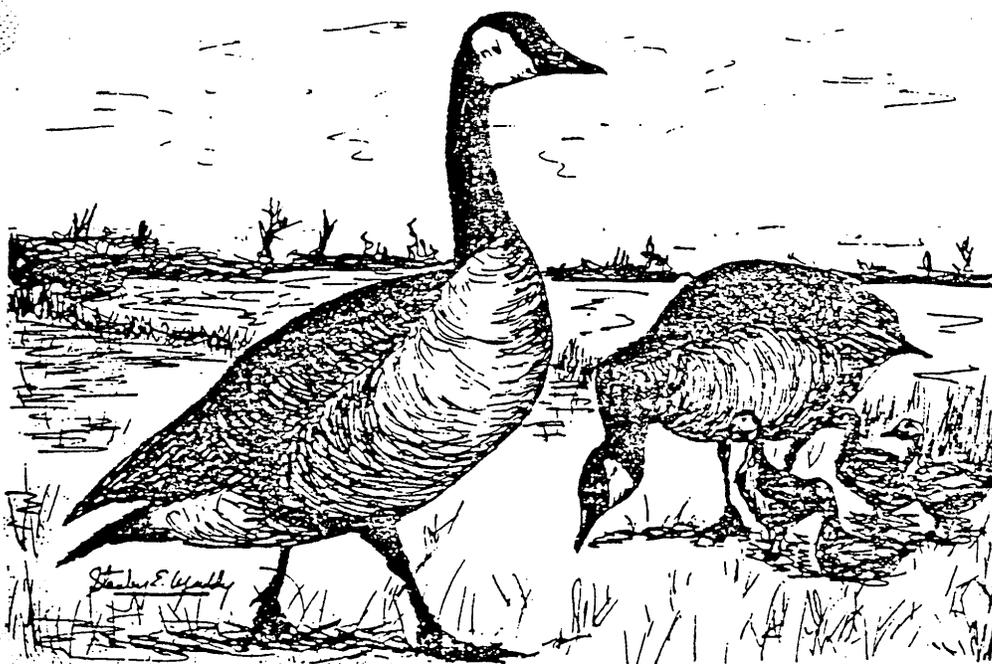


IMPROVING YOUR POND

FOR

DUCKS AND GEESE



**Improving Your Pond for Ducks and Geese**

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**The introduction of Giant Canada Geese into Southern Iowa has created a great deal of interest in waterfowl. Although Southern Iowa traditionally has not produced ducks and geese, the large numbers of farm ponds provide much potential habitat. This booklet contains successful ideas used in other parts of the country for improving habitat and increasing numbers of ducks and geese.**

Safe nesting sites for waterfowl are limited in Southern Iowa. Waterfowl tend to nest in the same general area in which they were hatched. This is commonly called "imprinting" and while not fully understood, it consistently occurs. The fastest way to increase duck and goose populations is by improving habitat so more young are successfully produced in the area. This can be accomplished by several methods, each having advantages and disadvantages.

If you want to exert the least amount of time and effort, use permanent islands or floating islands covered with fiberglass. They require less maintenance. Other structures require more time and effort but may be equally successful. Human nature is such that we tend to lose interest in a project if it does not succeed immediately. This is particularly true with duck and goose programs as it may be several years before you are successful in attracting a breeding pair to your pond.

While not recommending any specific structure over another, we do urge you to try one or more ideas mentioned. Good luck.

## TYPES OF STRUCTURES

### Permanent Islands

**These are built during construction of a pond. They offer several advantages over artificial structures.**

#### Advantages

- **They are natural and blend with the environment.**
- **They provide both loafing area and brood rearing habitat.**
- **They require little annual maintenance.**
- **They are long-lived.**

#### Disadvantages

- **They can be expensive.**
- **They must be installed during construction of pond.**
- **They are not always feasible.**

### Floating Islands

Essentially there are three types of floating islands being used successfully. The first is constructed of wood, the second is styrofoam framed in wood, and the third is styrofoam covered with fiberglass. In existing ponds, they are probably the best substitute for a natural island.

#### Advantages

- They are not affected by water fluctuation.
- They can be easily installed in deep water.
- They provide loafing areas for the birds.

#### Disadvantages

- They are more expensive than other artificial structures.
- They provide no brood rearing habitat.
- They require annual maintenance.

### Pole Structures

Pole structures are nesting structures mounted on top of a pole. The nest is usually constructed of wood, fiberglass or one-third of a barrel.

#### Advantages

- They are relatively cheap to obtain.
- They are easy to install.

#### Disadvantages

- They are subject to destruction by ice.
- Most kinds are relatively shortlived (five to ten years). 0 They require annual maintenance.
- They do not blend with the environment.
- They do not provide brood rearing habitat or loafing area.
- They may not be readily accepted by geese.
- They cannot be used on areas where water fluctuations exceed three feet.
- Placement is limited to fairly shallow water.

## PLACEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF STRUCTURES

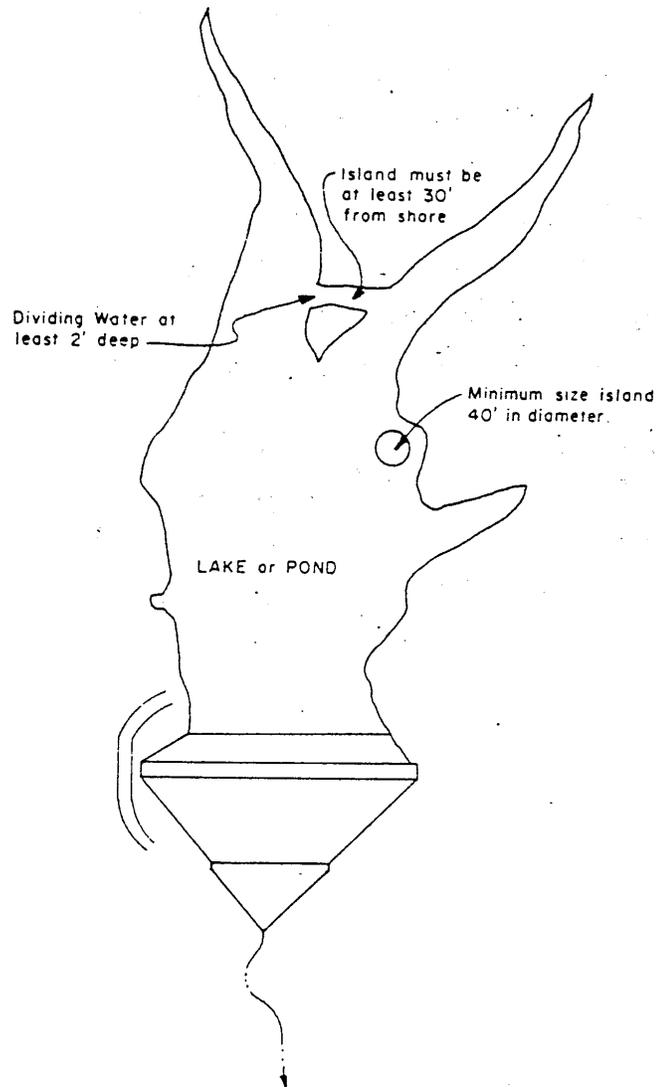
Pole structures and floating islands need to be in the pond before ice out to attract and hold migratory waterfowl. Care should be taken to work on ice a minimum of six inches in thickness. These structures should be placed in relatively undisturbed areas, preferably 20 feet from shore. Holes must be drilled in the bottom of the nesting box to drain out excess water. One inch of styrofoam should be placed on the bottom for insulation of eggs during cold periods. Nesting material can be either hay, straw or wood chips. Hay and straw should be replaced each spring, prior to ice out, while wood chips may last three or four years.

**While all ponds may attract Waterfowl, some are better than others. Ponds with the best chance of attracting waterfowl have some common characteristics:**

- 1. Ponds close to an established waterfowl population .**
  - A. As the established population expands, ducks and geese will be looking for a new home. They usually head for the closest suitable habitat.**
- 2. Ponds that are lightly grazed or ungrazed.**
  - A. Grassy vegetation that will hide a nest will provide natural nesting habitat. In addition, young birds will use the area to feed on insects.**
- 3. Ponds with emergent vegetation (cattails, etc.) or trees in the water.**
  - A. Many species prefer nesting over water with vegetation hiding the nest. The vegetation in the water provides escape cover for young birds.**

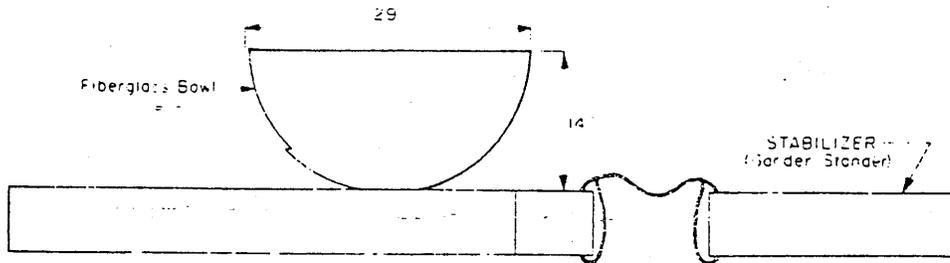
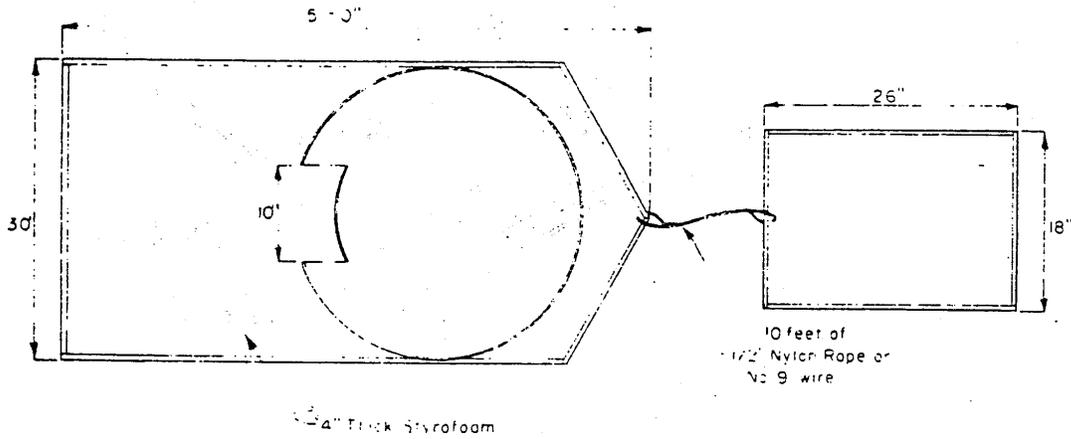
For additional information, see your local Conservation Commission Wildlife Biologist or County Soil Conservation District Office.

## PERMANENT ISLANDS



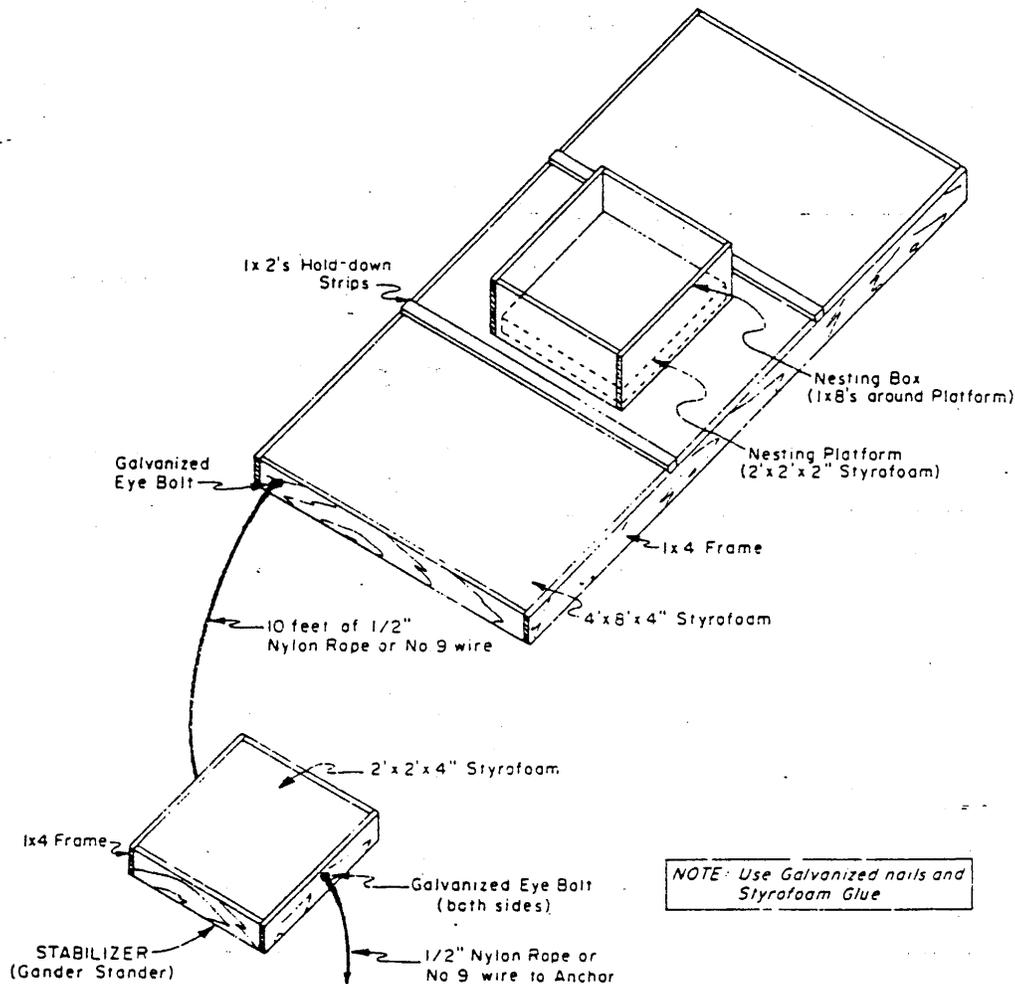
If you are constructing a new pond, consider building an island. This may be done by borrowing soil to cut off part of a natural peninsula or by piling soil to make an artificial island. In either case, the island should be three feet above the permanent water level. At least one side of the island should have a slight slope (five to one) for easy access by waterfowl. The island should be crowned so that it remains well drained. Seeding such as alfalfa-brome, Reed canary or switchgrass is recommended to provide nesting cover and to control erosion. Not more than one island per acre of water is suggested. The limiting factor will usually be feasibility of the site.

# STYROFOAM / FIBERGLASS FLOATING STRUCTURE



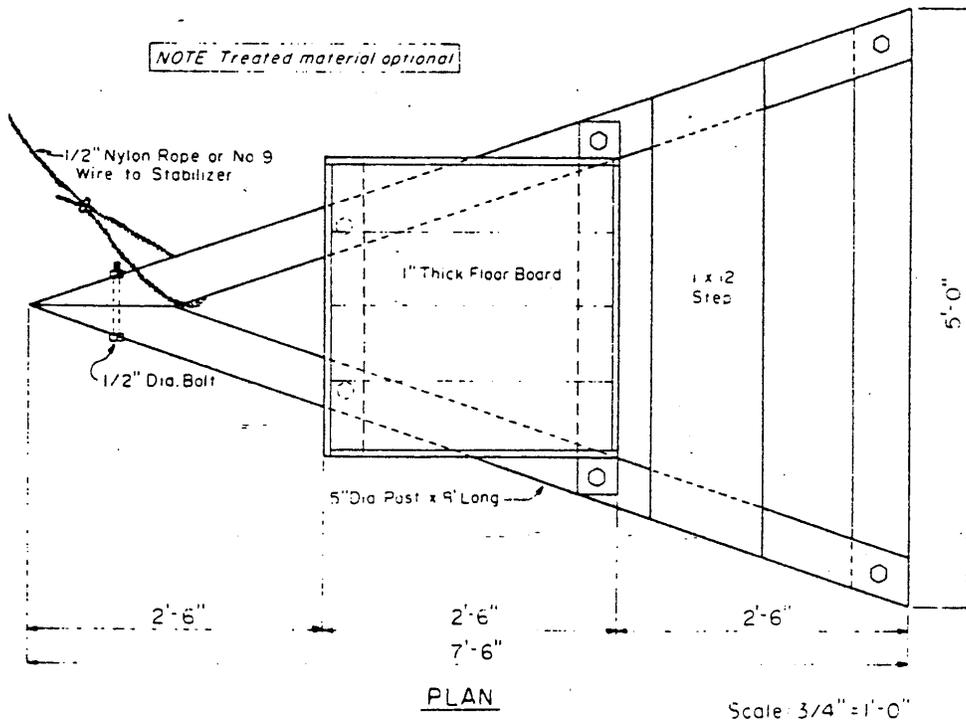
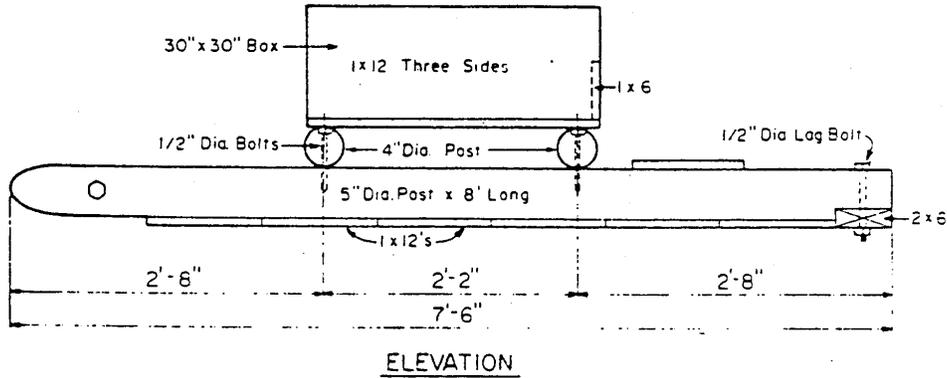
Next to a natural or man-made island, the fiberglass coated styrofoam floating structure is probably the easiest to install and maintain. Unless damaged or stolen it should last indefinitely. This structure is available commercially at a cost of approximately \$160. Use something comparable to two cement blocks (about 90 pounds) for an anchor for this type of floater. Judge the length of the rope or wire from anchor to front of gander stander at two times the depth of the water

## STYROFOAM/WOOD FLOATING STRUCTURE



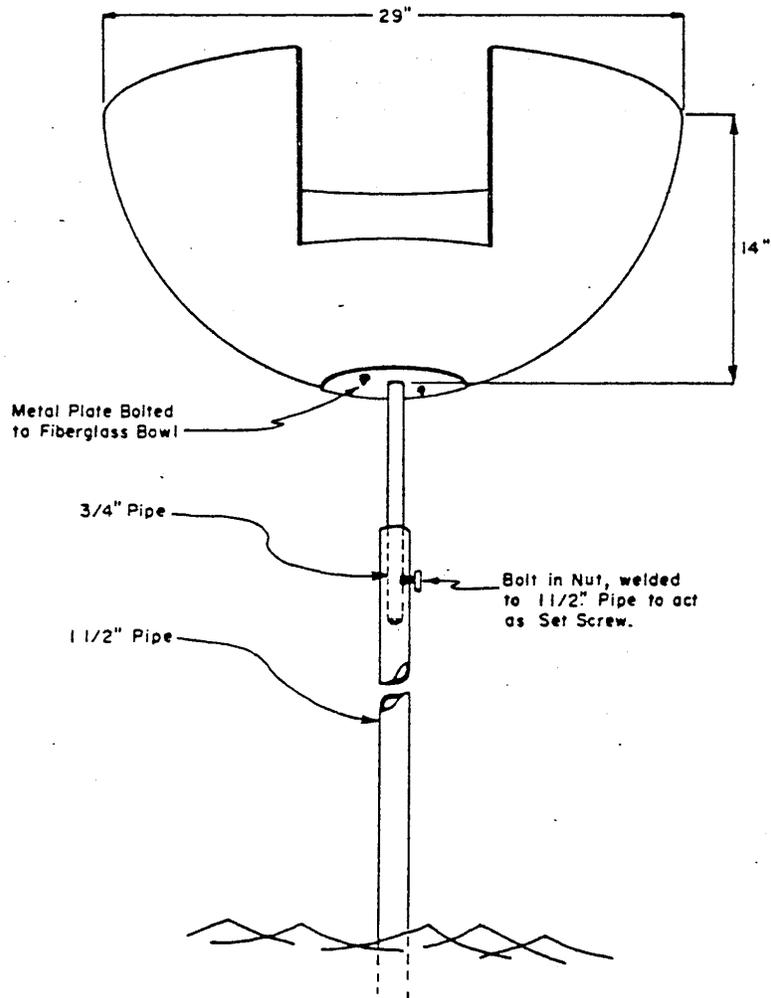
This can be built at home in various sizes. It should be at least 30 inches wide and 48 inches long to be stable in water. It should be removed before winter to avoid ice damage. Muskrats can be a problem by chewing the styrofoam unless it is completely covered with wood or chicken wire. This is relatively short lived and may need frequent maintenance. As with other "floaters" this should be attached to the stabilizer with ten feet of rope or wire and the stabilizer attached to anchor with length of rope or wire two times the depth of water. Anchor should weigh about 90 pounds (two cement blocks). Field mice may make a winter home of this if it is not stored properly. Cost, using new material, is approximately \$50.

# NESTING PLATFORM FLOATING STRUCTURE



This can be built at home by most novice carpenters with simple tools. Either new or used materials may be used with new estimated to cost \$50 plus labor. It should be removed before winter to avoid ice damage. The "gander stander" should be made of wood with the length of rope or wire to the anchor being two times the depth of water. This is a relatively short lived structure. It tends to waterlog and sink. Treated lumber adds to life of this structure.

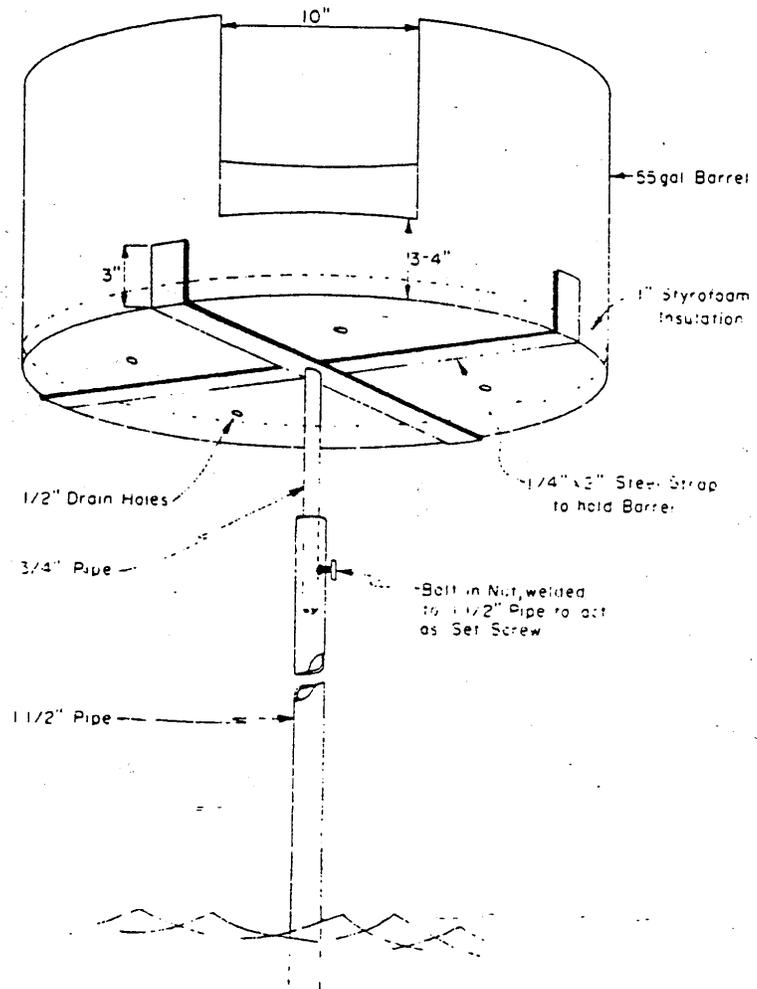
## FIBERGLASS POLE STRUCTURE



**The fiberglass bowl, commercially available, can be placed in a pond fairly easily. Styrofoam insulation is embedded in the fiberglass and the entire structure is long lived.**

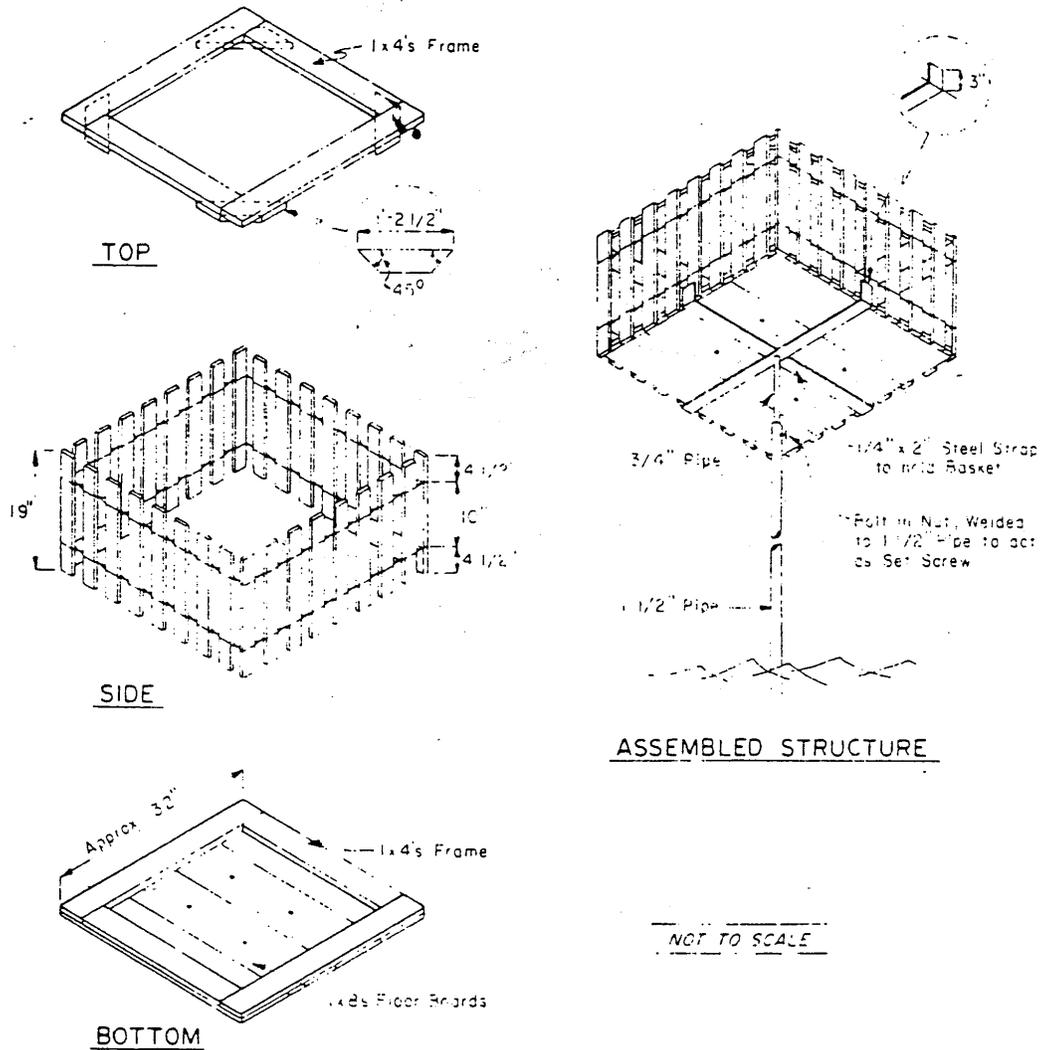
Although the fiberglass is very durable and can be left out during winter, there is risk of ice damaging the pipe causing loss of the bowl. Old disc blades work well in attaching the pole to the fiberglass bowl. These are available for approximately \$40 plus pipe and labor.

# NESTING – BARREL POLE STRUCTURE



This structure can be made in the home workshops out of one third of a 55-gallon barrel. It should have at least one inch of styrofoam in the bottom for insulation. As with other pole structures, ice may be a problem. Cost is approximately \$10 plus pipe and labor.

# WOOD-POLE STRUCTURE



This is one method of building a wood pole structure. The pipe is similar to other pole structures and has the same potential ice problems. As pictured above, the approximate cost would be \$15 plus pipe and labor. It is relatively simple to build but has some disadvantages, primarily maintaining nesting material in box and being fairly short lived.

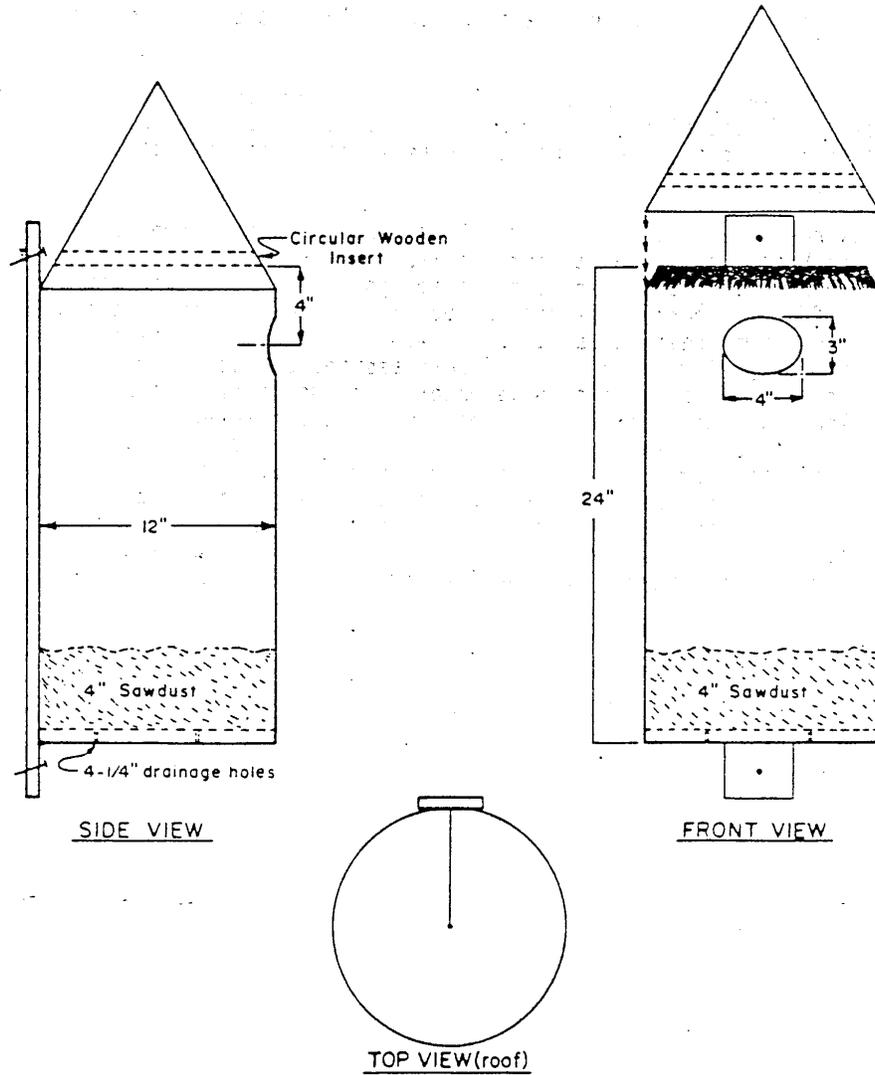
## Woodduck Nesting Boxes

There is a species of duck native to Southern Iowa, the woodduck or "woody".

Woodies were nearly eliminated from Iowa due to overhunting and destruction of natural nesting areas. In recent years, woodduck populations have come back dramatically as a result of efforts by conservation groups.

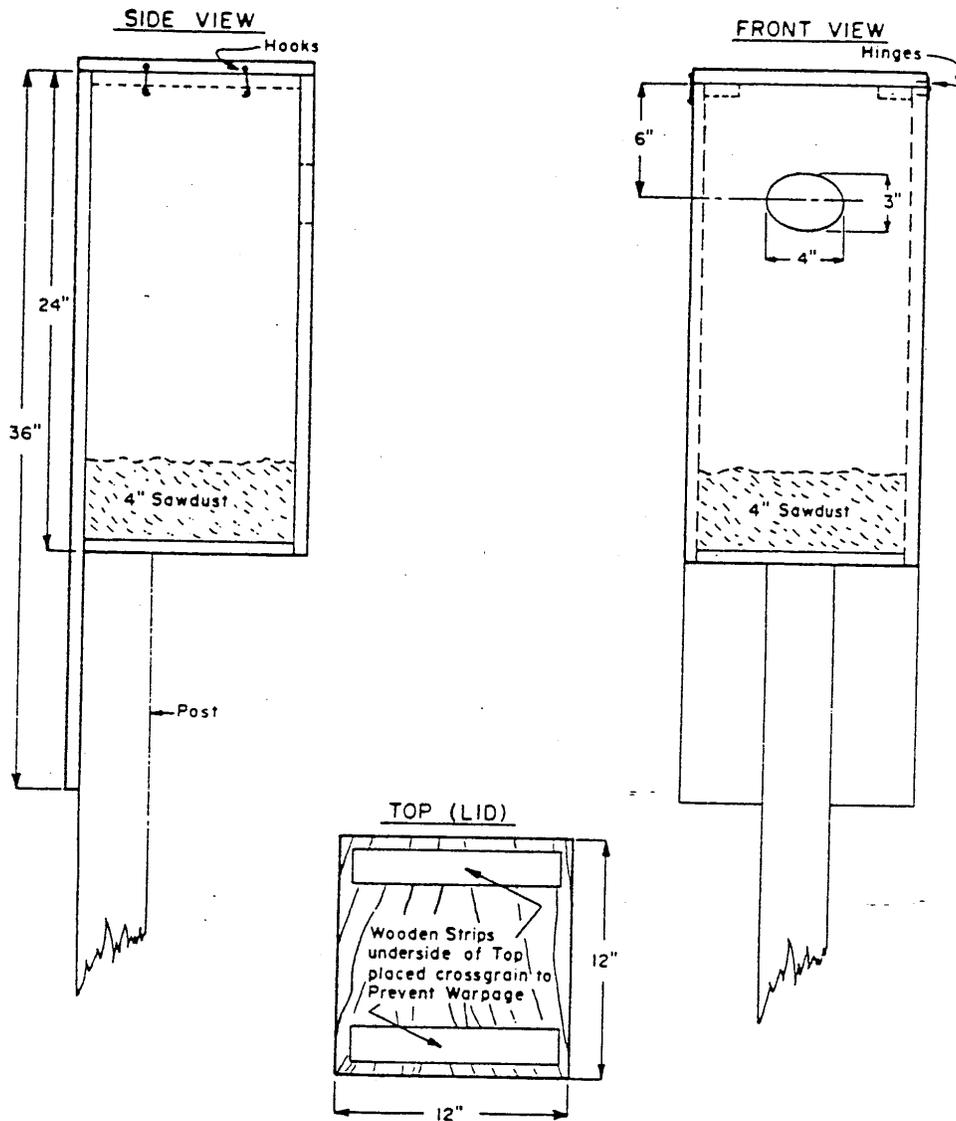
Woodducks nest naturally in a fairly large cavity in the trunk or large branch of a tree. As timberland was cleared, natural nesting areas disappeared. Farm ponds can provide good nesting areas with a little effort. Woodduck nesting structures properly installed can provide substitute nesting cavities for Woodies. Boxes are made either from rough lumber, metal or fiberglass and are attached to an existing tree or on a pole above water. Any holes or cracks which allow light to enter near the bottom must be covered, for ducks will not use these boxes. Authorities disagree on painting but some type of paint or sealer will aid in preventing deterioration. A dull, drab, natural-appearing color such as olive drab would be best. Nesting boxes should be placed by March 15. More detailed information on placement and maintenance of woodduck boxes is available from your local State Conservation Commission Office or Wildlife Biologist.

# WOOD DUCK NESTING BOX



Woodduck nesting box constructed of twelve inch stove pipe (galvanized) with wooden bottom and top insert. Conical sheet metal roof discourages predators. Newly hatched birds climb out of the nest, therefore, some material is needed for a toe hold on the inside up to the opening. This may be rough lumber (1 x 4), screen wire or automobile undercoating. If this structure is not installed over water, a suitable predator guard (not shown) should be constructed.

# WOOD DUCK NESTING BOX



Woodduck nesting box constructed of rough lumber. If not made of good material, is relatively short-lived. Drain holes should be drilled in the bottom. If installed over land, predator guards (not shown) are necessary. Sawdust nesting material should be replaced each year.