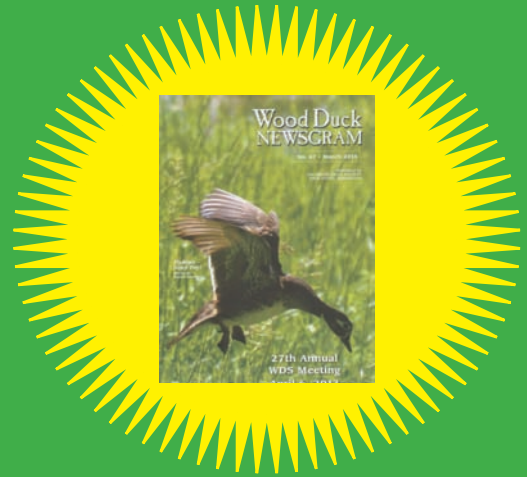


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Reports from the FIELD

Dennis Corvello and Matt Meyer manage the Wilderness Unlimited wood duck program in northern California, including an impressive 300+ boxes. We were pleased to receive this engaging story and their great photos. Dennis wrote: "I'm sending you a few pictures we've taken (*see pg. 10 for photos.*) Two are of bee hives. We constantly battle the bees – five to ten hives a year. We've finally found a bee keeper who will come and remove the hives. The other two pictures are of Ringtails [*also called ringtail cats*] that use our boxes. Usually when we find a ringtail in a box

we also find a dead hen. Predator guards don't really work for us since about 95% of our boxes are in trees, and we have over 300 boxes. Ringtails are endangered in California so the best we can do is to remove the lids. After the cats decide to abandon the [lidless] boxes, the boxes must be changed out due to the smells left by the cats. The hens will not use the locations [until we change boxes.] We have had to relocate strings of up to ten boxes that the cats have used as feeding stations. These had formerly been high producing locations that the hens left after [the ringtails had targeted the boxes.] The bee hive boxes also have to be removed and replaced. Since a lot of our boxes are near rice fields, the lingering smell of honey attracts rats. The rats come in and eat the eggs. All in all, we still produce around 1400 ducklings a year."

While most WDS members do not live where there are ringtails, we all deal with raccoons, their close relative. The raccoon is one big reason why the WDS recommends the *Best Practices* method of mounting boxes low on a pole, protected with a cone guard. In our reply to Dennis and Matt, we stated, "We can only imagine what a huge task it would be to switch over 300 tree-mounted boxes to *Best Practices*."

Anthony Spatafora, of Harvey, LA, deals with predators like alligators that are foreign to most of us, as he manages his 61 box unit near the mouth of the Mississippi. But here's what he had to say about *crows* in an email to the *Newsgram* in December: "For me, crows are a bigger problem on jump day than any other predator, including hawks and gators. Look closely at the enclosed photo (*see photo, pg. 10.*) Notice the duckling at the hole ready to jump, the one in mid-air, the hen on the ground hissing at the crow, the three ducklings with the hen, and the crow perched on the gate arguing with the hen. After the photo was taken, the crow flew up and snatched the duckling at the hole before it could jump."

Brad Pierson, lives in Plymouth, a western suburb of Minneapolis, MN. He has taken on the daunting but satisfying task of managing WD boxes in the *ten* parks that comprise the Three Rivers Park District surrounding his home. Here are his 2012 production figures: There were 129 boxes. 73 held hatched clutches (60% success), with membrane counts showing that 544 ducklings jumped. Brad added: "Wasps seem to be a big factor in the SW part of the District. The three parks in that area have lower production and higher abandonment rates – and more wasp nests." Brad asked if this could be causative or coincidence. Good question. See page 18 for more on wasps.

Blue puzzler: *Check out the photo of the hatched WD nest on page 10.* In 2006, your editor placed a box in the backyard of the parsonage next to a church in Willmar, MN. It's about 200 yards from a public park and a productive wetland. Every year from 2007 through 2012, it has held a successful WD nest, including 23 jumped ducklings from the compound clutch I followed in 2012. It had been a couple weeks after the estimated hatch date when I opened the door of the box. Four unhatched eggs, some down, and several of the 23 membranes were lying in the NE corner of the nest and were partly stained *blue*. They were lying next to a small, dark blue, egg-like structure with a hole in the top of its shell. I was puzzled. *Answer is on pg. 7.*

Reports from the Field continued on page 10

Ringtail. Story on page 9.

PHOTO BY CORVELLO AND MEYER



Reports from Field continued from page 9



Honeycomb. Story on page 9.
 PHOTO BY CORVELLO AND MEYER