

PORCH-SITTING



MAKES WAY FOR DUCKLINGS

HARLAN ALBERS

## WITH A FLURRY OF FUZZ BALLS, LITTLE WOOD DUCKS HEAD OUT ON LIFE'S ADVENTURES.

*Dorothy Kruse*

**Porch-sitting is a wonderful pastime and one at which I am quite proficient. Porch-sitting in the Flambeau River State Forest, with a view of the Flambeau River, takes top honors in that category. You never know what you're going to hear or see.**

Actually, hiking or fishing tops porch-sitting for me, but the number of flying and biting insects determines the pastime of the day. It was one of those warm spring days, where bugs were

just waiting for a victim to appear. I was not interested in playing that victim so I decided to sit on the screened porch that jutted out between the trees and catch up on some reading.

I had been reading for about an hour when I was suddenly aware of a rhythmic, low-pitched background sound coming from somewhere between the porch and the river. Laying my book aside, I concentrated on the location of the sound and determined it was near a tall pine about halfway between the porch and the river.

As I was looking at the tree, I thought I saw a little ball drop to the ground. The mystery sound in the dense undergrowth seemed to pick up in intensity as the ball disappeared in the tall ferns at the base of the tree. Then, one by one, more balls dropped.

I looked up the tree trunk hoping to find the source. About 15 feet up, I saw the wood duck nesting box my husband, Charlie, had mounted a few years earlier. The little balls were falling out of that box.

The balls had to be ducklings and that had to be Mom at the base of the tree, encouraging her babies to jump. Time had come for them to make the trek to their grown-up home, the Flambeau River.

Knowing how a wood duck box is constructed, I had an idea of what was going on inside the box. The box is perhaps 12 inches deep, with the entrance/exit about three-quarters of the way up. Inside the box and below the hole, Charlie had nailed hardware cloth specifically for the ducklings' exit.

I envisioned the awkward little fuzz balls with tiny webbed feet trying to climb that wire mesh toward Mom's beckoning call. I wondered how many times they fell back down and had to start all over before they finally made it out the hole.

Once they made it to the hole, they had to free-fall down to Mom hiding below. After living in that dark, cramped box, the light of the outside world must have been blinding to their little eyes and terribly intimidating. Talk about a leap of faith.

It was an unforgettable experience and, even though the box is still used by either wood ducks or mergansers each year, I have never experienced their exodus again. For the best porch-sitting, you really do have to be in the right place at the right time. ❧

*Dorothy Kruse writes from Oregon, in Dane County, where she patiently awaits her next visit to the cabin on the Flambeau River.*