

Purple Martin CHATTER

Spring 2023

Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin

Volume 11 Issue 2

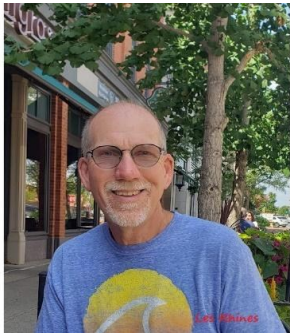
It's Purple Martin Time!

Calendar of Events

- April 23 Earth Day/Bird Celebration 12-4p Warner Park, 2930 N Sherman Ave-Madison
 Member Russ Hefty will be representing the WPMA.
- July 1 Annual MartinFest Celebration 12-4p, details inside
- February 9-11, 2024 Garden & Landscape Expo, Exhibition Hall at the Alliant Energy Center-Madison



Photo Brian Thays



A Message from the President

Les Rhines

They're Back!

On March 27th I saw a Facebook post that said a Purple Martin had been sighted in Montello, Wisconsin.

I thought, like many of you, that this is just way too early, especially when I had looked ahead at the weather forecast which called for many days of rain and cool temperatures. I decided to check out the PMCA Scout Arrival page to see if I could find out who the landlord was that reported the bird, and when I saw the name of the landlord, I knew that that first Wisconsin arrival for 2023 would be well taken care of.

You see, it's this time of year that we anticipate so much, we can't wait to see that black silhouette in the sky, or hear that first chew, chew, chew. For many of us, it's like being a kid again at Christmas. We just wish the martins would wait a bit longer until natural food sources were available for them. From that first sighting the adults, or "Homesteaders" as Adam Troyer likes to call them, continue to trickle in and begin heavy feeding, pairing up and selecting nesting compartments or cavities. It will be awhile yet before the SY's show up here, typically not until the first full week of May. I recommend that you monitor the PMCA's website to follow the SY migration northward.

My first sighting this year came on April 10, at 1:15 in the afternoon. I happened to be in the yard putting up my repeating starling trap when I heard that familiar song, and after several fly overs, the ASY male landed on a Troyer vertical gourd that was occupied by an ASY pair last year. My season had begun. Later in the day I reported the arrival on the PMCA Project Martin Watch, which helps other landlords know when birds are arriving in their area. Please consider reporting the date of the first SY to your colony to the PMCA as it helps those that are starting new colonies.

So, what else is going on in the martin world? If you have not heard of it, the WPMA is once again hosting a MartinFest, but this year, it's a bit different. This year we are having a Martin Walk on July 1, 2023. We have recruited four nice colonies within a short driving distance of each other near and around the Oostburg, Cedar Grove, and Sheboygan Falls area. The time is from 12:00 to 4:00 pm and event goers can start at any of the four colonies, with things wrapping up at the Host colony of Terry Mentink.

We will have our silent auction there with the featured item of an in-the-box Troyer T14 setup (*minimum bid \$500.00*). Check out the flyer for this event in this newsletter for more details

and check out our calendar of events in this issue as we will be out and about this year. Also, I just wanted to mention that Master Bird Bander and WPMA Board member Dick Nikolai is going to be banding the young nestlings at host Terry Mentink's colony beginning at 3:00. Dick makes this a hands-on event so bring your kids and grandkids to get involved in this activity.

The WPMA once again had a display booth at the Madison Garden and Landscape Expo this past February, Dick Nikolai also made a presentation during that weekend event to a crowd of over 90 people. We had the opportunity to talk with many people about martins. To further explain Gail and Rick Bolden have provided their perspective and their experiences from the show in their article.

In Greg Zimmermann's column he writes about the research that has shown how a small piece of land has become important to the migration of the PM, I think you will find it very interesting. Russ Hefty offers his perspective in an article entitled Citizen Science; in it he allows to catch a glimpse of what he's doing to promote Purple Martins.

Brain Thays along with his dad Jim offer some insights on hosting martins and both having the distinction of recording the first scout in the state.

I offer my own perspective on record keeping in an article entitled *How Much Information Do We Really Need*, highlighting the importance of keeping good records.

Recently, as my wife Mary and I were driving through Kentucky, we had the opportunity to witness a murmuration. Google defines murmuration as *flocking is the behavior exhibited when a group of birds, called a flock, are foraging or in flight*. Because we were driving on an interstate at 75 mph, we could not just pull over and watch or take pictures, but for the brief time we got to see it, it was amazing. But then my martin brain set in, and I started to think of all the martins that these birds (starlings) would attempt to displace. My thought was that I don't want to see a murmuration in Wisconsin, but maybe it's too late.

We have had the experience of seeing and feeding bluebirds





since mid-January, usually two males and one female. This photo was taken on March 3, 2023, just as this male was exiting the mealworm feeder. The original feeder that we started with is on the left of the tree trunk and the feeder in the center with the bluebird is a jar type that I quickly made when we realized that we could not keep up with their appetites. We did have one pair nest in our yard last summer, and now we are hopeful that we will see many more of the birds of blue this summer.

Memberships. As a reminder beginning in January 2023, we will electronically send out “current year” newsletters to our board members and only to our paid membership. All previous year’s newsletters will

still be available on our webpage. Please consider becoming a member; memberships are \$10.00 annually and run from January 1 through December 31, please contact Treasurer Deb Zimmermann if you would like to become a member. Deb’s contact information is provided at the end of the newsletter. Please note that this is the only change in services that we have made. We will continue to offer public meetings, annual MartinFest, Statewide Mentor Program, free site evaluations, and managed public colonies.

New President. We continue our search for our next President to lead the WPMA. We are also recruiting a secretary, if you are interested in serving as President or Secretary, please contact Treasurer, Deb Zimmermann, you can find her contact information further in this newsletter.

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.

In closing, I must thank all that have contributed to making this newsletter possible, and to all that have contributed in some way to helping the organization, it is because of your hard work and dedication that make the WPMA a success. Your hard work and effort are much appreciated. Thank you.

They’re Baaack!

MARTINFest₂₀₂₃

July 1, 2023

12:00 p to 4:00 p

The Wisconsin Purple Martin Association (WPMA) invites you to join us for our annual festival to celebrate the beloved Purple Martin. This year’s MartinFest 2023 will be a MartinWalk, featuring a self-guided tour of four private martin colonies, located within a short distance of each other. You will be able to visit one or all at your leisure, and the event will conclude at the host colony site where our popular silent auction will commence at 3:00 p.m. This year’s premiere item is a new in-the-box polywood Troyer T-14 house, aluminum pole, winch, cable pole top, perch rods, and pull-out nest trays (*retail \$1,562, minimum bid \$500*).

-Host colony-

Terry Mentink - W2977 Wilson Lima Rd, Oostburg, 53070

Dale Wingert - W2715 Miley Rd, Sheboygan Falls, 53085

Dean Heinen - W2924 Co Rd OO, Sheboygan Falls, 53085

Ron Lenz - W2879 Co Rd G, Cedar Grove 53013

A Word from the V.P.

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

Hello fellow Martineers! I have a little information on how our birds migrate each year to our back yards.

After spending the winter months in Brazil, Purple Martins will begin their long migration back to North America. There are several paths of migration they could take: some will follow Central America and Mexico up to the US, or island hop across the Caribbean, or follow Central America up, where they will cross the Gulf of Mexico over to Louisiana and Florida. This migration can take weeks or months. For Wisconsin’s birds, this seems like the most preferred route.

Just off a splinter of land sitting midstream in Brazil’s Rio Negro, There is an Island, known locally as *Ilha do Comaru*, its just 12 acres in size or slightly larger than Yankee Stadium. It attracts an outsized number of the Purple Martins. Host to a concentration of roughly 250,000 birds between February and April, and it’s one of the largest Purple Martin roosts ever discovered.

Its significance isn’t just its size, however, but also the pivotal role the roost may play in the bird’s long-distance migration. Comaru could be the staging ground, or Launchpad, that scientists suspect, for many of 9.3 million Purple Martins that funnel from South to North America. The arrival of Purple Martins each spring is eagerly anticipated across North America.

The birds’ breeding range extends from Canada to Mexico and consists primarily of the United States east of the Rockies. Apart from small populations on the West Coast, in the southern Rockies, and in Southwestern deserts, they nest exclusively in structures from hollowed-out gourds to miniature condo complexes that we humans erect to welcome them. The birds often return to the same yard, and even the same martin house each year. Although Purple Martins have been studied extensively in North America, scientific knowledge tapers off when they fly south. Just where they go, what routes they take, and what critical habitat lies along the way remain largely a mystery.

Purple Martins are an aerial insectivore they hunt insects on the wing and that places them among the fastest declining avian groups (insect populations have also dropped, due to causes such as pesticide use). But the birds’ risk is also compounded by their marathon journeys as they fly north and south every year.

So if you as a landlord ever wonder what our birds go through, this is a little reminder of what our birds do every year to come back to your housing year in and year out. I hope you enjoyed.

Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer Deb Zimmermann

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| Savings | \$2843.64 |
| Checking | \$2368.12 |

Geolocator donations \$1611.00

The information taken from the geolocators will tell us about migration, where they go, routes they take, which will be very helpful in our mission of Purple Martin conservation.

Thank you all so much for the donations, we really appreciate it!

Happy Spring!

The Accidental Citizen Science Project

WPMA Member Russ Hefty

It all started last July when I attended an estate auction in rural Juda, WI. I was wearing my customary PMCA baseball cap when I walked up to get my auction number for the day. The auctioneer noticed and commented that he maintained a purple martin colony at his farm in rural Browntown, WI.

This made me curious, so I checked out the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas when I returned home. His location was not documented, and there were no reports of Purple Martin colonies in all of Green County. A few days later I made a phone call to the auctioneer to learn more about his colony. Turns out he hosts 50-60 pairs every year. He then shared with me the existence of at least 3 additional colonies present in Green County. He gave a vague reference to some people having Purple Martins in Argyle, WI but did not share exact locations.

The challenge was on. I was determined to find those colonies in Argyle and figured with a population of only around 800 people it wouldn't be too hard to locate them. I drove around town looking but had no luck finding them until I stopped at the convenience store and asked the clerk about Purple Martins. They directed me to a location just two blocks away where I heard the birds before I saw them. Success! I rang the doorbell, and the owner (Carol Lancaster) came to the door, and I explained my interest in her Purple Martin colony. She invited me to sit on the patio near two twelve-unit gourd racks in the backyard. We chatted about the birds who were feeding a few late season nestlings. I learned that their purple martin colony started about 25 years ago in a most unusual fashion. They had tried to attract birds for several years with no luck but then fate intervened. There was an old gas station used as a repair shop located a couple of blocks away that had a Purple Martin house that was not actively managed. But, in spite of that, a single pair of Purple Martins was raising young in the house. Ownership of the property changed, and the new owner did not want the house. Carol's husband Louie talked them into letting him move the house with a pair

of nesting Purple Martins using it. First, he evicted all the House Sparrows, and then slowly moved the pole and house over several days to the Lancaster's yard. The purple martins tolerated this movement and successfully fledged young. I figure the nestlings were likely near fledgling age so with so much invested the adult martins didn't abandon the nest. The following year purple martins returned to their yard, and they've hosted them ever since. A quite remarkable way to start a new colony!

I again checked the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas and found no colonies of Purple Martins noted in Lafayette County (where Argyle is located). So, I decided to search on and found an additional 3 undocumented purple martin colonies hosted by Amish families. I will follow up this summer and document using ebird so this information will be available to the public.

I had caught the bug, so I decided to move west to search Grant County for Purple Martin colonies. This search was aided by a kindly Purple Martin supply vendor who provided me with the addresses of customers/potential customers who had received a catalog from them. So, one fall Saturday I ventured on a 14 ½ hour road trip through Southwestern Wisconsin. I located two new colony sites and met some very motivated wannabe purple martin landlords. I provided them encouragement in their pursuit and gave them a copy of the PMCA purple martin booklet.

Recently I became acquainted with a New Order Amish man from Iowa who shared information regarding a new Amish Community west of Monroe, WI. I will check in on those folks this spring and summer. I've already learned that one family has a colony started with 4 pairs noted in 2022.

It will be a summer of searching for Purple Martins in this part of Wisconsin hoping to ensure that they continue to be a part of the cultural and ecological landscape.

Do you have a group that would like to hear a presentation on Purple Martins?

WPMA Board Member/Master Bird Bander, Dick Nikolai can arrange to speak at High Cliff State Park for your group. Contact Dick for more information!

Wisconsin's Garden & Landscape Expo Board Member/Editor Gail Bolden

Admittedly, Wisconsin winters are cold, snowy, and long, and this winter was no exception. There were more gray days in the Fox Valley than the previous six winters we've lived in Wisconsin, and the lack of sun could not even coax my overwintering geraniums to flower. Not. One. Bloom.

While the winter is long and just when you think it will never end, along comes February and the annual *PBS Wisconsin's Garden & Landscape Expo*. My geraniums still weren't blooming, but spring has arrived in Madison February 10-12. My husband, Rick, and I were more than ready to get out to look at pretty flowers and talk Purple Martins with anyone remotely interested in listening.

The Wisconsin Purple Martin Association (WPMA) has been an exhibitor at the show for a couple of years, then COVID hit, so the show was cancelled for 2020-2022. When the doors opened at noon on Friday, it wasn't long before the crowd reached us in a frenzied fashion, all smiles with their coats draped over their arms, holding bags of their collected info on everything from *no mow lawns* to worm castings. The pace and fervor seemed more like a Black Friday crowd, but maybe people were just happy to be out of the cold, I'm not sure. I'm pretty sure though that their geraniums weren't blooming either, so the show seems to be a great mid-winter respite for those anticipating the first signs of spring, at least that's what 13,584 people were also thinking.

WPMA's booth was next to the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW), so attendees got their fix of two coveted birds that really need our help. It was interesting to see attendees stop by both booths, and I am certain BRAW was preaching as we were, that you must monitor and dispatch non-native birds. Our advice went even further though, in that we don't want *any* bird other than Purple Martins nesting in our colonies or you will never had a successful, healthy colony.

That said, Board Member, Dick Nikolai was able to sneak away on Friday afternoon to present his program, *Knowledge to Accomplish Success for Purple Martins*, which was well attended. We were busy answering questions while he was presenting, and it seemed to me that many followed him back



WPMA Booth @ Wisconsin's Garden & Landscape Expo



President Les Rhines, Members Russ Hefty and Rick Bolden await Garden Expo crowd.

to the booth, much like rockstar groupies, all looking for possible reasons why the Purple Martin eludes them.

(continued next page)

(*Garden Expo continued*) Success may come easy, not so easy, or *not at all* for some wannabe landlords, but we were there to present facts, hand out information, and show our group of props to help get our point across. The question we seemed to hear the most was, *How do I attract martins?* While the most heard statement was, *My grandpa had martins!* We spoke to hundreds of people and whatever the inquiry, we sprung into action, sharing advice that we have all heeded, leading to our own success as landlords.

It seems there are three types of visitors to the expo: *uninterested* (those that give you a side look as they parade past the booth, hoping you don't call out to them like a carnival worker), *interested* (they have a certain glimmer in their eye, either they want to share their martin stories or it's a glimmer of hope that you can share how to get them), and *undecided* (they just want to slither in and grab literature without speaking, and promptly slither back out). It wasn't long before the booth was surrounded by both interested and undecided parties, and we seemed to be walking sideways past each other to grab literature or a Super Gourd to show. The booth is impressive, a nice sized display board full of information and flanked by two sections of a T-14. As you know, there's nothing small about being a martin landlord. The houses, the beefy poles, and gourds the size of a three-month old. There wasn't much room for people to come in and see everything, and there is much to see. Two booths is the goal for next year; perhaps that would entice even the *uninterested* to see what we have to offer.

My first Wisconsin's Garden & Landscape Expo was incredibly positive, and it proved to be an important outreach opportunity for our organization. While I did not know what to expect, my thought was that at some point, I would be able break away to buy a hosta or two or six and glean pointers from BRAW on how to attract bluebirds to my own yard. It wasn't my husband's voice in my head saying, *Seriously, another hosta?* We simply didn't have much time to do much of anything but talk martins, and I'm OK with that, as this outreach is *that* important. Our hope is that you join us February 9-11, 2024 as a WPMA volunteer or guest because there's a pretty good chance your geraniums won't be blooming.

How Much Information Do I Really Need?

Les Rhines

So, that is the real question. How much information do we really need, and how much information do we really need to collect? This information that I'm referring to is what we refer to as Martin nest data. Many would argue that it's all about the individual landlord's perspective, but it's more than just recording the date of the first arrival on a calendar, *it's much more*. As a landlord it's important to have a clear picture of what's happening at your colony as the nesting season progresses. To do this the PMCA provides a form on their website www.purplemartin.org called the *Martinwatch Nest Data Sheet*, but we have provided one here that you can print. This form allows us to capture all of these important details as the season goes on. The form has specific entries for each compartment that is occupied by each pair of martins, including:

Housing Types, Cavity Number, & hole type
Male/Female Age
Date First Egg is Laid
Projected Hatch Date
Actual Hatch Date
Earliest Possible Fledge Date
Egg # Total
Hatch # Total
Fledge # Total

The form also provides space where the landlord can record the dates that the colony was observed, which we call *nest checks*, by entering one or more of the provided codes. The value of the data sheet, allows us the landlord to know the progression of each nest at our colony through observation is especially helpful when nestlings are close to fledging. Not only is this helpful during the current martin season, but by maintaining these records landlords can look back and gain historical perspective on their colony. Examples include, which compartments or gourds always fill first, egg clutch size, hatch rate, nest changes, and fledge rates to name a few.

The last thing about the form is, don't be afraid to share the information that you've gathered. First, send off a copy to the PMCA www.purplemartin.org for their ongoing research. Second, send a copy of your data to Dick Nikolai of the WPMA. Dick, with his researcher's background compiles the data he receives and produces a report that is representative of the health of Purple Martins in Wisconsin.

Something else to consider is that as a landlord, if you would like a Master Bird Bander to band the young at your colony, they will ask to see your records, so they know the ages of the nestlings and what they will encounter in each compartment.

Dick Nikolai, a retired DNR Biologist and WPMA Board Member, has for many years been interested in the nesting and wintering habits of Purple Martins as well as their migration patterns. Dick has been involved in studying these patterns in partnership with the PMCA by using the Geotracker technology. Dick is once again asking for donations to be used to purchase and install geolocators on Wisconsin Purple Martins in 2023, please review the following and consider making a contribution to this effort.—Les Rhines

GPS Geolocators Donation Request

Dick Nikolai

Please note this request comes quick because of the need to piggy back with the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) order that will be made soon to acquire GPS Geolocators. Their order goes in around February 10, 2023. Preliminary cost per transmitter is around \$500.00 per unit when done with others, saving costs, and acquiring them on time before the tagging and banding season. Indicated to them that it would take time to request from the various organizations from Wisconsin to see if anyone was interested in assisting the cost sharing of these to be placed on Purple Martins at the High Cliff State Park colony near Sherwood, Wisconsin. My goal indicated to the PMCA was to purchase and place ten GPS Geolocators in 2023 along with color banding those individual adults. Indicated that payment would be best later if the order can be made now by the PMCA and they would be able to make payment until the \$5000.00 for the geolocators can be raised. The PMCA did not indicate one way or another but did state another order could be made later. In the past, orders later have higher costs and availability comes during the nesting period generally around the end of June making it not as suitable for picking appropriate candidates to place the geolocators.

In the past we have placed eleven of these on past Purple Martins in two different years of 2019 and 2020. Two of these geolocators were retrieved in various ways. One by me in 2020 and the second reported by a citizen in Shelbyville, Tennessee. First retrieval of the GPS Geolocator encountered problems trying to download information by me in September 2020. This was sent to the PMCA in Erie, Pennsylvania where they also attempted and failed to retrieve information on the geolocator during the winter of 2020-21. This was further sent to the manufacture in Europe during early spring 2021 where they also encountered their first negative retrieval according to the PMCA.

Our second GPS Geolocator on a Purple Martin was found by a father and son combination for a trucking company south of Nashville in early September 2020 at Shelbyville. Retrieval of the unit was attempted by me through email and by telephone to the individuals during September and October 2020. Offers were made to pay for the geolocator's transportation and to replace it with one similar. No returns from the finders or even recognition when talking to the secretary for the company. Offered to even give their company recognition for cooperation. With that frustration had communications with the PMCA to see if they could retrieve the geolocator. Information was passed onto the PMCA along with the geolocator I had and waited. During

May 2022, information was relayed back to me that attempts were unsuccessful to gain any information on both

of the GPS Geolocators transmitters.

Gaining information on any study that uses banding, basically relies on citizens and manufacturers to be partners. While information was not gained specifically where these Purple Martins traveled across Wisconsin, the United States or even South America we did gain several important things. First the ASY-M (at least a two-year-old male) for the one I retrieved defied everything in coming back to a cavity that had an opening similar to a slot opening called Conley II. The antenna was broken off but whole otherwise. How the Purple Martin gained access is beyond my comprehension when so many other cavities nearby had round holes for access. Both this male and its mate brought off a brood to fledging in 2020. The other Purple Martin was a SY-M (a year-old male beginning its second year of life) that also was a member of a great duo that brought off their young to fledgling. This male made travel to Tennessee in the fall where no records before were known from a Purple Martin migrating during that season. Shelbyville is near Nashville where a large roost of hundreds of thousands of Purple Martins was downtown creating problems for the citizens in the area. Maybe that is the reason for not replying from the father or son from the trucking company. Either way some piece of scientific evidence was relayed.

Hope the information spurs some quick response from our citizens of Wisconsin to donate and fills in the response from those who have contributed for some of those geolocators. Please send contributions to the Madison Audubon and mention contributions are for Purple Martins. Your tax donations are most welcome to gain information relating to this declining species in Wisconsin.

Madison Audubon, Purple Martin fund, 211 S. Paterson St. #340, Madison, WI 53703

<https://madisonaudubon.org/>

For further information you can contact me at prairiechicken@att.net.

Checks can be mailed to the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association (WPMA), WPMA Treasurer, N6018 Hwy 32, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085

Make those checks out to the Madison Audubon (Purple Martin Fund) and we will mail those to the Madison Audubon for you.

<http://www.wisconsinpurplemartins.org/contact-information.html>

around Wisconsin

NEWS and NOTEWORTHY PLACES



Prescribed Burns

Planned burns occur in the fall and spring in different areas of the marsh, which encourages prairie grass vigor while eliminating invasive weeds. Smoke filled the air during this visit.



Horicon Marsh

32,000 acres

The northern two-thirds of the marsh (21,000 acres) is under US Fish & Wildlife Service jurisdiction while the southern one-third (11,000 acres) is owned by the State of Wisconsin and managed by the DNR. It is the largest cattail marsh in the United States and one of the largest freshwater marshes in the U.S. The marsh is recognized as a *Wetland of International Importance* and a globally and state *Important Bird Area*.



Purple Martin Colonies

There are two colonies onsite on the state site, each having two T-14s. Staff indicated that both colonies are thriving. On our visit, all cavities were closed yet; however, most bluebird houses and even the wood duck box trail had HOSP peeking out of the cavities or sitting on top as shown above. While the hope is they get a handle on the invasion, the reality is that without taking active measures, the colonies will dwindle. WPMA cannot express enough how important monitoring is.



Meet the Landlords *WPMA Mentors Jim and Brian Thays*

Jim reported the first PM sighting in Wisconsin for 2023

First Arrivals of Spring and Advice

March 27 my wife and I were having lunch in our three-season gazebo when we thought we heard a martin. I looked at my wife and said, *Sounded like a martin but not likely*, after all it was only 40° F outside. Just then an ASY (after second year of age) male Purple Martin began on circling the area where we have a T14 Martin House and a 12 gourd gourd rack. I had put fresh pine straw in the gourds and T14 the previous week but the gourds and T14 were at ground level with entrances blocked in anticipation of our usual April arrival of martin *scouts*.

I removed the entrance doors from the gourd rack gourds and hoisted the gourds to the top of the two-inch aluminum pole and returned to the gazebo. Almost immediately the martin circled lower and landed on a south-facing gourd signaling the start of the 2023 martin season for Wisconsin.

Even though I have had, in excess, of 20 seasons of martins with my now adult son Brian, hearing the first martin of the season never gets old. Our martins generally arrive around the first week in April or before. This early arrival can be problematic since the weather here in Central Wisconsin is not free from winter's grip and martins are often left with no food source. In anticipation of inclement weather, we always have houses ready (but not open) and a supply of crickets in the freezer.



Jim Thays colony-Harrisville, WI

Photo Jim Thays

Through the years our colony has grown to near capacity 26 apartments and fledgling in excess of one hundred chicks annually.

Looking forward to the upcoming 2023 season. —*Jim*



Brian Thays colony-Montello, WI

My name is Brian Thays and I have a 9-year-old colony that started due to the help of playing Daytime Chatter and Dawnsong CD's. My colony is located 2 miles north of Montello on the edge of open farmland. I currently have 4 martin poles that consist of a round gourd rack, an S&K barn with gourds underneath, a T14 with gourds, and an aluminum DH-12 castle. In 2022, I hosted 52 pairs of martins. The work and energy that goes into maintaining and monitoring my colony is worth the effort, as the sky is always filled with plenty of action and beautiful chatter.

This year, my season started with a complete surprise. On April 3rd, at 6:00 pm, I was out doing some yard work when I happened to look up to witness my first martin of the season. Even though that first sighting is routine, it never gets old. This year, it was an ASY female that made its first appearance. She circled about 60 feet up and then made that characteristic wing fold, diving down like a bullet. All of my housing was lowered at the time with all entrances plugged. Despite this, that female martin went from pole to pole, chirping loudly to let me know she was back. I waited a bit to watch her actions before opening any cavities. I wanted to see which system was of most interest to her. Ultimately, I decided to open 2 cavities from each of the 3 main systems just to give her some variety. After April 3rd, another week went by before I even saw another martin

martin. As of today (April 11th) I have two ASY males and one ASY female that come and go.

The main advice I can give to those who are new to the martin hobby is to keep vigilant on keeping housing plugged and ready for those first inspecting martins. The biggest mistake I had made when starting out was to unplug housing too early. This only adds to lots of work and anxiety trying to keep tree swallows, sparrows, starlings, and other non-target species out of the housing while you wait. Instead, keep your eyes to the sky and always be watching for visiting martins so that housing can be unplugged in a moment's notice. Most new housing shouldn't be unplugged until early to mid-May in unestablished sites around Wisconsin. When I lived in Westfield, my very first colony started as late as June 23rd. The potential nesting season is quite long, so never give up hope. In addition, I would always have a supply of crickets on

hand for early arrivals and for seasons with cool, rainy weather. I would train a young colony as soon as possible by flipping crickets during inclement weather. There is nothing more frustrating than to lose birds during cold weather when insects are scarce. Last, but not least, talk to other landlords to see what works for them. Visit other colonies. Get to know the landlord community and the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association. Landlords love to share their knowledge and experience. You make lots of new friends in the process and it helps fill the gap while you are waiting to attract that first pair of birds.

I am including a few pictures of my martin housing for your enjoyment. —Brian



We would like to highlight your colony; send us your story. Submission instructions are on the back page of this issue.

MartinWalk Bird Banding Bird banding will commence at 3:00 on 1 July at our annual MartinFest Celebration at Terry Mentink's colony. This is a family friendly event and offers a great opportunity to bring children, grandchildren or anyone interested in bird banding. Dick typically lets those from the crowd handle the birds. It's a worthwhile event to attend!



Tom conducting a nest check at his colony.

Remembering Tom Rank

Dick Nikolai

Over the course of the past few months my reflection of close friends or associates has been heightened by trips going long distance. Two of these being connections to Purple Martins. One a short jaunt to Nashville last November and the other to Brazil. Nashville in 2021 had hundreds of thousands Purple Martins coming into a roost into downtown during their late summer. They caused such a ruckus that some were euthanized, scare tactics were used and many people were setting up sides whether for or against. Guess that is life! In Nashville the citizens along with politicians arrived on a solution for 2022 which removed many of the trees to discourage Purple Martins roosting so as not to have poop on buildings, trees, and sidewalks. The Purple Martins lost.

Roosts or their concentrations of Purple Martins was one of my many discussions with Tom Rank either by phone or in person at his home or colony site. Purple Martins and Tom had always what I call a *symbiotic relationship*. *They seemed to feed off each other but most of all they created this family cohesion of each assisting each other in various ways, especially the Purple Martins. Tom's "Extended Family" was easily approached and often came close to strangers admiring them. Tom spent every day monitoring or creating a close association with those Purple Martins regardless of the poop, wet or dry weather or rain or snow and he worked through the negative aspects to make those families of Purple Martins bring the cheer to him and Candy. Tom's vibrance clearly was the motivation for both the Purple Martins and his human family. All of them fought through the adversity of their lives doing what they do best which is being part of this world and sharing their lives with others.*

Now the Brazilian trip is one long travel destination whether for Purple Martins or humans. All who travel that great distance have plenty of time to be thankful of arriving. My travel of 30+ hours going down and another 24+hours coming back is pittance to what Purple Martins do in their travels. Tom many times was amazed of their finding his martin housing out

of the blue and sharing their time communicating to him each and every day. Each martin truly was cared for and worried about like a parent for their children. Tom would be amazed that they are also capable of finding a small island in a huge land mass equivalent to all of the lower 48 states. Those Purple Martins almost appeared as if they were honoring Tom as they came down passing by my head while I was thinking of that friendship admiring the concentration of 130,000 passing before me going into cover.

What that reminiscing created was that passing away through death maybe a finality but it is also was an addition to our world or the connection being passed onward through other life or lives. We are all connected in various ways beyond our comprehension. Memories cannot be washed away but rather they are traveling around the world. Though our lives are short our association with "Family" whether it be Purple Martins or other humans is long lasting. Even in death we are contributing to our world regardless and that is something very much appreciated by all life. May all of us carry our passion well past as in Tom Rank's and share our "Family" too many to carry on life.



Picture of the Rio Negro River (Tributary to the Amazon River) in Brazil at sunset on March 14, 2023.

-Photos by Dick Nikolai

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