

**Predators:** Raccoons, Snakes, Hawks and Owls all think Purple Martins make a tasty meal. Some of this predation can be prevented with efforts such as guards on poles (yes, Snakes & Raccoons can climb metal poles), and ensuring housing is not erected too close to trees where aerial predators can hide.

**Housing:** Choose the spot with the most open flyway possible. Proximity to your house is fine, as Martins like people, and you will be able to enjoy them more. Modern Martin housing and gourds offers many options. Look for large compartments (avoid 6" x 6" rooms and small gourds), Starling Resistant Entry Holes, removable access doors/caps for checking and cleaning, and poles than can be lowered for nest checks and maintenance. To start your colony, consider one house, or a small gourd rack. In time you can add more, if you desire, as your colony grows. Here are just 2 examples of what is available:



Photo courtesy of Purple Martin Association



Photo courtesy of Leslie Morrison

**The Landlord's Benefits:** An established Martin colony is a pleasure to watch and listen to. Each spring we await the return of "our birds". Involvement in the colony can maximize your enjoyment of it as well as its nesting success. Involvement varies with each landlord, but many find satisfaction in lowering the housing regularly to check for problems and monitor the nesting progress. Tracking the dates of egg laying and hatching permit the accurate forecast of "fledge day", when you can see the new birds take their first flight!

See the OPMA website ([address below](#)), and the PMCA website at [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org), for detailed information on all topics above.

The **OPMA** holds 5 meetings in Essex County each year:

***Feb / Apr / May / Jun / Sept***

Public welcome! Dates/Locations are advertised in "events" section of local papers 3-4 weeks ahead. OR, check out our website for meeting information: [www.ontariopurplemartins.ca](http://www.ontariopurplemartins.ca)  
OR [www.essexpurplemartins.ca](http://www.essexpurplemartins.ca)



**Adult Male\***

## ***The Ontario Purple Martin Association***

was founded in 2001 by two gentlemen in Essex County who hoped to share their wonderful hobby with others. The group steadily grew from a small, local gathering of Purple Martin landlords. Today, the Association has a wealth of information and experience among its many knowledgeable members. And through affiliation with other conservation groups, such as Nature Canada & the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA), it is a major contributor towards efforts to help the Purple Martin, which is a species currently listed as "in decline in Ontario".

OPMA members are involved in Purple Martin conservation at their own sites, as well as at local golf courses (Orchard View in Ruthven, Erie Shores in Leamington, and Woodland Hills in Woodslee). We also maintain housing at Holiday Beach Conservation Area and in the town of Colchester. Many of our members also host Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.



**Adult Female\***



**Hatching Year\***



**Nestlings\***

\*Photos courtesy of Purple Martin Conservation Association

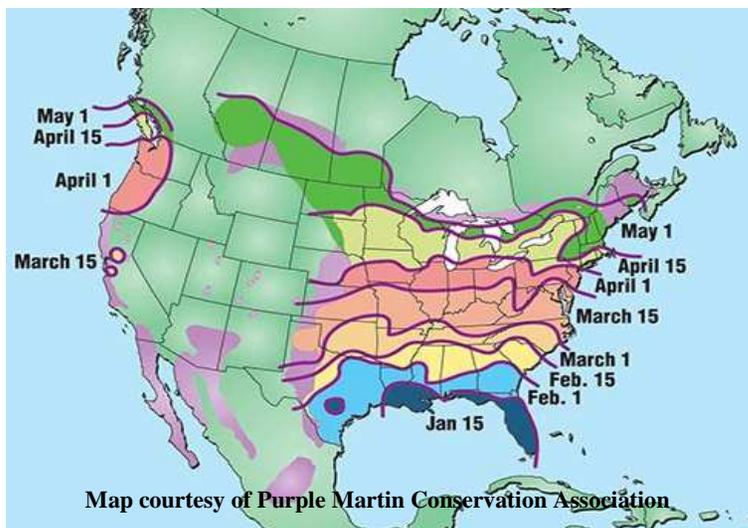
## Why We Love Purple Martins

The Purple Martin is the largest in the swallow family. Its graceful soaring flight, social chatter, tolerance of being near people, and communal nesting habit make it a wonderful bird for people to attract to their backyard.

Once Purple Martins have made your yard their home, they will return every year for as long as they live, to raise their young. Thus they become “your birds”, and you will find that they show an increasing level of comfort as you walk about your yard and perform “landlord activities”. This “site-fidelity” is the reason you may see housing that is in poor locations, dilapidated, or overrun with sparrows and starlings, but still hosts Martins. In fact, the only thing that can deter their strong site-fidelity is severe predator problems.

There are 3 “sub-species” of Purple Martins. All of them spend the non-breeding season in the rain-forests of Brazil and then migrate to North America to nest. East of the Rockies (our sub-species) they are totally dependent on human-supplied housing, since natural nesting sites such as old tree snags and vacant cavities have been virtually eliminated. West of the Rockies and in the deserts they nest mostly in their ancestral ways, in abandoned woodpecker cavities. In the Pacific Northwest, they are beginning to use gourds and clusters of single-unit boxes for nesting.

Martins breed only in North America, from Florida to Alberta! The migration to and from South America is an amazing journey. It is staggered, so that Martins which arrive in Florida in early January, and raise their young there, can be beginning their southward migration at the same time as Martins are beginning their nesting cycle in Ontario.



Our Martins typically begin to arrive in south-western Ontario in the 1<sup>st</sup> week of April. The nesting cycle takes approximately 1 ½ months to raise their young from eggs to fledglings.

Both the male and female share nest building, using an assortment of materials such as twigs, pine needles, or even maple keys. The female lays 2 - 7 pure-white eggs; 1 per day. She incubates the clutch for approximately 16\* days, then the young hatch. Both parents feed the young continuously for about 28-29\* days until the young fledge. The young are dependent on their parents for food and training for 1-2 weeks after fledging. It's not uncommon for the fledglings to return to their human-supplied housing at night to sleep during this period. (\*These numbers reflect the norm observed for southwestern Ontario.)

Martins eat only flying insects, which they catch in flight. Their diet is diverse, including many different insects, however, Martins do not consume Mosquitoes in any great quantity, as often claimed by Martin-house manufacturers! If you want Mosquito control, choose housing for Tree Swallows and Bats! Martins feed high in the sky during daytime; Mosquitoes stay low in damp places during daylight hours, or only come out at night.

## Challenges to their survival

**Scarcity of suitable housing:** Many existing houses are not maintained, are not in proper locations, or are taken down when the current owner moves on. Much of the existing older housing does not have the features of new housing which maximize the fledging success rate

**Starvation:** Martins returning to bad spring weather with few insects can quickly die. Fortunately, many landlords throughout the breeding range in the U.S. and Canada have taught their “colony” to accept supplemental food, saving their birds and helping the species survive. Martins can be taught to recognize Crickets, Mealworms, and even scrambled eggs as food. Landlords train them by flinging Crickets through the air to simulate a natural food supply. This has been one of the most important breakthroughs in helping the Purple Martin survive in Ontario, and has saved many a colony from dying out.

**House Sparrows & Starlings:** These non-native species usurp natural and human-provided cavities from our native birds. To attract Martins to a new site, they must be kept out! The new design of Martin houses and gourds include “Starling Resistant Entry Holes” which work well to keep the aggressive Starling out. The common House Sparrow is not so easy to deter, since any entry large enough for a Martin will also admit a House Sparrow. Pull out any nesting material they bring in. A Martin house

claimed by House Sparrows will not attract Martins looking for a new home!