

Purple Martin CHATTER

Summer 2023

Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin

Volume 11 Issue 3





A Message from the President

Les Rhines

If you did not attend MartinFest 2023, you missed it. It was a time to renew old friendships, and to make new friends. We had beautiful weather; we had three really nice martin colonies for people to view and we had a bird banding demonstration that was as entertaining as it was educational. More on all of this as I go along. But for those that attended, thank you and I hope that you had a good time. This year's event was different, as we had three unique colonies included in our MartinWalk. At the main host colony of six-year landlord Terry Mentink we saw wood housing types of a 12 compartment Northstar along with 12 Buskas Bungalows, a Troyer 16 Gourd rack, and another Gourd rack holding 20 gourds. In 2022, Terry had 58 pairs and fledged 311 babies. At the second colony we met Dean Heinen, a second-year landlord. Dean's colony consists of a T14, a set of 12 Buskas Bungalows and a Gourd rack with 12 gourds. In Dean's first year as a landlord, he attracted three pairs. This year he attracted 5 pairs and in future years his colony will grow as the Oostburg, Sheboygan Falls area is a hub of private colonies. At the third colony of your walk, you met Dale Wingert. This is Dale's third year as a martin landlord, and he has seen rapid growth, hosting 11 pairs in just his second year. I do have to mention that Dale had been trying off and on for thirty years, but it was not until his mentor Greg Zimmermann became involved that Dale's fortunes changed. The housing at Dale's colony consists of a NorthStar, (2) T14's and some Gourds. To his credit Dale is already paying it forward and helping others establish colonies in the Sheboygan Falls area. Thank you, Terry, Dean and Dale, for allowing us to showcase your colonies in our MartinWalk.

Dick Nikolai, and Bob Ring spent much of their afternoon banding the birds at Terry's colony. The young were banded first, but then at 3:00 they captured adult birds from previously set traps and conducted a banding demonstration. Bob worked the traps while Dick provided the instruction to the audience about the wing and tail measurements that he records as well as the weight of each bird. Dick also provided his insight to the overall health of each bird that was banded. After an adult was banded Dick would hand off the bird to one of Terry's grandchildren to release the bird, which was quite a thrill for them.

Our Silent Auction was very successful, you will see the numbers in Debbie Zimmermann's Treasurer's report. Note: we rely solely on donations from individual and corporate donors for our auction items, and we are very thankful for their generosity. We are also thankful to all of those that bid on the items we had at the auction. Mostly everything sold.

What's next? Our board will be meeting soon to reflect on this year's event and begin planning for next year. Note: we have already received inquiries from other landlords offering their colonies as host sites for MartinF2024. We'll keep you posted as details become available.

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: <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. 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. At this year's MartinFest we signed up 8 new members, it's not too late to become a member of the WPMA.

New President. It's no secret that I am interested in stepping down from the role as President, we are actively searching for someone to lead the organization forward. We are also recruiting a secretary. 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 not exist. Always know that it is very much appreciated.

A Word from the V.P.

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

Hello Everyone; I hope your summer is going well. Our association just got done with our first ever MartinWalk. It was a great event, I helped out hosting Dale Wingert's colony. Dale is somewhat new to being a martin landlord and this is his best year yet. We hosted 3 sites and the turnout was spectacular. I want to thank all who helped make this event possible; without your help something like this couldn't be possible.

I have multiple nests that are now fledging and multiple nests that recently laid eggs, so my season is going to go into September. I hope all of you are having success this season; if not, there is always next year. Enjoy the rest of your summer!



Happy Birthday, Little One!

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Deb Zimmermann

Grand Total of \$2818 from MartinWalk!

We now have \$2133.72 in checking and \$4217.58 in savings.

Thanks to all who contributed, to all who worked at the 3 sites, and the attendees and buyers. Thanks to the hosts, Terry, Dean, and Dale and the banders, Bob and Dick. The feedback I got was that people could listen to Dick talk all day. Working together we all made this a very fun and successful event.

I really enjoyed meeting and reconnecting with past and new members. I think our 1st MartinWalk format was a great success.

MARTINFest



Dean's Colony





Dale's Colony



Terry's Colony





Have Trap, Will Travel



If you visited Dean's Colony during MartinFest, you may have noticed the elevated sparrow wire trap shown left. Les modified this trap (which he inherited from his father) to make it portable to move around the yard.

Feeding trays supply the beloved millet to entice them or, depending on the time of year, feathers may work as an attractant as well. When the trap is not in use, it is covered with a black garbage bag.

An angle bracket attaches to the wire trap on one side while the other end is secured by two clamps wrapped around the PVC pipe and secured with hex nuts. The piece of aluminum tape at the top keeps the rain out.



The PVC pipe then slips over a green fence T-post. He has notched out the PVC as you see here to keep the PVC pipe and trap from twirling around in the wind. *Genius, Les!*

Do you have a tip or trick that may help your fellow martin landlord? We'd love to hear from you! Submission instructions are in the back of this newsletter.

Why Concern Ourselves About the Nashville Roost in Wisconsin?

Dick Nikolai

Last December while visiting various sites across the United States our family chose to visit the Nashville area for a pre-Christmas junket. It was one of those curiosity areas that many people want to see involving music, Christmas decorations and themes, warmth during early winter, shopping, and sightseeing, especially in the Tennessee capital. The area was not chosen for Purple Martins when finishing the touches to go, but an article in late July on Nashville relayed information about changing how our favorite bird was deterred away from downtown. That thought was kept in my mind as we walked along one of Nashville's favorite streets which is Broadway or nearby where everything happens for country music within the city. Of course, I asked our Nashville guide who sort of quietly indicated where the heart of the problem occurred with Purple Martins, only a few blocks away where I could work in a short detour where we were going a few days later to see the Country Music Hall of Fame.

One of my most often things I say is *think like a Purple Martin when viewing locations for housing*. Much the same when I viewed the area. It was a no-brainer why they came to this roosting site, for it had all the parameters needed for their safety including openness of the landscape. Included as important, cover was tree structure perfect for perching that were planted near the Nashville Schermerhorn Symphony building. Even the buildings' structure had ledges perfect for grasping along with wetlands nearby like the Cumberland River (See Figure 1—Travel map and Figure 2 showing aerial view). Final item was a fountain of running water creating an attractive sound of a waterfall.

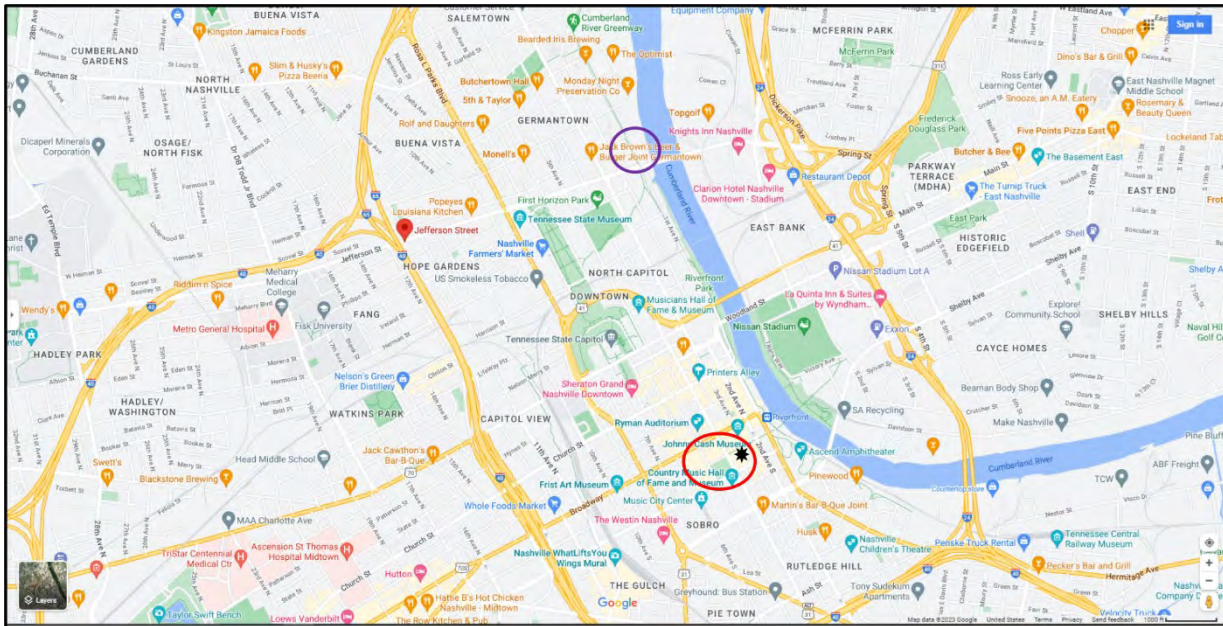


Figure 1
Road Map of Nashville
(* indicates
Schermerhorn Symphony
Building within red
circle). Purple circle is
where roost was in
August 2022.

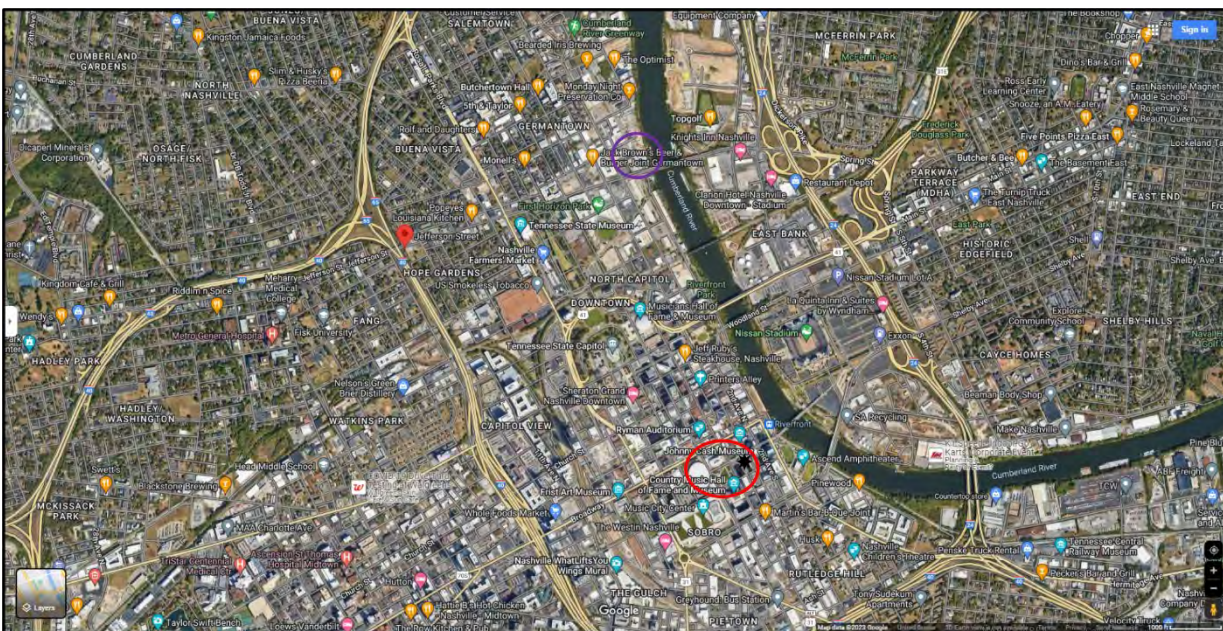


Figure 2
Aerial View of Nashville
(* indicates
Schermerhorn Symphony
Building within red
circle). Purple circle is
where roost was in
August 2022.

Of great importance since mid-August 2010 to the present, over a 100,000 Purple Martins were seen in heart of Nashville. These various sites included the area near the Country Music Hall of Fame were north and east of this location but always nearby the Cumberland River.

Want to indicate to all that some of our Wisconsin Purple Martins fly through this area, for in September 2020, one of our GPS Geolocator transmitters applied to Purple Martins at High Cliff State Park was found dead in nearby Shelbyville, Tennessee. Unfortunately, the data from the transmitter on this Second Year Male was not retrieved or even allowed from the finder to know all the places this martin traveled. We can only surmise that this martin probably roosted at least one of the nights in Nashville and went out foraging during the day to Shelbyville about 60 miles away.

In April 2019, the main National Football League (NFL) Draft stage was on First and Broadway in Nashville, as over 250,000 people were nearby at the Schermerhorn Symphony Building in what they called the Selection Square. In preparation for this event, removal of 21 cherry trees were removed with ten of them being replanted at another site. This also was controversial, for over 65,000 people signed a petition about them being removed. The NFL kindly provided money to plant 40 trees to soften the controversy. Schermerhorn Symphony Center was the host to Selection Square, which featured the team tables where representatives from each club made their draft selections. Parking lots and surrounding areas near Nissan Stadium were utilized to handle the large crowds.

In 2020, as we were in the prime of the pandemic, all those trees near the Schermerhorn Symphony building were standing on several sides creating perfect roosting opportunities for this temporary guest. Few people were out in great numbers, especially to any concerts, plays or even football games. Remember the masks and the distance we were to be from each other! Solitude, quietness, lights at night, open venue-perfect habitat and few people created the perfect storm to launch a large roost since across the street had a huge openness added to the landscape from the NFL presence (See **Figure 3**: August 31, 2020).

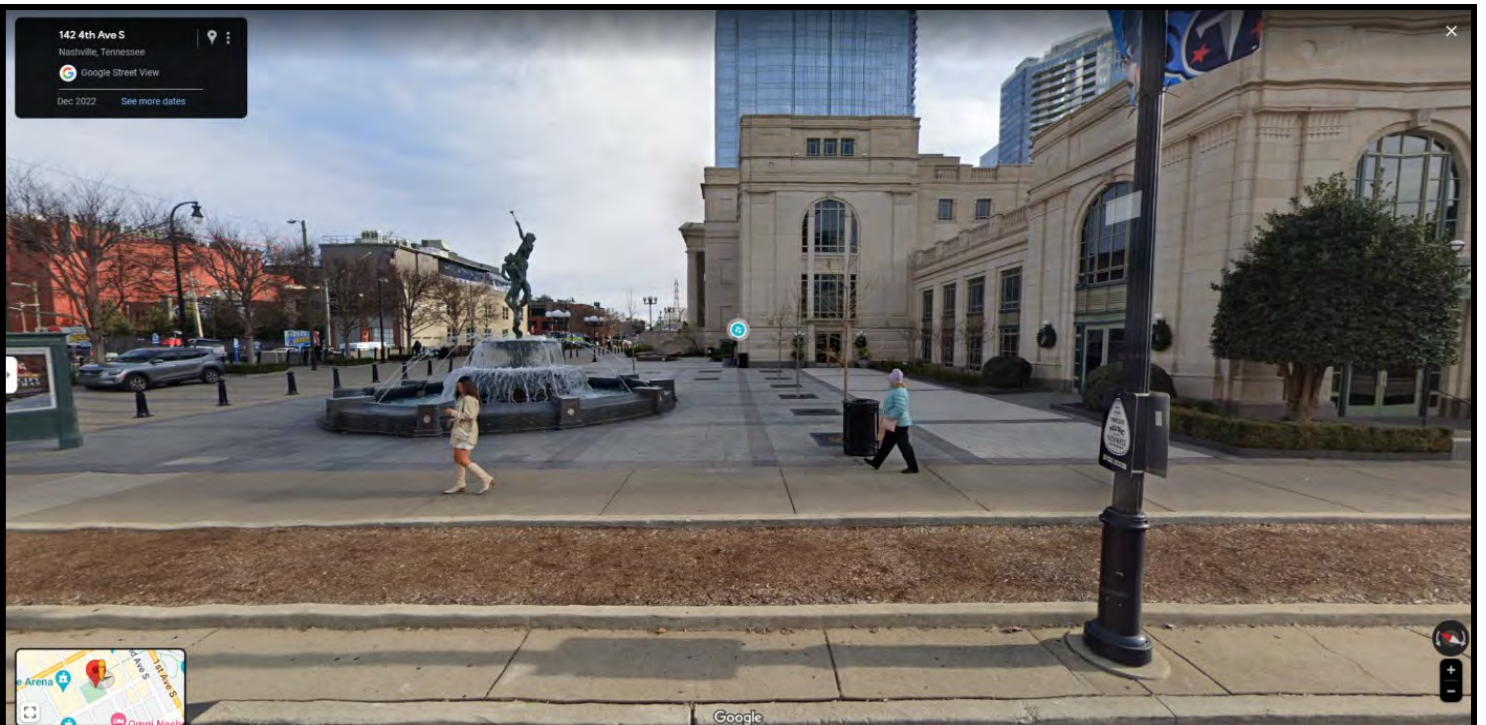
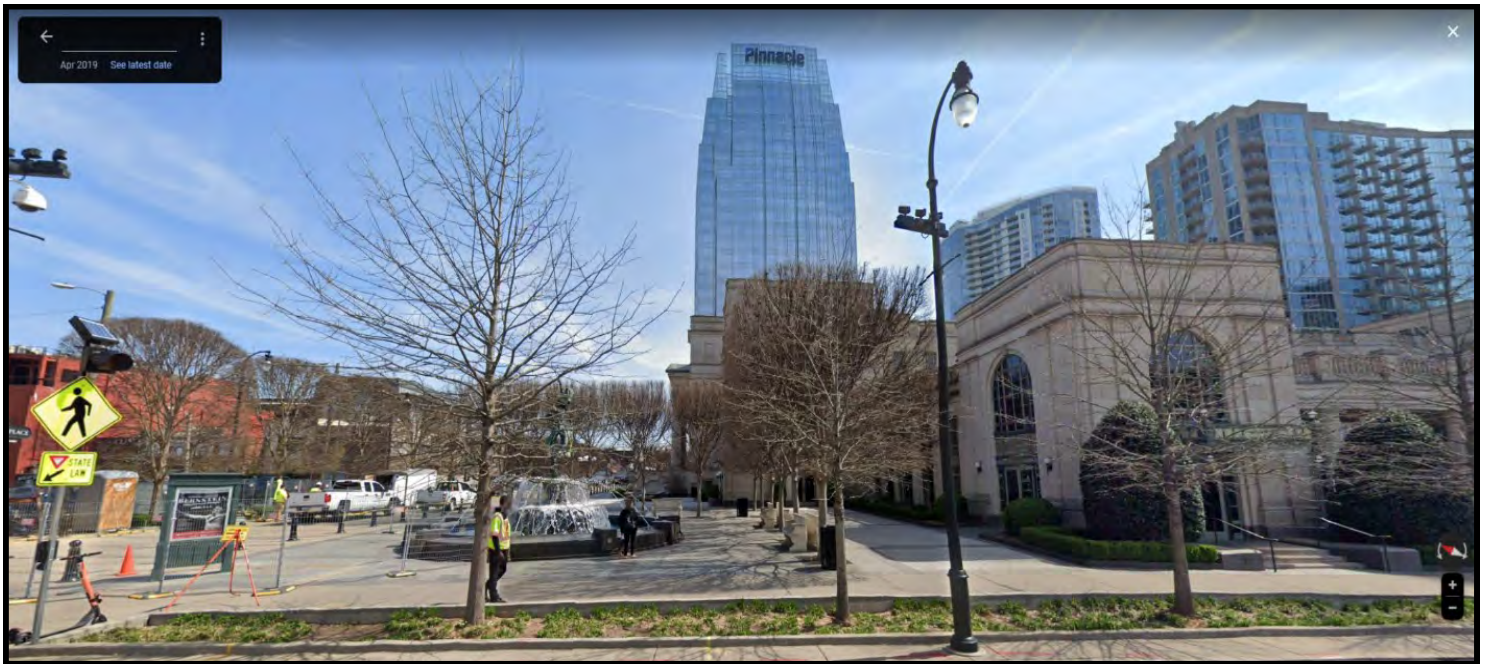


Figure 3. View of Purple Martins captured by Blake Farmer/WPLN from August 31, 2020. *People have flocked to downtown Nashville, Tennessee the past few days to take in a rare sight: thousands of Purple Martins. The migratory birds, on their way south for the winter, rarely roost in urban areas.*

In 2021, as everyone began to come out of their seclusion, people wanted to attend venues of all sorts. The Schermerhorn Symphony also wanted to look at hosting a concert in late summer to clear some debts except the Purple Martins beat them to the venue site. Imagine 100,000 plus martins coming every night for at least a month leaving their excrement behind, along with

other species joining in the celebration of noise. Therein created a super conflict of users competing for music of the human nature and those naturalists, tourists, and birders competing for music of these Purple Martins while sightseeing.

In May 2022, a compromise was reached to remove 31 trees and replant 146 trees around Nashville. Partners were The Nashville Tree Conservancy Corps, Schermerhorn Symphony, Friends of Warner Park Birders, Tennessee Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services looked at controlling Purple Martin concentrations away from the Schermerhorn Symphony Building (Figures 4, 5 & 6). Even though a human compromise was reached for the area surrounding the Schermerhorn Symphony, it did not guarantee a future area for Purple Martins. Around July 2022, Purple Martins came back to the Nashville area. They flourished somewhat over the next month or so finding several sites to the north of the former roost site of 2020 and 2021. A particular site near the Cumberland River became the majority concentration for the Purple Martins by late July (See Figure 1 and Figure 2 for purple circle).



Figures 4 & 5. Before removal of trees and after tree removal at the location of the Schermerhorn Symphony Building.

-Photos courtesy Google

**Figure 6**

Cherry trees were moved from the end of Broadway to a spot on First Avenue (Shelley Mays, smays@tennessean.com).

Then of course came my encounter of visiting the area in December 2022. As I walked down Broadway and then onto 4th Avenue South, I realized the amount of removal of trees that were surrounding the Schermerhorn Symphony Building both in front and along the parking area. I certainly could picture the mass of Purple Martins and feel the spray of the excrement from those 100,000 moving darts overhead, but hey, I been crapped on before so for me it would not be a big deal. A few months before in August 2022 (**Figure 7**) I had the same thing happen at our Wisconsin roost in Winnebago County from 90,000 and just a few months ago in March 2023 from 130,000 roosting Purple Martins having the same occurrence near Manaus, Brazil on the Rio Negro.



Dick Nikolai 8-17-2022

Figure 7. Wisconsin Roost from August 2022.

What a great thrill from Nashville (**Figure 8**) to at least dream and recognize how important it is to be able to witness large roosts of Purple Martins. Each one of those martins came from someone's back yard or from some park or from some area hosting a colony. That is the importance of us being partners with Purple Martins, no matter where they reside on the yearly trips each year. Value what you have for it may sometime disappear, especially large roosts or even your colony.



Figure 8: Looking from the County Music Hall of Fame across to the Schermerhorn Symphony Building on the right. Looking on the left is the Nashville Hilton Downtown and the Bridgestone Arena where the NFL Draft Day was held.

-Photo Dick Nikolai

My last note to all is to view, enjoy and use monitoring to connect more with your martins. Everyone can provide us with a clue on how Wisconsin did for calendar year 2023 by sending in your nesting summaries.

Many thanks and looking forward to hear how the season has progressed.

Nesting Summary Requested Information

1. First arrival date
2. How many nests having eggs
3. Total of eggs laid
4. Total hatchlings
5. Total fledged
6. County of housing or address
7. Your summary on how the season went for your area

Submit by November 1, 2023 to Dick at prairiechicken@att.net

So, How Do You Like Your Eggs?

Les Rhines

You've probably been asked this question many times when you've been out at your favorite breakfast restaurant. Do you like your eggs sunny side up? Or, do you like them flipped, once over easy, or how about scrambled?

Ok, right about now you're wondering what the heck is this guy talking about, and why is he so interested in my preference for eggs. So let me attempt to put it into perspective. This past spring, after many years of trying I was finally successful in teaching my resident martins to supplemental feed by flipping. I had been successful in feeding these purple winged avions by either offering them *room service* in the form of crickets in their compartments as well as putting crickets in a raised bed and breakfast, yet flipping had always eluded me, at least until this year. I'm of the opinion that in past seasons the birds were not at that desperate stage where they would accept a flying morsel of food or maybe it was more of operator error. I think it probably was a combination of both, but it was probably more me than the birds. However, it is true, like everyone says, when one bird takes it, the others notice, and soon they are all involved. To that end flipping technique is important, I have found that it's best to flip straight up in the air above the birds, it gives them a longer chance to see the food and react to it. Do not flip food directly at a bird.

So, back to the eggs. I figured out quickly that at the rate the martins were going my supply of crickets would be exhausted so I had to try to transition them to eggs. I also considered the cost of cricket's vs eggs and eggs are more budget friendly. I did my research; I had talked to many people that had been successful in supplemental feeding eggs to their martins, and I had watched *YouTube* videos on how to do it, additionally I'd seen lots of people on Facebook making it look way too easy. It wasn't long and I had the flipping part down, and by the way, my flipper of choice is the long blue ice cream spoons that are available at your local restaurant that starts with *C* and ends with *s*.

Now, for the eggs, I tried to cook the scrambled egg, plain, with one teaspoon of water, like a pancake on the stove, being careful not to overcook them, then I cut it up into small 1/4 inch pieces. When I flipped these to the martins, they would watch it go by, it was like you could see their eyes roll, but if I followed it up with a cricket, they were all over it. Undeterred, I next tried the microwave using the same recipe. I cooked the eggs for about one minute and cut the pancake the same way as before; when I flipped them, I had the same results as before, more eye rolling, hmmm.

I remember seeing Greg Zimmermann's WPMA Facebook post on adding one teaspoon of crushed mealworms to the egg mixture and thought I need to give that a try. Maybe it was a color thing. Greg's recipe not only provides added protein, but gives the eggs a bit of brown color, I thought this would fool the martins. Also, this time I tried cutting the pieces differently, into small lengths that resembled a cricket. It was about now that I was thinking, the lengths we go to for these

birds. When I flipped this batch along with crickets there was less eye rolling and to my surprise, I actually had a few takers. It was that breakthrough moment that I'd been looking for. A new theory began to form in my brain, maybe the color and irregular shapes would do the trick.

For the next feeding I prepared one egg with one teaspoon of water and two teaspoons of crushed mealworms (Greg's recipe) on the stove in a nonstick pan cooking the egg mixture until they resembled random sized crumbles. When I flipped those egg crumbles along with the crickets the martins readily accepted them. A giant hooray.

Supplemental feeding eggs as has been reported by many is a far less expensive alternative to crickets, especially when you are feeding many birds.

Which brings me back to this question *how do your martins like their eggs?* These martins that I have been caring for showed a preference, which may not be the case at your colony, and they may readily accept any of the other forms that I mentioned earlier. My advice to those that have not yet taught their birds to accept eggs is try other forms.

Some final thoughts. Supplemental feeding can take many forms, and I'm not qualified to state that one is better than the other. The main thing is that the landlord attempt to provide supplemental food sources during those weather events that prohibit martins from feeding naturally. Crickets, eggs, and mealworms are just some of the acceptable forms of supplemental food that martins accept either by flipping or in elevated feeders.

Also, keep in mind that supplemental feeding is not just a springtime thing, in recent seasons there have been many prolonged cloudy, rainy, and windy days occurring during the summer months. If these prolonged weather events occur while young are being fed and the adults are not able to feed naturally the colonies' survival is at risk. Teach them to accept supplemental feed now.

By the way, mealworm scrambled eggs smell terrible when cooking, be warned.

Footnote. There were several days during the middle of June when the weather cooled along with high winds, many martins suffered and incurred losses as food sources were scarce. Supplemental is not just a spring thing. Practice your flipping now so that you are ready when it becomes necessary.



Another Unpredictable Spring

April may be a distant memory for most, but for a Wisconsin Purple Martin landlord, it was an especially rough and memorable start to the season. A mid-April snowstorm with sustained high winds mellowed to thunderstorms with rain and sleet on the west end of Lake Winnebago. That, coupled with 24 mph winds, it seemed more like February than April. Others had it worse, but the point here is, there are lessons to be learned with weather and to prepared for anything!



Thin ice buildup on Troyer tunnel porch during April snowstorm.



T-14s at half-mast during April storms and wind.

During the storm, an ASY was spotted at one cavity entrance squawking like she was hurt. The cable was frozen, preventing the house from lowering, but luckily the T-14s were already at half-mast. There was a very thin layer of ice that formed on the Troyer tunnel porch which impeded her exit. As you can see by the photo, the opening looked passable, but the treads in which they use to push and pull themselves through the entrance were covered in ice. A flathead screwdriver, a *Little Giant Ladder*, and a husband quickly remedied the problem. Be mindful that anything is possible in spring in Wisconsin, and always be prepared! -Ed.

To Intervene or Not?

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

As your colony grows, so do the instances of martins needing our help as the season wears on. It's really a numbers game-if you have 100 eggs, you will have many more opportunities for things to go awry than if you had 15 eggs. The question remains, will I know when to intervene or will I let nature take its course and not intervene?

Some things are easy to remedy, like a capped egg, but there are nestlings that get pushed out of the nest by their siblings or worse, pulled from the nest by the parents. Do the parents sense something is amiss with the nestling? We don't know, but we can try to help.

Jumpers-literally jump out of the cavities as a result of a parasite infestation. Easy remedy, change bedding at 10 and 20 days to help reduce the pests.

Overly excited when feeding-these guys

want to be the first in line to gobble up that dragonfly, but instead fall out of the nest onto the ground. The adults will alert you by carrying on and swooping down to it. Consult your monitoring worksheet to see which cavity is missing a nestling.

Differing ages of nestlings-these are the birds that get pushed out of the nest as they are much smaller than their siblings. In the photo right, the one in the foreground hatched three days after its siblings. He was placed back in the nest but was found in the same spot on two subsequent nest checks, so he was placed into a cavity with similarly aged birds. All five have since fledged.

Monitoring your colony by doing nest checks is always recommended and when you get to know your colony, you will know exactly what to do when any situation arises. -Ed.



around Wisconsin

NEWS and NOTEWORTHY PLACES



A National Natural Landmark

One of the last remaining coastal dune and wetland habitats found on the Great Lakes.



Lots to do! 127 camping sites, 6 miles of beach along Lake Michigan, numerous shaded trails to hike, Point Beach State Forest has much to offer and much to see!



Rawley Point

Rawley Point Lighthouse is located within the forest where it has been operated and maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard since 1853. It is the tallest lighthouse on the Great Lakes, towering 113' above the beach. It is available for rent to active-duty personnel and military veterans.

Point Beach State Forest-Two Rivers



Active & Stabilized Sand Dunes The sandy shoreline changes with the constant motion of the waves. You can see the active sand dunes, which are covered in grasses that transition to the forested area. Inside the forested area are the stabilized sand dunes where the tall pine, white cedar, and juniper anchor the dunes, protecting them from further erosion.

Send us your photos of WI Noteworthy Places



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 in January, April, July, and October.

Board of Directors

President Les Rhines musthavemartins@gmail.com (920)889-0060
Vice President Greg Zimmermann grgz52@yahoo.com (920) 467-6253
Treasurer Deb Zimmermann dpierce52@yahoo.com (920) 467-6253

Board Members

Joe Francis jnlfrancis44@gmail.com (920) 918-4466
 Larry Lienau larmon@tds.net (920) 565-2780
 Dick Nikolai prairiechicken@att.net (920) 734-0828
 Bob Ring ringbob@earthlink.net (920) 989-2771
 Gail Bolden 3rngbold@att.net (540) 623-0762
 Terry Mentink tdmentink@hotmail.com (920) 980-9434

Individual membership dues are \$10 annually (January-December).
 Membership includes quarterly e-newsletter; please provide one email address per membership. Mail checks payable to:

WPMA Treasurer
 N6018 Hwy 32
 Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085

Additional membership inquiries: dpierce52@yahoo.com

Desire to be a PM Mentor? musthavemartins@gmail.com

Editor: Gail Bolden 3rngbold@att.net

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.

Written content and photographs may be republished with publisher permission.

Our partners in bird conservation:

