

Purple Martin
CHATTER

Fall 2023

Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin

Volume 11 Issue 4

Migration

Follow the journey to Brazil

Fall is Upon Us
President's Message

YEAR-END REPORTS

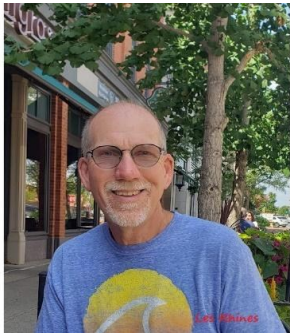
Its an Obsession

10 SPECIAL MARTINS
and many thanks



Purple Martins Heading to Roost site

Cover by Dick Nikolai



A Message from the President

Les Rhines

Fall is Upon Us!

Welcome back to the fall issue of the *Purple Martin Chatter*. By this time of year all your housing should be cleaned and prepared for winter; if you have been procrastinating you still have time and mother nature will provide many nice days for you to get the job done. At my home colony I try to have this completed by the end of September, but due to other things going on in my life this fall I'm just getting to it as I write this column. The gourds have been cleaned and packed for some time now, but the wood housing will be coming off the poles and packed away in the garage after making a brief stop in my basement shop for some TLC. At the public colony that I manage I leave the T14 house on the pole, but I wrap it with a tarp, usually around the middle of October, I try to time this before it gets too cold and wet. I want to have this done before we get into any extended rainy events. I also try to remind landlords that now is a great time to make corrections or changes to your setups. Maybe you wanted to add more housing for next year or change the pole from a traditional break style to a pulley and winch, now is the time to do it. Do the outdoor projects now, and winter is the time to do the painting and wood maintenance.

As you turn the page on the 2023 martin season, please consider sending your 2023 nest reports to Dick Nikolai that he can add it to his database. Through Dick's work we have a better understanding of how our Purple Martins are fairing in the state of Wisconsin. For those that have already done so, thank you. I know that many Wisconsin landlords send their nest reports to the PMCA and that is great, and we should do this, but also sending it to Dick helps us see what's happening in our own state whereas the PMCA can tell us what's happening in our region. Dick's contact information is available at the end of this newsletter.

On November 11, 2023, Dick Nikolai will be making a presentation at the Arboretum in Madison WI. The topic of the presentation will be *Purple Martin Surveys*. The WPMA will again participate in the Garden and Landscape Expo in Madison, the dates are February 9-11, 2024. The WPMA booth will again be next door to our birding friends, The Bluebird Restoration of Wisconsin or BRAW. Dick Nikolai will be providing a talk during the show, but at the time of this writing the date and time for Dick's talk has not yet been determined. If you would like to help us at the Garden show, please let one of our board members know, your help at the booth would be greatly appreciated. Our 2024 MartinFest is also in the planning stages, but this much I can share. The date is June 29, 2024, and the location will be in the St. Cloud area. Chuck and Annette Bartus have agreed to allow us access to their private colony for the day. The Bartus' have been active landlords for the past 12 years and feature a variety of housing types including wood housing and a mixture of plastic and natural gourds. In 2023 they fledged 157 young from 41 pairs. Thank you, Chuck and Annette, we

look forward to seeing you on the 29th of June for MartinFest. We will provide more information about MartinFest in future announcements, but for now keep June 29, 2024, open.

In recent issues of this newsletter, we have been asking you the readers to share your story of how you came to be a martin landlord, so in this issue I thought I would share my own story. You see, over the years I have been asked many times, what was it that got you involved with Purple Martins, well the credit for this obsession of mine goes to my dad, more about that later in the newsletter.

Memberships. As a reminder, WPMA memberships will expire December 31, 2023. All current members will continue to receive the *Purple Martin Chatter* newsletter in an email form. Beginning in January 2024, we will post all four issues of the 2023 newsletter to our webpage along with previous years newsletters. Our webpage can be found at <http://www.wisconsinpurplemartins.org/>. Please consider becoming a member, memberships are \$10.00 annually and run from January 1 through December 31, please contact Deb Zimmermann-Treasurer if you would like to become a member. Deb's contact information is provided at the end of the newsletter.

Newsletters published in 2024 will only be available to active or current members, please note that this is the only change in services that we have made, we will continue to offer: public meetings via Zoom, annual MartinFest event, statewide mentor program, free site evaluations, and managed public colonies. At this year's MartinFest we signed up 8 new members. Please consider a WPMA membership for 2024.

New President. I have agreed to remain president for another year, while we continue a search for an individual to lead our organization forward. Gail Bolden has agreed to add another hat to her collection, as she has agreed to become the acting secretary as we continue to search for an individual to fill that three-year term. If you are interested in serving as either president or secretary, please contact our treasurer, Deb Zimmermann, you can find her contact information further in this newsletter. Thank you for your consideration.

Tell us your story. We would like to hear from you, our readers, please share your stories with us, just submit your stories to our editor Gail Bolden. Please include photos.

Finally, there are so many people to thank for keeping this organization going, our board, our mentors, our members, our corporate sponsors, the friends of the WPMA that manage the public colonies, the list just goes on and on. Without the hard work and cooperation of all these individuals the WPMA would simply not exist. Always know that your cooperation is very much welcomed and appreciated.

A Word from the V.P.

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

Well another season is in the books! Although I had full occupancy, I didn't have as many hatchlings as I should have. The season started in early April for me and with about 2 weeks of supplemental feeding my martins were well on the way. As June approached, we experienced unusually dry and hot weather.

This happened just as egg laying began, and it made a difference big time. Most nests had 5-6 eggs per nest but not all hatched, so my result was down a good 20 %. The good news was those that did hatch did really well. I only lost 4 young which is really great. As the season wound down, I had a re-nest and I had martins until September 3rd. So now fall is here and it's time to relax and enjoy the rest of the final warm days. It won't be long until the weather changes.



Photo Gail Bolden

Fall Migration Continues

Purple Martins have been long gone, but migration continues for those birds passing through Wisconsin and for those overwintering here. While Yellow-rumped warbler numbers are slowing, winter residents, Dark-eyed Juncos and White-crowned sparrows have arrived in my area, seemingly overnight. Maybe you have noticed an influx of bird activity at your feeders or see fluttering of little birds visiting your yards. You can track migration via dashboard.birdcast.info. At this writing, an estimated 309,600 birds crossed my area overnight with a peak migration estimation of 1,000,500 birds on 4 October. Migration is a fascinating part of nature, and it's a great bird activity that helps pass the time while awaiting our martins' return.

Wisconsin Year End Reports for 2023 Purple Martin Nesting

Dick Nikolai



Purple Martin summary for 2022 had 43 separate colony areas reported in 18 counties. In the northwest and in the southwest no reports were sent in 2022 with few reports within the middle counties of Wisconsin. Hopefully one of you who reads this will come forward to begin filling in entries and becoming a part of the statewide reporting system.

Let us improve upon that report for 2023 and reach the goal of at least 50 colonies reported. After all, during Wisconsin Bird Atlas 2 more than 150 colonies were reported from 2015 to 2019. Having traveled throughout Wisconsin in recent times my suspicion tells me we have at least 300 operating colonies. Your information is indeed important.

Information needed is total number of pairs, total number of eggs, total number of young hatched and total number of young fledged. Please send in your report by **November 1, 2023** for it is a task that takes lots of my time to collate and make sense of everyone's submittals. If you have when your Purple Martins arrived and when they left that is also important to note in your report. Never feel embarrassed of how few martins were raised for we are all in this together to make Wisconsin proud of what we all have accomplished. Many thanks.

-Send reports to *prairiechicken.net*

My Obsession with Purple Martins

Les Rhines

Over the years I've heard many stories from people about their experiences with Purple Martins. I've talked with people that have been landlords for decades, others that are just beginning their journey with them and many that have memories of them from their childhoods. For me it was in my childhood that my relationship with Purple Martins began. I grew up in Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin. We had a house in the city with a large lot, or at least the lot seemed large in the eyes of a 7-year-old. In the fifties where I grew up there were many people that had Purple Martin colonies, my uncle Clarence and my dad each had a single two-story martin house mounted on a fixed or stationary pole with large 2" round entrances on their properties. You understand that at that time starlings were not yet an issue, sparrows however were already a problem and dad had a trap set up on the wash line pole ready and waiting for them.

In that summer when I was seven, I remember being outside playing on the swing set with my siblings and the neighborhood kids and being scolded by this black bird from my dad's bird house. At the time it was not pleasant, I could not understand why this bird had it in for me, I would not put it in the same category as Alfred Hitchcock's movie *The Birds*, but it forced me to go play elsewhere. Now, every time I have one of my martins dive bomb me at my home colony, I'm reminded of that childhood experience.

Fast forward two decades, and my wife Mary and I are living in our first house in Sheboygan near the shore of Lake Michigan. Mary sees an ad in the local paper for a used martin house and buys it for me as a birthday present. The house was made to the old standard, small compartments, multiple levels, and looked like a church. It somewhat resembles a T14, check out the photo that I've included. The gentleman that sold it to her gave this advice, *where you live, just have the house up by April 15th, and you will get martins*. He was right, and that was the easiest colony that I ever started. Of course, I knew nothing about martins, only that they were nice to look at. Life was pretty busy back then and I had other things occupying my time. We moved on from that place to Sheboygan Falls and took the house with us, to make matters worse, we moved just as the martins were returning in the spring and I had to watch them land on the house while it was in the horizontal position. They would fly around and land for some time before they gave up and moved on. As you can tell, I clearly did not have a clue. The house eventually ended



Poorly sited PM house

-Photo Les Rhines

up at my in-law's home in Howards Grove, and as you can tell from the photo it was not placed in the correct location to attract martins, still clueless.

In the late 1990's Mary and I bought a large rural property outside of Cleveland, Wisconsin and on the property was an old, abandoned Trio house. We learned from the neighbors that the original owners maintained a martin colony for many years. It was apparent that the house had been neglected by martins but not sparrows, and it was at that time that I decided to get martins to nest once again, I mean, how hard could it be, I did it once and it was easy. Well, it was also at that time that I learned about the PMCA and what a wealth of information they provided. I realized that the Trio was not going to cut it and I went about making a T14 and attracted the first sub adult pair in that house after six years of trying; there were birds in the area, in fact there

was a thriving colony only one mile away, and during those six years we would get many visitors, but it wasn't until year six that we got a pair to stick, that was in 2001. It was the same year that Mary and I traveled to Finger, Tennessee. Victor Stoll hosted the national Purple Martin festival, and that year Victor's colony had more than 660 pairs of martins, it was quite a sight, and a learning experience. The sky was black each evening as the birds returned to their houses. Mary was the luck winner of one of the raffles, the prize being an eight compartment Northstar house, when we returned home the house was quickly added to the T14 setup and was accepted by the martins in a few years it was filled, and a nester was built, before long everything was full. A side story to those years of building that colony is where my musthavemartins email address came from, I was obsessed, and many times I found myself saying *must have martins* to family and friends, they thought maybe I was a little crazy, but they understood, I think. You get it, don't you?

Continuing to move forward in time, we now live outside of Plymouth Wisconsin, and we are in the process of building colony number three. We attracted our first subadult pair in 2014, and hosted yet another subadult pair in 2015, then we experienced a drought until again attracting an adult pair in 2020. From that point on, we have been fortunate and have experienced steady growth to where we hosted 12 pairs in the 2023 season. The thing that I did not expect is that seventy-five percent of the pairs chose a gourd over the wood housing in 2023. We have a 16-capacity gourd rack and each of our two wood houses have 4 gourds hanging under them. Most birds chose either a Troyer vertical, or a Super gourd, an excluder gourd, or a chirpy nest. The wood housing of choice is an 8-compartment Northstar. Like everyone, we are hoping for more birds in 2024.

So, that's my story, I'm a third-generation birder. My grandmother raised canaries to sell in her basement, that was a popular thing in the fifties and sixties. My dad, in addition to having a martin colony, was also interested in raising pigeons for show purposes. Dad's specialty was the English Trumpeter. Ultimately, martin populations declined, and dad's focus continued with the pigeons. I also remember as a kid attending the pigeon competition with my dad at the local auditorium, I wonder if that's still a thing. I might have to Google it. I've included a picture of an English Trumpeter along with some of the ribbons that dad won. I'm beginning to understand where I got this obsession from.

Well, now, I hope you can better understand where I got it from. The thing is, I know that I'm not alone. *What's your story?*



-English Trumpeter



Pigeon Club ribbons

-Photos Les Rhines

Ten Important Purple Martins and Many Thanks

Dick Nikolai

As I have said many times when the Purple Martin season is over how grateful I was to work through it and how peaceful it is to be completed for 2023 and as equal as important for the other past years. Even though I treasure this species, their time with us is stressful for we put so much of our efforts for their success that it zaps the energy in both the physical and mental being of one. There is always something to learn and glean from Purple Martins and the ignorance sometimes disappoints one along the way. It is not that I am stupid but a feeling I always do not know enough. When they are in trouble one feels hopeless. Every year has these ups and downs and it does not get any easier if you care for this species or any species along the way. What matters is that we put forth our best effort regardless and work through those hours, days, months and sometimes those seconds to ensure that this species is not lost forever as in the case of billions of passenger pigeons taken for granted only to have the last one die in a zoo.

In Wisconsin, we have experienced a great decline of Purple Martins in my lifetime. So, my plea went out this past late winter to early spring to ask for money from many of you to assist in contributing to science of finding more about our Wisconsin Purple Martins. Goal was to acquire ten GPS Geolocators which had in the past cost well over \$5000 or more than \$500 per transmitter. Because of many people's contributions we were able to buy these units through the Purple Martin Conservation Association and get these on time for this past 2023 nesting season. People contributing are listed below. They are not listed in any order but I want to make sure all who I know contributed are listed:

Beverly Leonard, Jill Rodriguez, Carol Zimmermann, Sarah McConnell each contributing \$50. They are a great Bird City group in the Lake Geneva area providing educational events for children and adults. Their provision along with others of monitoring for Purple Martins adds to the great treasure for the tourist community. They have often provided memories of their many smiles and dedication for birds in their community included are chimney swifts.

Badgerland Bird Alliance formerly the Madison Audubon Society was kind enough to set up an account for Purple Martins through donations I solicited or others contributed for work on this species. Their donation entailed \$666 from several donating individuals. Their members often assist me banding young Purple Martins in Green Lake, Marquette, and Columbia counties. It is a valued exchange of companionship for several days

placing bracelets on well over 500 young with 2023 having the first recapture at one of the sites and the first time having four adults being captured.

Winnebago Audubon Society is another group of concerned citizens that contributed \$500. A few of them have also contributed in several ways in the past by assisting me in finding a Purple Martin roost site in Winnebago county that seemed like a forever project trying to find.

Nancy & Pete Hutchinson, Brad Frankel, Lia Anna Andre, and Brad Collar each contributed \$100 for transmitters. Each of these individuals have in special ways been in contact with me over time sharing stories and many other things relating to Purple Martins and other birds.

Janet Martell, Carol Parsons, and Joan Urry also provided smaller donations that added greatly to the overall purchase.

Wisconsin Purple Martin Association also contributed monies to assist to make sure their efforts contributed to at least one transmitter when combined to donations directly to them.

Bob Ring, a faithful companion for banding contributed \$1545 for the effort. Without his effort and time many Purple Martins would not be carrying bands. Bob provided considerable effort with me to chose candidates for placing transmitters from June 22 to July 10 to accomplish our effort for placement of them. This is not an easy task for these martins need to be faithful parents. They also need to be successful of bringing off their broods through considerable effort through the elements of time along with their environment.

Ben Mueller contributed a portion of his day on July 5 to assist me on placement of one of the transmitters. He is a volunteer for the Appleton Parks monitoring their Purple Martin housing. We worked through the progression of effort and the martin chosen provided additional viewing for him along the way.

My contribution was time and remaining money both for the transmitters and for the color bands each were fitted on those ten Purple Martins. Hopefully the results of 2023 efforts will come to fruition in 2024 for these same Purple Martins will need to be survivors of two migrations and everything in between. If you did not realize they need to recaptured again so we can remove the information gathered so we can tell their story. Survival is our key but without your effort in 2023

this would not be possible for 2024. Transmitters were placed from late June to July 22, 2023. The many chosen Purple Martins came down to the ten shown below. Make your choice for your adoption if you want or chose to donate in 2024. *Many thanks go out to all who have contributed.*



Figure 1(left) is an ASY-M from compartment G-29 (WI 995) with a Geolocator placed 7-2-23.



Figure 2 is an SY-M from compartment HCN-01 (WI 996) with a Geolocator placed 7-4-23.

Figure 3 (left) is an ASY-M from compartment HCE-01 (WI 997) with a Geolocator placed 7-5-23.



Figure 4 (right) is an SY-M from compartment G-25 (WI 998) with a Geolocator placed 7-7-23.



Figure 6 is an ASY-F from compartment WG-03 (WI 500) with a Geolocator placed 7-8-23.

Figure 5 (left) is an ASY-M from compartment SP-11 (WI 999) with a Geolocator placed 7-7-23.



Figure 7 (left above) is an ASY-M from compartment B6-22 (WI 501) with a Geolocator placed 7-8-23.



Figure 8 is an SY-M from compartment HCN-02 (WI 502) with a Geolocator placed 7-9-23.



Figure 9 (left) is an SY-M from compartment R6-22 (WI 503) with a Geolocator placed 7-15-23.



Figure 10 (right) is an SY-M from compartment G-20 (WI 505) with a Geolocator placed 7-22-23.

-Photos courtesy Dick Nikolai

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Deb Zimmermann

We have \$1816.45 in checking and \$4223.29 in savings. The garden show entry fee has been paid. I hope everyone has their martin houses cleaned out and put away for the season. *Happy Fall everyone!*

Flying like a Purple Martin

Dick Nikolai

Have you ever wondered what it is like to migrate? Over 200 species of birds come to Wisconsin each spring and leave our state beginning in late summer. Short-distance travelers like bluebirds head to places in southern United States with many wintering in areas like Tennessee and Kentucky where food resources are abundant along with great habitat.

Long distance (Neotropical) migrants cover thousands of miles one way. They seek suitable habitat for maintaining weight with great food resources, protection from the elements which may include cover avoiding predators, stability of warmer weather, assistance of others of their own species (more eyes mean protection from predation), breeding when resources are at their optimum and of course harbors all the elements for their survival.

Needed fuel for migration is body fat which is lighter in weight and covers less space making it perfect for birds to place in key parts of their body. More energy is stored in fat than protein or carbohydrates making it the ideal addition for that strenuous travel by adding up to 50% more of their body weight. Species like Baltimore Orioles, Bobolinks, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and Purple Martins are those Neotropical Migrants going to South America. Purple Martins spend many months cruising from September to June amongst the Amazonian waterways.

Having flown around the continental United States numerous times along with extended airplane trips to Hawaii, Alaska, Ireland, Iceland, Panama, and Costa Rica can be fun but for birds it is a stressful adventure to find areas for procreation or to survive until the next season.

We all have dreams for fantastic reasons of adventures, curiosity or just rest. Like most people I have a million of them that never come to fruition like an adventure to Brazil. A lifetime of years has flown by since my original curiosity in college, when a suggestion of a coordinated trip to South America to see Purple Martins came about by the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA). As it turned out this first PMCA group adventure came on March 10, 2023 when my plane flew out of Appleton in a snow storm being de-iced several times going to Atlanta. That meant getting up at 2:00 AM for the eventual liftoff at 6:15 AM. From there it was off to Atlanta, then to Sao Paulo, Brazil and from there to Manaus, Brazil covering 32 hours of airports and flying over 7800 miles. Exhaustion, lack of sleep, achy muscles and joints were all going at once as one stepped out of the airport in Manaus when several smiling faces came to

greet me making everything disappear. Both were from the Amazonas Birdwatching Eco Tour (Luiz Fernando, & his wife Vanilce Souza and a day or so later with Eduardo Souza Czaban). See **Figure 1**. My first day on land in Manaus was comforted by these folks displaying great concern along with details of the hotel, meals and adventures following. Most of all a warm meal and a good night rest to recover from my stress over the past hours or miles traveled. Imagine the strain from those Purple Martins going the distance, finding food resources, spending nights not as accommodating, avoiding predators, in the elements of Mother Nature and over several weeks. Did not mention avoiding windows, vehicles, buildings, wind towers, cell towers, planes and other man-made obstacles creating hazards from their flight upwards of hundreds of feet instead of tens of thousands of feet upward for cruising on a plane.



Figure 1: Luiz Fernando (right), & his wife Vanilce Souza (middle) and a day or so later with Eduardo Souza Czaban (left) guided us through special places in the Amazon Basin.

Did know that Purple Martins are the largest of all swallows ranging from 7 to 8 inches in overall length with a wingspan of 15 inches. They are perfect for flying long distance just like an airplane cruising. They weigh approximately 2.5 ounces or around 60 grams when healthy. Martins fly roughly 35 MPH with about 250 to 450 miles of travel distance in migration. Their food or flying insect resources is done on the wing from 160 to 500 feet in elevation while I sit in comfort in an enclosure being handed food. My travel time was 244 MPH which was close to what migrating Purple Martins travel per day with their wings flapping many times over a trip of at least 22 days in length instead of 24+ hours.

Beginning on March 12, a land adventure was arranged to view Brazilian birds and its landscape traveling several hours north of Manaus. Luiz our guided provided a warm welcome for the day and four of us early birders, Julie Mattox, Kirk Darren (Darren), Penny Briscoe & myself in our adventure of sightseeing birds, landscape, geology, local Brazilian life, cuisine, biology, importance of life as he saw it, and of course, the politics along with human nature.

Several goals were outlaid for the day, which were trying to locate a rare bird (Cock-on-the-Rock) amongst the foot travels into the rain forest, walk to some waterfalls, discuss viewing Purple Martins in the days ahead, stay safe while having a fun recreational pursuit. Most of the day provided a misty humid endeavor but the highlights were spectacular views of caves, wildlife of all sorts (lots of species of bats), the rare Cock-on-the-Rock, and esthetic waterfalls.

As with most tours in my experience, they are greatly organized and structured. Certainly, this was the case with the basics. Luiz and the whole Amazonas Bird Watching Tour Group was far different, giving their naturally down to earth adventuresome guidance with many personal touches of the landscape we were hiking through, backgrounds of bird species knowing their habitats, calls and where to expect seeing them in abundance. They were patient with everyone regardless of age, disability, comfort, food preferences, travel problems and even the lodging knowing what people go through to seek comfort even when little can be found. Imagine the temperature of being in the 80's with very high humidities always making sure people were cognizant of the elements of grueling topography, slippery slopes, unwanted wildlife (dangerous spiders, ants, and mosquitoes), and many other obstacles. Always there were added personal touches from this group in creating the right ambience like the geology, restaurants with art or carvings on tables, great food or talk with the restaurant staffs relaying the libation of the day or the delicacy or taste of new foods for us ahead of time and working in what I call the comfort of outside and inside activities to bring smiles even when the sweat is rolling off your body or cruising through the pitfalls of an airport with personal sending you in circles and providing a cross of language barriers to allow their frustration takeover for you in a calm matter trying to make things flow even when they do not go right. Feeling special was great relief to know you would not be left alone in a far-off country holding the money bag or comforting one when stressed.

My week went fast wondering where my time went but knowing many things were seen, learned, new friendships made and knowing the southern landscape is in great hands. Those great hands are concerned people

everywhere trying to preserve their past, present, and future in landscapes, culture and creating businesses to promote what they have in a sustainable way.

Expectations and reality are two outcomes for any trip. For me my expectations were to resolve some issues



Figure 2: O Iracema Falls located west of the city Presidente Figueiredo, Amazonas, Brazil.



Figure 3: View of Weathered Sandstone near this waterfall. Notice how moist the soil is in the exposed area. This forms more of a slippery fine particle base where the erosion takes place flowing into the muddy vegetation on the left.

concerning Purple Martins' habitat along with looking at possible food resources they possibly might be feeding upon. Make contacts and feel how our martins going to be taken care of when they leave North America. Are they in great hands? Indeed, they are but as with everything we must be aware of the pitfalls encountered with human civilizations. Progress does not mean impacting the landscape but it does mean surviving with the landscape. It means adapting, change, and realizing we are not alone. Without birds or wildlife or our Purple



Figure 4: Our guide Luiz arranged at a local restaurant to eat lunch in the city of Presidente Figueiredo.



Figure 5: Amazonas, Brazil showing a bird species called "Cock-on-the-Rock".

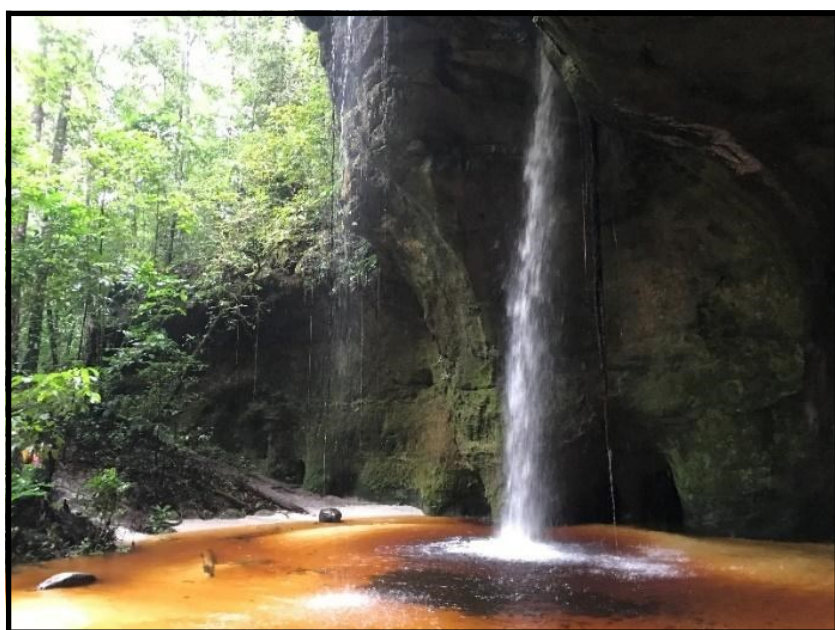


Figure 6: near the Caverna do Maroga Waterfall which is located to the east of the city.

Martins what would that mean to us? Further without other humans of various descent and backgrounds to meet and discover with them the values of their country we would never visually see the true identities of our Earth. Last, I want to let you know this is not a tell all and show all. My encounter is to skim the surface showing important values of that short duration while also letting you know Purple Martins exist because of all humans noticing their value or all our environmental surroundings. We have impacts and all of these affect our world in many ways. Indeed, a special trip and a reflection on life and a species we take to heart!

Those guides eased the problems encountered along the way, they provided a safety net of housing, friendly talk, ties to the hotels, restaurants, transportation on both land and water, found rare birds, introduced us to their country with explanations, introduced us to geology, landforms, local cuisine, sought out esthetic waterfalls, were well prepared for problems, talked about biology, provided the calmness needed for the trip but also on each day and throughout the day. Expectations and reality are two outcomes for any trip. For me my expectations were to resolve some issues concerning Purple Martins' habitat along with looking at possible food resources they possibly might be

feeding upon. Where we were was amongst millions of acres of dedicated park with a few acres chosen by Purple Martins to be a safe spot for their gathering before heading back to North America. These small acres of a roost allowed them safety for an extended period of rest to grow back their wing primaries while adding fat to their bodies. Food resources were not at this island area but to areas where abundance occurred around blended water resources where insect rich areas existed. How vulnerable this small island patch is really the important part. Its recognition as a tourist visitation and attraction creates an aura credited to its mass of tens of thousands of Purple Martins but most important shows how vulnerable a population can be impacted due to disease, human impacts or even weather phenomena like large tropical storms or hurricanes or even lightning bolts. This concentration of Purple Martins for about six months also provides a food resource through their feces for a great percentage of a certain species of fish. It changes the makeup of water and debris located around the island interacting totally with the environment it is located. Everything is related to each other in some way. Importance is how it is maintained with its resources and partners.

What a week of adventure from seeing Purple Martins many times coming or going from a large roost on an island equivalent to the court where I live in size. Adventures at night seeing snakes, camions, listening to the rustling of thatched roofs after being awoken at Hotel Anaconda (*see Figure 7*) noting that I did not show the inside of the cabin for a picture does not give its true ambience. It is cover from the elements and some critters) or the Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge Hotel (*see Figures 8 & 9*) knowing it is a species using the roofs for travel or species hunting from them to fulfill

their daily needs. Fantastic views from atop the tower in early morning of wildlife heading out for foraging or just interacting. The soft floor of the rain forest sinking beneath one's feet as we travel or the rising water levels stretching for miles across, slinking by boat through sunken forest by rising riverine corridors and watching tarantulas crawling the walls or amphibians scrambling their way to somewhere.

As boats gathered my last evening in Brazil watching this massive gathering of Purple Martins I watched as people took photos and videos, seemed impatient, boat attendants weaved in and out of the vulnerable cover with motors rumbling, lights from the Hotel Anaconda being turned on by running motors generating noise along with the dozen boats with people talking loudly taking it for granted. Never take things for granted for in a blink of an eye your Purple Martins could disappear or at least a portion of them either there in Brazil, along the way where there are bottlenecks in crossing over the gulf or ocean or at our own colonies, disease taking many of their lives or the roost that is contained within Wisconsin due to neglect boat travel straight through the roost area. My caution to all is to enjoy their stay with you. Never take for granted that they will return. Be amazed with their lives as you are checking their cavities. Most of all pause when they are getting ready to leave your colony sites and show your gratitude of silence and awe. Forget the camera, being most grateful for their stay with you as the chosen area in your yard or site of placement of housing. A tip of their wings I have seen to show their gratitude along with their melodious music to the solitude of the evening. That moment of connection wins the lottery solaces the soul. Nothing beats that feeling of contribution from both ends of earth from a Neotropical species.



When being in the moment I tune out the world around except for the feature I am concentrating on where the realization hits you the most in the heart, soul, and mind.

Figure 7: Approaching Hotel Anaconda near the Island Roost. Spent one evening here on March 13, 2023. Morning came early with a thunderous event of wind, rain, lots of thunder and a spectacular lightning event around 5:00 AM. We were at eye level for the storm within our cabins for nearly an hour. This delayed the morning travel to the roost along with a slight delay of Purple Martins leaving their roost. Remember we were in cabins and the Purple Martins were in the elements. One more tidbit is the water in 2022 rose to the level of the base of the cabins before receding.



Figure 8 & 9: View of the last cabin at the Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge Hotel from my cabin to the end of the development at the hotel into the Amazon where we were told not to go beyond at night. These cabins had all the caveats of modern convenience of three-star hotels back in the U.S. Nothing like getting spoiled in the jungle even with a greenhouse porch.



Figure 10 Looking 40 feet down from the Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge area towards riverbank of Negro River at Novo Airão City, 160 km far from Manaus. The Lodge is positioned in front of Anavilhanas Archipelago, the biggest fluvial archipelago of the world and a Brazilian National Park.



Figure 11 Maximum Flooding levels at Hotel of the Amazonian Rivers in this century from the pier of the Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge Hotel. Note the 2021 level was one step away from hitting the top of stairs and the 2022 level was a foot or so lower.



Figure 12: Google aerial view of Brazil shown with the city of Manaus. The Amazon Basin is the equivalent of the lower 48 states of the United States in size. It gives you more of how large this area is in its entirety. The area I traveled in Brazil was a postage stamp leaving me breathless of where my travels were. Brazil, officially the Federative Republic of Brazil, is the largest country in South America and in Latin America. Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country by area and the seventh most populous. Its capital is Brasília, and its most populous city is São Paulo which has over 20 million people residing.



Figure 13: A closer Google aerial view of the city of Manaus of over two million people on the lower right. Star indicates Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge Hotel along the Negro River and the many islands contained within it. The Amazon River is located just south of Manaus showing the brownish cloudy fresh waters. Great places for insects and of course areas for Purple Martins to forage during the day.



Figure 14: Google aerial view of the city of Novo Airao. The red circle indicates Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge Hotel along the Negro River which is adjoining the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization World Heritage site of the Central Amazon Conservation Complex composed of four protected areas (Jau National Park, Anavilhanas National Park, Amana Sustainable Development Reserves, and Mamairaua Sustainable Development Reserve) comprising of 5.6 million acres. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/998/>



Figure 15: Flooded Timber Near Roost Site.



Figure 16: This tree is an iconic point for guides to know where to view Purple Martins as they come to the roost in the evening or go out from the roost in the morning.



Figure 17: (top) Purple Martins leaving roost after a violent thunderstorm that lasted nearly an hour around 5:00 AM prior to their leaving the roost (6:20 AM, March 14, 2023). There was an intermittent streaming of Purple Martins for about 20 or so minutes due to the storm instead of a rapid departure.



Figure 18: (bottom) View of the Sky Showing Thousands (small dots) of Purple Martins Gathering Before Going to Roost (March 16, 2023, 6:22 PM). Time for the collective to arrive takes about 20 or more minutes with the final descending taking about five minutes. The sky appears to swirl amongst the clouds with sometimes an occasional peregrine figuring to have a snack before bed-time. This evening had no acquaintance as in the other two evenings that I witnessed making more memorable as I prepared to head homeward in another six hours for another long trip of 20 hours back to Appleton. Memories of this gathering eased the long trip home with a snowstorm arriving again during the night of travel dumping another foot of white swirling with the wind. Thankful for the warmth of my southern encounters of Purple Martins, the many new friends made and most of all knowing we are not alone on this endeavor of having family coming home to enjoy their warm friendly singing. It is great to share common feelings for this Neotropical migrant and others while working to ensure they stay as an important part of our lives.



Want to leave you with the final pictures. First two are showing pink dolphins (**Figure 19**) and an important species of fish near the roost. It has significance with Purple Martins and is called **Pirarucu (*Arapaima gigas*)**. *This is the world's largest scaled fish. The species can grow to more than 7 feet and weigh up to 300 pounds residing in shallow bays and calm waters. It has a small head compared to its whole body. Large scales cover its body with a copper-bronze coloration with a cream to whitish belly. It has a bright red accent along body. Pirarucu come to the surface every so often gulping air. Their diet consists of small fish, crustaceans, and amphibians. Most notably eating Purple Martin excretions during December to June composing 60% of its diet on the Rio Negro near the roost site (Figure 20 right side).*

During the stay in Brazil the sunsets were as fabulous as any place I have been visiting. Besides in the last quarterly I introduced the picture (**Figure 21 below**) and that is how I want you all to feel the warmth, calmness, joy of the scenery along with those expectations that a dozen people felt in this fantastic place for a long week or so.



Figure 21 & 22: Sunset on the Negro River or Rio Negro after watching Purple Martins and then viewing the night-life what the river offers.

The Return of the Wood Ducks



Photo Gail Bolden

Wood Ducks returned this season! Last year’s fledging of twelve contrasted with this year’s one fledge and one unviable egg. Hoping for better luck in 2024.

Mark Your Calendars

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 11 November | <i>Purple Martin Surveys</i> UW-Madison Arboretum 1207 Seminole Highway—Madison |
| 1 January 2024 | <i>Membership dues collected</i> |
| February 9-11 | <i>WI Garden and Landscape Expo</i> Exhibition Hall at the Alliant Energy Center |
| February 10 | <i>Dick’s Presentation at the Show</i> (details to follow) |

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