

WOODWORKING FOR WILDLIFE

MALLARD NEST CYLINDER

The drake mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) is the most sought-after species of waterfowl in Mississippi. No other species so quickly comes to mind when waterfowlers take to flooded rice fields and cypress brakes during Mississippi's waterfowl season.

The mallard has the most extensive breeding range of any duck. During February and March, mallards are leaving their wintering grounds and begin the migration to the nesting grounds. Mallards usually reach their nesting grounds around April and May, depending on how far north they nest.

As large flocks arrive at the larger water areas of the breeding grounds, they begin to break up as pairs and disperse to potholes and other small water areas. Within a few days of selecting a particular pothole the pair selects a nest site. The hen forms a nest bowl or scrape in old plant litter or moist earth. The area is usually 7 to 8 inches in diameter and 1 to 2 inches deep. The hen lays one egg a day and adds down to the nest until the clutch is complete. Mallards lay an average of 9 eggs per clutch. Incubation lasts around 26 to 30 days.

Nest failure can be a significant problem and predation is the largest contributor to nesting failure. Skunks, raccoons, red fox, crows and magpies are all principal destroyers of mallard nests.

The mallard nest cylinder can be used to encourage mallards to nest in safer locations. This cylinder may be used by "farm pond" and other semi-domestic mallards which remain in Mississippi during the nesting season (rather than returning north to the mallard breeding grounds).

It is recommended that the nest be placed over water no less than 3 feet above the highest water level expected during the spring season. Position the nest perpendicular to the prevailing winds in your area. This prevents nesting material from being blown out of the nest, but more importantly, it prevents the hen's scent from being spread over a large area, possibly attracting a predator to the nest. A predator guard can be placed on the post. The nest should be secured to the platform with wire.

The nesting material should be replaced annually in February. The nest can be turned around at this time, and if the hay is thin, some can be pushed between the layers of wire using a thin board. Usually, by the third year, all the hay in the nest will need to be replaced.



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