

STRUCTURES FOR WILDLIFE SPECIFICATIONS

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

WOOD DUCK

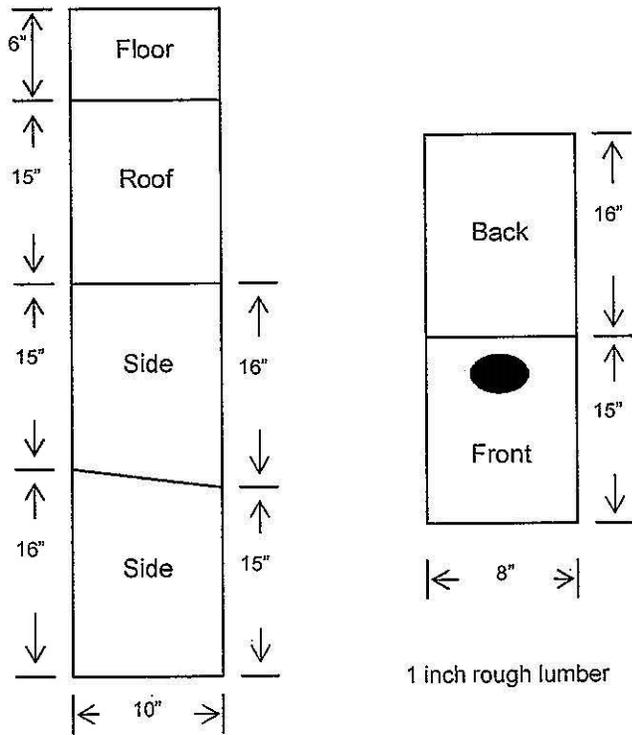
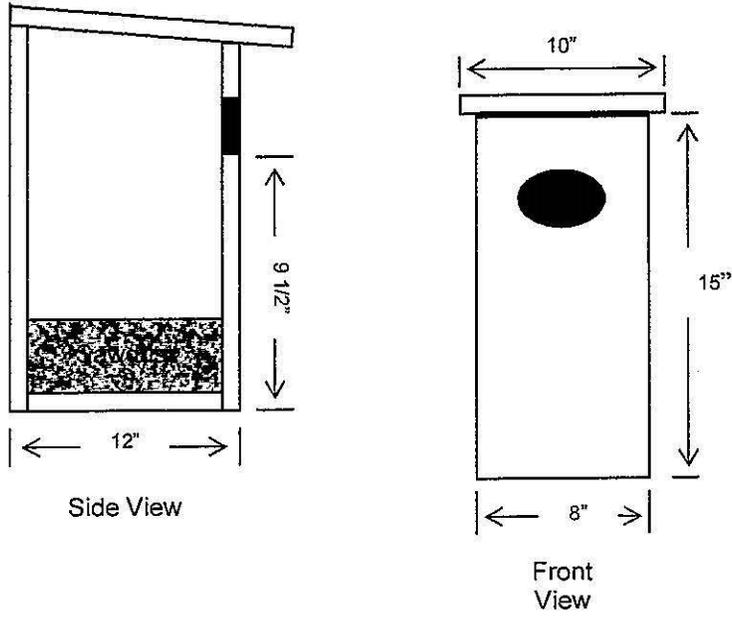
Nesting Cover. Nest boxes should be constructed of weather resistant wood such as cypress or cedar. The wood can be painted, stained or treated with light colors, but only on the outside surface. Dark colors, metal or plastic nest boxes often absorb excessive heat on warm spring days, which can be detrimental to wood duck reproduction. The entrance hole should have a four-inch diameter or be an oval that is three inches high and four inches wide. *Figure 2* provides an example of one type of nest box design. A three-inch-wide strip of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch mesh hardware cloth should be fastened to the inside of the box under the entrance to function as a ladder for the hen and newly hatched ducklings. The cut edges of this cloth should be folded back before insertion to avoid injury to the ducklings in their climb from the nest to the entrance hole. A three-inch layer of coarse sawdust should be placed at the bottom of the box to serve as nesting material and help prevent the eggs from rolling around. At least four small drainage holes should be located at the bottom of the nest box. The lid or one side of the box should be removable to facilitate monitoring and cleaning.

All wood duck boxes should be fitted with a galvanized sheet metal predator guard (*Figure 3*) to prevent snakes, raccoons, squirrels, opossums and other predators from negatively impacting nesting success. Because of the secretive nature of nesting wood ducks, individual nest boxes should be placed in relatively secluded areas within timber stands where natural cavities would typically occur. Nest boxes can be placed either on land or over water. If located over water, they should be placed at least four feet above the high water level and the entrance hole should face the open water rather than the shoreline. Because of the ease of access by predators, installation of nest boxes directly on trees should be avoided. Nest boxes placed on land should be located from 30 to 150 feet away from the shoreline. Boxes placed directly on the shoreline appear to be more likely frequented by nest predators. Since the hen must lead her ducklings to water soon after they hatch, the area between the nest box and the water's edge should be free of any major obstacles such as roads or fencing. This area should contain cover such as buttonbush, swamp privet (*Forestiera accuminata*), etc., that affords duck movement with protection from predators. Nest boxes placed on poles over water are generally more easily monitored than those placed in trees. Whether the box is placed over water or land, the entrance should be clear of obstructions to provide easy access for the ducks. In Louisiana, nesting may begin in February, so nest boxes should be cleaned, maintained and put in place by December of each year.

While the normal brood size for wood ducks is 10 to 15, nests have been found to contain 30 eggs or more. These extra eggs are the result of intraspecific brood parasitism or "dump nesting". Dump nesting occurs when a female, frequently a first-year breeder, follows another hen to nest sites during the egg-laying period. The visiting bird is stimulated to lay her eggs in the nest of the other hen. In the wild, this impulse is kept in check because wood ducks

normally nest in isolated locations. Artificial nesting structures are often mistakenly erected close together and/or in highly visible locations. This creates a situation where dump nesting is common and overall reproductive success decreases. Because of this, it is critical to locate nest boxes in isolated locations mimicking naturally occurring tree cavities. Although it may take nesting pairs longer to locate these types of nest boxes, nesting success should be high when found. Also, nest boxes should be placed 600 feet apart and should not be visible to one another. Once a nest box program has been started, a regular annual inspection should be made during early winter (December) and/or well after the nesting season has ended in late summer. Old egg shells, wasp nests, any unhatched eggs, etc., should be removed and general repairs to the box and the predator guard should be done. Nesting litter (coarse sawdust) should be replaced at least every other year. Disturbance of the hen during nesting season (February through June) may cause her to abandon the nest. It is a violation of federal migratory bird statutes to destroy or disturb the nests or eggs of migratory birds.

Figure 2. Wood duck nesting box design



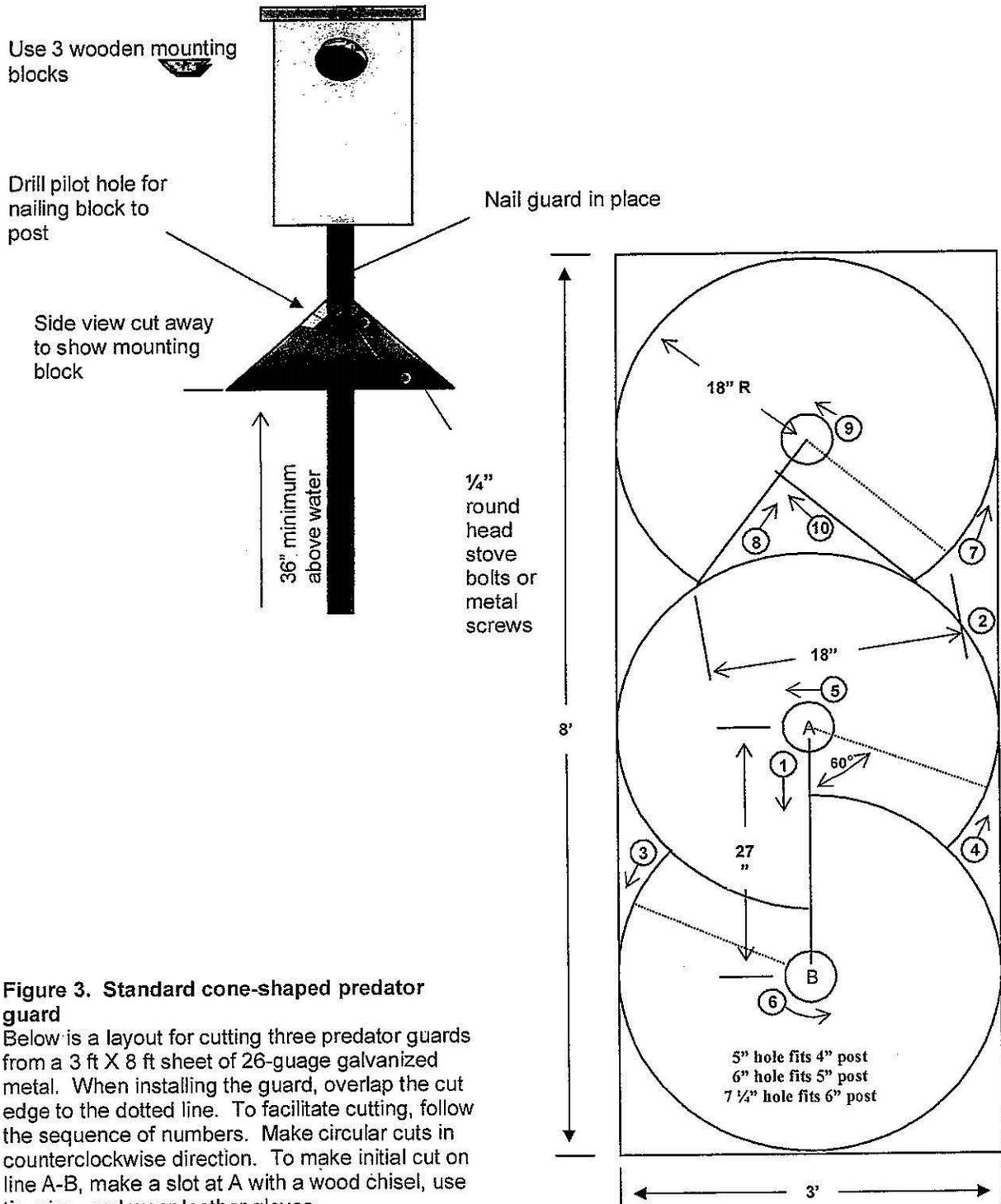


Figure 3. Standard cone-shaped predator guard

Below is a layout for cutting three predator guards from a 3 ft X 8 ft sheet of 26-gauge galvanized metal. When installing the guard, overlap the cut edge to the dotted line. To facilitate cutting, follow the sequence of numbers. Make circular cuts in counterclockwise direction. To make initial cut on line A-B, make a slot at A with a wood chisel, use tinsnips, and wear leather gloves.

To minimize access to nest boxes by predators, metal predator guards should be installed on all wood duck box support poles.