

Purple Martin  
**CHATTER**

Fall 2025

Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin

Volume 13 Issue 4

**Nest Reports *Due***

***Presidents' Messages***

**Fall Clean Out**

***MARTIN*Fest 2026**

**TINKERS & TWEAKS**

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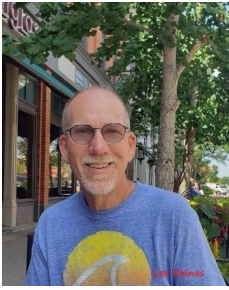
***WE NEED YOU***

**Late Fledges**



Photo WPMA Member, Mike Turba

## Co-Presidents' Notes



### Co-President Les Rhines

Hello again everyone and welcome to the Fall 2025 edition of the *Purple Martin Chatter*. As I sit down to write this message, the weather is anything but fall-like. This extended stretch of 80-degree days in late September and early

October has been well received by many; I include myself in that group. I know, I know, this is Wisconsin and it will change, and we'll start to feel the chill of fall soon enough.

Well, enough about the weather, and time to turn our attention back to Purple Martins. As of this writing most martins have migrated through the area and many martin landlords have taken their housing down for the season and have it all cleaned and packed away for the winter months. Our Vice-President Greg Zimmermann talks about the process of late summer and fall cleanup in his report found in this newsletter. Co-President Nicki Schumacher offers some advice on starting new colonies and what it takes to get birds to your newly established site, and later, I share some information about some different things that happened at my colony in 2025.

Looking ahead to 2026, the WPMA will once again be represented at the *PBS Garden & Green Living Expo* held at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison. The show, marking its 33rd year, will run from February 13th-15th. Additionally, we are in the planning stages for our own 2026 MartinFest, but here's what I can tell you so far. We're headed back to Marsh Haven Nature Center near Waupun on June 27, 2026. Marsh Haven Director Matt Rupnick and the staff have accepted our request to have the event on the grounds of the nature center. In addition to all that the center has to offer we will have other bird-focused groups joining us that day. There will be representatives from Save Our Songbirds, Bird City Wisconsin, Lake Michigan Bird Observatory, Dane County Humane Society Wildlife Center, Horicon Bird Club, as well as the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin. Please keep in mind that this is a *free family friendly event* with lots of activities for both kids and adults.

One highlight of the event will again be bird banding by Master Bird Bander, Dick Nikolai so you don't want to miss that. Additional details will be provided as they are finalized.



### Co-President Nicki Schumacher

*How Long Should I Try? Until.*

That was actually a quote I found online on Pinterest. Many times in my experience have I thought about this question and answer. How long do I keep trying to attract Purple Martins? Some people attracted birds the first time they tried, others took a few years. For me, it was 13 years before I attracted my first pair.

I had the right setting and location, I had the houses and gourds, and I had a body of water nearby. After a few years of trying, I attracted one pair. I was ecstatic. I thought it would be easy from that point. It wasn't. A rogue male came in and destroyed what the pair had, and they never returned.

Despite that downfall, I kept trying, and a few years later with some changes, including removing a few trees and moving a house, I attracted a few pair. Every year after that I attracted more birds. That was almost twenty years ago, and I've had martins ever since.

Each year I make minor changes. This season I added a tray feeder, and I'm putting up a third house for next season.

If you are getting frustrated and want to give up, just keep trying until you attract some. You will attract some, it just might take more time than you think.

How long should I try? *As long as it takes.*

Lastly, thank you to everyone for all the things you do on behalf of Purple Martins. Special shout out to our network of WPMA mentors and to all of those that manage our many public colonies throughout the state. Just know that the time and energy that you provide helping promote the cause of Purple Martins is greatly appreciated. Enjoy the fall weather and don't forget, if you have a story that you wouldn't mind sharing with us, just send it to our editor, Gail Bolden.

## A Word from the V.P.

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

It's fall, and your season is over. Now is the time to take down your Purple Martin house for a good and thorough cleaning, and to prevent other birds from taking over. First off, remove all the nesting material from the house and nest boxes and scrape off any residue from the sides of the wall. Then, take a cleaning solution and scrub the outside of the house and inside each cavity. I use a 10% bleach concentrate solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) this provides a powerful disinfecting method for cleaning your bird house. Always wear gloves and thoroughly wash your hands and arms when done cleaning.

Once your house is completely cleaned out, let it sit for a day or two in the sun until it's dry. Bird houses are a major breeding ground for deadly parasites such as fleas, mites, and spiders. They attack baby birds, robbing their bodies of vital nutrients and in some cases killing the very young. Adult birds are also held captive of deadly parasites. At this point you can plug up the holes and store it until next season, or you can remove it from your pole and store it in a cool dry place. There are videos on you tube showing step by step on how to clean houses. I have a link to a web page for you to copy:

<https://youtu.be/8iy52YepXOM?si=vcd19hGXb4hwDkT>.

Finally, the one thing I would like to mention is to not pre-nest your house while it is in storage, this can invite rodents like mice and other unwanted creatures to inhabit your house in the off season. Mice urine and droppings can be dangerous to your birds. Having a clean house in spring ensures healthy birds and brood habitat.

## Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Deb Zimmermann

We have \$1808.72 in our checking account.

## WE NEED YOU

Mentors provide invaluable information and encouragement for new landlords or even for seasoned landlords who have questions. *The following counties do not have a WPMA mentor.* Let us know if you would like to share your knowledge and experience by becoming a mentor today!

Contact any Board Member for more information.

- |            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| Ashland    | Marinette   |
| Bayfield   | Marquette   |
| Brown      | Menominee   |
| Buffalo    | Monroe      |
| Burnett    | Oneida      |
| Chippewa   | Pepin       |
| Clark      | Pierce      |
| Crawford   | Portage     |
| Douglas    | Price       |
| Dunn       | Richland    |
| Eau Claire | Rock        |
| Forest     | Rusk        |
| Florence   | Sawyer      |
| Grant      | Shawano     |
| Green Lake | Taylor      |
| Iron       | Trempealeau |
| Jackson    | Vernon      |
| Juneau     | Vilas       |
| Kewaunee   | Washburn    |
| LaCrosse   | Washington  |
| Lafayette  | Waupaca     |
| Langlade   | Waushara    |
| Lincoln    | Winnebago   |
| Marathon   |             |

## Tinkering at My Colony for the 2024 season *Les Rhines*

Just about every year I've tried some different things at my colony, most of the time it was out of necessity while I was trying to attract purple martins to my site. It seems I was always doing something, moving a pole, changing an entrance plate, etc. I was always listening to other martin landlords, and asking questions as to what worked for them, I was also following multiple Facebook groups sifting through all the recommendations that they had. Well, I have to say, some of it worked and some of it didn't. But that's a topic for another day. These days my wife and I are fortunate to have a colony that is growing, and I guess it gives me a little freedom to tinker, at least, just a bit, but obviously not as much as when we just started getting birds.

For the 2025 season four (4) new S&K Bo Axis gourds were added to my setup, if you're not familiar with them, the Bo Axis gourd can be assembled and hung either in a vertical or horizontal orientation, I chose the vertical orientation because I have many Troyer vertical gourds in my setup and the birds really seem to like them. The result of the tinkering, of the four (4) Bo Axis gourds only one (1) was occupied, so we'll see what happens next year.

Another thing that I tried this season is to offer some cavities without a porch; I did this by building and installing a tail prop on two (2) old Troyer horizontal



gourds, and I also added a tail prop to one (1) of the cavity entrances of my Northstar.

I know, right about now you might be asking yourself, why a tail prop? Porches work just fine, right? Well, yes porches do work fine, and I have no intention of eliminating them at my colony, but I had a conversation with someone that has also tried this at their site and had mixed success, so I thought I'd

try it. After all, martins did not have porches when they nested in hollowed out cavities in trees, way back when. The idea is to always try and offer a variety of housing and housing types, keeping in mind that not all birds will embrace it, but some just might. The result of this trial was that of the two (2) horizontal gourds that I converted, a pair of SY birds claimed one (1) of them, while the other had some nesting material placed in it, but no real nest, so, maybe next year both will be claimed.

The tail prop on the Northstar house however was a different story. As you can see from the picture, I made this tail prop to include a two-inch round hole, thinking that this would be easy for martins to enter. Well, it didn't take long after I installed the entrance that I saw a black bird hanging from the round entrance, I thought great, the martins found it and liked it, and this is going to work. Unfortunately, as I got closer to the colony, I could begin to make out that the outline of this bird was a bit different, you guessed it, not a martin, but instead a starling. I continued to watch and thought surely this starling is just checking it out and will not be able to enter the compartment without a porch. Well, let's just say the starling proved me wrong, and it didn't take me long before I had the house lowered, the tail prop removed and the Troyer tunnel back in place. Just between you and me, I might be inclined to tinker with this again next season, but I'll change out the round hole for a Connelly II entrance and see what happens. I'll keep you posted.

The last tinkering for the season was with my attempt to attract and keep a nesting pair of Tree Swallows to a specific gourd approximately 25 feet from nearest base of one of my martin houses. As you can see from the picture, the setup is an old Troyer horizontal





gourd without a tunnel, it's been my experience that Tree Swallows like horizontal gourds, a lot. To further entice the *Trees* to accept the gourd I place a *flasher* above the gourd, this flasher swings in the wind and mimics what looks like a bird to an investigating Tree Swallow. One final thing that I do is to place feathers inside the gourd cavity, and I spread a few on the lawn around the gourd, this usually gets the Tree's attention and their in. Usually nesting before the martins arrive, which is really what you want to happen. I should also mention that I have had nesting pairs of Trees in this gourd setup for many years.

Well, this year that didn't happen, the Tree Swallows would come and go but they just would not commit, so I tried something different. I took down the horizontal gourd and replaced it with a Chirpy Nest (*left*).

As you can see from the picture, the Chirpy nest, like the gourd before it, is only 5 feet off the ground. Unfortunately, the Tree Swallows behaved the same as before and after a while, they stopped coming altogether. But it was about that time a pair of SY Purple Martins moved in and ultimately fledged five (5) babies from that nest. As you can imagine, this made me a bit nervous throughout the season having martins raise their young so close

to the ground. My lesson from that tinkering is that I will keep the Tree Swallow gourd in place for next season, although, I'm expecting to see martins looking for that Chirpy nest on that short pole next season.

My advice, *don't stop tinkering*.

## Upcoming WPMA Board Meeting via Zoom

We are always looking for members to join our board and our group. We will be holding our next meeting virtually on Sunday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6:00 p.m. If you are a current member, the zoom link will be sent via email on or before 11/2. On our agenda (which will also be emailed to current members) is a discussion about elections for board positions and the elections procedure. Please consider filling a position on our board. We're always looking for more representation in the state, and people who are willing to help in our mission of preserving and restoring the Purple Martin population in Wisconsin.

Recently we welcomed Dean Heinen to our board. Dean comes with experience with Purple Martins for many years, and has been building martins houses. Please join us in welcoming Dean to our board! -*Nicki*

# One Last Item for 2025

## Send in Your Data

Dick Nikolai

For the past five years I have been soliciting your nesting season reports. With the sixth year in the books and our beloved purple martins enroute for their winter home, my reminder is everyone’s data assists in telling a story from whether it is from Cumberland to Racine to Belleview or La Crosse to Marinette or even central Wisconsin near Necedah or Edgar, Chippewa Falls or Pittsville or our capital at Madison. At the end of the 2024 nesting season 63 complete reports were sent (see Table 1) from 21 counties.

You are the ones that gather information that is assembled to indicate who, what, when, where, how goes it, clean the housing and prepare it for the 2026 season. Your flying miracles and noise makers are what makes the spring and summer seem so quick as we observe their antics each day and now miss their chatter through the fall and winter. So, continue giving your memories and skills to supply the score sheet of how well Wisconsin did for the nesting season of 2025. Let us continue telling other landlords to submit the data at hand for it will have bearing when it is looked upon by the agency of the Department of Natural Resources when decisions are made for species that need assistance or have concerns within the state.

One last note is that 120 people reported when their martins came in 2024 to the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) while only half sent in their information to me. My urging is to make it as complete as possible by sending a copy of your data to me too for all the information sent to the PMCA has the complete information needed. If you do not have the PMCA’s form, please utilize the form following. Let us beat the total number of last year and strive to making one hundred data submissions. Send in by November 30.

Wisconsin Purple Martin Summary Reports for 2020 to 2024																
Nesting Year	# of Counties	Sites	1st martin	Pairs	Nests	Nests with eggs	eggs laid	Eggs/nest	Hatched	Hatched/ nest	% Hatch	Fledge	Fledged/ nest	% Fledged	% Fledged from eggs	Last Fledgling
2020	13	17	4-2-2020	567	566	542	2831	5.00	2393	4.23	84.53%	2112	3.73	88.26%	74.60%	8/17/2020
2021	16	34	3-28-2021	1052	1050	1025	5141	5.02	4164	3.97	81.00%	3614	3.44	86.79%	70.30%	8/31/2021
2022	18	43	4-01-2022	998	1007	971	4855	5.00	4068	4.04	83.79%	3851	3.82	94.67%	79.32%	9/3/2022
2023	17	54	3/26/2023	1211	1210	1189	5748	4.83	4786	4.03	83.26%	4475	3.76	93.50%	77.85%	9/10/2023
2024	21	63	3-26-2024	1681	1673	1656	7792	4.71	6663	4.02	85.51%	5655	3.41	84.87%	72.57%	8/23/2024
2020-2024			26-Mar	5509	5506	5383	26367	4.90	22074	4.10	83.72%	19707	3.66	89.28%	74.74%	10-Sep

**Table 1:** Summary of each year from 2020-2024 shows the total number of basic categories needed for 2025. In 2024, 63 reports were submitted with complete data reflecting our nesting season from 21 out of 72 Counties within Wisconsin.



**My data supplied all the Purple Martins.  
Why not you?**

# **Wisconsin Purple Martin Nesting Report**

Address below is to identify colony location in a County

Send to [prairiechicken@att.net](mailto:prairiechicken@att.net) by **November 30**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

First Scout: \_\_\_\_\_

How many nesting pairs or nests present? \_\_\_\_\_

Eggs laid: \_\_\_\_\_

Eggs hatched: \_\_\_\_\_

Young fledged: \_\_\_\_\_

Last nest fledged: \_\_\_\_\_

Last of purple martins seen at colony: \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate observances seen throughout nesting season that you feel are important:

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## It is Never too Late: August Nests & Nestlings

Dick Nikolai

For the past few years, we have had late season nesting by our purple martins throughout Wisconsin due mostly to our weather impacts. My curiosity has always been present when these happen to our beloved purple martins. All of us know that it takes about a week for the process of building a nest, another week for preparing for copulation and fertilization of eggs, 16 days for incubation, another 28 days for fledging and finally about a month for recuperating to build fat for migration to South America with finally residing some place in Brazil to enjoy the time off before beginning the process all over. What a marathon for these 2.5 ounce streamlined birds. When procreation takes place, all matters for the parents for their success with expending their energies has a purpose. Be Successful!

Giving our protocol for Purple Martin survival and procreation it is even more a miracle within a 75-mile radius of Appleton we had four reported late broods in August 2025. Each of these had a separate set of circumstances leading to success or failure and all of them contained parents which were second year (SY) parents learning for the first time on how to take care of their eggs, young and fledglings. Most of these late nesters or parents are ages over two years of life and have gone through ecological parameters with weather being the culprit preventing their success. Not so in 2025 making it even more important to get them successful. Giving my thought process, I set out to see success of these youngsters to make it to fledging but more than that is the success of their survival to make it back to Wisconsin with hope that someone will see them or be recaptured through some means. One last item is that most landlords are surprised they have a late nesting. These late nesters are more secretive for generally they are alone without support from others in the colony that have left due to success or failure in the normal nesting period.

First off is the nest down near Port Washington with a nest that was constructed in June showing no promise of any eggs when suddenly activity comes with an egg being laid on June 24. Even more surprising is that five eggs were deposited late by a second year (SY) pair, so late in the nesting period. While banding the nestlings on July 14 in the housing it was surprising to see four small nestlings a couple of days old when all the other young were at least 11 days of age. Lots of voices or watchful eyes in the colony when hatching for the parents, but a massive exodus of adults and their young by July 28, leaving them to defend the site all by themselves. Estimated fledging would be for these SY parents on August 8, approximately 11 days later. Generally, when August comes around there is a depletion of numbers of flying insects and the species available to these SY parents to choose. While competition for sites or areas for finding insects nearby the colony is lessened, it still makes it for a long day trying to feed five young for 28 days in twosome. A very good SY pair feeds around six to eight times an hour. When I was notified on August 4<sup>th</sup> of this late nesting still holding its own with five young, I was surprised of the survival of these young. On August 6<sup>th</sup> when banding, my intuition and sighting of these young told me of the problems of the SY parents in trying to keep five active young well fed was nearly impossible. All were feathered with noticeable weights being subpar as indicated in **Table 1** listing as WI-561 to WI-565 along with noticeable differences in their physical age for all five. These differences were in the overall length of feathers, overall length of their physical body, in wing length, and length of legs. Head and brain appeared normal with the body proportions. After banding, a process of feeding of all young rehydrated crickets was made with the most to the lightest. On August 10 the lightest of the five died with all the rest showing declines of their weights, showing the hardships that the parents endured trying to get their offspring to fledging. My picture of the SY male was to show physically the keeling of the breast but unfortunately the picture was blurry and not worth keeping from my old Iphone 7. On August 11<sup>th</sup> all four of the brood fledged from their housing. On top of all that on August 9-10<sup>th</sup> the area surrounding Port Washington going southward had super thunderstorms with rain exceeding many parts of over five inches. This weather prior may have been the contribution to the death of the lightest youngster for it was hot and humid with temperatures of the high 80's to the lower 90's for those dates.

*To assist you along the way for this article and the other three sites you need to know other information.* Note that one ounce equals 28 grams to assist you in reference. Adult martins weigh around 65 grams or 2.3 ounces when they are at full weight and young should attain the maximum weight somewhere around 14-16 days of age until they fledge. Bones dry down by getting hollow for flight around those ages and muscle is gained where the weight is stabilized. Adults when nesting, weigh between 50-60 grams from my experience of banding and weighing them over the years. Where hardship occurs is having above (85+) and below normal temperatures (50 & below), rain more than a couple of days, heavy downpours, high winds above 15mph for extended periods, cloudy weather, wet nests, and

high invertebrate numbers within the cavity. Then you add feeding by the parents themselves, feeding the young and searching for invertebrates. Exhausting job to do 6-8 times per hour for the duration of daylight SY parents which is the average for good parents. Anything less is not good for the young. A few last features are decreases of available daylight losing about three minutes per day beginning July 1 and the total number of invertebrates and species available. Timing, timing, timing, and timing are the biggest entities that long distance migrators such as Purple Martins need in getting their replacements, recuperating weights, and heading back for the long migration.

Band #s	Weight in Grams	Actual Banding Age	Estimated Banding Age	Fledging timing	Fledging Date	Wt grams near fledging
WI-561	43	26 Days Old	21 Days Old	31 Days Old	11-Aug-25	42
WI-562	49	26 Days Old	22 Days Old	31 Days Old	11-Aug-25	46
WI-563	43	26 Days Old	21 Days Old	31 Days Old	11-Aug-25	37
WI-564	47	26 Days Old	22 Days Old	31 Days Old	11-Aug-25	39
WI-565	37	26 Days Old	18 Days Old	Died		
WI-566	53	21 Days Old	19 Days Old	32 Days Old	20-Aug-25	55
WI-567	51	21 Days Old	19 Days Old	32 Days Old	20-Aug-25	54
WI-568	48	21 Days Old	19 Days Old	32 Days Old	20-Aug-25	50
WI 569	60.7	19 Days Old	19 Days Old	28 Days Old	23-Aug-25	Unknown
WI 570	52.5	19 Days Old	18 Days Old	28 Days Old	23-Aug-25	Unknown
WI 571	33.8	19 Days Old	16 Days Old	Died		
WI-573	53	22 Days Old	22 Days Old	32 Days Old	1-Sep-25	56.7
WI-574	49	22 Days Old	19 Days Old	32 Days Old	1-Sep-25	48.1
WI-575	35	22 Days Old	17 Days Old	Died 25days(31.2)		
11/14 survived to fledging		All dead young weighed under 40 grams			Are these the ones to die?	
All Parents were Second Year Females & Males						

**Table 1:** Banded late young in August 2025. WI-561 to WI-565 youngsters are from Port Washington, WI-566 to WI-568 youngsters are from Appleton, WI-569 to WI-572 youngsters are from Long Lake near Potter, and WI 573 to WI 575 youngsters are in between the communities Hortonville and Greenville. Note their weights and what their appearances may look like for their estimated ages. Late season young experience less feeding, especially with Second Year (SY) parents. Deaths occurred for young weighing under 40 grams.

The second nest was located at housing along the Fox River near the boat ramp in Appleton (See Figure 1). This is one of Appleton's public colonies maintained by volunteers. Housing was visited by myself to band nestlings on July 2 with recording of information to assist in accounting for records by Ben Miller the volunteer. In one of the cavities there was a nest completely engulfed with feathers and amongst was a small white egg. My assumption was this was a late nesting tree swallow as my notes indicated (TRSW 1 E, lots of feathers), especially since the white egg was smaller than Purple Martin eggs and no leaves. When Ben followed up on his future checks on July 6, 12, and 19, he found four eggs with the feathers being more matted along with nesting materials. On further follow-ups by Ben on July 28 and Aug 2 there were 3 young. August 9 came banding day with my observation of the 4th egg that was smaller than normal which was addled and the young within the nest looking like 19 days old instead of the actual 21 days. That intuition of alarm having SY parents in August was put forward for I already was prepared by having live crickets present. We weighed each of the young (Table 1) WI-566 to WI-568 with the lightest being 48 grams. We proceeded to feed each of the young with Ben taking the charge to check on them to supplement feeding in the future until he could not. Then from August 16-20, I followed up to check on their health with weight checks supplementing food until fledging. Note the weights slightly increasing upwards. Not perfect but more even. Forgot to add that when we went to band and following days afterward it was imperative to check on the times of the adults feeding. This ranged at first check on Aug 9 was two times an hour for both parents' bringing food to six or more times per hour the last four days in the nest when they were all above 50 grams. Weather was hot with temps in the 80's during the first couple weeks of their lives contributing to little feeding during the main part of the day forcing the young to come the front of the cavity after their eyes were open. *Always write comments when checking cavities for it may clarify situations or make more sense as the nesting goes forward. It always makes you better prepared.* Going forward, the second of the last evenings on August 18 brought recognition from purple martin acquaintances (Figure 5) sensing the impending first flights. Lots of coaxing but no takers from the youngsters. By August 19 th the evening prior to fledging, I had developed lots of trust from the adults and young who readily accepted my food provided to them for they did not fledge early. My last evening with them (Figure 6) showed the SY male flying in to coax them out as their mouths were wide open with no food. As I tell many people the more often you interact with your martins the better, they are accepting of you peeking in and touching them if need be. When checking the evening of August 20, the young were calling from a tree on the hill overlooking the park where the parents were feeding them. On August

21, no martin activity near housing or the vicinity. What you ignore when not checking may lead to death. What you know can at least salvage a life. Nice to know that all three made it to fledging with a great chance for survival. Thanks to Ben for his part when he continued to feed after our banding, for they were even more accepting when I came on their last few days.



Figure 1 Housing along Fox River.



Figure 2 Young were 9 days old on July 28 coming to the front of the cavity due to SY pair feeding twice per hour with weather being hot with temps in the 80s the first couple weeks of their lives.



Figure 3 Fourteen days old on Aug 2 & banded on August 9 at 21 days.



Figure 4 Placed the young back in the cavity seeing that no harmful invertebrates appeared in the cavity.



Figure 5 On the evening of August 18 many of the adults and their fledglings came by the housing trying to coax the young out of the cavity.



Figure 6 Evening of August 19, the adult male pretending to feed his young to coax them out.

The third late nesting was at Long Lake in Manitowoc County just across the border from Calumet County to the east of Potter. Much the same was with the parents being SY adults trying to get their young to fledge in August. Bob Ring was notified of a late brood and banded the three young found in the cavity on August 14. Weights were for the three were WI-569 at 60.7 grams, WI-570 at 52.5, and WI-571 at 33.8 grams. None of these young were fed extra food along the way with WI-571 dying on August 20 just a few days from when the other two fledged on August 23. Keep in mind they were 19 days of age with the healthiest being at where it was to be at almost 61 grams with the middle one weighing in about 10 grams lighter looking like 18 days old and the third one weighed almost 30 grams lighter looking like a 16 days old youngster. Whenever you have great disparities like this, the dominant youngster always takes in most of the food while its siblings suffer.

Feeding extra food resources several times a day to the underweight ones would easily give them a better chance of survival in the nest and after fledging. My gut feeling is the parents were also hurting too from the reasons mentioned earlier. Success was getting two of the three to flight but the unknowns for survival of the parents and the next lightest youngster make one wonder if more time needs to be aware of the situations to assist young within the cavities. Another landlord sent a picture to me (Figure 7) showing a young martin amongst its siblings around July 20<sup>th</sup> indicating a difference of age or growth due to competition. In this case the physical age difference was 15 days versus around 10 days. When we see such discrepancies as landlords, we need to react more quickly to these situations either by placing these young in another cavity matching its physical age if possible or begin supplementing food to these youngsters so they can catch up in size and be able to fledge successfully with greater survival. Without doing so will result in the death of the undersized youngster.



**Figure 7** Note the sizeable difference of older siblings (feathered) around 15 days of age to the smallest (pink stage) showing physical body size of 10 days of age except for advancement of wing feathers. Thanks go to B. Fanning for supplying the picture.

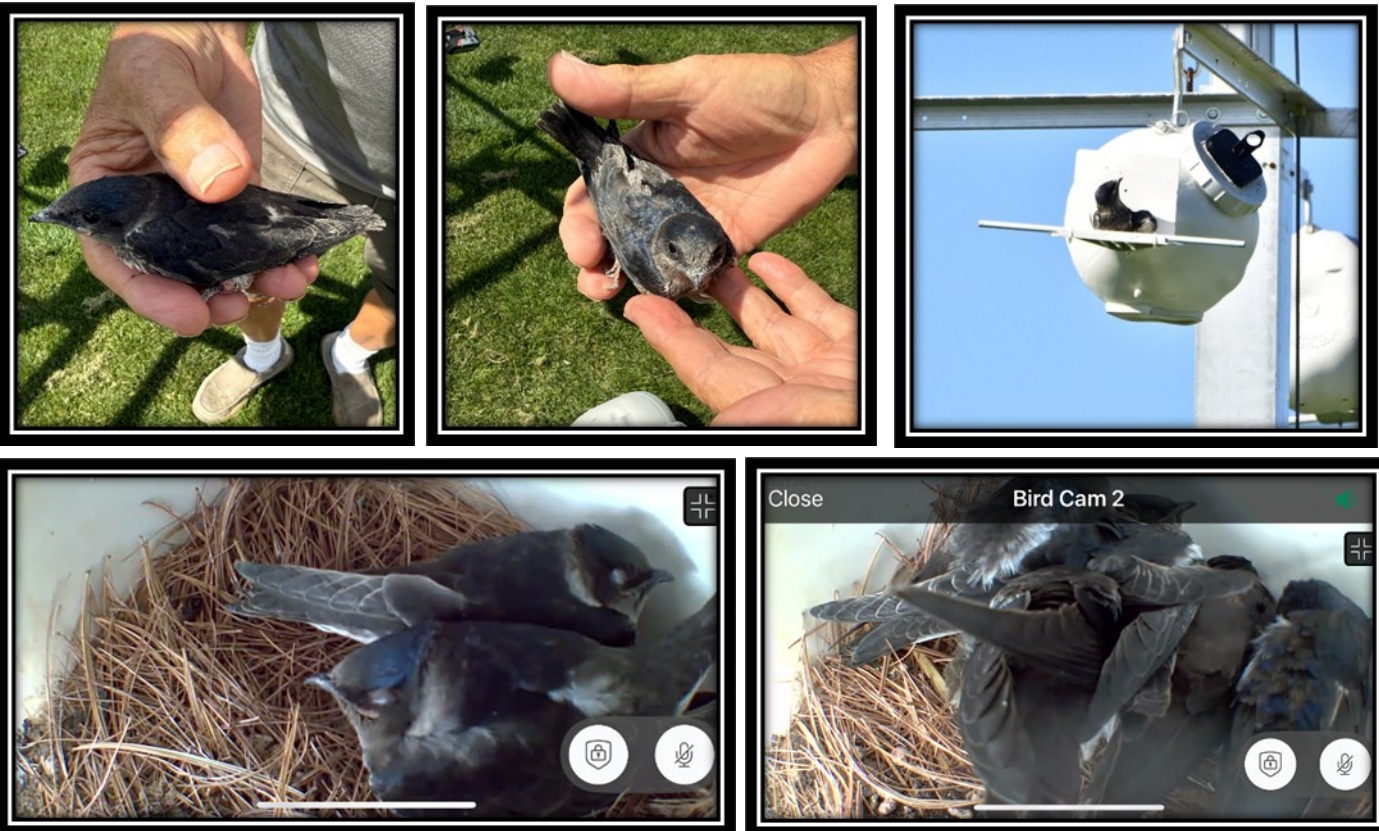
The fourth and final banding of late 2025 August nestlings were recorded between Greenville and Hortonville. Bob Frankel had four young hatched on August 1 by a late nesting second year pair of martins. One of these young perished around August 13 due to the SY parents lack of experience of taking care of nestlings. On August 20, these SY parents had three young remaining with weights of 1.7oz (48.2gms), 1.1oz (31.2gms), & 2.0oz (56.7gms). On August 21, the three young were banded with some training for Bob on how to feed the young rehydrated crickets. The lightest was given the most food with the others receiving a lot less in trying to advance their weights along with not overloading their digestive systems.

Unfortunately, the lightest one identified as (WI-575) died on August 25 weighing 31.2 grams. That youngster was doing great prior with feeding and appeared healthy enough to make it to fledging. The other two weighed at 56.7 grams and 48.1 grams on their 25th day. Regardless one never knows the outcome unless one tries. Every martin fledged becomes an opportunity for someone at some place to start a new colony or improve upon one that exists.

On day 26, the two remaining youngsters (WI-573 & WI-574) are healthy and improving as shown in **Figures 8 & 9** as Bob has them in his open palm of his hand. They have become accustomed to Bob feeding them giving the additional comfort without fear. On September 1, both youngsters become restless on day 32, quickly fledging shortly after the picture of **Figure 10** was taken. This success becomes a fruitful memory for Bob when they sneak back to spend the night in their gourd again on day 32 in their suite by themselves. That memory is topped the following evening when they spend day 33 with their entire family as shown in **Figure 11** which is a rarity for late fledglings. Hopefully this tight responsible family unit stayed together for a few more days or even longer giving them the assurance that maybe they may be back in 2026 to share some more memories with Bob or share it with a new landlord.

While these four pairs represent a small portion of Wisconsin's late broods there are even later Purple Martin broods across the United States that fledge late. In 2025 one of those broods occurred to Bill Miller at his colony in Orwell, Ohio. He too was surprised to find a brood while cleaning out his seven T-14's in mid-September and noticed two youngsters just getting feathers. Bill Wenger went down to view this late brood taking some pictures. When Bill Miller and Bill Wenger lowered the housing, a martin flew out on October 1 meaning they just fledged or on the day before which was September 30. Hopefully both Ohio parents along with their youngsters survive two migrations just as our hopeful group of young fledglings from Wisconsin. Ours are red color-banded on the left leg and the Bird Banding Lab aluminum band on the right which makes them greater chance to see if they survived.

Please report any bands or their numbers whether it is partial or a full complement of numerals or letters you get or find to the Bird Banding Lab at <https://www.usgs.gov/labs/bird-banding-laboratory> where it indicates **Report Band**. It is easy to report and many times you will find out what has taken place from its history afterwards. Our thanks to you ahead of time.



**Figure 8 top left.** Shows the lightest of the two surviving young martins on August 26. **Figure 9 top middle.** Shows the heaviest of the two young martins on August 26. Both are 26 days of age. **Figure 10 top right.** On September 1 the young are shown just before fledging on day 32. **Figure 11 bottom left.** At 32 days of age both fledged young came back to their cavity to spend the night. **Figure 12 bottom right.** On day age 34 (September 5) the photo shows the entire family spending time with each other in the gourd for the last time. The SY male is on the far right with the SY female on the far left.

## Being a Desoto Purple Martin Landlord Ken Damro

*The Mississippi River will always have its own way; no engineering skill can persuade it to do otherwise.* - Mark Twain

In 2013, I was awarded permission to set up two poles of martin housing at the Genoa Fish Hatchery on the banks of the Mississippi River. I tried for martins there for 5 years before giving up. I then realized there was a definite Purple Martin and martin housing shortage in a region that looked perfect for martins.

In 2022, I relocated near DeSoto. There were no colonies near DeSoto and the few martins that nested in the area suffered from House Sparrow invasion and general human neglect (and continue to do so today despite my attempts to get involved). What was once a hobby or a way to enhance your yard with bird song and poetic graceful avian flight, has now become a serious conservation issue.

My introduction to Purple Martins came early in life. My father and grandfather had large colonies in Kaukauna back in the 60s and 70s. Back when pretty much anyone could get martins regardless of whether you were situated on water or not. At age 18 I relocated to Wisconsin's Northwoods. I'd often ride my bicycle around Vilas and Oneida Counties checking on martin colonies on various Northwoods lakes. I tried for martins at a few lake front locations, but was largely unsuccessful. By the 1980s and 1990s, I saw those colonies dwindle and eventually disappear. I relocated to Southwestern WI in 2011, the only martins I saw were along the Mississippi River. The Upper Mississippi River is a vast network of sloughs, bays, swamps, and marshes, an enormous insect factory.

The property in which I currently reside isn't favorable for Purple Martins so I contacted the village of DeSoto and asked for permission to erect housing on village property close to the Mississippi River. Desoto is also a municipality that has been approved for being a Bird City participant. This program gives extra emphasis for those municipalities in reward points who cater to Purple Martins in Wisconsin.

Last May (2024) I had a T14 with 4 gourds and 12 gourds (on two poles) erected at the new site. A number of SYs checked out the housing. On May 19, an SY male arrived, eventually found a mate, and they began hauling nesting on May 26. Soon more came and by the end of June, there were 4 SY pair nesting and lots of other visitors. One pair didn't lay eggs but stayed most of the nesting season. Another pair laid eggs but abandoned them during an extended rainy period but two pair stayed to raise 6 young from 15 eggs.

On April 10, 2025, (my second year at this site) my first ASY male returned. More martins returned to the site throughout spring until there were 18 pair with 87 eggs (4.83 eggs per cavity). In the end, this colony fledged 58 young, (only 66.6% with 3.22 fledglings per cavity), still not bad I think for a second year colony.

Having a martin colony on public property has its advantages and disadvantages. It's good to have more public exposure and when I die or sell my house and relocate, hopefully there will be people to carry the martin landlord torch for many years to

come. In addition, hosting martins on public land makes it possible for me to have martins since my property isn't suitable. The challenges on the other hand are that it is more difficult to control sparrows since the public may view it unfavorably. Vandalism is also a threat, but so far so good in

that regard. There is also less control over decisions and making changes to martin housing may need to go through a political process. In my case, I have been informed that there will be infrastructure changes in 2026 and I will have to move my colony after just two seasons. I have begun doing that by moving one gourd rack at the beginning of this year and one at the end of this season.

Some of my goals regarding my colony are to continue to learn to be a better landlord. I'd also like to build up martin numbers in my colony, attain a better fledgling percentage rate as well as bolster the martin population in this region. I think it would be good to get more people involved. I consider Purple Martins a *gateway species*, one which lures the non-birding community into an interest of Purple Martins and eventually spins off into interests of other bird species, insects, habitat awareness, environmentalism, etc.

I've had people ask me why I bother with Purple Martins. After all, with climate change, the crash of our insect populations, chemical pollution, species extinctions, and all other gloom and doom issues these days, what's the point? To this I can only say that if we don't try, there is no hope.

It sure is uplifting to know there are others who share our interest in hosting Purple Martins.



*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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