

**Purple Martins** (*Progne subis*) are the largest member of the swallow family in North America, measuring 7 1/2 inches (19 cm) long and weighing 1.9 ounces (55 grams). Taxonomically they are placed in the Kingdom: Animalia; Phylum: Chordata; Subphylum: Vertebrata; Class: Aves; Order: Passeriformes; and Family: Hirundinidae. Three races (subspecies) are recognized: *Progne subis subis* breeding in eastern North America and eastern Mexico; *Progne subis hesperia* breeding in the deserts of Arizona, western Mexico, and Baja California; and *Progne subis arboricola* breeding along the Pacific coast of the United States and Canada, and in the Rocky Mountains.

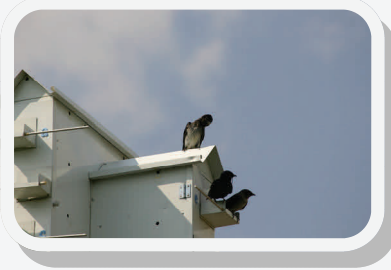
Purple Martins spend the non-breeding season in Brazil then migrate to North America to nest. East of the Rockies they are totally dependent on human-supplied housing. West of the Rockies and in the deserts they largely nest in their ancestral ways, in abandoned woodpecker nest cavities. In the Pacific northwest, Martins are beginning to use gourds and clusters of single-unit boxes for nesting.

The pair-bond of the Purple Martin is monogamous. The male and female cooperate equally in building the nest out of mud, grass and twigs. The female lays two to seven pure-white eggs at a rate of one egg per day. The female incubates the clutch for approximately fifteen days,

then the young hatch. The parents both feed the young continuously for a period of 26-32 days until the young fledge. The young continue to be dependent on their parents for food and training for an additional one to two weeks after fledging. It's not uncommon for

the fledglings to return to their human-supplied housing at night to sleep during this period.

Martins, like all swallows, are aerial insectivores. They eat only flying insects, which they catch in flight. Their diet is diverse, including dragonflies, damselflies, flies, midges, mayflies, stinkbugs, leafhoppers, Japanese beetles, June bugs, butterflies, moths, grasshoppers, cicadas, bees, wasps, flying ants, and ballooning spiders. Martins are not, however, prodigious consumers of mosquitoes as is so often claimed by companies that manufacture martin housing. An intensive 7-year diet study conducted at PMCA headquarters in Edinboro, PA, failed to find a single mosquito among the 500 diet samples collected from parent martins bringing beakfuls of insects to their young. The samples were collected from martins during all hours of the day, all season long, and in numerous habitats, including mosquito-infested ones. Purple Martins and freshwater mosquitoes rarely ever cross paths. Martins are daytime feeders, and feed high in the sky; mosquitoes, on the other hand, stay low in damp places during daylight hours, or only come out at night. Since Purple Martins feed only on flying insects, they are extremely vulnerable to starvation during extended periods of cool and/or rainy weather.



Information ...courtesy of the PMCA,

Photo by John Balga

## Join the Ontario Purple Martin Association and receive the following benefits:

- Free admission to membership meetings
- Sharing creative martin housing devices
- Speakers sharing their interests and experiences
- Organized colony site visits
- Organized workshops and field trips
- A borrowing club library
- A members website at :  
<http://essexpurplemartins.ca>  
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**Membership is only \$20 Canadian per year.**

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**Address:**.....

**Province:**.....**Postal Code:**.....

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**Please fill out this form and mail it with a cheque or money order for \$20 payable to:**  
**Ontario Purple Martin Association**  
**c/o: Carol Taves, Treasurer**  
**Ontario Purple Martin Association**  
**1305 Talbot Trail, Wheatley, Ontario, N0P 2P0**

**Email: [carol@tec-land.com](mailto:carol@tec-land.com)**

**Phone: (519) 825-7026**



## Ontario Purple Martin Association

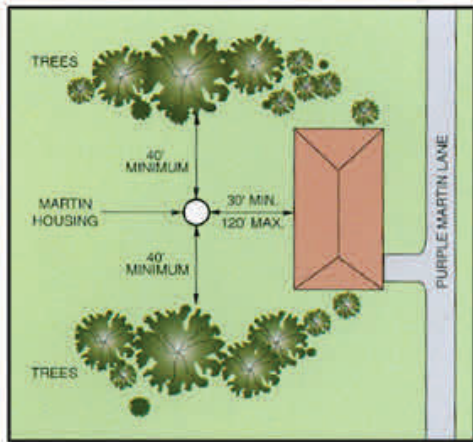
The idea behind the Purple Martin Hobby is to provide safe, predator - proof nest boxes for purple martins , allowing them to fledge more young than they would in natural cavities.

Photos courtesy of John Balga

### Location

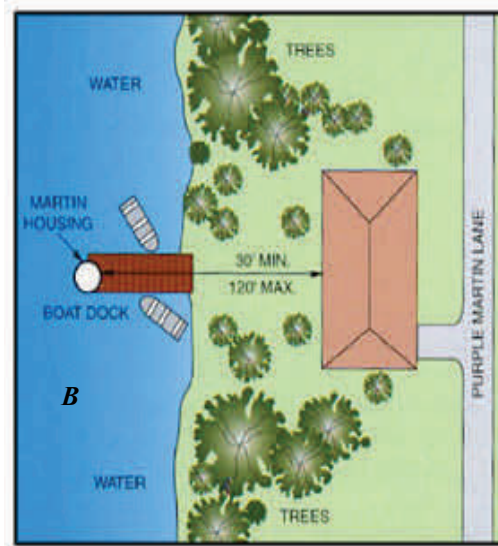
The major reason people fail to attract martins is that they place their martin housing incorrectly, or their site is inappropriate martin habitat to begin with. Martins have very specific aerial space requirements. Housing should be placed in the center of the most open spot available, about 30-120 feet from human housing. There should be no trees taller than the martin housing within 40 feet, preferably 60 feet. Generally, the farther the housing is placed from trees, the better. See site Diagram A. In the southern half of their breeding range, martins are less particular about house placement. Southern landlords can sometimes place housing within 15-20 feet of trees and still attract martins.

Height of these housing can be anywhere from 10-15 feet. Keep tall bushes, shrubs and vines away from the



pole. Do not attach wires to a martin house, especially if they lead to trees, buildings, or to the ground. If your yard has too many trees near the martin housing, relocate the housing to a more open area, mount the housing higher, or prune (or remove) trees to create a more open site. If you have a wooded lot, but live near a body of water, refer to site Diagram B. Boat docks make ideal locations for mounting a martin house or gourd rack.

*PMCA website publication*



### Housing

Houses and gourds should be painted white, or a light pastel color; trim can be any color. White housing seems to attract martins best. White housing reflects the heat of the sun, keeping nestlings cooler. Compartment floor dimensions should measure at least 6"x6," but 7" x 12" offers better protection against predators and weather, if starlings are controlled. Compartment height can be from 5" to 7" high. Place entrance holes about 1" above the floor. Hole size can range from 1-3/4" up to 2-1/4", but 2-1/8" is recommended. Many published plans for martin housing (and some manufactured houses) are made to improper dimensions. If your housing is unsuccessful, check the dimensions and modify where needed.

Look for housing designed to raise and lower vertically, with easy access to compartments. Landlords may need to lower housing daily to evict nest-site competitors, or to check on martin nestlings. Systems that telescope up and down, or raise and lower with a pulley and winch, are the most practical. Nest checks will not cause martins to abandon their nests or their colony site. Number the compartments and keep written records. Houses and gourds should be painted white, or a light pastel color; trim can be any color. White housing seems to attract martins best. White housing reflects the heat.

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**Purple Martin Banding Project**

As part of our ongoing activities in Ontario, projects such as the banding of Purple Martins are carried out during the breeding



season while the young birds are still in their nests. The primary purpose of banding these birds is to identify and record each bird's vital statistics for future reference.

Subsequent sightings of the martins allow landlords to gather information about their travels, habits, general growth and health. It also allows frequent inspections of the colony's growth and development to ensure a good and healthy outlook for this area's martin colonies.

