

Purple Martin CHATTER

Spring 2022

Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin

Volume 10 Issue 2

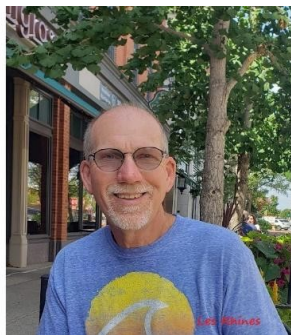


Photo courtesy Tammy Milbrath Strebe

Upcoming Events

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| <i>April 12</i> | PM Presentation @ 6:30 p.m., <i>Plymouth Generations (1500 Douglas Dr., Plymouth, WI 53073)</i> |
| <i>May 7</i> | Bird Banding with Dick Nikolai 7-10:30 a.m. <i>Oshkosh Bird Fest, Menominee Park, Shelter #1, Oshkosh</i> |
| <i>June 11</i> | Ice Age Visitor's Center @ 6:00 p.m. <i>(N2875 Hwy 67, Campbellsport, WI 53010, 1/2 mi w of Dundee)</i> |
| <i>June 25</i> | MartinFest @ 9 00 a.m. - <i>Marsh Haven Nature Center (W10145 State Rd 49, Waupun, WI 53963)</i> |





A Message from the President

The birds are coming, the question is are you ready?

Hello everyone, and welcome to spring, or I hope it will feel like spring as you read this. It is the first few days of April as I prepare this

column and we have begun to see Purple Martins returning to Wisconsin, while at the same time we seem to be having a, I hope brief, return to winter with 1 to 3 inches forecast for tomorrow, and the extended forecast predicts cool and wet conditions for the foreseeable future, typical start of April in Wisconsin. The birds are coming, the question is are you ready? If you are new to this avian hobby then you still have some time to prepare, because typically martins that start new colonies are the sub-adults or (SY's), and they don't begin to show up in Wisconsin until the first week of May and their migration can last about six weeks. But, for those landlords that have established colonies our houses and gourd racks are already up, and a few cavities are open. Those cavities or compartments are lined with a generous amount of "dried" pine straw bedding, and we have already prepared for supplemental feeding by having a supply of frozen crickets, and mealworms to go along with the scrambled eggs that we prepare. Some of us also have a ready supply of extended time hand warmers to place in the compartments on the extremely cold nights.

To introduce or re-introduce you to supplemental feeding we have re-published an article prepared by WPMA VP – Greg Zimmermann that ran in the spring 2021 issue. Mealworms are available in many locations, I buy mine at Fleet Farm, and I buy the one- inch banded crickets from an on-line source, "Josh's Frogs", but there are many other sources available as well.

Spring is also a busy time for our board, it is the time when we field many requests from people wanting to know how they can attract PM and start a colony. With that thought in mind now would be a good time to make you aware of the mentoring programs that are available to you. Mentoring plays such an important part to the success of a new colony; to that point you will find two articles in this issue; one written by Mary Ward depicting her experience with her mentor, the late Chuck Meyer, and the other by Greg Zimmermann about his experience with a Door County colony.

The PMCA offers a mentoring resource through their website, in addition, the WPMA has been developing mentor services and currently we have 28 mentors available covering 18 counties in Wisconsin. If you are interested in either becoming a mentor or require mentoring services, contact any one of our board members.

There are several other features in this newsletter, including the second in a series about our founder, Tom Rank. This time, Debbie Zimmermann, WPMA Treasurer, writes about

her experience when she and her husband Greg first met Tom.

Also, Pat Ready, the editor of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin or BRAW has provided us with an article about getting and keeping bluebirds on your property.

Dick Nikolai provides us with an informative article about the practice of nest monitoring. The article is based on Dick's many years of banding experience, I think you will find it very informative as I did. Dick also provides us with a detailed checklist to be used when doing those nest checks.

I report on a successful Eagle Scout project that has resulted in another "new" public colony for 2022 located in Appleton.

A reminder that it is not too early to start planning your summer activities, MartinFest is almost here. MartinFest 2022 will be held on June 25th, at Marsh Haven Nature Center located outside of Waupun, Wisconsin. Please view the flyer inside the newsletter and mark the date on your calendar. I am particularly interested in hearing from WDNR Nancy Businga about Purple Martin health considering that the avian influenza strain has spread to Wisconsin. Also, if you are interested in volunteering to assist us at MartinFest please contact me. Don't forget now is also a good time to renew your \$10.00 annual WPMA membership, contact Treasurer, Deb Zimmermann to do that.

In other news, we are welcoming two new members to our Board of Directors. Board member and Newsletter Editor, Gail Bolden and Board Member Terry Mentink. Both Gail and Terry are active martin landlords and have demonstrated a passion for helping others in fulfilling our mission *To Restore and Preserve the Purple Martin population across Wisconsin*. We will provide a short bio for all our Board Members in our next newsletter, in the meantime be sure to congratulate and welcome both Gail and Terry.

And finally, we are looking for a venue for MartinFest 2023, if you have a suggestion for us, please forward it to any one of the board members.

Well, I know that there is a lot here, so it might take multiple sittings to go through it all, but I think it's worth it, and please share this with others.

Here's wishing all of you a very successful martin season; I'm looking forward to seeing you at MartinFest.

Spring has Sprung!

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

A very big hello to all our Purple Martin friends out there. As I write this, our beloved birds will be arriving soon; let's hope the spring weather makes it an easy transition for our birds. My topic for this newsletter will consist of 2 articles, in my first article, I will discuss a situation with martins in Door County and the second will discuss the importance of supplemental feeding during inclement weather.

I have been in touch with Andy Gill, Executive Director of The Ridges Sanctuary located in Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin. They currently have a Purple Martin house along with a well-equipped gourd rack. Their problem is the housing is not situated in a location that makes it desirable for Purple Martins. This past fall I decided to take a ride up to Door County and see if it was possible to find a better solution for a new site for the Sanctuary's martin houses. After a site evaluation, I decided it was best to ask them to move their houses to a better location just across the street from the sanctuary. The move will provide a better visual and open space for martins. The space is located just off the bay of Baileys



Ridges Sanctuary new colony location Photo courtesy Greg Zimmermann

Harbor; there are a few trees that will need to be taken down to provide as much open space as possible. As it turns out the trees are in bad shape and are dying. The location is village owned and Andy has the blessing from the village to use the site.

With this being the new location the next step is to take all housing down and prep the site, let's hope this new move works, Andy and his staff will be doing most of the work and if anyone would like

to volunteer, I'm sure they would appreciate it.

The Ridges Sanctuary
8166 State Highway 57
Baileys Harbor, WI 54202

(920) 839-2802

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Debbie Zimmermann

Checking	\$447.38
Savings	\$1925.35
Total	\$2352.73

John Hensey
Loren Martell
Normal Stetzel
Mark/Susan Martin
Peter/Mary Hutchinson
David Wood
James Potratz
Gail Bolden

Memberships

Carol Parsons
Dick Nikolai
Brad Collar
Robert Shimek
Brad Lundgren
Ken Verhagen
Bob Frankel
Sally Stachniak
Bob Gehringer
Lia Anna Andre
Renee Thelen
Davis Eggebeen
Randy Wiskirchen
Eric/Jean Heinith

Always Be Prepared

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

We are getting closer for our birds to arrive. April 1 is fast approaching and within the first few weeks of April, some of us will have our first scouts taking up residence at our colonies. Between now and April, you need to make sure everything is ready to go, always check your cables and winches and anything that could cause unnecessary problems getting your martin house raised. Once you finally have your house up be prepared for anything that comes your way. My first and biggest concern is the weather. Weather conditions that limit insect availability include temperatures below 40 degrees, steady rain, or dense fog for example. When flying insects are scarce, energy spent foraging unsuccessfully can hasten starvation. Watch perched birds for drooping wings, a sign that the martin's system is beginning to break down and digest its primary flight muscles. Physical condition of the birds, severity and duration of poor weather, site specifics, and individual limitations will all play a role in what feeding technique works best for you and your birds. Be flexible-try several methods until you find one that works. Here are some methods:

Tossing. Tossing crickets scrambled eggs or mealworms into the air may be the best method for first time feeding attempts, as it is closest to the martin's natural feeding habits. Propelling food into the air requires time and effort from both the landlord and martins, and food will be missed or dropped. Landlords report the greatest success with tossing food after 2-3 days of non-feeding weather when martins are hungry enough to pursue the food but not too weak to go after it.

Platform feeding. Offering food on a platform is ideal. This self-serve method requires minimal energy and allows martins to eat multiple items at one sitting. Since most landlords report that supplemental food is recognized as food more quickly when tossed,



High Cliff Colony-Early arrivals are being fed and handwarmers are placed in south and west cavities to help conserve heat. Remaining houses will be raised as more birds arrive.

Photo courtesy Dick Nikolai

many transition their birds to platform feeding after they have first eaten tossed food. Tossing food right above the feeder encourages martins to land on the feeder.

In-cavity feeding. Mealworms, scrambled eggs and crickets can be placed inside a gourd or house compartments where they can easily be seen and eaten by roosting martins. This method can be particularly helpful during very cold temperatures or advanced stages of weakness when conservation of energy is critical. While live food often stimulates a feeding response, they tend to escape or bury themselves in nest material. Landlords can use dried or thawed insects. Another method to try is to put food in shallow dishes and fasten them to porch or cavity floors, or to interior walls. Lowering the house to add food will flush the martins but the energy expense is worthwhile if they return and eat. For a video on supplemental feeding and how to save starving martins please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNcZ6ip92h0>

I might dwell on this all season long but this is a necessity, and supplemental feeding will ensure your birds survive and be healthy enough to fly south when that time comes for departure. Good luck to all this season.

Nest Monitoring *To be doing or not to be-* **That is the Question!**

Dick Nikolai

Each year, all Purple Martin landlords come to some type of dilemma of conducting nest checks or monitoring their colony when young get near the age of fledgling. Granted, I may have different agendas when checking housing for Purple Martins. Our nest monitoring is used for banding so more of an intensive checking takes place so we know about all details of each cavity. Our details become almost a daily chore to properly capture the adults once the young hatch. This monitoring serves its purpose to reduce stress on the Purple Martins, for it gives a constant check on their status along with familiarity of us. Housing goes up and down vertically so the young along with the parents know it is a daily routine during warm periods of the day. We become a part of the colony experience just like a Cooper's Hawk flies over or through the area to see if a meal is available.

Weekly nest checks are commonly encouraged to gather support information to react to problems encountered. No checks mean a person has no knowledge of what is happening within the nest or even the colony itself. It's like ignoring problems with a hope of always having a successful colony. *Mother Nature* does not operate in a vacuum. More experience one has in monitoring, the more it benefits those young Purple Martins to their eventual first flight along with their success of the colony.

Yearly monitoring contains many highs and lows even for a seasoned retired wildlife biologist. As I said many times before with people who know me, our Purple Martins are my extended family. Seeing even one young Purple Martin fledge is an accomplishment for it gives hope amongst the many downs of a breeding season. That is why putting so much effort in monitoring even when we have been told not to monitor the housing after the young are 21 days old or when there is fledging occurring.

My suggestion for many of you is not to fear the young fledging. That will always occur regardless. Note if you lower your housing on a schedule the martins are quite accustomed to the floating vertically downward and upward. Use of monitoring needs to be completed on warm days with timing beyond the hurried pace of the adults feeding early in the morning along with the last snacks of the late

afternoon. Disturbance needs to occur after 10AM and be completed before 4PM. There are always exceptions to guidance, but it relies on common sense for the protection of those Purple Martins, whether they are young or old.

Each day that monitoring is taking place always survey the area in the air and on the ground. That also goes for those days when just observing. Note always what your adults are telling you through sight and sound. Follow what is happening with those young with your monitoring sheets. Are those young coming out the entrance holes, are they on the ground, what is the weather each day (windy, below 50 degrees, wet and cloudy, exceptionally hot, drastic temperature changes, how much precipitation and when it occurs, etc.) and if you are not present, have someone check on your martins. You are best when you know on a daily basis how your colony is doing just like a watched pot never boils. You see the growth of the young, know the parents even better, and are aware of changes that could possibly occur.

My banding, along with monitoring experiences are varied over 35+ years and personal experience of 65 years with martins, has always been questioned or critiqued by myself, even when I fail to fledge some martins due to circumstances beyond my capabilities. So, bear with your heart for its that reason I may go against the grain. I have seen disease nearly take all our young, cold weather extend beyond what was to be, storms coming at the end of daylight, nests drenched several days in a row, predators getting beyond guards, just to mention a few. A guard is as good as the person who places it and knows that it is only 95% effective. Always expect the unexpected. In 2021 it has been a bummer of a year.

Just to give you an example of what happened in one of our houses that we take care of during this past season near High Cliff State Park. During one of the storms that we had in late July, the pole broke, sending the housing crashing down with young in it past 24 days of age. Due to other circumstances, I was traveling to another city several hours away. The landlord of that housing is in his later 80's. Both of us assumed we lost the young along with possibly the adults. With the housing down on the ground the adults and young survived. The adults (ASY's) fed their young for two days while the landlord offered what he could do until we had time to do repairs. Needed to find info on how many young survived from the cavity, along with their status and last but not least, needed to know when they would fledge.

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We actually placed a new pole and hung the quarter section of a T-14 onto it which took three hours. Caught all five young in bushes and flowers and placed back into the cavity. Hole was covered for 20 minutes to calm them plus another half hour before the adults came back to feed their young. Without monitoring, that would not have been accomplished. From parents to young that acquaintance of monitoring could have ended in disaster. Handling them came easy, so this was a success.

Another story even after the one mentioned. A mixed (SY-M & ASY-F) pair of martins had young that were to fledge on August 20. Four young were in the cavity with very attentive parents. Caught and banded the adults prior to two back-to-back thunderstorms delivering several inches of rain. First storm occurred during the day on August 10 with no harm to all after



Photo courtesy Dick Nikolai

When colonies are actively monitored, the birds are accustomed to human interaction. When storms snapped the pole for this house, the landlord was able to replace the pole and retrieve the birds, thereby saving the brood.

check. The second storm occurred the following day at dusk lasting for several hours with temperatures falling. By the time of my arrival the following day in the afternoon, the young were dead in a rain-soaked cavity after 18 hours passed on August 12. Age of the adults certainly were a factor and error on my part due to personal items to be accomplished at home may have contributed. It does suck the wind out of one trying to fledge some martins.

Others in 2021 have experienced problems past the last monitoring date and when young are fledging. Take the chance and do another session of monitoring. Even when finding young dead, it is worth noting. Young are trampled by their own siblings when they are being fed due to the law of survival through competition where the healthiest survive. Sometimes it is also plausible for the birds in a cavity to fledge and then come back. They

may not have paid attention to their parents for training on how to capture insects or wanted the safety of the cavity to be fed. SY martins are not always great parents, so that may also come into play for the death of their young martins. That is what observing does is indicate what problems may occur while trying to get ahead of those future problems. Keep up the great work on checking. It always makes a person a better landlord for those martins.

Storms can cause moisture in nests or from body heat, adding to the growth of mites or fleas or lice or some other invertebrates. Parents often refuse to go into cavities when these heavy infestations occur, especially when the parents are SY's. Towards the end of the season, SY's do not have the colony effect and often abandon the young. These SY parents are easy prey for Cooper's Hawks or even owls at night, for they are inexperienced in raising young. With fewer eyes watching, it is not as safe for the remaining pairs. Even if one of the pair is lost, generally the remaining one abandons quite easily, unless it is an ASY.

Note that sometimes the young get anxious trying to get food and fall out of the cavity. Having a small scale handy gives you a perspective of how stressed the young may be. They should weigh 55-65 grams between 14-18 days old. Young martin bones harden during those ages, becoming hollow so they can be light enough to fly. If young martins develop a bacterial problem with their eyes, they lose the ability for their nictating membrane to cleanse their eye and may cause sight, balance and flight problems. Result is going down to the ground instead of up into the air. Always inspect their feathers to ensure they are clean and kept up from grooming. That is where monitoring assists, so you can identify the age of the parents while knowing when they would be fledging. Having the house checked often even when attaining the age of almost fledging keeps the young more used to the housing being checked. They often will give a chance for viewing by cowering in the back of the cavity. If any young fly, chances are they have flown before. Adults learn the voices of their young sometime after 20 days of age. Like teenagers, their voices squeak with high or low pitches until they get near fledging. This is timely for when they attain flight the parents can easily identify their young fledglings' voices. Hope this long narrative gives everyone at least some insight to go beyond the normal inspections. Monitoring truly is the key with most people fearful of checking the cavities when it gets near the fledging stage. I would rather know through checks at a minimum of every three days or less.

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If we want to care for our Purple Martins in a holistic way, then the fear of them fledging early should not be a factor. Housing that goes up and down many times has little effect until the young are touched. They cower in the back as the parents have taught them or through natural instinct. Place foam stoppers or cups into the cavities with strings or cardboard over each cavity. All young that fly are either ones that have fledged already or are the ones capable of flying. Fledging occurs from 25 to 34 days, depending on the condition of the young due to food resources. Young martins on the ground need to be placed back into the cavity if the adults are feeding them. That is where monitoring records assist. Martins are best to be cared for by their parents. When no parents are present, meaning they have either died or have abandoned the cavity, then one needs to either place into a cavity of similar aged young or contact a rehabilitator:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/directory.html>

Before any problems occur, monitor your cavities until all fledging has taken place. Details are to get people to effectively manage their colony. They need to be ready when any problems occur so one can address them. Being a detective manages the colony so a disaster does not cause the colony to be lost.

Many landlords miss the last two weeks or longer of the Purple Martin's life cycle. They assume the young will fledge without problems, but that is where many problems begin. As I alluded is that every young martin counts in the later stages before fledging for those to have the greatest chance to be someone's martins to colonize the next site the following year. If they are in poor condition or under further stress, Mother Nature has ways to make sure only the strongest will survive with or without our assistance.



If one is concerned about premature fledging, cardboard can be placed over the cavities during nest checks.

-Photos courtesy Dick Nikolai

Learn to age young by monitoring and writing down the cavities age. Compile your own pictures or have on hand a chart from the PMCA showing the age of young martins. Being a responsible landlord takes in more than placing your housing. Remember it's your extended family.



Day of hatch (note the capped egg in the photo).



15 days old



21 days old

As President of the WPMA I have the opportunity to correspond with many people that have similar interests, you guessed it, Purple Martins. My correspondence is usually with adults, however, on July 30, 2019, I received an email from Logan Poelzer, who was 14 at the time. In Logan's email he writes that he is a Boy Scout in Troop 12, out of First English Lutheran Church, located in Appleton, and that he was looking for something to do for an Eagle Scout project. He explained that he'd heard about a potential project from his mother, she had recently seen a featured story produced and aired on an WFRV television program. The featured story that Logan's mother was referring to, was an interview with Dick Nikolai, a retired biologist from the WDNR and an active Board of Director for the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association. In that interview, which aired just

Eagle Scout Project Yields New Martin Colony

Les Rhines



On January 22, 2022, Logan Poelzer, Boy Scout Troop 12, receives his Eagle Scout Achievement for his Purple Martin project. *Well done, Logan!*

prior to the June 2019 MartinFest, Dick talked about the difficulties that Purple Martins are having competing with other species for nesting cavities and how they needed human intervention to survive.

In Logan's email to me he explained that some of his favorite birds are members of the swallow family like the Tree Swallows, Bank Swallows and Barn Swallows. He said that just enjoyed watching these birds fly because they are so

aerodynamic and acrobatic, and that he would really like to know if there was anything that he could do for the WPMA as an Eagle project.

We continued to correspond and the project that Logan settled on was to build and erect a purple martin house at one of Appleton's parks. The WPMA provided Logan a set of plans for an eight compartment Northstar house and with the help of Dick Nikolai, Logan was able to enlist the cooperation of Greg Hoekstra from the Appleton Parks and Planning, and with Greg's help Vulcan Park was chosen to be the site for the future house.

Logan and his crew preparing to install his newly built Northstar house.



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By the end of the summer of 2021, Logan had completed building the house and along with his grandfather they were turning their attention to the pole and winch setup.



The responsibility of the continued care of the housing, including nest checks, will be initially performed by Logan, and transitioned to the park staff and volunteers.



The completed installation of Logan's Northstar house-Vulcan Park

Arrangements were made to get the hole dug that the house could be in place to take advantage of the spring 2022 migration, and as you can see from the accompanying photo's the pole and house were set in place in late fall, with a good-sized crew of helpers to get the job done.

A footnote to the story: At the end of each of Logan's emails to me was this quote: "Do or do not, There is no try" ---Yoda

To me, it summed up the determination of this young man.

PostScript on supplemental feeding:

I went out looking for an alternative to supplemental feeding of our martins. I stopped at the local FleetFarm and in the poultry area I found a bag of boon worms. They are much larger and are high in protein, which is better come egg-laying time. Plus, they are easier to toss into the air. Thought you might want an alternative.

-Greg

Welcome!

Randy Wiskirchen of West Bend and Eric & Jean Heinith of Oshkosh, our newest WPMA members!

We appreciate your support!

MartinFest 2022

**Marsh Haven Nature Center
Waupun, Wisconsin
Saturday, June 25 9AM-4PM**



Location

**Marsh Haven N. C.
W10145 State Road 49**

Located on 46 acres, three miles east of Waupun on the Northwest end of world famous Horicon Marsh.



Food/ Refreshment

**Provided by Friends of
Marsh Haven Nature Center**

Proceeds to benefit Nature Center & Purple Martin Colony

www.marshhaven.org/

Booths

Purple Martin housing (Bob Shimek)

Sparrow Traps, Decoys, Aerial Insect & Food Flippers, Nesting Material, Martin Attractants, Starling Exclusion Entrances, etc.

(Wisconsin Purple Martin Association)
www.wisconsinpurplemartins.org

Free event is open to the public.



Arrive to meet purple martin landlords & enthusiasts. Be inspired with the sights & sounds of a large colony of purple martins established in 1996-97. MartinFest will be centered around you, purple martins, Wildlife Disease Specialist Nancy Businga, President WPMA Les Rhines, & Master Bird Bander Dick Nikolai. Various vendors will be onsite throughout the day, a popular Festival silent auction & much discussion with colony landlords. Bring your whole family, friends & neighbors!

Disclaimer: Event program may change due to weather, cancellations from speaker or harm to birds.

9:00 AM	MartinFest 2022 Opens. Sign in & Browse
10:00-10:30 AM	Seminar: Purple Martin Ecology & Housing
10:45-11:15 AM	Seminar: Dealing with Weather, Nest Site Competitors & Predators
12:00-1:00 PM	Lunch. Browse Displays & View Martin Colony
1:00-2:00 PM	Purple Martin Health, Disease & You (WDNR Nancy Businga)
2:10-3:15 PM	Nest Record Needs for Monitoring. Banding Demonstration
3:25 PM	Silent Auction Closes
3:30 PM	Award Silent Auction Items (Cash or Check)
4:00 PM	Event Ends



Lodging

AmericInn Hotel & Suites (Wyndham Waupun)

920-345-1140

204 Shaler Dr., Waupun, WI 53963

wyndamhotels.com

Baymont (Wyndham Waupun)

920-345-2913

5 Gateway Dr., Waupun, WI 53963

wyndamhotels.com

Badger State Hotels

920-324-2500

5 Gateway Dr., Waupun, WI 53963

stayboarders.com

Inn Town Motel

920-324-4211

27 S State St., Waupun, WI 53963

Bird Banding Demonstrations MartinFest and Oshkosh Bird Fest will be two opportunities this season to see bird banding by Master Bird Bander, Dick Nikolai.

If you have never witnessed a bird banding, it's a sight to behold, and one experience that I highly recommend. —Ed.

Volunteers are needed
to help during MartinFest
Contact Les for more information



Photo courtesy Tammy Milbrath Strebe

MartinFest 2023

Do you know of a venue that could accommodate our annual MartinFest celebration? We are always looking for host locations, so if you have an idea you'd like to run past us, contact any board member and we will look into it!

Nest Monitoring Checklist

1. Conduct nest checks after 10 a.m. and before 4 p.m., when the flurry of feeding is at a minimum.
2. Do not check during inclement weather, unless you see young on the ground or a dead bird blocking the entrance.

Tools

- 5 gallon pail w/layer of pine needles on bottom/light cover
- Extra pine needles for nest changes (9-10 day old nestlings)
- Notebook, pencil, clipboard
- Project MartinWatch spreadsheet or camera
- Prognosticator or your own laminated photos to age nestlings
- Small flashlight
- Damp cloth
- Gloves/dust mask for windy days
- Putty knife
- Fabric pieces with long strings attached to plug holes to prevent older nestlings from premature fledging
- Gram scale
- Leatherman tool or small scissors

Process

Before you conduct a nest check, consult your spreadsheet, determining which cavities need a nest replacement so you are aware where the older birds are and can plug the cavities of ready to fledge birds, if needed.

- Walk around housing, looking for any nestlings on the ground.
- Lower housing.
- Open each cavity, one at a time, noting nest progress, egg count, nestling count, parasites, etc. and document in your notebook/MartinWatch spreadsheet or take a pic and immediately document your findings after you raise your housing.
- During active hatching, look for capped eggs and assist when needed.
- On occasion, fish line will make its way into a cavity; inspect nestlings/nest/cavity and pull/cut out with your scissors.
- If doing a nest change, remove each nestling and place in tall bucket/cover nestlings/remove nesting material/scrape cavity out with putty knife/wipe cavity with damp cloth/add fresh pine needles/replace nestlings. *Only replace one nest at a time!*
- Try to weigh the 14-18 day old nestlings; they'll squawk; they should weigh 55-65 grams. It's a good health gauge.
- Secure all cavity closures.
- Raise housing.
- If you have plugged cavity openings of older birds, wait 5-10 minutes for nestlings to calm, then remove plugs.

Sources: PMCA, Dick Nikolai, my own experiences - Ed.

Purple Martin Nesting Request 2022

Dick Nikolai

For the past several years I have been summarizing Wisconsin Purple Martin housing information to show what is happening across our state either through the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas project or through the electronic Wisconsin Purple Martin Association newsletter, *Purple Martin Chatter*. This is utilized to give landlords knowledge of what may be happening in their portion of the state due to weather, disease impacts, success, failures, assist in making decisions in a region of the state or a glimpse of the future expectations.

Without your contributions it will be basically my information of the data I collect along with my observations. Purple Martins thrive here because of what we do. As a statewide organization our goal is *"To Restore and Preserve the Purple Martin Population across Wisconsin."* Without your support and care of the Purple Martins at your colony or creation of new colonies across Wisconsin, our state may have many more absent territories in the future, like in the areas north of Highway 64, areas in the central sands and the driftless regions.

On the average, Purple Martins have declined in Wisconsin from the Breeding Bird Survey from 1966 to 2019, 5.8% per year. We are very fortunate in Eastern Wisconsin where we have many wetlands to see Purple Martins common. Knowledge, you send along with my expertise creates for a better learning experience for us all to keep Purple Martins coming back to Wisconsin.

Please fill out the Purple Martin Conservation Association log sheet that is also included in this article. Send a copy at the end of the breeding season to them and one to me at prairiechicken@att.net. Good luck with your Purple Martin seasons ahead, by welcoming your family of martins back and enjoy their friendship, song and antics.



The Purple Martin Conservation Association's Project MartinWatch

Help the PMCA conduct groundbreaking research to better understand Purple Martins.

The PMCA needs your help! Since 1995 martin landlords have been participating in a continent-wide citizen science project known as "Project MartinWatch." Participants monitor their nests, record information on this data sheet, and send them to the PMCA by September 30. This allows the PMCA to gain a range-wide understanding of the reproductive success of Purple Martins.

How to participate: Conduct a nest check every 5–7 days after nest building begins, recording the contents of each nest cavity and what actions you take. Continue doing nest checks until all young have fledged. Nest checks should be done in the afternoon and as quickly as possible. Contrary to popular belief, nest checks won't cause martins to abandon their nests. In fact, research has shown that landlords who conduct nest checks have more productive colonies.

Determining parental ages: Using binoculars or a spotting scope, you can age martins by distinguishing the four breeding plumages.

- Adult males exhibit solid bluish-black plumage.
- Subadult males will have at least one, but may have many, solid bluish-black feathers either on their chin, throat, or belly.
- Adult females have bluish feathers on their head, shoulders and back, chests are a grayish-brown. Their undertail feathers are predominantly brown with white edges.
- Subadult females look similar to adults, but their undertail feathers are almost entirely white with a brown pinstripe down the center. Refer to the PMCA's laminated adult photos* for images.

Counting eggs and nestlings: Purple Martins commonly hide incomplete clutches under a layer of green leaves. Inspect this layer gently to feel for hidden eggs. Once hatched, nestlings huddle together making them difficult to see. You may need to separate them with a finger or blunt probe to get an accurate count. **NEVER MOVE EGGS OR YOUNG TO DIFFERENT NESTS!** This lowers the success of host nests, shortens parental life, and can spread disease.

Aging nestlings: The first time you encounter a hatchling, compare the largest one to the laminated nestling photos* to determine its age. Record this age in your nest check entry. Use this age to determine the actual hatch date if it is unknown.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Completing the data sheet: Use the codes given to record your data. Each row represents an individual nest cavity.

Column 1 is used to record the housing type, cavity number, and hole type using the codes given.

Column 2 is to record the age (if known) of the male and female.

Column 3 should contain the date the first egg is laid. Since martins lay one egg per day, we can extrapolate a date by subtracting. A nest with two eggs would have had the first egg laid on the previous day. If you are unsure if egg laying has just finished, enter a range spanning from the day after your previous check to the date you determined by subtraction. Typically, incubation lasts 15 days.

Column 4 is to record the actual hatch date. Determine this either by direct observation of hatching during a nest check or by aging chicks using the PMCA's laminated nestling photos*.

Columns 5–19 are used for nest contents. The top row should show the date of the check and the boxes represent the nest contents and actions taken. The final three columns should be used to summarize the nest record, with the total of eggs, hatches, and fledges for the entire sheet shown at the bottom.

Fledged or failed: It is critical for you to enter a final nest check after all of the nestlings have fledged in order for the PMCA to be able to use your data. It is unlikely that you observe the moment a nestling leaves the nest, but if a martin lives to the minimum fledging age of 26 days we can assume successful fledging. The final nest check, showing an empty nest after that minimum age, is necessary.

Housing Type:
WH = wooden house
MH = metal house
PH = plastic house
AG = artificial gourd
NG = natural gourd

Age:
A = adult (ASY)
S = subadult (SY)

Landlord Action:
NR = nest replaced
D = discarded
B = banded

Hole Type:
RH = round hole
CH = crescent hole
EH = excluder hole
OH = obround hole

Species:
PM = Purple Martin
HS = House Sparrow
ST = European Starling
TS = Tree Swallow
BB = Bluebird
HW = House Wren

Nest Contents:
X = empty cavity
E = # of eggs
Y = # of young
HD = hatch day
1DO = 1 day old
DY = # of dead young

Housing type: Cavity # & Hole type	Male/Female age	Date first egg is laid	Actual hatch date	20 May	25 May	30 May	4 June	9 June	14 June	19 June	24 June	29 June	4 July	9 July	# Eggs	# Hatched	# Fledged
WH-1 RH	A ?	5/23	6/08	PMN	3E	7E	7E	2E 5Y 1DO	7Y	7Y	7Y	6Y 1DY D	6Y	X	7	7	6

* Buy laminated photos at
shop.purplemartin.org

WDNR Press Release

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Strain Confirmed in Wisconsin's Wild Bird Populations

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced today that EA H5 Avian Influenza, a strain that is highly pathogenic for poultry, has been detected in wild birds in Wisconsin.

The samples were collected from a Cooper's hawk and a bald eagle submitted from Dane County, a lesser scaup from Columbia County, a red-tailed hawk from Grant County, a Canada goose from Milwaukee County, and a trumpeter swan from Polk County.

This announcement follows preliminary positive results found by the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center and confirmed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratory on March 30 and March 31.

On March 14, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) announced the detection of HPAI in domestic poultry in Jefferson County. The DNR continues to work closely with our state and federal partners to monitor for this virus.

The strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) currently affecting the health of some domestic and wild North American birds is known as EA H5N1. It has caused disease in domestic and wild birds in multiple states since it was first detected in North America in December 2021.

More information about the distribution of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5 and H5N1 in North America is available on the U.S. Geological Survey website.

DNR AND PARTNERS MONITORING WATERFOWL, RAPTORS AND AVIAN SCAVENGERS FOR HPAI

As part of existing avian influenza response plans, federal and state partners are working on additional surveillance and testing. DNR staff have increased monitoring efforts for this strain of HPAI, focusing on species most likely to carry or be affected by the virus.

The DNR asks the public to email or call with reports of waterfowl, waterbirds, raptors (especially bald eagles) and avian scavengers such as crows, ravens and gulls showing tremors, circling movement or holding their heads in an unusual position. These symptoms may be a sign of HPAI.

These reports can be made to the DNR Wildlife Hotline by emailing DNRWildlifeSwitchboard@wi.gov or by leaving a voicemail message for a return phone call at 608-267-0866.

Anyone who observes sick or dead birds should minimize contact with them. Do not touch dead birds or wildlife with

your bare hands. If you have to touch a dead bird, wear gloves or use a plastic bag to put it in the garbage. Wash your hands with soap and water after handling and throw away any gloves.

Avian influenza is caused by a virus that is common in wild birds, especially waterfowl and shorebirds. There are many different subtypes of avian influenza, and most do not cause obvious signs of disease in wild birds. Waterfowl often carry avian influenza viruses naturally without causing disease, but there have been rare strains, such as EA H5N1 HPAI, that can cause disease in some wild birds or other animals. Whether a strain is classified as low or highly pathogenic depends on how lethal it is to domestic poultry.

In general, upland birds such as wild turkey have behaviors and prefer habitats that make them less likely to encounter avian influenza viruses in the wild. Spring turkey hunters can find safety and precautionary information on the USDA website. This strain of HPAI also does not pose a food safety risk; properly handling and cooking harvested birds to an internal temperature of 165°F kills the virus.

More information on Avian influenza viruses and the ongoing response to this HPAI strain can be available on the DNR's wildlife diseases webpage. The DNR will continue to update the website with any future HPAI findings in wild Wisconsin birds.

ENHANCED BIOSECURITY FOR DOMESTIC POULTRY

DATCP reminds anyone working with birds to complete premises registration and to practice enhanced biosecurity. Producers are encouraged to move their birds indoors, when possible, to prevent contact with wild birds and their droppings.

HUMAN HEALTH

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this strain of HPAI does not present an immediate public health concern, and no human cases of avian influenza have been found in the United States.

Wisconsin actively monitors for human cases of avian influenza and has plans in place to respond, if necessary. More information about how avian flu affects humans is available on the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website.

To Report Sightings - Contact the DNR Wildlife Hotline
Email: DNRWildlifeSwitchboard@wi.gov
608-267-0866
Leave a message for a return phone call

Eastern Bluebirds Still Need Our Help

Bluebird Restoration

Association of Wisconsin, Inc.
(BRAW)

In 1986, it was estimated that the Eastern Bluebird population in its historic range had declined by 90% during the preceding 50 years. Loss of habitat, increased populations of predators such as house sparrows, European starlings and raccoons, and the loss of natural cavity nest sites contributed to the bluebirds' decline.

In an effort to reverse this trend, private citizens and the Department of Natural Resources organized BRAW, an independent non-profit organization of citizen scientists. With the use of man-made nest boxes, blue birders have been able to gradually increase the bluebirds' numbers.

Although many State and Canadian provinces have similar groups, BRAW is unique among them. Since its founding, BRAW has encouraged its members to participate in a unique nest box monitoring program. This program, in which about 20% of BRAW's members participate, involves the once-a-week collection of simple, but extremely useful data about nest box activity. BRAW asks its volunteers to report a summary of the data on the BRAW Easy Summary Form. People from all over Wisconsin file the reports each year. Based on those data, BRAW reports to all of its members/subscribers by means of its quarterly newsletter, *Wisconsin Bluebird*, the production of bluebird trails throughout Wisconsin.

The reported bluebird production in Wisconsin has increased from 5,000 since 1996. In 2012 monitors reported over 30,000 bluebirds fledged. This improvement resulted from changes in the selection of box types (from deep boxes to



small, shallower boxes) and from changes in box management methods. Today, most Wisconsin monitors have switched away from the use of closely spaced boxes to widely spaced boxes (at least 100 yards apart).

There is more to be done. The annual fledge of about 22,000 bluebirds would be ideal but extreme winter weather down south has taken a toll the past few years. There is room for a lot more bluebirds.

BRAW coordinates its bluebird recovery program through workshops and meetings, press releases, web site, articles in publications, and its official quarterly newsletter, the *Wisconsin Bluebird*. BRAW also has an annual membership meeting, located in different parts of Wisconsin.

The network of BRAW County Coordinators may conduct local workshops each year, typically during the late winter and early spring. These resource people help individuals, clubs, and organizations to effectively aide in the effort of bluebird restoration.

BRAW subscribers/members provide BRAW's financial base, e.g. for the

publication of the *Wisconsin Bluebird*, construction of nest boxes and more.

We invite you to join us and to be part of the bluebird recovery movement, wherever you live.

The Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Inc. is a nonprofit organization incorporated under the laws of Wisconsin and is classified as a tax exempt, 501(c)(3) organization by the IRS. Subscription/Memberships and other contributions to BRAW, Inc. are tax deductible. BRAW is an all-volunteer organization.

Nest box plans, habitat, setting up a trail and membership info is at

www.braw.org

Photo credit: Patrick Ready



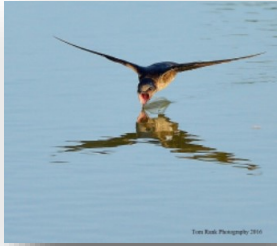


Photo courtesy Tom Rank

Remembering Tom Rank

Treasurer Debbie Zimmermann

I first remember meeting Tom Rank and his wife, Cindy, sometime after my husband did. They stopped at our house to check out our colony. I remember the date well, it was August 3rd, my birthday. It turns out Tom and I share a birthday. My sons had brought over an ice cream cake, and when we were done talking martins, I invited them in for some cake. Tom said he didn't want to intrude. Candy said she'd love to since it was ice cream cake. I knew right then I was going to like that girl.

Another thing I remember is MartinFests at Tom and Candy's house. They started the first MartinFests, and they had a beautiful property. They had a super colony with a pond. Over the years that Tom had martins, he raised thousands of them. He would give advice to anyone that wanted it and he loved sharing his knowledge. He gave many talks and answered many questions about martins.

Tom was also an avid nature photographer. I have several of his pictures on my walls. When I complimented him on his beautiful pictures, he would talk about how many 'bad' shots he would take before he got that perfect one. He definitely had the patience for wildlife photography.

Tom passed away in April of 2017 and we still miss him.



ASY

Photo courtesy D. Zimmermann (Tom Rank Photography)



Eastern Bluebird

Photo courtesy D. Zimmermann (Tom Rank Photography)

Meet the Landlords

Mary Ward

Oh my gosh, I wish I had a mentor!

I have loved birds for a long time!

My mom inspired me with her delight in backyard birds, cardinals being at the top of the list. I knew little, but I knew I loved birds.

First came the walking/horse-riding trails with bluebird boxes, and hours of watching with binoculars, only to discover the charms of Tree Swallows. I put up a martin house, clumsy, heavy, and it required two people to raise and lower it. It became a home for sparrows and rotted apart. *I knew nothing!* This was in Waukesha County, Southern Kettle Moraine area in the 1980's-90's. Seeking a mentor never occurred to me and I was ignorant about how to provide for Purple Martins and I was not teachable.

A move to Dodge County and an old farmstead on Lake Sinissippi-part of Horicon Marsh Flyway-opened an entirely new world of birds: migratory birds, spring arrivals, fall birds, waterfowl, cormorants, kingfishers, eagles, cranes, owls, many species of hawks, pelicans, all kinds of songbirds, and vultures. *What a world!* And then the astounding presence of swallows: Barn Swallows, (one of the largest local colonies with over 100 nests), Chimney Swifts, Cliff Swallows (over 30 nests) and pretty soon I had 90 boxes on bird trails winding around the fields. At this juncture, I had the joy and gifts of many mentors in the local bird club. There were birding events, talented DNR teachers, skilled photographers, raptor rehabilitators. I began to recognize birds by sounds and flight patterns. Wow!

And not a Purple Martin in sight! Of course, no martin house! I didn't know where, how, when, what kind...so I did nothing about a house.

Well, that's not true. I traveled to the Horicon Marsh and watched Purple Martins at the DNR field stations where there are four Purple Martin houses.

In early spring, 2016, with the help of a DNR warden and Bird Club president, I received a metal octagon martin house and a small diameter pole with crank and cable system. With more help from friends, this house and pole were mounted in concrete on top of a drumlin, far away from buildings and my home. I was *proud as punch* of this metal house and pole/crank though I had

difficulty operating it: pinched fingers, cable displacement, cuts from sharp metal...*and no martins for four years!*

Then, in mid-June, 2020, I heard martins amongst the other swallows flying overhead. A pair had started nesting in the martin house on the hill. I *loved* watching this pair (and others that seemed to hang around). I walked or 4-wheeled up to sit and watch-hours of watching, listening, learning from the martins. I played YouTube martin songs from my phone. I feared the cable coming off the track, so I never lowered the house until they left in August. *I was hooked!* And, I knew I wanted something better for the birds and for myself. Big drawback for me was the land had been sold. So the martin house was in walking distance, but not on property I owned.

What should I do? I was flummoxed.

I remember having this thought: *Oh my gosh, I wish I had a mentor!*

During the summer months of 2020, I began searching for information and seeking other martin landlords. I became a member of the Purple Martin Conservation Association. I took notes wherever I saw a martin house, and I saw a lot of variations of style, size, location, operation. I began looking through the PMCA catalog to learn about houses, hardware, poles, styles, dimensions, types of holes, perching rods. So much to learn, to understand, to decide! And no one wanted to mentor, nor take the time to assist. The message was pretty consistent: *just put up a house or you already have some coming to your house. Just keep that one.* But, I really didn't want to do that because:

- A) Technically, it wasn't on my property, so not my house to care for.
- B) I didn't trust the house/equipment-without really knowing why. It seemed lacking for me and for the martins.
- C) I didn't want to set in motion more mistakes.

I called the PMCA often, to get ideas, suggestions, and their knowledge. Staff was extremely generous with their time, patience, and information.

However, they were on the east coast in Erie, PA and they are not intended to be mentors. One staff member asked if I was aware of their mentorship program and that's when the tides turned for me and the martins that would one day arrive to my *new colony*.

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(Meet the Landlords continued)

I put in a request for a mentor, gave my name/phone/email contact. PMCA forwarded my information to a Wisconsin landlord who had offered to be a mentor.

On August 18, 2020, I received an email from my Wisconsin mentor: Chuck Meyers from Beaver Dam Lake.

And so began a remarkable relationship that lasted over a year. Chuck died December 11, 2021 after a short period of physical decline. Dick Nikolai paid tribute to Chuck in the winter issue of *Purple Martin Chatter*. He wrote of Chuck's many skills and interests, his honorable intentions to be truly helpful, his past contributions to community and country, his fineness as a human being, and of course, his passion to serve the Purple Martins that came to his spot on Beaver Dam Lake.

But equally true, is the service Chuck Meyers provided to the Purple Martins that eventually arrived at my spot on Lake Sinissippi. He did that through his remarkable and timely mentoring of me.

I had no idea what kind of house to purchase. Chuck said, *I will give you catalogs and teach you the differences*. And he did.

I had no idea where to place the martin house. Chuck said, *I will help you with that. I will come over to your place and we will look over the possibilities*. And he did.

I thought the PM houses (I was now ready to put up two poles to be ready for a second house when the colony grew-thinking positively) needed be in an open space heading toward the field. Chuck said, *You want to be able to hear/see/enjoy the martins all day and be able to get to the houses easily*. So a far better spot was identified and became even more suitable when two dead elms were removed. His clarity about placement proved to be 100% on target. That's what Chuck did.

I was uncertain about types of housing, Chuck said, *Troyer's is a good source. I will give you their catalog*. And he did.

Chuck said, *It's really helpful to see the birds and houses in action*. He invited me to his home to see and learn about types of houses and openings, styles and use of gourds, bedding material to add, feeding trays, pulley systems, pole styles, locations, and all the pros/cons. He taught me how to record numbers and why. That's what Chuck did.

At this point I have a PM friend to talk to and to discuss ideas, doubts and fears. I have begun to get the

educational newsletters as I was a PMCA member. I have ordering sources and staff with a lot of knowledge, skill, and experiences.

I chose the T-14 super combo with four horizontal gourds. In fall 2020, everything I needed to have my first Purple Martin house, arrived in a big shipment.

I had no idea how I was going to get those poles in the ground and the houses mounted. Chuck said, *I will help you get those mounted*. And he did.

A handy fellow dug holes and mixed concrete. Chuck and a younger fellow mounted the pulley system to the poles, the top perches, and finally the housing unit with four gourds mounted underneath. Chuck said, *You need to vent those gourds and I will do that for you*. And he did. Chuck said, *You need to close those openings over winter and in spring until the PMs arrive. Then only open a few*. He taught me what to get. That's what Chuck did.

I had two poles with perches, one T-14 housing unit, four gourds, and a pulley system I trusted and could easily crank. I saw my new PM house and poles until every day from windows and as soon as I walked out my back door. I saw it when I shoveled the walks, when I drove in the driveway. I saw it and loved it all winter long. Chuck said I would be happy with my choices because I took my time and chose well. And I was.

In September, a cluster of cells was found in my right breast and so began a year of cancer treatments. Chuck told me of his wife's journey with cancer and so he became a mentor/friend in matters beyond Purple Martins. Our relationship expanded in unexpected directions of support. My first end goal (after treatments) was to raise my PM house and gourds in spring 2021 and this became a wonderful vision to strive for.

Chuck said he would stay in touch over the winter 2020-21. And he did. We texted, emailed, and had phone calls. He reminded me of the PMCA cam recording to watch a mated pair of Purple Martins raise eggs to fledglings. He introduced me to WPMA and the names of fellow Wisconsinites who are active landlords. He sent me old newsletters and dropped off booklets on Purple Martins. He told me of events that may happen or not due to covid uncertainties.

Chuck cautioned and reminded me that putting up a house does not mean martins will nest there. In his words, *You have a great system, safe and attractive. You have a super location. There was a pair in the former house about 500 yards from you; there's a good*

(continued next page)

chance martins will come to your new house. However, some people wait ten years or more.

All you can do is wait, watch, and do some things to help attract. I will guide you. That's what Chuck did through the winter.

Spring 2021. With guidance from Chuck and Troyer's staff and with permission from the new land owner, I kept the old metal octagon PM house lowered. It was neither safe, dependable (the pulley), cool in hot summer temperatures, nor roomy enough for young martins. Surprisingly, that was a hard decision to make...it had been, after all, where martins had nested, successfully, the previous year.

Now, my new house was the only nearby attraction.

Chuck said, *Get two decoys and put them on the perches.* I did. Chuck said, *I have a gift for you.* He gave me the Dawn Song CD. That's what he did.

Chuck said, *Get a boom box, set it on your back porch* (that was near enough to the PM house, according to Chuck...*the sound will carry.* I did.

Chuck said, *Play the CD every day, all day, when martins are reported in your area.* I did.

For fun, I ordered the Daytime Chatter CD too, just to shake it up for my ears. I kept track of return sightings on the Scout Arrival Study provided by the PMCA. That's what I did.

Martins returned to Chuck's colony March 29, 2021. Cold, windy, and wet March weather arrived along with them. Chuck provided food, lots of bedding and warmers in the nest boxes. He shared all of this with me to help me learn. That's what Chuck did.

Over the next two months, Chuck called, texted or emailed. He was beginning to have some health concerns but kept up on his nest checks, egg counts and encouraging me. Chuck said, *Birds continue to arrive through May and into June for the SYs. Don't give up. There's a good chance a pair will take an interest.* That's what Chuck did.

Starlings tried getting into the holes. No luck, I have the Conley II openings. Sparrows pestered. I set the nest trap and caught the male, who became my attraction for the larger sparrow traps I set up to protect the arriving Barn and Cliff Swallows.

I kept playing the Dawn Song. I kept trapping sparrows. I kept watching and listening for Purple Martins. I kept track of reported Wisconsin arrivals. That's what I did.

Chuck just kept sending encouragement with his words, his experiences, and his knowledge. That's what he did.

I learned that a mentor cannot make the birds arrive. I learned that a good housing system cannot make the birds arrive. I learned I must trust a Power far greater than me and that only the right thing will occur.

I saw the first adult male on my new house April 25th. Then a female arrived. They explored both openings and gourds for two days, then they both vanished. I thought a Cooper's Hawk had gotten them. Troyer staff suggested that sometimes the female declines the site, so the pair moves on. But what a joy it was for me to post on PMCA a Wisconsin arrival at my location!

Chuck advised, *Just keep playing the CD. Late May, early June are prime times for the SY to arrive and look for housing.* That's what Chuck did.

After two to three weeks of nothing, I began to notice birds around the house, in the air, but inconsistent appearances. I did not know how to identify ages, I knew there was one very dark bird that kept reappearing. Then, I noticed birds spending time going in and out of the holes I had opened up.

Meanwhile, the colony at Chuck's house was thriving and growing: 83 eggs by May 24th. He taught me by texting and describing the activity, but Chuck was beginning to have more physical complications, and our planned get-togethers were cancelled, but we chatted by phone and text.

On June 20th, I texted Chuck my update of 7 nesting pairs, 30 eggs, and the number of eggs in each nesting box. Via phone, we celebrated the blessing of martins choosing my new housing system. I could tell that he was delighted with his success, delighted for me, for the martins, for all-for the bigger picture. What's important here is that there is *no* rivalry, *no* jealousy, *no* competition, *no* boasting for his guidance, just pure delight. Chuck modeled the true spirit of mentorship.

Chuck guided me, via text, how to prepare eggshells and scrambled eggs, to check the nests, change the bedding material, and record the status of each nest. That's what he did, though his stamina and health were deteriorating.

Chuck never came to my home again.

But he put me in touch with other helpful people including Les Rhines, Dick Nikolai, and Mark & Sue Martin. I joined the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association. It was Dick Nikolai who stepped into the mentor role in mid-July with lengthy phone calls. He walked me through my fears and false beliefs about handling young birds, taking them out to change bedding, and literally lowering the house every day. I

(continued next page)

learned the science and reasoning why good landlords intervene and take action. And I'm so glad I had that support, walking me through the steps. I believe that more young birds survived to fledging as a result of those interventions I was guided to do. I learned so much that month and did things I would have never known to do.

By this time, Chuck was in a facility in the Fox Valley area and was not receiving phone calls. I was continuing my own treatments and practicing covid precautions. But, when I went into late summer with confidence of being a first-year landlord and so enjoyed the fledging and eventual departure of the beautiful Purple Martins that had chosen to reside in my PM houses.

So, let's close this article with a few takeaways about Purple Martin mentorship, from my perspective.

Every new PM landlord needs a mentor, though they may not know it.

Every PM landlord has valuable experiences and knowledge to share as a mentor, though they may not know it.

Though every new or potential new PM landlord needs a mentor, they may not be willing to accept guidance.

Having Chuck as my mentor has been better than reading an article, better than reading a book or pamphlet, better than watching a video, better than attending a zoom class or lecture, better that going it alone for sure!

After Chuck entered the facility, I was lovingly given time from members of WPMA. Via phone consults, I

relied on Dick, who stepped in and guided me with the final weeks with my new martin family members. This turned out to be crucial! I had to face my fears: lowering the house daily, opening, checking, cleaning the nest boxes, handling young, removing the dead young (3), recording dates, noting the fledging of each box, and more.

Like many experienced landlords, I felt the sweet sorrow of the departure of our Wisconsin Purple Martins in early fall. Then I go to lovingly clean my (now used) housing system, lower the house for winter and close the openings, already glad for the April 2022 arrival.

And now, I get to pass along that which has been so generously given to me, benefiting in equal measure to the giving and more martins will be served as well.

It is so clear to me that focusing only on my colony misses the opportunity to serve our whole family of martins. So, I'm registered with PMCA as a mentor; I've written an article to inspire those who may read it, and I'm ready to serve the Purple Martins returning to Wisconsin, 2022 by helping want-to-be landlords and other mentors, helping at local WPMA events, and adding house #2 in June after members of last year's family returns.

I'm looking forward to being of useful and loving service.

If you are interested in becoming a PM mentor, contact any board member for more information. -Ed.

Thank you...

We received a donation of \$190 from Lia Anna Andre of Illinois with her membership. *A big thank you to Lia for her generosity and support!*

Purple Martin Chatter is a publication of the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association, an organization dedicated to preserving and restoring the Purple Martin population in Wisconsin. It is published four times annually.

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PM tips or stories? We welcome member's submissions! Please limit submissions to 500 words or less; photos must be your own for publication. Direct articles in Word format and jpeg photographs to editor.

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46th Annual

Artistry in Wood

Mid-Wisconsin Chippers will be having a woodcarving show on May 1st at the Oshkosh Convention Center, 2 North Main Street, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. See bird and fish carvings and more! Board Member Larry Lienau will be among those artisans showing their work.

If I were to choose, I'd rather have birds than airplanes.

-Charles Lindbergh

Our partners in bird conservation:

