woodies range across most of the United States, southern Canada and northern Mexico. Their preferred habitat is calm, shallow waters like those found in ponds, swamps, river pools and sheltered lake coves. Because their natural nesting environment is tree cavities, they are one of few duck species that can perch on a tree branch. Wood Ducks mostly eat seeds and fruits; they are particularly fond of acorns. Like most birds they add some protein to their diet with whatever insects they happen upon.

Since tree cavities can be scarce, Woodies have benefited greatly from man-made nest boxes. Once a nest is established, Momma lays 6 to 15 eggs. A couple of weeks later the ducklings have quite an adventure when it's time to leave the nest. Imagine this, you are a baby Wood Duck in a tree 50 feet above the ground, you can't fly yet, and Momma is in the water below calling (Wood Ducks call with a squeal rather than quack) come down, come down now! No need to worry; like parachutists sans parachutes the ducklings, one at a time, safely plop to the ground where Momma gathers them up and leads them to a protected area of the pond. Of course, leaping to the ground is only the first challenge. Danger lurks for all wildlife in the pond. Snapping turtles, snakes and Great Blue Herons are only part of the peril for the young Woodies. Survival of the fittest is Nature's first rule.

This doesn't mean that Man can't bend Nature's will a bit. Thanks to the nest boxes at Beaver Dam, we usually have at least one Wood Duck family there every summer. Hopefully, the sight of Woodies will brighten your walks there this year, too.

As always [hsvbirds.org](http://hsvbirds.org) has a lot of information about everything you'd like to know about birds and some of Nature's other wonders. You will see on our web site that HSV Audubon has available a Village birding checklist. It lists the over 200 species of birds that might be seen in the Village, when they might be seen and how common they are. It's a great way to keep track of the birds at your feeder.

HSV Audubon meets the 2nd Friday of each month, except in the summer, at 10:00 at the Coronado Center. Guests are always welcome.

Photos by Vic Prislipsky