



HOW TO BUILD A DUCK TUBE

Flooding, habitat destruction and predators can all take their toll on mallards trying to nest in fragmented habitat. You can help by providing safe nesting sites for the ducks.

Providing safe artificial nesting structures for mallards has been proved to increase their breeding success. Placing duck nest tubes in sheltered sites with plenty of access to suitable habitat, where mallard would naturally want to make a nest and raise their broods, achieves consistently good results. Mallard nests are often destroyed before the eggs have had the chance to hatch, through predation, trampling from livestock or disturbance from dog walkers.

In other countries artificial nests have been shown to boost nesting success to more than 80 percent.

Anyone can make and erect nest tubes to help improve the population of wild mallard in their area. It may take several years before the tubes are used, but don't be disheartened – once they are occupied, the ducks and their offspring will likely return to nest year after year.

BASC has been working as part of the Waterfowlers' Network to monitor the breeding success/failure and usage of duck nest tubes. Anyone who has duck nest tubes on their land can contribute to this research by completing the Waterfowler's Network's online data recording form.

Siting the tubes

DO

- Choose a location where mallard are already breeding; tubes will not magically attract ducks.
- Choose a location that will allow ducklings to find food close by when they fledge – reed beds, weeds and cover will hold the insects they need.
- Position the tube 90° to the prevailing wind - no one likes a draughty home.
- Move tubes around if they have not been used after the second breeding season.
- Place more duck tubes over a period of years. Mallard will often return to try to breed in the same sites where they were raised.

- Refresh the hay around the outer cylinder and inside the tube each year, by February at the latest.
- Make sure you have the necessary permissions from the landowner; some protected sites might also require permission from the relevant authorities.

DON'T:

- Site the tubes over fast-flowing or tidal water.
- Site tubes where predators can get at them.
- Put tubes too close together.

Materials

- Medium tensile garden wire mesh, 2.5cm mesh size – 1m wide X 2.2m long.
- Cable ties x 9 / wire strips or Hog rings.
- Hay which has not been in contact with predators such as dogs, cats, foxes, etc.
- Scaffold tube / post – size dependent on depth of water and softness of the bottom – finished height to be 2ft above water level.
- Either a metal frame as pictured or a wooden plank fixed to a metal pole as per the online video¹.



Duck tube construction

1. Cut wire mesh to a 7ft (2.2m) length.
2. Measure along the mesh 34 inches (86cm). Roll the end of the mesh over to this point, and attach the end of the mesh using cable ties or wire. This should create a cylinder approximately 12 inches (30cm) in diameter.
3. Over the remaining flat wire, spread an even covering of hay, approximately two inches thick, ensuring there are no gaps.
4. Continue rolling the wire to create an outer cylinder enclosing the layer of hay.
5. Fix the end of the mesh sheet to secure the outer cylinder.
6. Pack more hay into the outer cylinder to fill in any gaps.
7. Once you are happy with it, fix the tube to a base or cradle.
8. Put some loose hay into the tube to give a base layer of bedding.

Other considerations

- Do not remove eggshells or feathers left in the tube. Instead, when replacing the hay, put leftover feathers and eggshells back in on top of the loose hay – this shows potential future occupants that it is a viable nest site.
- Assess what predator/pest control is currently being done around the nest site and whether it needs to be increased.
- Keep disturbance around the nest site to a minimum.
- Consider adding a remote camera when installing a duck nest tube. This will ensure you can monitor the species that uses the tube without causing any disturbance.

- Report information about your duck nest tubes by completing the online data recording form on the Waterfowler's Network's website at the end of the breeding season (waterfowlersnetwork.com/2219)

Further guidance/reading:

- ¹BASC Film (2020) Making and positioning a duck nesting tube – youtube.com/watch?v=63vQu8BWqU
- BASC Film (2014) Duck Tubes and how to build them – youtube.com/watch?v=7Rklo2zx-sw
- BASC – basc.org.uk/duck-nest-tubes-for-mallard