

Michigan Purple Martin Friends

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2018

Purple Martins in Fall: It's time to fly south!

In the fall of each year, after young have hatched, fledged, and learned to forage for themselves, it is time for both the young martins of the year and their parents to make their seasonal migration trip south for the winter. You might wonder where your Purple Martin friends have gone, when they might return again, and what you can do in the meantime.

Purple Martins are a Neotropical migrant: they go to where food is seasonally abundant. These insectivores travel approximately 5,000 miles each fall and again each spring, spending the greater part of the year not actually on the breeding grounds here in North America. Most martins spend the winter in Brazil, but can also be found in other central South American countries during the winter non-breeding season. We may find ourselves thinking that Purple Martins migrate away from “home” for the rest of the year, but research suggests they are actually a South American swallow that gradually evolved to migrate into North America – where the longer summer daylight hours allow for long days of insect foraging.

Before they make the long flight south, Purple Martins form temporary roosts in the late summer. These pre-migration roosts can be enormous – up to several hundred thousand individual martins! Purple Martins gather and stay overnight at the roosts, spending up to about four weeks at a roost before departing on migration. Once on migration, martins cruise quickly – in 2007, a study using geolocators documented Purple Martins migrating from Erie, Pa., to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico in just five days! This segment of their migration comprised 1,500 miles, including a flight over the Gulf of Mexico (500 miles over water)!



Purple Martin fledglings and adults.

Photo by Angela Mozer.

See the Purple Martin Conservation Association website or magazine Issue 18 Volume 2 for more on migration flight paths and geolocators: <https://www.purplemartin.org/research/20/geolocators-and-gps/>. Also check out an image of martin migration on page 3 of this newsletter.

What should you be doing when your martins are away? Well, to start with, leave your martin houses up and open until at least late August or mid-September. Young Purple Martins will check out new colonies where they may want to return to next year, and colonies can be safe places for them to spend a night as well. Later in September, you should lower your houses and/or gourds, clean out the old nests, and block the cavity entrances. Some landlords will leave the houses on the poles (lowered as far as they go) and others will take the houses down and store them for the winter. Do whichever is most convenient for you. Be sure to open at least a few of the cavities in late March or early April for those early-arriving Purple Martin scouts! You can open the rest of the cavities in mid to late April, preparing for another wondrous summer spent with your Purple Martin friends.

Walpole Island Purple Martin Project

A brief highlight from our friends across the river – Richard and Susan Carr

On the northeast side of Lake St. Clair (in Ontario) is a very unique area – Walpole Island First Nation, encompassing six islands in the St. Clair River delta. Vast wetland and marsh areas provide habitat for Purple Martins and for many species of birds, wildlife, insects, and even endangered plant species.

In 2009, Susan Carr's father wanted to have a Purple Martin house because these aerial insectivores are so good at eating mosquitoes. From there, Richard and Susan Carr began researching, learning the history and cultural significance of Purple Martins, and they decided to start the Walpole Island Purple Martin Project. Currently, Richard and Susan and landlords of seven colonies, comprised of a total of 13 martin houses. This is the first year that each of the houses had at least one Purple Martin pair – the population occupying their colonies has expanded steadily!

In addition to hosting martins during the summer breeding season, Walpole Island's extensive wetlands host a huge number of roosting martins during migration.



Purple Martins are aerial insectivores. Here, a rare sighting of a martin on the ground.

Photo by Angela Mozer.

More than 250,000 Purple Martins roost in the Walpole Island wetlands during migration! This roost is not very accessible for viewing, but there are staging areas on the island where martins gather by the thousands before going to the roost overnight.

At the end of the summer, the Carrs still have their Purple Martin houses up, and will clean the houses and plug entrance holes once the roost is gone, and all the martins have moved on for the winter. Richard's tip is to lower the houses on the poles, plug the holes to prevent undesirable birds or critters from moving in, and leave the gourds and houses out for the winter. The gourds withstand winter weather well, and he has modified the T-14 houses by adding a metal roof that reduces overall weathering. In early April, the Carrs raise the houses, opening just about half of the cavities at first. Once martins have arrived, the rest of the entrances are opened for the summer.



Purple Martins flocking to a roost. Martins form huge roosts (several hundred thousand individuals) during fall migration.

Image: Ann Harkness, Flickr CC

LANDLORD CHATTER

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANGELA MOZER

Angela Mozer is a first-year Purple Martin landlord. She and her husband installed their first martin house in May 2018, at their home in Lapeer, Michigan. This was their second summer living at this location, which has a 2-acre pond and a nearby marsh with lots of available habitat for birds, wildlife, and insects. With luck, one or two days after installing the house, Purple Martins showed up and decided to move in!

How many nest cavities do you manage, as new Purple Martin landlords?

This first year, we had 12 nest cavities in the house and added six Troyer gourds. We have excluder entrances on the gourds, but still have round entrances on the house. We haven't had problems yet with House Sparrows or other birds.

What is one thing you did that made your first season as a Purple Martin landlord successful?

Doing frequent nest checks. We had to know that everything was going ok - it was a learning experience. By doing nest checks, we were able to tell when the babies were not getting fed, and we could tell the state of the nesting material. We did two nest changes this summer.

What, if anything, will you do differently for next year?

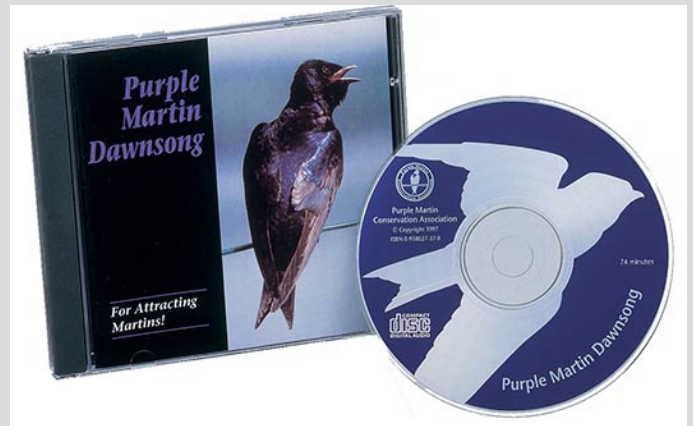
We are upgrading! We have added a bigger house, hoping to attract more Purple Martins. We are keeping the colony in the same location - it seemed perfect and the martins loved flying around the pond. We will put up the houses and gourds earlier in the spring - in the first week of April, not in May as we did this year. We will also play the dawn song.

"I loved every minute of it even though I was going crazy at times!"

- Angela Mozer

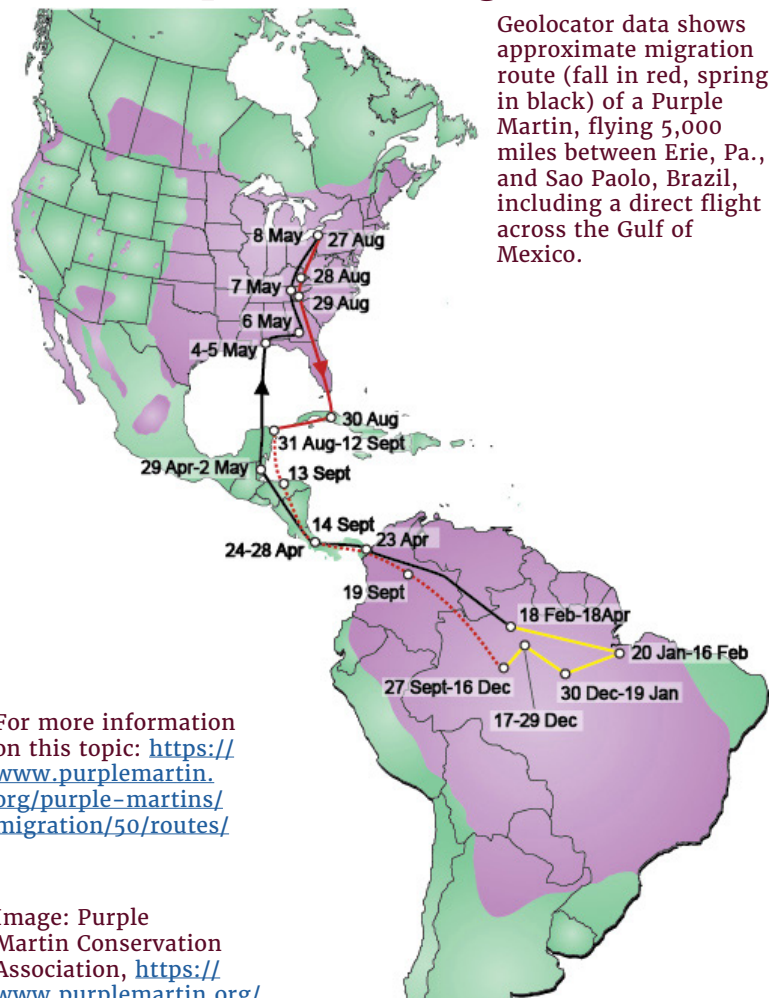
What is Dawnsong?

Dawnsong is a vocalization sung during the pre-dawn hours by adult male Purple Martins, sung to attract other martins - this singing can be heard from many miles away. Having trouble attracting martins and want to try something different next year? Consider using a Dawnsong recording to attract new martins to your colony!



Purple Martin Dawnsong. Image: Purple Martin Conservation Association.

Purple Martin Migration



Purple Martin

The Walpole Island Purple Martin Project began banding nestling Purple Martins in 2011 (with proper banding permits). One nestling male, banded in 2011, returned for six consecutive years to the same colony where he hatched, traveling the 10,000 mile round trip six times! Wow!

In 2009, the Walpole Island PMP hosted two pairs initially, with 11 young hatched and fledged. In 2018, there were more than 100 pairs, with more than 500 fledglings!

Richard and Susan Carr are successful landlords because they actively monitor the martins, they perform nest changes when needed, and generally keep an eye on the colonies. Because they are banding nestlings, they keep track of when eggs are laid and when eggs hatch, in order to band nestlings when they are an appropriate age and size.

Fun



Fact

Greetings, fellow Purple Martin enthusiasts! This is the fourth in a series of seasonal, fun, infomative newsletters about Michigan Purple Martins and the Michiganders who care for them. We welcome your feedback as we begin this new project. If there is a topic you would like to see included, a question you would like to submit, or photos you would like to share, please send your thoughts to: LRowse@michiganaudubon.org.

We hope you've enjoyed this issue!

Join the Michigan Purple Martin Friends on Facebook: Share photos, ask questions, join the flock!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MichiganPUMA/>

If you have housing up for Purple Martins, be sure to register your colony at:

www.michiganaudubon.org/bfc/PUMA

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August - September 2018

Upcoming Events

2018 CraneFest

October 13 and 14

12:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

For over two decades, crowds have gathered to celebrate Sandhill Crane migration during this fall event that also includes artwork from several nature-themed Michigan artists, informational booths from state nonprofits and organizations, merchandise and food vendors, and a family educational tent with activities for children of all ages. In addition to nature walks on the property, there will be live animal presentations throughout the weekend.

The main attraction, the “fly-in” of hundreds of Sandhill Cranes, typically begins slowly throughout the afternoon with the best viewing of cranes between 5 p.m. and dusk.

CraneFest takes place at the Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area located at 22300 15 Mile Road, Bellevue, MI 49021.

Visit www.cranefest.org to find out more about this year's event!