



ESSEX COUNTY PURPLE MARTIN ASSOCIATION *Newsletter Jan 16, 2010*

Hello fellow martin enthusiasts !

Well, another year has come and gone and here we are at our first get-together of a brand new martin season. We hope everyone has had a wonderful Christmas!

As of yesterday (Jan.15) there are 16 landlords from Florida & Texas that have reported the arrival of martins on the PMCA "scout map". This is in sharp contrast to 57 reports on the same day last year. So migration has been considerably slowed by the terrible cold snap that reached so far south.

There is also a remarkable report of a martin that has over-wintered in an Amish colony in Ohio..... and as of Jan. 8, she is still surviving, apparently on supplemental food being flung by the landlord. Below are some excerpts, but to see a picture of her & read the "thread", you can visit :

<http://pa-in.facebook.com/group.php?gid=80896689095>



Ohio has an over-wintering Purple Martin. The homeowner says the female had a late nesting and the last young left in November, but she stayed. I took this photo near Apple Creek, Ohio, on 1/1/2010.

Update from the local rare bird hotline: Purple Martin still around as of Friday, 1/8/10.

Spoke to one of our local PM experts yesterday. Learned that she didn't nest where she is now, but showed up with a young one in August. The young left in November, and she stayed.

Annual Dues: Today is the day we collect our annual dues, which help keep our club going. Dues hold steady at \$20.00 per member/family. Some of our funds go toward keeping our lending library stocked with items that can benefit all of our members, so we hope that you avail yourself of the variety of aids and information that we offer.

The 2009 season was one for the record books. Most landlords have never experienced a die-off of nestlings before. Most of our members reported a 30 – 50% loss of their eggs / young. From the club members who reported their results, we fledged **646** young – far short of our usual numbers. We encourage everyone who went through the heartbreak of 2009 to remember this: your colony is still **HOME** to your martins – they will not abandon due to weather related failures - and they will be returning to start the amazing process all over again. We landlords are the few, among millions of people, who offer homes for these amazing birds and experience this unique interaction with a wild creature, so enjoy **YOUR** birds, and know that you are helping them survive.

The ECPMA Board wishes everyone the very best for the upcoming martin season !!!!

Submitted by John Balga:

.....2009 Colony Suffers Many Losses

The purple martin year started off with a cool spring /summer season. There were more cool days than warm and it seemed that the martins had a difficult time foraging for insects. Throughout much of May and June the weather was hit and miss.

My colony started out looking like would be a great year.....42 plus pair with several young sub-adults looking to nest at the end of June. This was much later than I expected to see but the summer season seemed to be two weeks behind. It seemed that there would be a banner fledge with 140 young or so plus lots of eggs. The majority of young or eggs seemed to be around 3-4 per nest.

On June 29th 85 young were banded with the help of Marianne Knapp. Monday was a beautiful warm day. Remember this was just after our June meeting. I continued banding other colonies throughout the day: Marianne's, Dennis Shady's and Paul Hamel's. Everything seemed to be going nicely until Tuesday. Then the weather changed and a cold gusty northwest wind arrived. I watched as the martins huddled around the housing trying to get out of the wind. Isn't it funny that I thought how I had mentioned to another landlord on Saturday, "the success of this year's fledglings would hinge on warm weather"!

I hoped that by next day the weather would change, but I watched and the martins watched as their young called out for food. My breakfast tray was filled with egg shells, eggs and crickets but the martins only fed their young egg shells, not enough to bridge the feeding gap. One male martin thankfully fed crickets to his young. The others just sat around and pecked at the odd cricket.

Wednesday, July 1st saw my colony devoid of all martins. Where had they all gone? I knew that this was a symptom of a much deeper problem. I pulled down the housing and felt the young. They were so cold. I couldn't feed all of them. The martins returned later that evening to a very cool night with no insects, and I had a very restless night.

Thursday morning was eerie. No chirps, no martins. Today was a killing day with wet weather. I knew that the next few days would be very disheartening.

Friday turned warm and sunny and the martins foraged for insects and the sun came out. Then I realized that it was time to start removing the dead young. My heart sunk as almost fully feathered young were dead in the nest. Those young that remained just couldn't survive as they were very weakened by the past few days of no food and cold temperatures. The killing summer wind had taken its toll on a promising year of martins. When all was said and done 85 or so young were removed and I estimate that I had lost 50% of the young. I would have to wait and see if the eggs that remained would hatch. This was a double hit because many of the young had also been banded with a Federal as well as an Ontario red band on their left leg.

Throughout the week I called as many landlords as possible to notify them of what had happened or what was going to happen. Everyone commented, some cried, and others stood helpless ready to give up the hobby. Mother Nature gives, Mother Nature takes away. This was a wide spread weather phenomenon that reached south and north into the United States and Canada. There were thousands of babies lost in Ontario, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey. Hopefully, next year will be a better purple martin season for everyone. Although thousands of baby martins were lost in the summer of 2009, the adults do not respond negatively as they would to predator devastation – such as raccoon, owl, or snake. The cost of survival is often a painful memory that will not soon be forgotten.

.....2009A Major Disappointment

2009 began as a normal year. Russ Banfill was the first to see a martin at his colony on April 2nd, while Gilles Breton's birds appeared on April 5th. This seemed very early, and Gilles' single martin survived on eggs for a couple of weeks as the temperatures plummeted. Russ sent me some photos of the martins and tree swallows that were perched on his houses on April 7th. They were all over his houses and backyard trees as they tried to escape the blustery winds and snow showers. Was this a foreshadowing of things to come this year in hindsight?



Martins arrived at the colony of Mary Wilson and Jim Sudds on the 8th, and mine finally arrived on the 13th. 's birds arrived on April 8th and mine finally arrived on the 13th. I prayed that they would hang back since the weather was so unpredictable.

Gilles' martins survived well as they readily accepted eggs from the ground feeder and on the wing, but he wondered how his martins would survive the year since he had removed two 14-compartment units from his colony site. The martin housing at Woodland Hills Golf Course has never met with very much success so we decided to relocate an 8 gourd rack and a Taverner 16-compartment martin house to a new location within the golf course. After this relocation, the gourd rack and the martin house, as well as his neighbor's martin house took up the slack of the displaced martins. Twelve of the 16 compartments and six of the 8 gourds were occupied. "This was going to be a banner year and very successful!" (So we/I thought.)

New members as well as long time members of our group saw increases in both adult and sub-adult birds at their colonies so it seemed that all the hard management work to rear lots of young had finally paid off. Members also reported seeing red banded Ontario martins at their colonies although very few could identify the numbers on the bands. I was able to identify two martins from other colony members. One of the martins I spotted came from Gilles' colony in Woodslee and another from Marie & Lyle Hall's colony in Gesto. Dennis Shady also reported martins with red bands at his colony at Ambassador Beach near Harrow but couldn't spot the numbers.

After our June 29th meeting here in Essex, Marieanne Knapp assisted with banding operations here at my colony on June 30th and we continued that week to band at Marieanne's house, Dennis' house and Paul's house. A grateful thanks to Marianne, Dennis, and Paul for assisting me with banding. Trudy and Joe called for banding as well and I scheduled to be at their colonies as soon as I could.

The weather changed for the worse after the initial banding on Monday and Tuesday so I decided to hold off. The next couple of days as everyone knows turned into a nightmare. The July 4th weekend was disastrous! I ceased banding after the weather turned and decided that it was too late to continue banding any young that may survive this weather challenge.

After all was said and done, 13 members reported over 1171 eggs laid at their colonies, 914 hatching, 646 fledging (55.16 %). Although the egg count appears low, some of our major colonies were not included in this count. There were some very good successes at some of our member colonies. Joe Manierski from St. Joachim (Ruscom River) reported 81 eggs, 63 hatched, 61 fledged (75.3%). Leo Dunn from Woodslee reported 30 eggs, 24 hatched, 23 fledged (76.6%). Some of the factors

which might have affected the die offs and the variations from colony to colony could be: the prevailing wind direction; the size and location of the colony; the age of the nestlings; the presence of local insects and/or proximity of a local water source. Some of the eggs and the very young birds were not adversely affected while those in the 7-14 day old range did not survive. Whatever the reason, we're glad to see the higher rates of survival for some of the colonies.

We do hope that 2010 will be a better year for everyone and this lack luster year is just a blip on the martin radar! I remind everyone that it appears that the adults were not adversely affected by this setback and there were no major adult bird die offs. The martins did not equate this die off to an owl or hawk or snake or raccoon predation. This also means that we should have the same number of adults returning in 2010 give or take the normal deaths which occur every year during migration.

.....Banding 2010

Give me a call @ 519-776-5777) if you want to participate in 2010 banding (approximately June 29th– July 10th. (FYI: Both Gilles and I are licensed to do this work under Master Bander, Phil Roberts.)

2009 was not a typical year for banding and we were only able to band 116 martins. Hopefully some of these will return next year and we will be able to see them through a spotting scope. These birds will have a Federal aluminum band on one leg and a red Ontario band on the other. 2009 birds will have the letter H followed by numbers 001-300 followed by ON. Example:(H 301 ON) (coloured band on right/federal aluminum on left) There is an article about our banding efforts in the January 2010 issue of Nature Society News. Check it out if you have time!

If you see a banded bird and can read the number, or retrieve a banded bird, please contact me with the full number on the band(s).

.....Unusual Parasitism in Purple Martins

A member called to report that they had lost many of their young who were about to fledge this past summer and they couldn't explain why. Blow fly infestations took many of their young this year. Below the metal nest trays were found tiny squiggly looking fly larvae that lie low during the day but feast on the young at night. By drawing blood from the young martins, it didn't take long for the nestlings to weaken. Combined with the cool temperatures, the blowflies added to the misery of the baby martin devastation this summer. I know what you are going to say: "Why didn't the landlord check?" They did, but perhaps not closely enough. Sometimes you just have to poke around in the nest or remove the nest completely and replace it. Even after taking this measure, success is not guaranteed. Once the young are weak, they succumb very quickly to the cold. Martin parasitism seems to be growing and one has to be more vigilant every seven days when examining the nests.

There is a new fly on the block called the BOT fly, which will lay its eggs directly on the skin of the martin. We will have to begin checking the young for this one now. In no way do I condemn the hands-off approach of some martin landlords to their colonies - to each his/her own. But I am convinced that those landlords who took active responsibility for doing nest checks and removed dead young from the nests really saved those that remained. Any young that blocked entrance holes really caused further baby losses; the parents were more motivated to feed those that remained.

Can April be far away? We will soon see the adults back again!

.....John Balga, Director

CRICKETS:

Again this year Mary Wilson will be taking your orders for crickets. The supplier has held their cost steady for a number of years at \$18.00 per thousand. Mary will place the order in mid to late March and everyone will have their crickets, ready to use (frozen and packaged by Mary), when martins begin arriving here.

If you want crickets, please see Mary after this meeting, or call her (519-326-1710) before mid-March. Prepayment of \$20.00 per thousand is required; any adjustment on the price will be made when you pick up your crickets. (The larger the order, the lower the shipping cost.)

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We want to provide a list of our meeting dates for the year. We will continue our practice of making reminder phone calls for each meeting, but you may want to clip out this schedule, or transfer the dates to your calendar. We always enjoy seeing everyone come out. Any changes to this schedule will be communicated to everyone.

We encourage members to volunteer to “host” one of the several meetings designated as “**Member Host**”. The club reimburses expenses to the host member for coffee / donuts / refreshments. In case of bad weather, individuals should contact the “host” (number will be provided) to confirm if the meeting will be held as scheduled. If volunteers do not come forward for these “host” meetings, the club will attempt to schedule at some other venue, but these meetings provide a wonderful opportunity for members’ colonies to be seen, and for the sharing of ideas and innovations. We encourage your participation.

2010 MEETINGS and EVENTS of the Essex County Purple Martin Association

- 9:00 am Jan 16, 2010 ..BREAKFAST MEETING - Heritage Village, Arner Town Line
- 7:30 pm Jan 28, 2010 ..John Balga is guest presenter at meeting of the Natural Habitat Network of Essex County. At the Essex Civic Centre. Everyone welcome.
- 6-9 pm..... Mar 5Home & Garden Show**
- 10-5 pm Mar 6Leamington Kinsmen Recreation Complex, 249 Sherk Street, Leamington.**
- 12-5 pm Mar 7**

- 9:00 am Apr 17Gilles & Judy Breton’s house
- 9:00 am May 1**BLUEBIRD TOUR** – Hosted by Don Bissonnette
- 9:00 am..... May 15.....Member “Host Meeting” Leo & Pauline Dunn’s house 519-975-0460**
- 9:00 am Jun 5Orchard View Golf Course
- 9:00 am..... Jun 26Member “Host” Meeting: John & Barbara Balga’s house 519-776-5777**
- Jun 29 -
Jul 10Bird Banding (approx. dates) Contact John Balga to participate. 519-776-5777
- 9:00 am Sep 18FINAL 2010 MEETING - Orchard View Golf Course (LUNCH provided)