

Blue Birds and Wood Ducks

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In Fall of 2004 a working group that included the PA Game Commission and the Harry Enstrom Chapter of the Izaak Walton League collaborated to develop a wetland along Whiteley Creek in Greene Co. Because this site was located in State Game Lands 223 it has since been maintained by the PA Game Commission.

In Fall of 2020, the above two partners revisited this site. In the Harry Enstrom Chapter we had the idea to enhance this habitat for birds & pollinators by introducing large, colorful, native flowering plants. This would also make it more attractive to the human viewer.

When we approached the PA Game Commission with this proposal they directed us to their land manager, Stephen A. Leiendecker, Southwest Region, Land Management Group Supervisor. After a few e-mail & phone exchanges we agreed to meet at the wetland. While touring the property, Steve Leiendecker was quite supportive of the idea because it meshed with their current plans to convert more vegetated areas in the State Game Lands to native meadow grass & wildflower habitats. He commented, though, that there were many other things that community volunteer groups could help with. These included : tree plantings to improve the habitat for game & other wildlife; bird nesting box installations ; old, long abandoned cemeteries in State Game Lands that could use some sprucing up. The Harry Enstrom Chapter decided to take on a Fall 2020 project to install Wood Duck & Bluebird nesting boxes in the wetland.

Wood Ducks & Bluebirds build their nests in cavities in trees that may have been formed by another animal or from natural tree damage & decay processes. They are not equipped by bill or claw to form their own cavities, so, in the absence of natural tree cavities, they will readily use a nesting box.

The PA Game Commission supplied 25 Bluebird boxes, 6 Wood Duck boxes, some mounting poles, the hardware for pole or tree mounting, and a bag of wood chip nesting material for the Wood Duck boxes. Steve handed them over to us on Saturday & on Sunday our crew of members & volunteers met at the wetland. Half of the crew, with ladders & muck boots, would install the 6 wood Duck boxes and the other half the 25 Bluebird boxes. While this seems like an uneven distribution of labor, the much larger duck boxes needed to be installed high up a tree and on or as close to the water as possible because, the day after hatching, the tiny chicks would have to flutter to the ground or water following Mom out of the nest for good. We'd read that nesting Bluebirds were very territorial and that the boxes should be spaced about 100 yards apart. Not necessary said Steve Leindecker. We could install 2 boxes within 10-20 ft of each other and a Bluebird would take one and a Tree Swallow might take the other. They don't recognize each other as competitors. Then space the next pair of boxes 100 yds away.

So that's the way the day went. We finished just before some rain came and even cleaned out several old duck boxes along the way. A good day, socially distanced, in the outdoors.

Any group interested in doing such projects should contact "PA Game Commission Southwest Regional Office at 724 238-9523" to let them know of your interest and to see what might be needed.