

Purple Martin

CHATTER

Winter 2025

Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin

Volume 13 Issue 1

MartinFest 2025

on the Bay of Green Bay

2024 Recap and 2025 Plans

Co-Presidents' Messages

GEOLOCATOR TRACKING

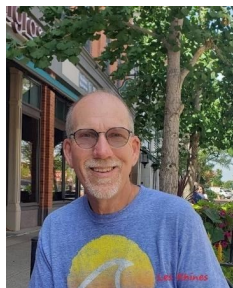
SNIPPETS FROM RUDY & PAUL

PBS GARDEN & GREENER LIVING EXPO



Photo courtesy Dick Nikolai

Co-Presidents' Notes



Co-President Les Rhines

Welcome to the Winter 2025 issue of *Purple Martin Chatter*. Wow, where did the time go? This past year seemed to fly by, no pun intended. It feels just like yesterday that I wrote to you about that first Purple Martin reported in

Florida on December 27, 2024. Or that in the spring I wrote to you about those large crowds of people that we met and talked to about



Purple Martins at the *PBS Garden and Greener Living Expo* in February 2024.

And, in the fall of 2024, I wrote about the fun filled day we had meeting with Purple Martin enthusiasts at our June 2024 MartinFest, held at Chuck and Annette Bartus' colony. I don't know about you, although it did not seem so at the time, but, this past year passed way too quickly. Maybe it's just my perception, but from conversations I've had with others, many people agree with me, or, maybe, it's just an age thing.



Well anyway, as you read this, you'll notice that it's a bit different from previous messages, that's because starting with this newsletter Co-President, Nicki Schumacher and I

will be sharing this column. As you may recall, we announced that Nicki and I will be serving the WPMA as Co-Presidents, so, look forward to hearing bits and pieces from the two of us starting with this issue.

I typically like to report when the first martin arrives in the United States and this year, (continued)



Co-President Nicki Schumacher

Hi Everyone! I'm so excited to be taking on a leadership role with the group, and I look forward to making contact with all of you at some point. One of my goals is to initiate more outreach within the state, so if you have any ideas or suggestions or contacts to help with that goal, I'd love to hear from you.

I've had martins for many years now, but it did take quite a while for me to attract them permanently. If you are currently having that same experience, my suggestion would be to keep trying until you are successful. I went through many years of disappointment and heartbreak, but now we're thriving, and I'm considering putting up a third house this spring.

The *PBS Garden and Greener Living Expo* will be happening on Friday, February 7th through Sunday, February 9th in Madison at the Alliant Center, so stop in and say hi, check out our displays and information, and pick up some brochures, pamphlets, and catalogs. We have two booths near the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW), and we're looking forward to seeing everyone that weekend. Thank you to those who agreed to volunteer for our group that weekend!

A few reminders in closing: MartinFest will be happening in Oconto on Saturday, June 28th. Details are included in this newsletter, as well as on our (updated) website and Facebook page. Please reach out if you have any questions or are interested in helping that day.

Second, don't forget to renew your 2025 membership. Dues can be mailed to our treasurer, Deb Zimmermann.

Third, if you haven't submitted your data to Dick Nikolai (prairiechicken@att.net) and/or the PMCA, to please do that soon. One of my resolutions is to be more consistent with nest checks every week. Life happens, and I was checking anywhere between 7-14 days, which was too much time.

(Les continued) the first two birds arrived on December 30, 2024. This was three days later than last year; one of these birds was reported in Coca Florida, while the other was reported in Lake Wales, Florida. Along with this notice we like to remind landlords and those putting up housing for the first time, that now is the time to start getting ready for the 2025 martin season. I must confess that I have been a bit lax in this department this year. When I took down the houses and gourds this past fall, I did the usual clean up, and storage for all the things that did not need repair or paint, and I put the other items that needed work down in the basement and have to this point, successfully ignored them. But now, there is a new sense of urgency to get things ready for spring, time to get to work. Here's the timeline to keep in mind, established colonies can expect to see birds return to Wisconsin near the end of March and early April, whereas those starting new colonies need to have their houses and gourds up typically the first full week of May,

to be ready to attract the subadults. So, we all still have a little time.

Here's one last little tidbit for you. According to the Milwaukee weather stations, the year 2024 was the warmest on record, a full 3 degrees above normal. The next warmest year was 2023; there just might be a trend here. We will have to wait and see just how the summer weather patterns develop; I hope that it is not like last summer with the sustained periods of rain and wind that resulted in the loss of many birds.

Looking forward to seeing you at the *PBS Garden and Greener Living Expo* in February.

A Word from the V.P.

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

Its hard to believe we are $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way through this century and in 2025 I will finally decide to retire. My goal is sometime during the month of July and then wind down to possibly part time. The one blessing will be that I can get up in the morning not being rushed and enjoy watching my Purple Martins. As I write this article it's cold outside and we have about 10 inches of snow on the ground. The one thing about Wisconsin weather, its very unpredictable, and a warmup is supposed to come our way and melt all the snow. We will just squeak out a white Christmas.

With that said I'm trying to redesign my North Star martin house this off season. The roof section is nothing more than wasted space and I want to put 2 compartments on the roof (kind of like 2 dormers) if it works out, I will have pictures for the spring article. I wish everyone the best in the New Year and hopefully everyone gets their birds this coming spring.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Deb Zimmermann

As of January 2, 2025

We have \$1706.08 in our checking account.

We have had membership renewals coming in and we are paid up for the garden show in Madison. The garden show is another educational opportunity for the public. It takes place February 7th—February 9th. Tell your friends.

Stay warm and Happy New Year!

In 2023 our aspiration was to place ten GPS Geolocators over the course of the breeding season on candidates of Purple Martin parents successfully raising their young against all the seasons obstacles. My hope would be for at least two to five adult travelers arriving back to our colony at High Cliff State Park in 2024. Historically, our average of 50% of adult martins that have been banded at High Cliff State Park (data from approximately 2002 to 2023) make it back the following year. Contributions from our organization, membership, outside organizations and other interested individuals provided over \$5,000 for ten GPS Geolocators. Placement of these instruments on the backs of purple martins would hopefully create elements of their travel beyond our wildest dreams. Their travel of to, from and within routes of these Wisconsin purple martins would open a world of answering questions through the geolocators power of storing data during the years long trip to South America.

Our yearly attempts are to band over the course of the summer all adults, young, or recapture ones which have bands. There is a protocol on placement of GPS Geolocators, as adults need to be unbanded as required by the Bird Banding Lab. Additionally, these were to be model parents throughout evaluation period of nesting from egg to feeding young around 14 days of age. The choices were 14 new second year males (SY-M's), 18 new SY-females (SYF's), 8 new after second year males (ASY-M's), and 8 new ASY-F's as we have looked back. Out of the choices of 48 Purple Martins, ten were chosen which include four ASY-M's, one ASY-F, zero SY-F's, and five SY-M's. Time frame for the season was from

roughly June 15 to July 31 meeting the criteria mentioned with ten placements. The first Purple Martin receiving a Geocator was on July 2 with the last one placed on July 22, 2023. Cavities chosen (*see Figures 1-5*) were from our Tower House (1), from our Marina site gourd rack (2), from our Wooden gourd rack at the marina (3), our T-14 with gourds at the marina (4), and the Park office in its T-14 (5). A wide range of sites and types of cavities were the goal to reduce bias away from predators or other hazards. If a cavity opening was not round to accommodate the chosen Purple Martin with geocator, then modification of the opening was fitted to compensate by making it round to pass the chosen bird.

Physically each one of our captures went through transformation from molting their feathers during late fall migration from North America to South America and prior to their return. Since some of these Purple Martins were SY males looking like females, they now would be looking like most ASY-M's being bluish black. Molted feathers would cover most of the Geocator blending in with the coloration of the martins. Our red anodized band with white lettering on the left leg along with a sprayed orange Bird Banding Lab aluminum band would hopefully highlight sightings. This would be our third attempt at seeking returnees with the other two times having an unsuccessful ending. One retrieval would have a Geocator fail to give any information after recapture at High Cliff State Park even after sending it to the manufacture. The second Geocator could not be retrieved from a private citizen in Tennessee after two months of trying after the martin was reported dead regardless of many attempted options including to pay for the retrieval of the Geocator.

The spring of 2024 was strewn out, offering many days of below temperatures in April and May with an abundance of rainy cloudy days. June and July continued with the rain with above normal weather temperatures. Delays with nest building occurred, laying eggs was begun and stopped, later arrivals of ASY's occurred after May 7 into the period of SY's arriving caused lots of infighting, eggs became addled, reneating, sparrow problems extending into mid-June all created a long stretch of trying to find noted martins. Had brief sightings but those martins seemed to elude detection and confirmation of having Geolocators. Towards late June we finally made confirmation of one having a color band and Geocator at the park office in the T-14 (*see Figures 6-8*). A second sighting seemed to disappear but several other color bands brought a sense of hope. As the season moved onward several captures turned out to be SY martins banded in August of 2023 (*see What Was and What Could Have Happened from Purple Martin Chatter, Volume 12, Issue 4 on page four*). Near the last day of June, a pair of martins settled into our gourd rack

Figures 1-5



1) Tower House



2) Marine Site
Gourd Rack



3) Marine Site
Wooden Houses

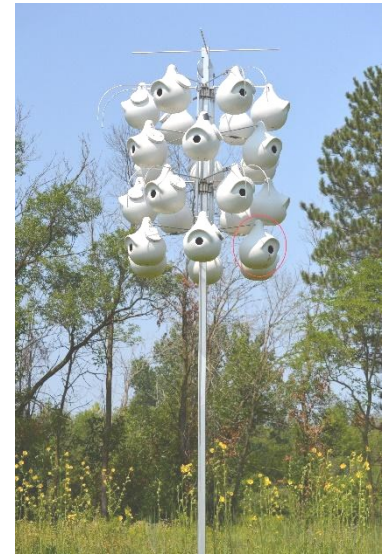


4) Marina Site T-14
with gourds



5) T-14 at Park Office

having our second Geolocator (see **Figures 9-11**).



Figures 6-8: (Left) Fitted our second Geolocator in 2023 on a SY-M (Paul) with color band **WI 996** on July 4 at nest cavity HCN-01 near the park office in a T-14 (see **Figure 12** showing both nest sites). (Middle) Paul a year older in 2024 as an ASY-M was recaptured on July 6 as the only martin nesting in our gourd rack at the park office in cavity HCG-22. (Right) Gourd cavity utilized by Paul on the lower right easily permitting him to go inside and assist with his partner an SY-F (gourd is red circle).

As it turns out both males were cavity mates in the park office T-14 in 2023. The named Purple Martin, Rudy was the last one to be captured in 2024 occupied the compartment the other one occupied in 2023 in the T-14. Intraspecific competition played (see **Figure 12 showing both nest sites**) a role of choices these martins made along the way, which delayed one in nesting with the problems mentioned prior. Thinking along the way of how the season developed in 2024 there may be possibilities of a Geolocator in 2025. Reasons being there were several cavities we could not capture adults due to weather interruptions. Some martins may even have gone to other colonies because of circumstances not being favorable. It would not be the first time a martin has left and then returned the following year to come back to our colonies. Having a positive attitude is what research is all about along with an open mind.

As of this time my snippet for all is that there are lots of points each of these two male martins have traveled each way in migration, roosting areas, habitats for their young after they have fledged, hotel habitats they have visited for durations to fuel up, and to areas who knows the reasons behind. Each time I visit their routes I am impressed and astounded of what is taking place. Imagine each day could be three to six points they chose over the 360+ days in their travels. Details recorded on the downloads are the date, time, GPS location, altitude, and velocity.



Figures 9-11: (Left) Fitted our eighth Geolocator in 2023 on a SY-M (Rudy) with color band **WI 502** on July 9 at nest cavity HCN-02 near the park office in a T-14. (Middle) Rudy, a year older in 2024 as an ASY-M was recaptured on July 17 at the park office in the T-14 in cavity HCN-01. (Right) Note the park office T-14 cavity HCN-01 is where Rudy's partner, a SY-F, is shown at the compartment feeding their young on August 2.

(continued)



Figure 12 Park office Purple Martin housing within the prairie was in its glory when the picture above was taken on August 2, 2024. Area underneath housing was mowed.

It was peculiar that both of the Geolocator ASY-M's had SY-F's as their partners in 2024. The best part of capturing these two celebrities was both males were very docile and calm through the Geolocator removal. Both acted in such a manner that they accepted a hand to lighten their load from a known person. This relationship allowed them to carry on their normal activities of feeding their young within minutes after release. When their release times came, each one behaved in manner that was more of saying thanks. They did not shake after being held as most captured martins do. Both had more of melodious melody on the release rather than one of shrieking. Lastly, both took their time flying a full circle of acknowledgement around me before flying off.

While I have given little details of the prize they brought back after 360+ days, my account with all was to acknowledge all the parameters that go with gathering information. Now for a brief description of the fascinating information they have brought to us. Their duration covered a period in Brazil in South America that had covered the worst drought in 120+ years in 2023. In fact, that drought extended itself again for 2024 into most of South America being hotter and drier. What impacts of their daily needs shown in the Geolocator travels will take sometime to decipher. Currently what I can provide is both martins had extensive travels that barely touched each other's routes. To extract each point recorded and their travel even for a day takes hours to zoom in on Google Earth Pro. As a Biologist my thoughts are looking at what attracts them to areas along the way. Some of that is feeding their young and the dispersion of their fledglings after leaving the nests. It considers their training lessons taught their young and goes to where they can put on fat reserves before migration in the best of the dining areas showing their forage availability. It shows their nights where they spend roosting to avoid predation keeping their fat reserves at a high level. Most of all I can at least provide you today is with the snippet of a trail of each martin across both continents.

As mention earlier, their information is awe inspiring. Your GPS unit in your car or truck provides similar lines of travel but on manmade routes. For us we need electrical instruments or computer driven items to guide us. Purple Martins like other birds use magnetic forces or inner compasses or physical attributes like waterways or stars to guide them in their travels.

Overall, I hope this snippet of pictures from these two Purple Martins gives you the feeling of respect for this species of how or where it goes through its ecological cycles so that they can greet us every year they survive to utilize our housing and mutually trust you for your guidance when they are present. As I said it before, they are family. Their trip

shown below is their Facebook response or a quick photo sent to family or friends or in this case to all of us. May there be many trips like this for all who are landlords. Respect is gained and returned. Hope the 2024-25 trip during the extended drought in South America does not affect our martins in Wisconsin. My inner sixth sense though keeps telling me beware. Hope I am wrong! Enjoy the trips of these two truly friends of the family.



Figure 13 The many lines show the travels throughout the month of July after capture in 2023 or during the return from South America for the nesting season of 2024 until recapture. It looks like this martin called Rudy, took flight everywhere. Note for each point, information is taken for a day, month, year, hour, minutes, seconds, latitude, longitude, altitude, and velocity of Rudy. Hope this gift of travel and pictures furthers your companionship with your martins.



Figure 14: Purple Martin Paul is shown on his migration for spring on the left and right for the fall in North America with the orange line. Paul crossed the Gulf non-stop flying all the way south of the Yucatan for approximately 1000 miles.



Figure 15 Purple Martin Rudy is traveling very close to the same route for spring and fall migration as shown with the lime green line while in North America. Rudy crossed the Gulf to the top of Yucatan following a similar route as Paul to the top of South America.

Figure 16 Purple Martin Paul utilized areas surrounding Manaus (red circle) including the roost area shown on the left. This is the area where I spent three nights watching purple martins come into the island on the Rio Negro River and one morning going out in March 2023. The Rio Negro River is a dark water area being more sterile.

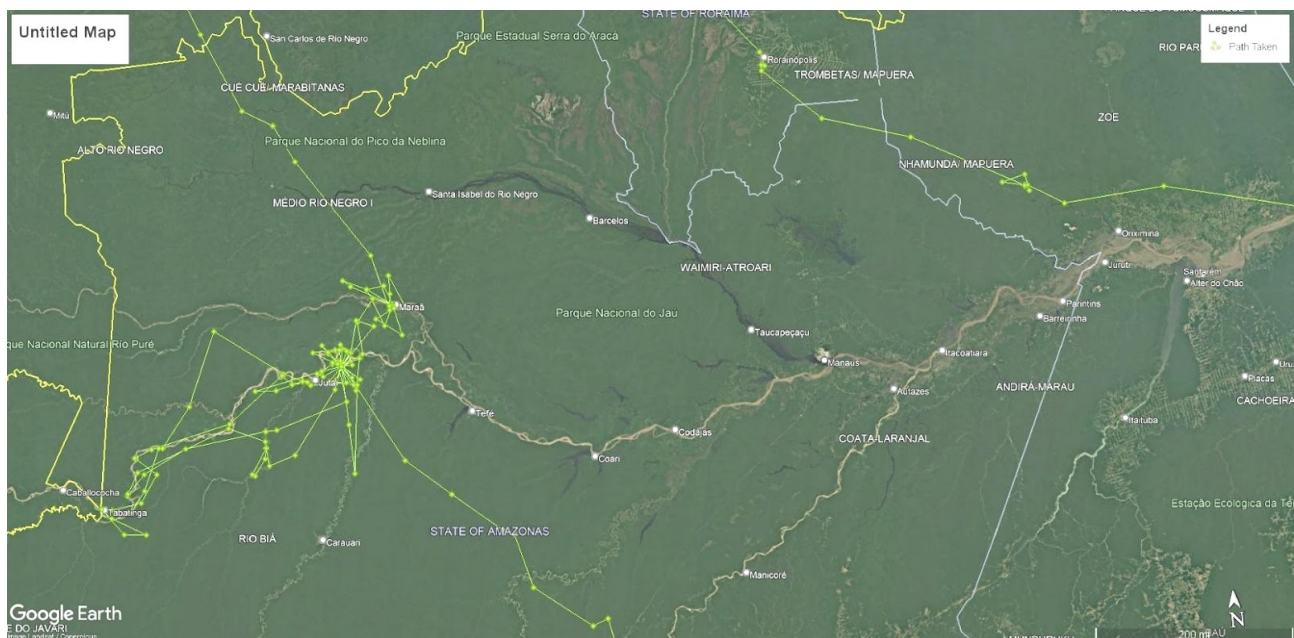
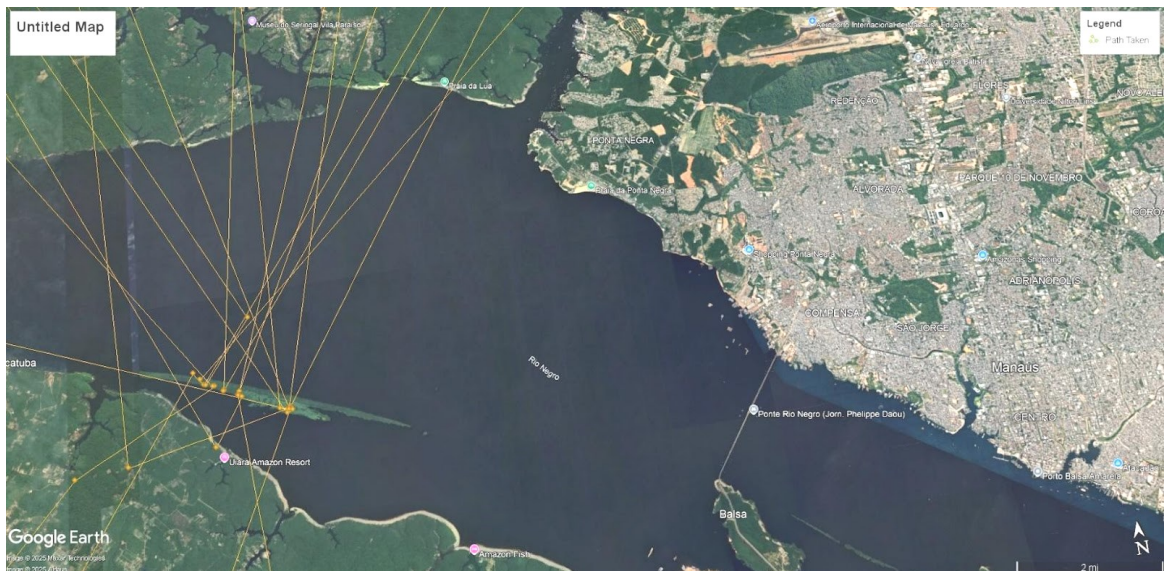


Figure 17 Purple Martin Rudy did not like Manaus (red circle) or the roost site (orange dot). He preferred an area along the Amazon River to the west and spent some time to the south on the Madeira River. These rivers are fresh water and have a great amount of silt as shown by the brownish coloration. All these rivers join and become the Amazon River near Manaus.

This article is reprinted with permission from *The Purple Martin Update* Fall 2024 issue, courtesy of the Purple Martin Conservation Association

Mark Your Calendars!

August 10th is officially National Purple Martin Conservation Day

The Purple Martin Conservation Association's President and CEO, Joe Siegrist, started talks with US Senator Mike Braun of Indiana in the summer of 2023. Senator Braun was interested in highlighting the plight of Purple Martins and raising awareness of the critical conservation efforts occurring in backyards and public parks across the United States.

Eventually bipartisan support was rallied with Senator John Fetterman of Pennsylvania cosigning a resolution to declare August 10th National Purple Martin Conservation Day. PMCA staff organized over 40 other nonprofits and local, state, and international organizations to lend their support, including:

- National Audubon Society
- The Nature Conservancy
- North American Bluebird Society
- Tucson Audubon, *Arizona*
- Best Coast Bird Club, *California*
- San Diego Audubon, *California*
- The Connecticut Audubon Society, *Connecticut*
- Alachua Audubon Society, *Florida*
- Audubon Everglades, *Florida*
- Clermont Martin Watch, *Florida*
- Duval Audubon Society, *Florida*
- Halifax River Audubon, *Florida*
- Peace River Audubon, *Florida*
- Southeast Volusia Audubon, *Florida*
- St. Johns Regional Audubon, *Florida*
- Venice Area Audubon Society, *Florida*
- West Volusia Audubon Society, *Florida*
- Purple Martins of Southshore, *Illinois*
- For The Birds of Acadiana, *Louisiana*
- Orleans Audubon Society, *Louisiana*
- Prairie Lakes Audubon, *Minnesota*
- St. Louis Audubon Society, *Missouri*
- Onondaga Audubon, *New York*
- New Hope Bird Alliance, *North Carolina*
- North Carolina Purple Martin Society, *North Carolina*
- Chalfont Borough Bird Town, *Pennsylvania*
- Erie Bird Observatory, *Pennsylvania*
- Philly Queer Birders, *Pennsylvania*
- Presque Isle Audubon, *Pennsylvania*
- Audubon South Carolina, *South Carolina*
- Charleston Natural History Society, *South Carolina*
- Belmont Bird Club, *Tennessee*
- Bird Safe Nashville, *Tennessee*
- Friends of Warner Parks, *Tennessee*
- Tennessee Ornithological Society, *Tennessee*
- Alveus Sanctuary, *Texas*
- Travis Audubon, *Texas*
- Kitsap Audubon Society, *Washington*
- Wisconsin Purple Martin Association, *Wisconsin*
- Birdsafe University of Toronto, St George campus, *Canada*
- Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington, *Canada*
- Bird Friendly Selwyn, *Canada*
- Ontario Purple Martin Association, *Canada*

On Thursday, September 19th, the US Senate officially approved Senate Resolution 803 to name August 10th National Purple Martin Conservation Day!

In preparation, this August PMCA asked people to share how they were celebrating their first Purple Martin Conservation Day—as well as pitch ideas for holiday traditions!

Brian and Cindy Patten in Pennsylvania shared that they were celebrating by completing their final nest checks and monitoring their final (163rd) baby left the fledge!

Laurie Doss, PMCA Board Member and educator based in Connecticut, shared that she celebrated the day by gifting PMCA t-shirts to all her interns.

Even across the border in Canada, Purple Martin hosts were celebrating! Heliana de Souza-Wagner of Saskatchewan shared that she was celebrating by wishing her martins a safe migration. “Have a safe trip to my beautiful home country of Brazil, Purple Martins and, till I see you again next season, in my backyard in Saskatchewan, stay safe!” Heliana said. *(continued)*

Other members suggested ideas for how to make a National Purple Martin Conservation Day tradition.

Susanne on Facebook suggested that people attend a Roost Watch Party, bring a Purple Picnic, and wear purple! Roost Watch Parties occur across the martins' range—with some of the biggest parties occurring at:

- Lake Murray, *South Carolina*
- Round Rock, *Texas*
- Houston, *Texas*
- Nashville, *Tennessee*

Roosts form across the country in August. If there's no organized Watch Party near you, you can plan one too! You can find a roost near you on the PMCA website, at www.purplemartin.org/research/19/project-martinroost/. Then make sure to invite fellow Purple Martin lovers on the PMCA Forum, the PMCA Facebook Group, and on our events calendar at www.purplemartin.org/connect/32/events/.

Others suggested that the holiday would serve as a

reminder to complete important annual maintenance on your Purple Martin colony—such as cleaning and storing housing for the next season or finishing up Project MartinWatch data sheets to send to the PMCA.

Whatever way you choose to spend the holiday next year, we want to hear about it!

Please share your holiday plans by writing to us at 301 Peninsula Drive, Suite 6 Erie, PA 16505, texting 814-833-7656, emailing lydia@purplemartin.org, or tagging us on Facebook: [@PurpleMartinConservationAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/PurpleMartinConservationAssociation) or Instagram: [@PurpleMartinConservation](https://www.instagram.com/PurpleMartinConservation)

Become a PMCA member to support Purple Martin conservation and to receive their quarterly magazine *The Purple Martin Update*, along with other valuable benefits such as access to expert advice, discounts on PMCA products, and more! Learn more at www.purplemartin.org

Tell Us Your Story We would like to hear from you, our readers, please share your stories with us. Just submit to our editor, Gail Bolden. Please include photos in jpeg format. *-Les Rhines*

Miss Me Yet?



Photo courtesy Dick Nikolai

Calendar of Events

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 7-9 February | PBS Garden & Greener Living Expo
Alliant Energy Center
Madison, WI
Fri 12-6, Sat 9-6, Sun 10-4 |
| 28 June | MartinFest
10:00a-4:00p
Oconto City Park (<i>WPMA colony site</i>)
5182 County Hwy N
Oconto, WI 54153 |



MARTINest 2025

15th Annual Free Event

June 28, 2025 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Oconto City Park (Wisconsin Purple Martin Public Colony Site)

5182 County Highway N, Oconto, WI 54153



The **Wisconsin Purple Martin Association (WPMA)** invites you to join us for the free **15th Annual Martin-Fest** with our sponsors to celebrate the beloved Purple Martin (*Progne subis subis*) along with Bird City Oconto.

Oconto City Park is a 24 acre site containing 700 feet of beach along the Bay of Green Bay, providing a picturesque setting to celebrate with **your whole family** watching purple martins along with mingling with martin enthusiasts. Weather permitting: seeing up close martin young, eggs, and live capturing of adult martins for banding. A vendor for purple martin housing will be present. Please join us for our Silent Auction for educational support throughout the day with awarding of items after 3:00 PM.

Facilities include playground, camping facilities, and flushed bathrooms. The Farnsworth Library will be present for activities with a scheduled storybook walk. Talks on banding, purple martin nest checks and nest replacements, a demonstration about taking horizontal gourds to drill and install 90 degree elbows on the covers for air circulation, on bluebirds and trail monitoring, fossils, reptiles, bees, Motus towers, etc.

Sponsor Contacts:

(**WPMA**)—Co-Presidents Les Rhines (920) 889-0060 & Nicki Schumacher (920) 207-6480

Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (Oconto County)—Gene Birr (920) 461-0108

City of Oconto Parks Recreation & Forestry—Director (920) 834-7706, <https://cityofoconto.com/parks-and-rec/>



MARTINest 2025

15th Annual Free Event

June 28, 2025 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Oconto City Park (Wisconsin Purple Martin Public Colony Site)

5182 County Highway N, Oconto, WI 54153



Purple Martin Schedule of Events

10:00 AM to 4:00 PM—Wisconsin Purple Martin Association (WPMA) Registration. Talk to WPMA Board Members throughout day on issues concerning purple martins. Housing Vendor will be present near registration area for people interested in homemade housing.

10:00 AM to 3:00 PM—Silent Auction. Items will be awarded after 3:00PM. Must be present to win with payment due and pick up items.

1:00 PM to 3:00 PM—Capture of Purple Martin adults and young by licensed banders who attach bands for the Bird Banding Laboratory (Weather permitting).

Presentation on nest checks and nest replacement & Presentation on venting of gourds

3:00 PM—Silent Auction Ends with announcement of awards afterwards

4:00 PM—End of MartinFest

Other Events & Booths Scheduled

11:00 AM to 12:00 PM—Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin with presentation, house monitoring & sale

12:00 PM to 1:00 PM—Raptor Education Presentation

10:00 AM to 4:00 PM —**Bird City Oconto** with children's bags including educational bird items; **Farnsworth Public Library** with children's activities along with a storybook walk; **Archies Angels** with Reptiles; **Earthaven Museum** with fossil dig for children at the beach. Fossil display and identification for rocks; **Lake Michigan Bird Observatory** with educational information on Motus Towers, bird research, and habitat information; **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources-Wildlife Management** on educational aspects; and **Brown County Beekeeper Association** on educational aspects with honey for sale.

Food fundraiser provided by the Park and Recreation Department of Oconto

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

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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.

Our partners in bird conservation:

