

*APRIL, 2014*



**ONTARIO PURPLE MARTIN  
ASSOCIATION  
Newsletter**

[www.essexpurplemartins.ca](http://www.essexpurplemartins.ca)

**Message from our Chair:**

Well, they have arrived! But is this good or bad? We wonder why they return when the weather is not the best for food but that is the way it is and we landlords can help the early arriving martins to have a good chance of surviving. This may mean supplying crickets, mealworms or eggs. Hopefully warm weather is around the corner and this will bring the insects out and greatly help our birds.

We are considering participation in the annual fall Hawk Festival which is held at Holiday Beach. When we had a display table there in 2012, we were able to interact with a lot of people who didn't know much about purple martins. Timing issues prevented us from being there in 2013, but as there are so few venues available that match us so well in our purpose of species conservation, we would definitely like to represent purple martins there again in 2014. But to do this, we need volunteers !! Closer to fall, a schedule will be set up with time slots of 2-3 hours for each of the 4 days of the festival (September 13-14, and 20-21), for volunteers to choose a time which would suit them best. These opportunities are good for our club, and help inform people about purple martins, so please give it some thought over the next several months, and if you can help out, let us know.

We are also looking at making some changes to our meeting dates. First, to accommodate our participation in the Hawk Festival, the final meeting date of 2014 will be moved up to September 6<sup>th</sup>. Next, beginning in 2015, we are also considering replacing our February meeting with one in early April. Some members are away during the winter months, and others often can't make it due to bad weather, so moving it to April will make it possible for those to attend. April is also when martins begin to arrive in increasing numbers, and there are always important issues to discuss regarding their return.

These changes would reduce our scheduled meetings to four. We thought also that adding a social get together in July would be a nice chance to talk to other members about their martin colonies, and enjoy some food and friendship.

We as a board are looking ahead to try to meet the needs of our club. Let us know how you feel about these possible changes which would occur in 2015. We are always open to ideas to improve our club, so if you have any suggestions, let us know and we will see what can be done to accommodate them.

I would like to thank Al Hamill and Marianne Knapp for agreeing to host our meetings on May 10th and June 21<sup>st</sup> respectively. We are always trying to find different venues for our meetings and having member host meetings definitely fits the bill. I also thank Orchard View for their continued support of our club. They have agreed to let us use the bigger room on the main level for our meeting, and have agreed with the dates given to them for upcoming meetings. This kind of cooperation in giving our club a great place for our meetings serves a very important need of our club.

As the season begins, I wish all of you good luck and much success. We always look forward to the return of the martins and hearing their very distinct song. I know that so much of our success depends on the weather but remember each and every bird born contributes to the well being of the martins.

**Paul Hamel**

# Welcome to our new members !



Bob Forbes, Forest, Ontario

Frank Catanzaro, Colchester, Ontario

## 2014 MEETINGS and EVENTS

- a) All meeting dates are subject to change as necessary. Any changes will be communicated to everyone.
- b) We will make reminder phone calls or emails prior to each meeting, but this schedule is for your convenience to print out, or transfer to your calendar.
- c) For “**member-host**” meetings, in case of questionable weather, individuals should contact the “host” to confirm if the meeting will be held as scheduled. **It is NOT the responsibility of the “host” to contact everyone.**
- d) See included map for directions.

9:00 am..... Apr. 19..... Orchard View Golf Course (main level meeting room)

9:30 am..... Apr 26 ..... **BLUEBIRD TOUR 1 ... hosted by Don Bissonnette**

9:30 am..... May 3. .... **BLUEBIRD TOUR 2 ... hosted by Don Bissonnette**

**(Don offers two dates to enjoy the bluebird tour. In case of bad weather, either date will be cancelled.) Note start time of 9:30.**

9:00 am..... May 10..... “**Member-Host**” Meeting at the home of Al & Anne Hamill

9:00 am..... Jun 21..... “**Member-Host**” Meeting at the home of Marianne Knapp

### *Approximate Time Window for banding*

Jun 28                  Jul 12                  Bird Banding ..... Contact Rob Cornies to participate.      **519-733-4004**

9:00 am..... Sep 6. .... **FINAL 2014 MEETING** - Orchard View Golf Course

### Contact any of the members below with questions and concerns:

John Balga..... 519-800-2504 .....martinman@hotmail.com.....Website / Banding  
Rob Cornies..... 519-733-4004 .....roba496@gmail.com .....Bird Banding  
Marianne Dyck..... 519-326-0095 .....rudyardmarianne@gmail.com ...Secretary, member records  
Paul Hamel ..... 519-738-3476 .....kp\_hamel@live.ca .....Chairperson  
Al Hamill ..... 519-738-6932 .....alhamill70@gmail.com.....Advisor  
Lyle Papps ..... 519-354-6404 .....Natural gourd expertise  
Cy Poisson ..... 519-776-9713 .....cypoison@hotmail.com .....Lending library  
Nancy Robson ..... 519-326-8557 .....nancyrrobson@gmail.com .....Media  
Dennis Shady ..... 519-738-4411 .....dennisshady@yahoo.ca .....New member advisor  
Carol Taves ..... 519-825-7026 .....carol@tec-land.com.....Treasurer, Finances  
Mary Wilson..... 519-326-1710 .....helenmwilson@yahoo.com.....Newsletters, Cricket orders

# The Times They Are A-changin'

For us, and for the martins too. With increasingly unpredictable weather, our birds face tough times.



**MARTINS SHOWING STRESS IN EARLY SPRING**

One clue that birds are stressed (cold, hungry, or both) is when their wings droop away from their bodies. If your birds look like these, they are stressed. If the weather is cold, rainy, windy, overcast, or any combination of these conditions, natural food is likely to be scarce. If your birds just sit on their housing and make few attempts to fly and socialize, they are conserving their energy, knowing that there is no food available. This would be a good time, if your birds aren't yet trained and you wish them to be, to fling crickets. Martins have to be hungry enough to overcome the natural instincts which tell them that no food is available under certain conditions, but when they learn to accept help from their landlord, they never forget.

Here is a link to an amazing story, with pictures, of supplemental feeding at a New Jersey colony. (This was published in the Summer 2003 Purple Martin Update Magazine, published by PMCA.)

[www.purplemartin.org/update/12\(3\)NJSupFeed.pdf](http://www.purplemartin.org/update/12(3)NJSupFeed.pdf)

## .....SEVEN WAYS TO HELP YOUR MARTINS.....

### **1..... Pre-Nests**

Returning martins are stressed from a long migration and lose precious energy trying to keep warm in our cool spring nights. You can help them by putting a few handfuls of nesting material in your housing (especially in aluminum or plastic houses and gourds), to keep them from contact with the cold surfaces.

A variety of items can be used for this purpose, such as:

Soft pine needles

Cedar shavings

Cut-up straw

Cypress mulch (available at landscape places)

Various twigs and dried plant stalks.

***Avoid anything which will not drain well or absorbs water, such as grasses.***

The main benefit of pre-nests in our climate is to help the martins conserve energy, but it also gives them a quicker start to their nesting cycle, as they often will incorporate the landlord-supplied materials into their nests.

## **2..... Supplemental Food**

Martins can perish after 3 days of no food. Their systems begin to digest their primary flight muscles at this point, so recovery is nearly impossible without professional rehabilitation. Crickets, scrambled eggs, and/or mealworms are the foods most acceptable for martins, as they are pure proteins which is what martins get in their natural diet. Excellent information is available on this topic on the internet, and within our own club many members have trained their colonies. ***If help is needed, call !***

## **3..... Grit.**

Grit is needed by adult and nestling birds alike to digest their food. Martins pick up bits of gravel, shell, etc., and these you will sometimes find in the nest. The natural diet of a martin provides plenty of protein but no calcium, which is thought to be needed for egg production. Many landlords like to supply grit for their birds. It provides yet another opportunity to view the activities of the colony, and reduces the potential and danger of birds landing on roadways to find grit.

Chicken eggshells are readily available. To prepare them: *Rinse each half to remove the gooey stuff, and then peel out the membrane (this only takes a moment and means you won't have a stuck together mess later when you crush them). Put the half egg shells on a microwavable plate, and let them air dry. Then microwave on HI for a minute (removes any potentially harmful bacteria). When cool, use your fingers to crush into pieces about the size of a pencil end. They keep indefinitely.* You can also buy "oyster shell" (preferably "pullet size") pretty cheaply - usually from feed stores, in a 50# bag - but it can be stored for many years of use.

If you have a raised feeder tray, this is where you can place the grit. If not, then you can spread it somewhere in your yard or even driveway, roof of a shed / garage, etc. – keeping in mind the need for openness for their safety from hawks, cats, etc. Other birds may also come for the eggshells, including barn swallows. You can put eggshells out in the winter, too - according to a study done by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, about 60 species of birds will consume them for the grit and calcium they contain.

## **4.....Nest Checks:**

Routine nest checks can help you to know exactly when your birds will fledge and therefore what age they are. During a nest check, you can spot and hopefully remedy problems: broken eggs; sparrow intrusions; dead adults or nestlings; mite infestations; structural problems with your housing, etc. Another great benefit of routine nest checks is that your birds will get very familiar with them and cease to be overly alarmed. Often the mother bird will remain in the nest with her young during a nest check. This is the best way to get to know your colony, but many people are afraid to do this, concerned that their "interference" will cause abandonment of the nest. **THIS WILL NOT HAPPEN** – these birds fly thousands of miles for their only chance to breed, and they don't give it up easily.

## **5.....Predator and Parasite Control:**

Our purple martins are dinner in the eyes of raccoons, hawks, owls, and snakes. Successful raids by any of these predators will have them coming back for more until your colony is wiped out. There are guards available that can prevent a good number of these losses. Stovepipe baffles are very effective against raccoons but not snakes. **MANY PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE A RACCOON AND A SNAKE CAN CLIMB A SMOOTH METAL POLE.** They can, quite easily. To stop a snake, wads of bird netting tied to their pole are effective – a snake climbing into it will be enmeshed in the netting and unable to escape. Aerial predators pose a more difficult problem. Owl attacks occur at night, and the nocturnal vocalizations of martins likely attract them to the colony. A wire cage around the house / gourd seems to be pretty effective, but difficult for many of us to build. Commercial owl guards are available for some gourds and houses. Wire cages can also prevent hawks from landing on a house and reaching into the compartment to pull out the birds.

Parasites are normal – birds live all their lives as host to various creepy-crawlies – mites and fleas, for instance. It is when an infestation occurs that parasites turn deadly to nestlings. Whole nests of young can be killed by mites – tiny insects the size of a grain of pepper – which crawl out of the nest material at night for a blood meal. Blowflies can pose the same problem in our area, although they seem to be less common than mites.

Nest replacements are the safest way to deal with insect infestations. See # 6 !

Of all of the problems that can plague purple martins, a predator problem (raccoons, snakes, owls & hawks) is the only one that seems to cause martins to abandon a site, so its good to know that we can take some measures against this. And fortunately, the things we can't control easily or at all – losses due to weather, starvation, storm, or mites seem to be understood differently by them – there are no reports of colony abandonment for any of those reasons.

### **6.....Nest Replacement**

A nest change is simply the removal of the used, infested nest, and replacement of the babies into a new nest of clean and dry material, making sure you use something that will not hold or absorb water. This can safely be done at 10 days of age, all the way up to 20 days of age. The PMCA recommends a nest change at 10 days, and suggests that in most cases, only this one nest change will remove enough of the parasite load that the babies will have a greatly increased chance of going on to fledge successfully.

Applications of pesticides are not recommended. But people experiment with various “home-made” remedies, some of which were detailed in the July 2013 newsletter.

### **7.....Premature fledging**

When a bird leaves the nest before its 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> day of life, it is a “premature” fledge. Survival will be difficult because it has not developed the growth in wing and tail feathers to sustain flight. A grounded martin is there because it cannot fly. (Healthy martins do land to pick up nesting material, or fall to the ground during fighting, but otherwise a martin's life is spent off the ground.)

Premature fledging can occur for a few reasons: Nestlings that are old enough to come out onto a porch can jostle each other around, and sometimes one falls – a healthy nestling, just needing to be replaced in its compartment. Sometimes a mite-infested nest will become so intolerable that the nestlings jump. Replacing them into their compartment in a new nest will give them a chance to survive. (This is where record-keeping becomes important !)



These 7 things can help your colony succeed! Some of them were covered in greater detail in the July 2013 newsletter. Please refer to it on our website [www.essexpurplemartins.ca](http://www.essexpurplemartins.ca).

Also, one of the very best resources for anything “purple martin” is the Archives of the PMCA (Purple Martin Conservation Association). A cruise through the titles under the Archive tab and the FAQ tab which come up on the forum page of this website will quickly show the wealth of information accessible for free – and you don't even have to register with the website to access any of their information. [www.purplemartin.org/forum/index.php](http://www.purplemartin.org/forum/index.php)

*WISHING YOU MANY PURPLE BLESSINGS !!!*