MALLARD NEST CYLINDER

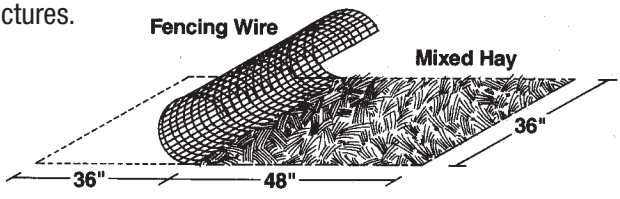
Most of us are familiar with wood duck nest boxes and the success of that program. Wood ducks were lacking suitable nest cavities in trees and readily took to artificial nesting structures, bringing these beautiful ducks back from the brink of extinction to become the most abundant breeding ducks in Ohio. Mallards, although not near extinction, are in need of help. Drought, habitat destruction, and predators take their toll as mallards try to nest in fragmented habitat. This is where you can come in- by providing safe nesting sites for more mallards in Ohio.

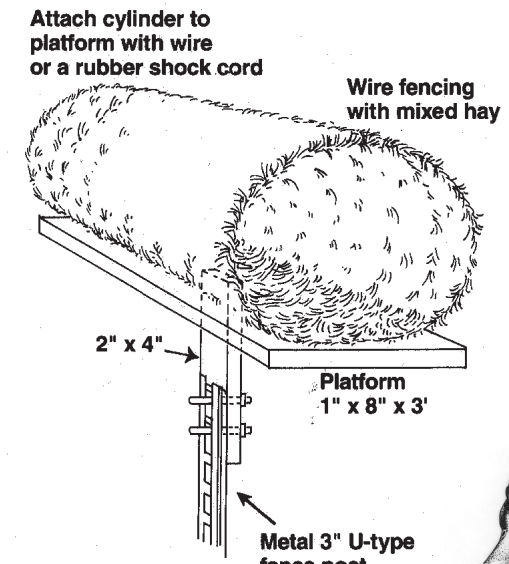
Mallards don't take to nest structures with the same tenacity as wood ducks, but they will use them if the structures are properly placed and maintained. This nest cylinder is easy to build, easy to maintain, relatively inexpensive, and liked by mallards. On a wetland wildlife area in Pennsylvania, 35 to 50 percent of the structures are used annually, and in farm ponds the use is approximately 100 percent! The really good news is that 90 percent of nests are successful in these structures.

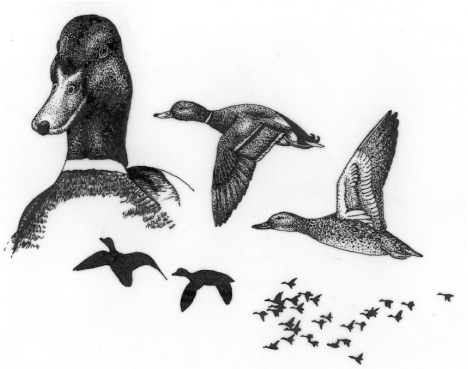
To make this nest cylinder requires a seven-foot piece of fencing wire 36 inches wide. Several types of wire will work, but the recommended type is welded, plastic coated garden fencing with a 2-inch by 2 1/2-inch mesh. A 50-foot roll will make seven nests. Also needed is a supply of grass or hay such as timothy/orchard grass mixture or blue-joint grass. Sudan grass also works well. Straw is a poor choice because it doesn't last long: don't use it.

Cut seven feet of fencing off the roll and place on a flat, hard surface. Measure three feet in from one end and mark the wire. Roll the end of three-foot section of wire to the mark, to produce a cylinder 36 inches long by 12 inches in diameter. Place approximately two inches of hay/grass over the remaining four feet of fencing. Continue rolling the wire over the grass and fasten with pig rings, or wrap the ends of the cut wire to secure it in place. Place a handful of grass in the center for nesting material. Now you are ready to place the nest on a platform or post.

The nest cylinder should be placed over water no less than three feet above the highest water level expected in spring. Place it perpendicular to the prevailing winds in your area. This will prevent nesting material from being blown out of the nest, and-more







importantly- it will prevent the hen's scent from being spread over a large area and possibly attracting predators. The nest cylinder should be placed far from shorelines and should have a predator guard on the post. The cylinder should be placed near adequate brood cover such as a marsh or stream corridor where the hen can transport her brood to a marsh.

Nesting mallards need overhead cover and the cylinder does an excellent job of providing it. The cylinder can be rotated after the first year to insure overhead cover, and a small handful of grass can be placed in the cylinder to supply additional nesting material. Every three years the grass should be replaced.

Once mallards catch on to the cylinders and begin raising young in them, success will increase and the local mallard population will build naturally. Young that were produced in the cylinders will search for a similar place to raise their young, so you should continue with this project as long as you have adequate habitat. This is also a great project to get young hunters and conservationists involved with. Raising a wild brood of mallards, which will supply observation and hunting pleasures and return each year to nest, will be extremely rewarding. Plus, mallards could sure use the help.