

# ONTARIO PURPLE MARTIN ASSOCIATION

[www.ontariopurplemartins.ca](http://www.ontariopurplemartins.ca)  
[www.essexpurplemartins.ca](http://www.essexpurplemartins.ca)

## 2019.... *SPRING*



### *Message from our Chairperson:*

It's that time of year when we begin to think about the return of the Martins! Many of us will start to take a look at our housing to make sure it is ready for the returning Martins. Some of us will also be thinking about feeding the returning birds if the weather turns nasty. Mary Wilson will be ordering crickets for this purpose so if interested contact her. Let's just hope that we will have good weather in April and May so the Martins have an easy time for preparing their nests and laying their eggs.

We had our first meeting at Colasanti's on February 16<sup>th</sup>. 45 people were in attendance along with Aly Hyder from Nature Canada. Susan Carr, Henry and Elaine Wolting along with their son Jeremy (the photographer who put the video together) gave a very interesting presentation on the roost on Walpole Island. Thank you to them for taking the interest to document this most important roost.

Speaking of roosts, I will also mention that John Balga and Ron Delcourt monitored the Point Pelee roost in August and early September last year. If you're interested in visiting this roost in August 2019, John has invited our members to come out and have a look. All you need to do is let him know if you are interested.

By the way, John is still accepting fledging numbers from last season. You can email him with your colony numbers if you have not already done so.

We have a number of events planned for this year. Again, we will take part in HawkFest during the weekends of September 14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> and September 21<sup>st</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup>. **NEW!** → On May 11<sup>th</sup> we will have a display at Holiday Beach Conservation Area to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day. Our club will be the main host for this event at Holiday Beach. If you can help out with any of these events let me know so I can add you to a volunteer list.

The OPMA is run by a board of nine members. For 2019, it is as follows:

Paul Hamel, Chair ... Richard Carr, Vice Chair ... Mary Wilson, Secretary ... Al Hamill, Treasurer. Lyle Papps, Dennis Shady, Fern Bellavance, Audrey Festeryga, and Marianne Knapp are Directors at Large, and John Balga is Consultant to the Board.

All these individuals have volunteered to be part of the board and to meet occasionally to make plans for our association. Thank you to them for all that they do for our club. In 2020 some of these positions will be up for renewal and this will be an opportunity for others to get involved as members of the board.

Each year we have two member-host meetings. This year the dates are May 25<sup>th</sup> & June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Henry and Elaine Wolting have again volunteered their home in Blenheim for the June 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting which is also our Pot luck / BBQ get together. Mark your calendar for this, because in years past it has been a highlight for our club! We still need someone to host the May 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. If you are interested, please let me know.

We keep adding new members to the OPMA! Because of this interest our club remains very viable and is able to be a positive voice for Purple Martin Conservation. Our finances remain strong because of our membership dues and we are able to carry on with our club functions. I want to give a thank you to all our general members for your continued support. We can only be an advocate for the Purple Martin if our club remains strong.

Finally, I once again thank Mary Wilson for her volunteer role in putting out our newsletter. It is the one way we are able to keep in touch with each and every one of you.

*Paul Hamel, Chair.*

### 2019 MEETINGS and EVENTS

- ◆ All meeting dates are subject to change as necessary. Changes will be communicated to everyone.
- ◆ We will make reminder emails **OR** phone calls prior to each meeting.
- ◆ For “**member-host**” meetings, in case of questionable weather, individuals should contact the “host” to confirm if the meeting will be held as scheduled. **It is NOT the responsibility of the “host” to contact everyone.**
  
- ❖ 9:00 am ..... Feb. 16 Colasanti’s, Ruthven .... In the WILLOW Room
- ❖ 9:00 am ..... Apr. 13. .... Orchard View Golf Course, Ruthven
- ❖ **New!!** May 11 ..... OPMA Booth at Holiday Beach for “World Migratory Bird Day” (10 to 3)
- ❖ 9:00 am ..... May 25 ..... “Member-Host” Meeting – Location TBD
- ❖ 9:00 am ..... Jun. 22 ..... “Member-Host” Meeting/BBQ – **Home of Henry & Elaine Wolting, Blenheim**  
Sept. 14-15..... OPMA Booth at Holiday Beach for “Hawkfest” (10 – 3)  
Sept. 21-22
- ❖ 9:00 am ..... Oct 5.... ..... Orchard View Golf Course, Ruthven

*Welcome to our new members!*

*Kathryn Boothby, Langton*

*Sandra Dupuis, Windsor*

*Mike Munger, Harrow*

*Donna Vazzeler & Nevaeh LePage, LaSalle*

*Tom Welacky, Kingsville*

*Kim and Rick Brown, Harrow*

*Gary Cullion, Windsor*

*Leona Crowder, Kingsville*

## *At our February Meeting*

# OPMA Learns about Walpole Island Roost

OUR MEETING WAS COVERED BY A REPORTER FROM ESSEX FREE PRESS. THE ARTICLE IS SHOWN BELOW, AND IS ALSO ON OUR OPMA WEBSITE AT THIS LINK: [FEBRUARY, 2019](#)

by Sylene Argent.

Courtesy of the  
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Pictured are the  
special guest speakers  
at the February OPMA  
meeting:

Richard & Susan Carr

of the WALPOLE  
ISLAND PURPLE  
MARTIN PROJECT

During the Ontario Purple Martin Association meeting, held on Saturday morning (February 16<sup>th</sup>), special guest speakers Susan and Richard Carr talked about the large Purple Martin roost on Walpole Island. The duo also showed a video local filmmaker, Jeremy Wolting, made late last summer that showed likely thousands of Purple Martins flying together at twilight on a summer evening.

Susan noted elders of Walpole had always spoken of having Purple Martins in that area, but she didn't recall seeing any. In 2009, a Purple Martin house was installed on the island, and a pair began living there right away. The Island now has 14 houses spread out over a 10-mile area that helped hatch over 500 fledglings last year, she noted.

"I thought it was great," Susan said of getting that first Purple Martin pair. She would learn of the difficulty other birders have had in attracting Canada's largest swallow to their own properties.

Purple Martin numbers are dwindling, locally. Purple Martins need a house to nest, and many of the Association's members look after those nests to help the birds thrive.

With an increase in population on Walpole Island, there was an increase in sightings, Susan said. This phenomenon was used as a teaching tool for colleges, universities, and schools. The idea for the public outreach was to get youth interested in birds, so the next generation will care for the feathered friends in the future.

The Purple Martins typically arrive at Walpole Island in the beginning of April, and stick around for around six months before they head south for the winter. While they are on the Island, she said, she, and others, are checking the nests, banding and document the fledglings, and making sure they are all healthy.

The Carrs knew videographer Jeremy Wolting's parents. Soon, Wolting was asked to film the Purple Martins, and a handful of other song birds, when they take flight, likely by the thousands, at twilight nearing the end of August in 2018. This time of year is a peak for this type of activity. It lasts for around 20-30 minutes, Susan estimated.

In the video, it claims this roost could be the largest for Purple Martins in North America. Wolting used a drone to capture the birds flying. "It is such a phenomenon, you get goosebumps watching it," Susan said. Susan believes this natural flying phenomenon is likely the birds socializing and getting the younger members of the crew ready for migration.

"Walpole Island is almost other worldly. It is a beautiful area," Wolting said of the experience, also noting the drone didn't seem to bother the birds.

Paul Hamel, President of the Ontario Purple Martin Association, thanked everyone involved in filming the Purple Martins on Walpole Island. "It was quite spectacular," he said.

The video is available for viewing on YouTube on Wolting's page:

Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qrOwZnFMfs> to watch the video. <https://youtu.be/7qrOwZnFMfs>

*Added by Mary: Assisting in the presentation were Henry & Elaine Wolting, who recounted the difficulties getting into this isolated area. (The isolation and potential dangers of humans getting lost among the numerous waterways and phragmite islands of the marsh is significant, and has led to stringent restrictions for access. These restrictions will mean that the general public cannot gain access to directly view this natural phenomenon, but also, fortunately, that this roost area will likely remain undisturbed by humans, as it has probably been for a very long time.)*

*Henry estimated that approximately 1,000 kms were logged on their boat, and a further 2,500 kms on their vehicle in the many days through August and September when they were travelling to and from Walpole Island. They left home (Blenheim) every day they could at 6-6:15 and got home around 10-10:30 and then edited footage or pictures until 11. (26 trips for Elaine, 24 for Henry, 15 for Jeremy and 6 for Jordan!) Jeremy spoke of the nervousness involved in flying an expensive piece of equipment (the drone) in that environment, in partial light, from a moving boat!*

*Kudos to Richard & Susan (who also spent an incredible number of hours tracking the roost and guiding the way), Henry & Elaine, and their sons Jeremy & Jordan. What a labour of love and dedication to capture what surely must be one of the most significant roosts in North America! (It is estimated to have about 250,000 Purple Martins, possibly coming from the northern tier of the US, Michigan, and potentially Alberta, as well as Ontario.)*

## **SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING and CRICKETS (Mary Wilson)**

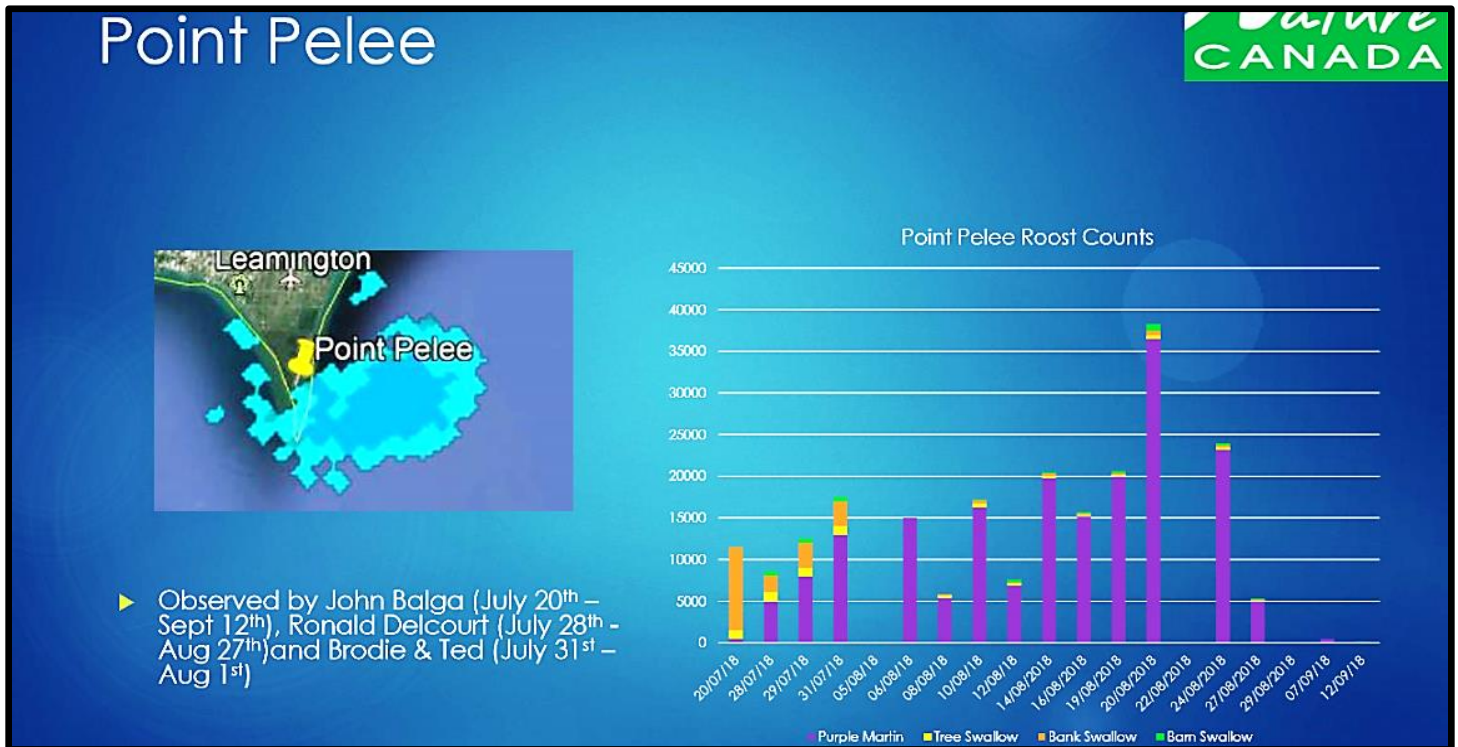
Supplemental feeding is being practiced by many landlords throughout the U.S. and Canada to get their birds through a bad patch of weather in the early spring. Particularly following their arduous migration, Martins can succumb quickly to "no-feed" weather when they are unable to regain strength.

As a volunteer service for the OPMA, I submit a bulk order for feeder crickets from a local retailer who adds our order to his own at the wholesale price he pays. No profit is realized by myself or the OPMA. Your order will be taken during the February meeting, or thereafter if you contact me, and at the appropriate time (approximately when Martins have arrived in northern Ohio), I will submit the bulk order for the club. When it arrives, I will freeze and re-package your crickets. All you need do is pick them up and put them in your freezer. (Any price adjustment beyond your \$20 pre-pay (if you have pre-paid) will be made at that time.)

There is nothing like knowing you can help your birds if bad weather hits. ***With apologies to our more distant members, this service can be offered only to members who are able to pick up (or have someone pick up) their crickets, as I cannot be involved in shipping live crickets.*** An alternative to crickets for all of us is live mealworms. This is described well in the December 2014 newsletter, available on our website at [www.ontariopurplemartins.ca](http://www.ontariopurplemartins.ca)

**Contact: Mary .... [helenmwilson@yahoo.com](mailto:helenmwilson@yahoo.com) ..... 519-326-1710**

## **Point Pelee Roost ... Finally Verified!** (Submitted by John Balga)



Doppler weather radar storm tracking has been around for several years now and one often views it on our local television stations when the weather forecaster tracks the current weather or upcoming storm front. It is a valuable tool for anyone to see what is coming or occurring. In 2017, while viewing a peculiar weather ring over Point Pelee National Park on the weather network radar (when there was really no impending storm on the horizon), a very special phenomenon was occurring.

Purple martin Landlords have indicated on the Purple Martin Conservation Forum that these rings occur in the early morning around sunrise or late evening at sunset and that they may be significant Purple Martin Roosts. They also indicated that these rings could be numerous other bird species rising or descending from a specific area. Often large groups of waterfowl are viewed in this manner.

After viewing this roost ring in 2017, my wife Barb and myself travelled up and down the roads in and around Point Pelee in the hopes of determining which species was contributing to the ring. We had very little luck in seeing large groups of waterfowl or even blackbirds in the area. However, large numbers of swallows were noticed on the power lines near the Point and in the Park but we were still puzzled. However, no significant large bird assembly was found.

Late Friday night of the first week of observation, we came across a large concentration of Purple Martins on the northeast end of the park just at sunset. The light was so low that even binoculars could not discern what was happening. We were overjoyed to learn that possibly the roost had been finally found! Using the information that we gathered we were able to return to the roost numerous times to see if it was a repeat gathering as viewed from the nights before. We were able to confirm the roost with other members from the OPMA as well as other interested individuals. The search was over; the roost was located. Documenting and verifying the Roost location with Nature Canada and the Purple Martin Conservation Association followed in the next few days.

Using radar images for "Project Martin Roost", PMCA has speculated that there are possibly 350 or more roosts in the eastern United States and Canada. As far back as August 1903, Percy A. Taverner, regarded as Canada's pioneer ornithologist, watched a great number of these birds milling about Point Pelee. Could this roost have been there then?

The Purple Martin Conservation Association has launched significant Roost studies over the past several years and Nature Canada launched a study in 2018 to determine where Purple Martin roosts are located in Ontario. Three catchment areas have been identified for the study and individuals have volunteered to monitor these possible Roosts. Training seminars have been held at St. Clair College and online Webinars have been conducted to assist those involved and to answer any questions that they may have.

Roost Monitors map where the Roosts are; determine an estimate as to the composition of the birds at the roost; and determine the rise and fall of the numbers during the months of July, August and early September. This July, Nature Canada will again launch this project at Point Pelee and more information will be gathered in 2019. Club members are invited to participate. Ron Delcourt and myself monitored the Pelee Roost and it is interesting to see the ebb and flow of the swallow numbers during mid-July and late August. Access to the Roost is limited but it can be viewed from an adjacent road closest to the exterior boundary of the Park. Purple Martins and other swallows fly over viewers' heads as they move toward the roost in the late evening, the time that the Pelee Roost is monitored.

A detailed analysis of this Summers' activities has been included for your perusal. As you can see the largest concentration of Purple Martins occurred on August 20, 2018. Close to 40,000 Purple Martins were observed from the road.

We hope to see many of our club members out for an evening this Summer to observe this phenomenon. Contact me if you are interested in arranging for a visit to the site. Keep the martins flying in Ontario!

*John Balga*

*(See OPMA Board below for John's contact information)*

## **Nature Canada .... Helping to Save our Swallows**

*(Submitted by Aly Hyder ... [ahyderali@naturecanada.ca](mailto:ahyderali@naturecanada.ca) ... Conservation Intern ... Nature Canada)*

### About Nature Canada:

For nearly 80 years, Nature Canada, one of the oldest national nature conservation charity in Canada, has helped protect over 63 million acres of parks and wildlife areas in Canada and the countless species that depend on this habitat. Nature Canada has been connecting Canadians to nature, while persistently working to conserve and protect wildlife and their habitats by working with people and advocating on behalf of nature. With our network of over 700 local and regional groups, we work at all scales to protect and conserve nature in Canada.

### Save Our Swallows:

Nature Canada launched our *Save Our Swallows* campaign in 2018, thanks to two years of generous funding by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Swallows, much like other aerial insectivore birds including the swifts, the nightjars and some of the flycatchers, are undergoing rapid population declines, which date back to when widespread monitoring of bird populations first started around 1970. Because of their dependence upon flying insects as their only source of food, swallows are good indicators of their environment, as their populations respond to changes in insect populations, among other things. The *Save Our Swallows* campaign aims to halt long-standing declines of Ontario's swallow populations by mobilizing communities and constituencies into taking action to help recover populations of these beautiful and once numerous inhabitants of our province.

There are three main aspects of this campaign:

- Monitoring and protecting swallow and martin post-breeding roosts along the southern Great Lakes,
- Improving Purple Martin breeding habitat, and
- Working with rural residents & farming organizations to improve environmental conditions for swallows in rural landscapes



*Marine Morel, Dr. Kevin Fraser, and Megan MacIntosh releasing a Purple Martin, 2017*

This campaign is a successor to Nature Canada's Purple Martin Project, which had been ongoing for the past five years. Purple Martin, the largest swallow species in North America, is a high-flying aerodynamic hunter that catches insects on the fly. East of the Rockies, Purple Martin nests exclusively in human provided housing which may very well be the reason why birders and naturalist groups have such an affinity for these magnificent songbirds. Unfortunately, like the rest of the swallow species, Purple Martin is undergoing a rapid population declines in much of Ontario. The causes of the population declines are numerous and complicated by the fact that Purple Martin migrates to Brazil each fall where it spends its non-breeding season. Like most of Canada's migratory birds, Martins can encounter many challenges throughout the entire annual cycle. Disentangling the threats to identify those that we can mitigate or eliminate is an essential element of effective conservation.

For the last two years, Nature Canada, working in collaboration with Dr. Kevin Fraser from University of Manitoba, has deployed MOTUS tags on Purple Martins to track and monitor them during the breeding, post-breeding and early migration (roosting) phases to learn more about their daily movements, migration timing and habitat use, particularly with regard to their use of post-breeding roosts. MOTUS, also known as the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, uses automated radio telemetry arrays to study movements of animals, including birds. Once a tagged Purple Martin comes within about 15 kilometers of one of 300 receiver stations in the Americas, a signal unique from that bird is received and logged. Signals are emitted every 10 seconds. This means that all the time a bird is within the range of a receiver, that receiver could be picking up signals or multiple ones if there are other transmitters within range. Analysis of Motus data allows researchers to map out daily movements, migratory flightpaths, identify stopover areas, determine timing of movements, and even associate species with the stressors they face along their migration routes. All of these are equally important in understanding and mitigating the declines in their population.

For the Motus deployments on Purple Martins along Lake Erie, data are captured and stored at the receiver stations. Many of the stations archive the data, which may only be available to researchers once it has been uploaded over the winter. The transmitters are live for about 120 days, covering a significant part of the fall migratory period. Dr. Kevin Fraser and his students received a tremendous amount of data, which must be processed and analyzed before publishing the results. Currently, Dr. Kevin Fraser and the lab at University of Manitoba are in the midst of deciphering and publishing the information from the 2017 MOTUS tagging season.



*Front row left to right: Paul Pratt, Ted Cheskey, Brodie Badcock-Parks, and Patrick Kramer.  
Back row left to right: Claude Radley, Ron Delcourt, John Balga, and Richard Carr, 2018*

The MOTUS deployments over the last two years occurred in three different communities along Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. We are grateful for the partnership of the Holiday Beach Migration Observatory (HBMO) & the Ontario Purple Martin Association (OPMA) in the deployments at Holiday Beach. Nature Canada & Dr. Kevin Fraser are truly appreciative of HBMO & OPMA members for helping organize the events and in the capture, processing and release of individual birds. In 2018, 31 Purple Martin received MOTUS transmitters at the Holiday Beach. Data from 2018 are being analyzed at the university lab. Once results can be shared, we will provide OMPA members with an update in your Newsletter.

*Dr. Kevin Fraser (right) and*



*Nature Canada intern, Brodie Badcock-Parks (left)  
deploying a MOTUS tag*

*A tagged Purple Martin*



Nature Canada intends to continue this work with Dr. Kevin Fraser in 2019, however the deployment locations are to be determined. Through ongoing commitment to this project, we hope to improve our understanding of what Martins do and where they go, once they leave their colonies at the end of the breeding season. We are particularly interested in understanding more about how Purple Martins use the post-breeding roosts. Roosts concentrate large numbers (thousands to hundreds of thousands) of birds in a very small area for up to several weeks. We want to ensure that roosts receive the conservation attention they deserve. Understanding what roosts are and what their function is, are important aspects to informing their protection.

Unravelling some of the mysteries around roosts is one small input that we hope will help in the conservation of Purple Martin. However almost all aerial insectivores are facing a massive die off and they require serious and immediate help. We understand the dire situation of these birds and acknowledge that collaborative conservation is required to protect and recover population of these birds that we care for so much.

To learn more about our SOS campaign, and other work Nature Canada does, visit [www.naturecanada.ca/SOS](http://www.naturecanada.ca/SOS) .

## Helping the Barn Swallow

At our February meeting, the question came up: "What are those structures along the Highway 401 corridor and who put them there?" No one was sure, but here is the scoop: (information excerpted from CBC News):

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/barn-swallows-habitats-highway-1.3566966>



When construction crews are working on the bridges and culverts that line our highways, songbirds can be left without a place to nest. The population of barn swallows is on the decline in Ontario, and it is believed to be partially due to a loss of habitat, which means it is problematic when construction work disrupts these birds' nests. They are being forced to nest elsewhere and if we keep doing that and there's less and less structures for them to nest on, eventually they won't have anywhere to nest.

That's why **Ontario's Ministry of Transportation** has been putting up some barn swallow habitats along Highway 401 lately, near the interchange with Highway 40, where work is taking place. Basically, the habitats are roofed structures that provide a ledge for barn swallows to build nests upon.

They also have nesting cups installed, which give the birds a starting point to establish their nests. The birds just tend to line the top of the wooden cup with a rim of mud and then they fill it with what they like, which is normally feathers for that extra layer of fluffiness for their young. The ministry is putting these structures in places where barn swallows are known to be nesting.

### **RESOURCES**

Remember to check the wonderful OPMA website maintained and provided by John Balga, our **website** manager. [www.essexpurplemartins.ca](http://www.essexpurplemartins.ca) or [www.ontariopurplemartins.ca](http://www.ontariopurplemartins.ca)

- ❖ **The Feed Store** in Harrow carries many Purple Martin products. They are located at 2564 County Road 20 East, in Harrow, and can be contacted at 1-519-738-2261.
- ❖ **The PMCA** (Purple Martin Conservation Association) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of Purple Martins through scientific research, state of the art management techniques, and public education. **The PMCA forum does not require sign-up, is totally free, and is a wealth of information from landlords all across N.A.** [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org)
- ❖ **Nature Canada:** Nature Canada's Purple Martin Project is part of an international initiative between university researchers, naturalist groups, Purple Martin landlords and citizens to help protect and recover aerial insectivore populations. The OPMA are partnered with NC in this endeavour and they are the recipients of our end-of-season colony statistics that are collected by John Balga. <http://naturecanada.ca/what-we-do/bird-conservation/purple-martin-project/>

## Researching Blue Roof Nest Boxes ... by Don Bissonnette

Our OPMA website (see first page) includes an article written by our member and bluebird expert Don Bissonnette. Very interesting and promising observations were made after several seasons of experimentation. If you're interested in minimizing sparrow problems, and if you're lucky enough to host bluebirds, this will be of interest to you!

### ***OPMA Board: Contact anyone below with questions:***

*The OPMA Board consists of 4 executive positions, and up to 5 directors-at-large.*

*Volunteers are not Board members, but Board members may also be volunteers. Volunteer functions are separate from board functions.*

#### ***(Board) Executive:***

Paul Hamel..... 519-738-3476.....kp\_hamel@live.ca.....Chairperson  
Richard Carr ..... 810-706-2344.....2009.wipmp@gmail.com.....Vice-Chair  
Al Hamill ..... 519-738-6932.....alhamill70@gmail.com .....Treasurer / Finances  
Mary Wilson..... 519-326-1710.....helenmwilson@yahoo.com .....Secretary / Member Records

#### ***(Board) Directors-at-Large:***

Fern Bellavance ..... 519-257-0013.....fern.bellavance@gmail.com  
Audrey Festeryga ... 519-712-9708.....afesteryga@yahoo.com  
MarieAnne Knapp .. 519-726-6180.....marianne1937@yahoo.ca  
Lyle Papps..... 519-354-6404  
Dennis Shady ..... 519-738-4411.....dennisshady@yahoo.ca

#### ***(Non-Board) Volunteer Functions:***

John Balga ..... 519-800-2504.....martinman@hotmail.com .....Advisor / Website  
Fern Bellavance ..... 519-257-0013.....fern.bellavance@gmail.com .....Lending Library  
Richard Carr ..... (see above) .....Walpole Island / Banding / Geo-Locators  
Lyle Papps..... (see above) .....Natural gourds  
Nancy Robson..... 519-326-8557.....nancyrrobson@gmail.com .....Media  
Carolyn Recker..... .....Goodwill Ambassador  
Dennis Shady ..... (see above) .....New Member Advisor  
Mary Wilson..... (see above) .....Newsletters / Cricket Ordering

**The first “Scout Report” for Indiana has been made on March 3, 2019.**

**Our birds are now only about 4 weeks away!!!**