

Purple Martin CHATTER

Summer 2022

Preserving and Restoring the Purple Martin Population in Wisconsin

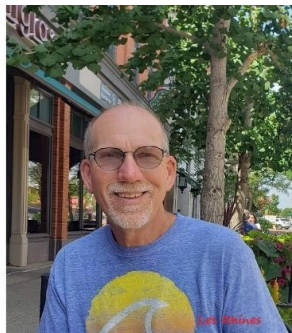
Volume 10 Issue 3

Inside this issue

President's message	2
MartinFest	3
It's a Trap!	5
Plymouth Generations update	9
Remembering Tom Rank	10
Meet the Landlords	11



Photo courtesy Gail Bolden



A Message from the President

Hello everyone, and welcome to another issue of *Purple Martin Chatter*. I hope that everyone is enjoying the summer and that you're able to watch and enjoy the growth of the hatchlings as

they near fledging, and in many cases, from what I've heard, landlords are already experiencing fledging. The birds at my personal colony will begin to fledge just about the time that you are reading this, although I do have a late nest that is not due to fledge until August 8th. The time goes by so fast.

Summer is also when we host our annual MartinFest and this year we held it on June 25th at Marsh Haven Nature Center. If you've never been there, the nature center is a very nice facility that offer several programs for both kids and adults, hiking trails and a first-rate martin colony. Renee and the friends were extremely accommodating to our group, and I would like to thank them for their generous hospitality.

Over the years we had been blessed with good weather at this event, but that was not the case this year, gray skies and the threat of rain forced us inside, but that did not dampen the spirits of event goers and participants. We were forced to improvise a bit, the bird banding demonstration had to be cancelled; however, a break in the weather allowed Dick Nikolai time to head outside and lower the houses and provide a demonstration on what to look for when doing a nest check and to talk about the importance of keeping good records. Another impromptu demonstration that was well received was by Greg Zimmermann; Greg put on his chef's hat and cooked up a special batch of meal worms and scrambled eggs and gave a demonstration on flipping to the birds.

Our featured speaker was Nancy Businga, DNR Wildlife Disease Specialist. Nancy provided a very informative talk, and while she covered so much material relative to all songbirds including Purple Martins, one of the things that stuck out to me was to make sure that we keep our feeders clean by washing them with a weak bleach solution a few times a season. This makes sense for the backyard bird feeder where were feeding the Cardinals and Blue Jays etc. However, as Nancy was surprised to the extent that martins are transitioning to platform feeders, (Bed and

Breakfasts), she advised that we make sure that we keep those feeders clean as well. Additionally, always remove any un-eaten food from the feeder after a few hours.

Our Silent Auction was a success as almost all the donated items were sold, we certainly want to thank all of those that donated items to our auction and I want to say thank you to everyone in the WPMA that worked either in preparation for the event or at the event; your willingness to provide your time and energy to help make MartinFest successful is very much appreciated.

Personally, one of the things I like best about MartinFest is that it gives me the opportunity to talk with people face to face about the success and concerns that they have at their colonies. Again, this year the concern about hawk and owl attacks came up often. I will provide two strategies that were shared with me. First, for hawks, a suggestion was to play Dawnsong and place martin decoys on the housing in the early season, before the martins arrive. The hawks hear the vocalization and see the decoys and continue to attack the plastic decoys and become conditioned that plastic does not taste very good and over time they stop hanging around and become less of a threat to the arriving martins. The second is that this landlord had been losing many birds to owl predation. With the season underway it was not practical to put cages around the housing, so he purchased one of those inflatable dancing figures, and placed it within the colony and by all accounts it has made a difference.

Well, I hope that you find the articles in this issue interesting, thank you to all of our contributing authors and with that, I invite you to get a fresh cup of coffee or your beverage of choice and enjoy this issue of *Purple Martin Chatter*.

MARTIN Fest

Marsh Haven Nature Center



While the bird banding was cancelled due to weather, visitors were able to get a glimpse of one cavity of nesting Purple Martins. Housing was on display for purchase and order. Indoor displays included additional housing, cavity traps, ground traps, food flippers, and more!





MARTIN Fest



Vice President Greg Zimmermann and Board Member Larry Lienau gave a supplemental feeding demonstration where Greg cooked up plain eggs mixed with crushed mealworms. Larry showed the method of flipping the eggs with a plastic spoon. Supplemental feeding is crucial to get the birds through periods of inclement weather.

Silent Auction items included Troyer horizontal and vertical gourds, a Coates WatersEdge Suite with pole, a reconditioned T-14, water wiggler, bird mister, original artwork, and more!



Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Debbie Zimmermann

Donations	\$65
Memberships	\$60
Pins	\$9
9 T-shirts	\$108
Total income	\$642
Donation to Marsh Haven	-\$50
Cost of pins	-\$20
Total	\$572

Originally published Summer 2021

It's a Trap!

Les Rhines

I'll come right to the point, I don't like House Sparrows. Sparrows have no place in a martin colony; I won't go into what this little avian devil can do, that's been documented many times over. What I'm going to attempt in this article is to outline some of the most popular methods of getting rid of sparrows and that is primarily through trapping. I do want to say up front, do not wait until you have a problem, rather, never invite them into your yard to begin with. By that I mean, if you feed song birds at your yard, only offer good quality songbird mix. Sparrows like millet and cracked corn, and if that's in your seed mix, you're just ringing the dinner bell. I will also admit, although I have a little bit of experience at trapping these winged devils, they have at times made to look like a fool. Trapping will take patience, and an arsenal of traps. There are entrance traps, nest compartment traps, food traps, nest box traps, and of course, not a trap at all but a pellet gun.

Entrance Traps

Tunnel Trap. This is a trap that is used with Troyer tunnels. The tunnels can be attached to vertical or horizontal gourds or purchased with a collar and attached to a wood house. The setup is simple, leave the sparrow nest in place, install the trip shaft from the inside so that a short stub extends out of the front, next place the gate over the top of the tunnel. The trap is sprung when the sparrow enters and pushes the trip shaft causing the gate to close trapping the bird inside. To remove the bird place a clear plastic bag over the collar and raise the gate, typically the bird will see daylight and fly out into the bag. Or in the case of a gourd enclose the gourd in a large plastic bag and open the access cover.



Photos courtesy Troyers Bird Paradise

Bob Buskus Bingo Trap. This trap isn't too professional looking, but it sure works good to trap House Sparrows that have already built their nest in the martin house that are using entrance plates instead of tunnels. The benefit is that like the tunnel trap you can leave the sparrow nest in place, the sparrow suspects nothing. All you do is clean out the area in

front of the perch on the nest tray, and set the trap in place. Then close the compartment door. The sparrow goes about his or her normal life not expecting anything when they enter the cavity, and. In the words of Bob Buskus, **BINGO** you got em! I have made a few of these and used them successfully, I've even used them if I had tunnel entrances. One thing that I do and recommend, is that you use a reducer plate to cover the starling resistant entrance. I make mine out of 1/8 inch sign material or cut them out of white aluminum house soffit coil stock, keeping the hole diameter no larger than 1 and 1/4 inch. Sparrows can enter but too small for martins.



Photos courtesy Northern Sky's Purple Martin



Photos courtesy Les Rhines

The sparrow reducer. As I mentioned, they can be made out of sign board material or thin aluminum. I use the signboard material most often (above) and secure it with white tape. The idea is that you want to make it blend in with the house, sparrows are quite observant. I use the thin aluminum reducer on the Troyer tunnels, just make sure that the gate slides over the reducer so the traps operates correctly. You could also use clamps to hold the reducer in place, just paint them white allowing them to blend in with the entrance.

Another alternative reducer is to modify the Troyer Tunnel. I take 1/8 inch sign board material and cut it to fit on the inside of the tunnel entrance, it is held in place by poster putty. I have this on hand and when I want to deploy it, I simply swap out tunnel entrances. The nice thing about this method is that the gate does not hang up on the tape or metal on the outside in the first example.

(continued)



Photos courtesy Les Rhines

Bait Traps

ST2—Wire Sparrow Trap. This trap is designed to catch sparrows using a variety of baits, seed, white bread and even feathers. It can be used as is, right out of the box, but, I would recommend a few adjustments. I place mine on a post about 5 feet high within the martin colony and I keep it covered with a black plastic garbage bag until I see a sparrow at my colony. I have found that if I leave it uncovered all of the time, I will catch finches and even morning doves. (hard to believe that a dove will fit in the cage, but it happens). Modification 1, I attach a small tray to the top of the trap for the purpose of placing seed, like millet and cracked corn. Next I remove the 2 small seed cups located under the trip hoops and replace them with larger shallow containers, yogurt containers are a simple choice. The operation is simple, bait it, open the two doors as the picture shows and it is ready to go. When a bird is caught the door/lid will close and the bird will be trapped, however, they will quickly find a one way access hole allowing them to enter the center section. At that point you can reopen the door/lid arming the trap again. The idea is that a trapped sparrow will call in other sparrows. This procedure is advised especially if the first bird caught is a female. Many landlords wear a light pair of gloves before extracting the unwanted bird from the trap. It is also possible to place a large plastic bag over the trap and open the door, thus catching the unwanted bird in the plastic bag. If however, a native songbird is caught, simply open the door/lid allowing it



Photos courtesy Les Rhines

to escape.

Elevator/Repeating Trap: This is another type of food or bait trap that is typically used in a situation where the landlord has many sparrows at his/her colony and other traps are ineffective. The operating principles are simple, bait is placed on the top platform and inside the caged area. The investigating sparrow lands on the hoops and begins to feed, they see additional seed inside the trap and attempt to reach it, however they fall into the larger cage through a one way gate. Once there they continue to call other birds. This trap requires additional food and water to hold a larger volume of birds.



Photo courtesy PMCA

This trap is available at the PMCA or Troyer's Bird Paradise.

Nest Compartment Traps

Universal Sparrow trap. These two style traps are available from the PMCA, their overall dimensions are approximately 4 1/2 , by 4 1/2 by 5 1/2 inch. The two entrance styles allow for use with a round hole and with a starling resistant entrance. Personally, I have owned the trap on the left for 15 years and have caught very few sparrows until I made some modifications. Most notably, I painted the trap black except the red gate/door. I also cut 5 pieces of aluminum trim and painted it black. I then attached those aluminum pieces to the inside of the trap using small electrical wire ties. The idea is to have the trap completely dark when it is placed inside house. I do not place any material inside the trap. Note: I have even caught starlings in this trap after making these changes, hard to believe that a starling would enter such a small compartment. I use this trap usually in the very early spring before martins arrive, because sparrows are already starting to look for nesting sites. I open one compartment on one of my houses and set the trap. Better to eliminate the problem early.

Nest Compartment Traps. These traps differ from the Universal traps above, primarily because of their size; these traps fit inside the entire compartment of the martin housing.

(continued)

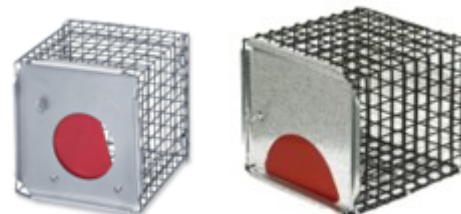


Photo courtesy PMCA



The trap on left is available at Northern Sky's Purple Martin Colony. The trap on the right is available at PMCA or Troyer's Bird Paradise.

Traps like these are only available from a few vendors like the PMCA and Troyer's. Because of that many landlords make their own. These traps are most effective at the earliest sign that a sparrow is interested in a particular compartment. Before the sparrow has a chance to build a complete nest, lower the house and pull out the nest tray and substitute the trap. It may be necessary to add some nest material inside the trap that it looks similar to what the sparrow had started. Be sure to place a reducer over the entrance to only allow sparrows to enter. As a preventative measure some landlords will always keep a trap in a particular compartment with a reducer, especially if they find that sparrows tend to build in a particular compartment. Another strategy is if during a nest check you find that the sparrows built a nest and have also produced eggs, you can still use this trap. Take out the nest and transfer the eggs to the trap with some of the nesting material and set it back in the compartment. You will likely catch the female in a short time, but the male will elude you. Once you have caught and dispatched the female, reset the trap and you may catch the male. Remember, sparrows become trap aware very quickly, when they notice a change, they abandon the compartment and move to another, further frustrating the landlord.

As I mentioned many martin landlords produce their own traps. These four photos show one of the compartment traps that I have built and use in a T14 or T10. This trap uses a sliding gate to trap the sparrow which is different from the universal trap that utilizes a hinged door mechanism. While both methods work, the problem that has troubled trap builders is to construct the trap that can be easily tripped when the sparrow enters, but, not too light that it trips while the house is being raised up on the pole. Fine tuning a trap takes some effort, and patience. In the photo's below, I show the inside workings of the trap as well as a means of extracting the birds. I usually place the entire trap into a large clear garbage bag and then open the release door.



Photos courtesy Les Rhines

Gourd Traps

Super Gourd. So far I've talked primarily about traps that can be used in wood or aluminum houses. However, there is the other realm of housing used by many landlords and that is gourds. Earlier I did mention the Tunnel trap, these traps can

be used on Troyer vertical and horizontal gourds because the Tunnel entrances have been designed to easily accept the tunnel trap. Other manufactured gourds require other traps, so at this point, I will provide some insight into these other manufactured gourds. First, let's talk about the Super Gourd. A trap is available for this gourd



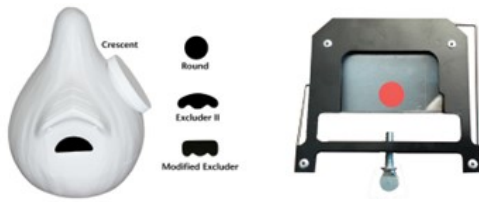
from Troyer's or from the PMCA. The trap is inserted through the access hole and is snapped into place by clips in the entrance hole.

Excluder Gourd. The trap that is available for the Excluder gourd will work with starling-resistant entrances, it has an easy to use shutter mechanism that slips over the inside porch.

This trap is available from the PMCA.

(continued)

Excluder Gourd. The trap that is available for the Excluder gourd will work with starling-resistant entrances; it has an easy-to-use shutter mechanism that slips over the inside porch.

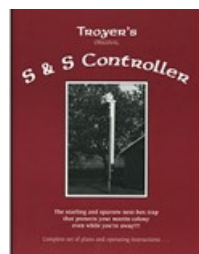


Photos courtesy PMCA

This trap is available from the PMCA.

Repeating/Elevator Traps

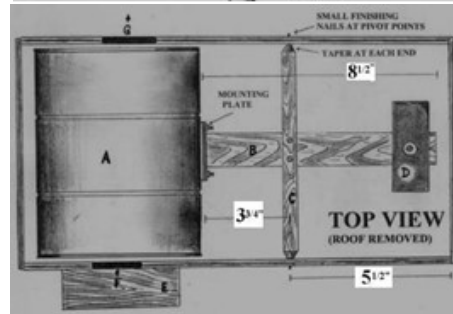
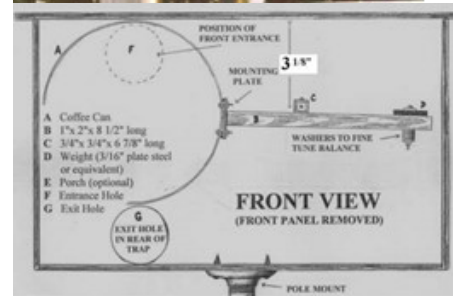
S & S Controller. This is a trap that is designed and sold by Troyer's Bird Paradise. The benefits of this trap are that it will automatically reset, it allows the landlord to release a native bird unharmed, it has a wire cage that is visible from a distance so you can see what is trapped, it does not require bait, and it will work great in reducing European Starlings and House Sparrows. Plans are also available if you choose to build one yourself. This trap resembles an actual martin house, so you want to place it away from the colony near a building or near trees; somewhere where martins are not inclined to go, but within sight of the colony. The theory is that when a starling is investigating your martin housing, they see this trap with the large 2-inch opening, and they can't resist. The trap uses a counterweight system that once setup can catch starlings and sparrows easily.



NB Compact Trap. This trap is a smaller version of the S & S Controller, it uses a counterweight system just like the Controller, except it is much smaller. I have provided a link to the plans from the PMCA. I included some pictures showing how the trap is constructed. This is the version I have at my colony.

Summary

Again, let me say that I don't consider myself an expert on catching sparrows, rather, I consider myself a lifelong learner in that category. But I do want to close with just a few other things. First never leave traps unattended, monitor them frequently, especially if you



choose not to use a sparrow reducer. Second, begin trapping early and don't wait until you have a problem, have traps ready to deploy when sparrows arrive. Most new landlords believe that sparrows will only be a problem in the beginning of each season, not true. Sparrows can and will have multiple nests throughout the season, so it is very likely that sparrows will invade a colony even after martins arrive. That is why at my colony I have

a system of traps; nest box traps and repeating traps for the very early season, and entry traps and bait traps for after the martins arrive.

I know that many of you out there will have much more to add to this, so feel free to share your thoughts.

Martins Make Their Return to Plymouth Generations

Les Rhines

The Generational center located in Plymouth Wisconsin is celebrating its 10th year of offering services to the local community in the form of programs for seniors and pre-school children, in addition to becoming a source for many clubs and organizations to hold meetings and public events. The Wisconsin Purple Martin Association has maintained a relationship with Generations, since they opened their doors. For those that were not aware, the WPMA started out as the Eastern Wisconsin Purple Martin Association, (EWPMA)



founded by Tom Rank and Generations was the site where we held our first public meetings. Within a year we were given permission to erect a purple martin house on the site. We thought it was ideal as there was a pond nearby and the site was wide open for bird flight. We initiated a fund-raising campaign and Ike Kumrow, an original board member built the T14 that is on the site today. The photo below shows the board members and volunteers that erected the house (from left to right, Greg Zimmermann, Ike Kumrow, Joel Schumacher, Joe Francis, Tom Rank, unnamed volunteer, and Nicki Schumacher).

As luck would have it, we had a pair of SY's the first year the house was up, and we thought this was going to be great. Unfortunately, that pair of SY parents abandoned their young and the house had been empty of martins, until this year.

We did our best over the years to keep the riff raff out by trapping sparrows and starlings, playing Dawnsong, as well as offering alternative housing for Tree Swallows, we were even considering moving the house

to a different location.

Then this year around Father's Day we started to notice martins flying around and have seen as many as five at any one time.

While doing routine nest checks we first found green leaves in compartment number nine, and then on or around June 24 we noticed the first egg. Ultimately 4 eggs were laid and on July 9, I was able to capture this photo, to my surprise it was hatching day.



In summary, public colonies present many challenges in that we don't always have eyes on the colony, and we know that sparrows can be relentless. On the day this photo was taken I noticed a "new" male sparrow hanging around. So once again I set traps in the compartments that showed some sort of sparrow nest activity, and I used a sparrow reducer to cover the entrance holes preventing a martin from entering. So goes the challenge of a public colony. Here's hoping that we can help this set of martin parents get their hatchlings to the fledging stage and we can get this colony growing.



Footnote to the story, 2 days after the sparrow's arrival he made the mistake of entering a compartment with a Bingo trap, end of story.

-Photos courtesy Les Rhines

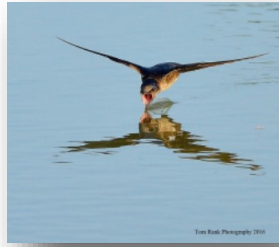


Photo courtesy Tom Rank

Remembering Tom Rank

Vice President Greg Zimmermann

Tom and I met in March of 2010. We were both attending a seminar put on by DNR Wildlife Biologist, Dick Nikolai at the Maywood Nature Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Dick's presentation was of course on the topic of Purple Martins. It was a very informative seminar.

After the presentation, Tom and I introduced ourselves to each other and that's when we got the idea of forming a club dedicated to Purple Martins. If my memory is correct, I also met with Ike Kumrow, Nikki Schumacher, Les Rhines, and Joe Francis. All were involved with Purple Martins.

As we talked about our own colonies, we decided that we needed to try and do something to help the martins in our area. We exchanged phone numbers and on one Saturday in April of 2010, we got together and formed our club. At that time, we called it the Eastern Wisconsin Purple Martin Association. Tom would be President. Tom's idea got off to a great start and soon our club was up and running, and as time went on, our club started growing. Tom reached out to the Generations Center in Plymouth, Wisconsin and that's where we had our first meeting. It was a success! We credit him for making this association what it is today.



The first Board of Directors of the Eastern Wisconsin Purple Martin Association, now known as the Wisconsin Purple Martin Association (WPMA). Pictured from left to right Joe Francis, Nikki Schumacher, Les Rhines, Tom Rank, Greg Zimmermann, and Ike Kumrow.

Meet the Landlords

Gail Bolden

I have always had an affinity for birds, and I am fortunate to have seen many over the years, as my husband's military career has taken us to both coasts and several spots in between. For a bird watcher however, no location compares to the number of *lifer birds* I have seen in my yard on Lake Winnebago. From the spring migration of waterfowl to the fall migration of warblers, it is truly a birder's paradise. Prior to moving to Wisconsin five years ago, I had never seen a Purple Martin; an added bonus is that I now have an active colony, but it did take some effort.

My lifer Purple Martin was an ASY male flying around my neighbor's Purple Martin house. There were also House Sparrows flitting in and out of the 12-room unit so I asked the neighbor if he managed the HOSP. "No, the sparrows get in first, then, when the martins come, they kick the sparrows out." That said, it explained why he never established a colony. It seemed to be a common belief and probably why I saw more HOSP condominiums than Purple Martin colonies in the area. On the lake, *prime* Purple Martin territory, and I rarely saw any that first year.

My expertise was bluebirds; I knew nothing about Purple Martins. They have one brood, compared to the three I was accustomed to with bluebirds. Their incubation period was longer, their fledging age later, and for those reasons, it was difficult to understand why martins are so coveted *<gasp>*. Since no bluebirds were in the area, I purchased an inexpensive 8-room plastic martin house and pole to see if I could attract a pair or two. Soon after I raised the house, I had a Tree Swallow emergency, but in late June, two SY pair nested and nine fledged. The housing had its issues: the dark cavities required a flashlight to see the nestlings, the cavities were not deep enough, nest changes were challenging, and the plastic tabs that held the doors closed broke



Photo courtesy Gail Bolden

before the season ended.

My level of understanding thankfully evolved and for season 3, I added a T-14 on a beefy Troyer 3" square pole. Not only did it fill up immediately, it lessened my anxiety with lake winds, which are mostly constant at my location. This season, I added another T-14 and fingers

crossed, I expect to report 114 fledglings for 2022. At this writing, I have ten left to fledge.

While my colony has grown, it takes time and effort beyond the season. I have an arsenal of traps and I dispatch HOSP all year long; I conduct nest checks every other day and sometimes daily during the season; I keep records, and the colony is now trained to accept supplemental food. Training them took three years of me flipping food up to them in drizzle, downpours, and cloudy days to no avail, but I kept trying.

This past spring, they finally caught on, and the difference with supplemental feeding has been remarkable. Last year, 56% of the eggs made it to

fledge, compared to this season, where, if all 114 fledge, it will be a 92.7% fledge rate. It has made a difference.

As the season comes to a close, I am reminded why being a landlord is not only a hobby, but a true conservation effort for a truly coveted bird.



Are you my mother?

Gail B.



MartinWatch Nest Data Sheet

As the Purple Martin season winds down, Dick Nikolai's season is far from over. When you submit your MartinWatch Nest Data sheets to PMCA, please send a copy of your report to Dick so that he can continue to research and monitor the health of the Wisconsin Purple Martin population.

Please send your reports to
prairiechicken@att.net.

Interested in a Wisconsin Purple Martin Association t-shirt?

We have several left:

Black (5 small, 1-2XL)

Gray (4 small, 3 large, 3XL)

Contact Debbie Zimmermann if you are interested

(920) 467-6253 or dpierce52@yahoo.com

Thank you...

to those that donated Silent Auction items for MartinFest, to those who bid on same, and finally to those that came out on a dreary Saturday to celebrate our feathered friends. Your support is very much appreciated!

MartinFest 2023

Do you know of a venue that could accommodate our annual MartinFest celebration?

We are always looking for host locations, so if you have an idea you'd like to run past us, contact any board member and we will look into it!



SY Male

Photo courtesy Gail Bolden

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.

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

Membership inquiries: dpierce522@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.

You might be a Purple Martin landlord if:

- you find yourself watching the skies starting the third week of March, *just in case*.
- you have a bulk supply of hand warmers.
- you schedule vacations around Purple Martin season.
- you can define *Tree Swallow Emergency!*
- you have a special omelet pan in your cupboard.
- you watch an inclimate weather report and can translate it into how many eggs/mealworms/crickets you'll need to get through the storm.
- your idea of Friday night entertainment is sitting outside watching your colony.
- you always have a current Troyer catalog handy in the event *you just need one more thing*.
- you look forward to nest checks!
- you keep a running log of HOSP/EUST dispatches.
- you will talk Purple Martins to anyone who will listen.
- the dog days of summer are the sad days of summer when your colony prepares to leave.

Our partners in bird conservation:

