

Summer... 2020

ONTARIO PURPLE MARTIN ASSOCIATION Newsletter

www.ontariopurplemartins.ca

www.essexpurplemartins.ca



Beautiful and Rare! This picture is from a post on PMCA forum by a landlord in Fisherville, Ontario.
According to Wikipedia: Albinism is only seen in about **1 of every 1,800** birds!

2020 MEETINGS and EVENTS

Our remaining events are in a tentative status due to the coronavirus situation.

As we approach each date, we will assess its viability,
governed by the recommendations and restrictions of our public health officials and government.

Sep 12-13 & Sep 19-20 "Hawkfest" (10 am → 3 pm) OPMA booth at Holiday Beach
Oct 17 Final Meeting of 2020 (9 am) .. Orchard View Golf Course, Ruthven

- 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.

Message from our Chairperson:

Wow !!!! That's my feeling for 2020 so far. Who would have believed that we would have to cancel most of our meetings and MartinFest this year because of a pandemic? This is the reality of the situation and we are going to have to regroup hopefully in 2021.

Luckily, the Martins are unaware of this turmoil and returned as they normally do in the early spring. But wait ... they returned to some very cold days and many colonies reported large losses because of this. At this point, I for one thought we were going to have a disastrous year.

In reality, many landlords reported large increases in their numbers:

- Our colony at Colchester Harbour has **17 pair out of a possible 20**.
- Ron Delcourt reported that the Holiday Beach colony is **100% full**. That's 72 pair in total.
- John has reported that the housing in Essex and McGregor each have 3 pair.

I think we sometimes forget that the Martin has been around for thousands of years and is able to adapt to many different situations. Hopefully, this will continue and we will be able to enjoy their antics and song even during these trying times.

Ron Delcourt, John Balga, and Al Hamill were able to put up a gourd rack at a new location in the conservation area just east of Holiday Beach. These are the gourds that we had from the rack that fell into the water at the Holiday Beach site and the rack was donated by Nature Canada. It all came about because Al reached out to ERCA and they were very supportive for putting up new housing at their sites.

It is almost that time of year when the various roosts start to become active again. John, Ron, and Henry Wolting had a zoom meeting with Nature Canada to plan out what they are going to do this year in regards to monitoring the roosts. John and Ron will be monitoring the Point Pelee Roost and Henry will do the same for the Walpole Island roost. Hopefully, we will have a report for the fall/winter newsletter.

Thank you to all who have paid their dues and continue to support our organization. Because of you, we will weather the storm and will be back hopefully in 2021 to continue our efforts to promote the Purple Martin. One thing for sure, it has certainly been nice to be able to watch and hear our birds during these past four months. It will be sad to see them leave in a few weeks but hope always prevails because they will return once again in 2021 to bring us joy and happiness.

I am not too sure at this point when we will meet again but it will happen and we will continue on with our activities that we have come to enjoy by being a member of OPMA. Be safe and enjoy the rest of the time that you have observing your colony. We have one more newsletter that will come out in the fall so we will keep in touch.

Paul Hamel, Chair

Welcome to our new members!

Ron Sebastian, Niagara Falls
Mary Anne Adam, Amherstburg
Cindy Fromstein, Toronto
Jacob Byler, Stirling
Andrew Smith, Harley

Happy News for 2020!



New Colony!

Our member Mary Anne Adam of Amherstburg sent this report:

"I just wanted to let you know that I have 4 martins born a few weeks ago. There are now 6 (4 fledglings) and 2 parents enjoying the rain on their gourd home. Many thanks for your advice and assistance. I'm so excited. Next year, I know I'll have more. Took 10 years, but worth the wait."

What great news, and encouragement for others who are still waiting! Persistence and patience pay off! Congratulations Mary Anne, on becoming a PM "landlord".



Success in Feeding!

From Al Hamill:

"I finally got my birds to start taking eggs via tossing! I then put them in the trays and they moved over to eat those up. Since I did not have a lot of crickets, I chose to just put them on the trays and they disappear every day -- working well."

And from Marianne & Rudy Dyck:

"Isn't this terrible weather for our birds? We had 5 pair, lost a male Saturday. They have not only learned to eat flung eggs but are now waiting to eat from the feeding tray. At least most of the birds - there are one or two of them that haven't learned. (The squirrels have found the orange slices now. So much for the Orioles getting their treat!"

Congratulations! It is a dedicated effort to teach Martins that skill, but there is great peace of mind for the landlord once their birds have learned it. Although some of them never seem to catch on, most do, and that can save a colony.

The Wolting colony in Blenheim: *report from Henry & Elaine*

Many of us have experienced Henry & Elaine's hospitality for the past several years when they hosted our June BBQ/Social meeting. And many Martins call the Wolting colony home. Here is a report from Henry about their 2020 season as of July 17th:



“The “new setup”, ending up with **96 rooms/compartments/gourds**.

Of course, the spring was horrendous with weather and other factors, so we were thinking it was a wasted effort that would maybe work out for us in 2021. We lost 8 ASY males and 2 ASY females from starvation or the cold snaps, and Elaine might have saved 2 other ASY males we found on the lawn that were almost dead. We warmed them up, force fed them eggs, kept them in a warmed-up eggs in a gourd in the house for one night, and then let them go the next day when they looked much better.

Then, for the first time ever, the subbies bailed us out...they came in droves from the middle of May into early June. Never thought I would say this, but I think they saved many colonies from disaster, or very poor years to say the least, including our own.

By the end of May/early June, the weather still was poor at best. We were at 450 eggs fed to the birds, but we have to say a special thanks to a chicken farmer down the road, he was awesome, going to have get him something for all the eggs he gave us. Elaine posted this to the purple martin Windsor Essex Facebook group on May the 11th if you have not seen it.

The video shows what we (and many others in our group) were up against every cold day this spring. That day we fed 32 eggs to what we think is well over 125 adults...they were definitely not all ours, but that is usually the case at our house.

<https://www.facebook.com/667665090/videos/pcb.3658424134173204/10157871104450091/>

We ended up with 71 pairs sitting on 337 eggs and/or young at one nest check in the end of June, **our best year ever**. We only found two very small young tossed out by subbies (a new all time low # for us), and 18 dud eggs that did not hatch on a check on July 5th. But now, as of July 17th, we are hesitant to check again. Many of our clutches are fledging with numerous young sitting in nice rows out on the porches, whereas other clutches are quite a bit behind. For us it does not pay to lower the units and have a bunch take off that are not quite ready to leave; the reward is not worth the risk. Even with the extreme heat to start out this July, everything is moving along well, maybe the pond helps out there. The “extreme heat topic” should maybe lead into a “vent the rooms” conversation that we could talk about at one of our future meetings.

On July 11th for the first time ever, we timed how many birds came in to feed their young over a span of 20 minutes. We were astounded that number was an average of 20 feedings per minute...to put that into perspective, when weather and bug production is good, that is 1,200 bugs per hour (mostly dragonflies that afternoon). So, in the prime feeding time of 11:00 am to around 4:00 pm at our house, that is **6,000 bugs** brought down for their young. Who knows what that rate is when it is really good, like at dusk or dawn? Something to try at your own colony, perhaps.

On the 15th of July we had our first few take flight, and from here on in the numbers will go down and down. The only bright side to them leaving our house is the spectacle we watch every August at the roost sites...an awesome event that everyone should see if they get a chance. Puts all of our hard work into perspective because almost every single one of those birds were in someone else's backyard giving them a summer of enjoyment.

Take care, sure hope we can all meet up to discuss this weird COVID19 2020 year that we will never forget.”



Speaking of Roosts: Purple Martin Roosts are the amazing sites all over North America where Martins congregate after the breeding season, before leaving on their long migration south.

Many of our members have seen the video linked below, but for those who haven't, it is well worth your time! This is a YouTube video of the “**Walpole Island Martin Roost**” in 2018. This roost is NOT accessible to the public, but several members of the OPMA had access, and produced this amazing and beautiful video! This roost is sure to be vibrant again in 2020 with many thousands of Martins! Enjoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7grOwZnFMfs>

“Vent the Rooms” Mary Wilson

Speaking of a “vent the rooms” conversation, I ordered 50 of these vented Troyer Gourd caps (on right below) earlier this year. Over the past few years, it seemed that there were always some gourds with very wet nests inside, particularly those with a large clutch. I’d always been thinking about making this improvement, especially as we seem to be getting more hot spells each year, so 2020 seemed like the time to do it.



Once they arrived, I took one to the various stores in my area that sell these types of fittings, to see if I could get anything similar. Here is a sample (left side above) of the ones I made using the parts I could find. Not as pretty as the commercial ones, but probably just as functional. After this season, I’ll take the time to spray paint the gray components white.

All together I had 65 of these vented lids, so I started with the gourds that had the earliest clutches and largest number of young. I wasn’t able to do them all, but because of what seemed to be a rather high percentage of whole clutches of eggs that probably were not going to hatch, and a few gourds unclaimed by Martins, I was able to put one of these lids on almost all of the gourds with young. If some of the egg clutches hatched afterwards, the little “pinkies” will be able to tolerate the higher heat days better than older birds, I’ve read, and hopefully the remaining time they’re in the nest won’t continue to be so sweltering.

For next year, I’ll get the rest of the lids vented. PMCA’s online shop has a 2-part vent available which looks very nice. It includes a screw-in “plug” for earlier in the season when it is cooler and venting in our area isn’t required.

Oh These Dirty Birds !!!!

Soon, all that will be left of the 2020 Martin Season will be the clean-up. Regurgitated below are some excerpts from a previous newsletter that perhaps some will find useful.

Like all landlords, we **clean up** after our tenants. Some tenants are cleaner than others.

“What a job – smelly, buggy, and often stuck like cement to the bottom of the gourd or house. Here’s a few tips and safety considerations for tackling this job that have worked for us over the years.

- ◆ Work upwind if possible ☺ Getting a face-full of who knows what isn’t any fun.
- ◆ Wear a mask. (especially in 2020). Without knowing all the potential hazards existing in a used martin nest, the feather sheathing alone could be a real irritant if breathed in (that’s the white, powder-like stuff that blows around when a nest is removed).
- ◆ Wear gloves, or at least have wet wipes (and sanitizer) with you. You’ll appreciate them.

I’ve found these tools to be useful with both houses and gourds:



- ◆ A garden claw breaks up the nest into smaller pieces which can be pulled out through the access port on a gourd or through the entry of a house.
- ◆ A small scraper with sharp corners is a great tool for cleaning the rooms of Trio houses – I use the small **countertop samples** that you can pick up (free) from any home improvement store. These are small enough to manipulate inside the compartment, and strong enough to really scrape them clean.
- ◆ An old CD, broken in half, works well to scrape the curvature of a gourd.
- ◆ A “dish” brush with a long handle is very handy to sweep out the loosened debris.
- ◆ Spray bottle with a water / bleach mix. Many landlords use this to spray into crevices to kill any hidden insects. Some landlords feel that it also acts as a deterrent for insects during the next season. What one landlord says:

“I take a spray bottle with a **10 percent bleach solution** with me, and an extra gallon of the mix in a jug. Don't get the mix too strong as it can burn your hands, and eye protection would be wise, and old clothes that you don't care get spotted. I spray down the nest first, then pull out most of it, and re-spray and wipe out with old rags. I hope the **bleach** mixture protects me as I progress. The greatest benefit to the housing may be that it really brightens up the exterior.”

How clean do they have to be?

- ◆ It's important to remove the old nest, and with it, most of the parasites that would otherwise overwinter in the gourd/house. Also, old nests that are left can cause deterioration of the house or gourd.
- ◆ As far as the martins are concerned, they don't have to be squeaky clean. A little dirt is not a deterrent.
- ◆ Some people wipe or spray with a bleach solution (see above), which may help to eliminate any remaining mites or fleas after the nest is removed.
- ◆ If you can get a hose to your housing, you can blast out the crevices and loose dirt.

How to store them for winter:

- ◆ If you have the time, energy, and storage space, they can be removed from the poles and stored out of the weather. No doubt this lengthens the life of housing and gourds.
- ◆ Otherwise, houses and gourds can be brought down to the lowest position on the poles. Remove all doors, floors, and access caps and store for the winter.

**** Trio doors that have been modified to SREH by means of a plate riveted or screwed on present a particular problem: mites can overwinter between the two pieces of metal. Same problem could exist in gourd caps that have liners that are left in place. Immersing in a bleach solution, or pouring boiling water over them as they stand vertically in a plastic container will get rid of all the critters. (But to be safe, store them in an outside area rather than anywhere in or attached to the house.)*



Where mites can overwinter.

- ◆ Gourds left on the racks (no lids), and houses left open (no doors/floors), are scoured quite clean by the winter weather, and are bugless and ready to go in spring. (This is what we have always done at the two golf course locations we take care of. It works very well.) It also prevents occupation by sparrows prior to martins returning.

The Erie Shores Golf Course colony report from Mary Wilson.

Among the many things that 2020 will be remembered for, this spring will unfortunately be remembered by some of us as a terrible one for our beloved birds. Here's the story of one of our colonies.

At Erie Shores GC, Leamington, the housing and gourds were not put up until early May, due to the mandated (COVID19) closure of public recreational spaces, and the directives from the course that only essential personnel were allowed. I believe there was, understandably, an initial concern about any perceived violations that could cause trouble for them. I fretted over not being able to get things ready, but the weather didn't produce too many worries for me during April. There were several days that were quite cold and even produced snow, but they seemed intermittent, and in any case, there wasn't much I could do. I just hoped that the birds would find shelter somewhere.

When I got permission from Erie Shores to get things ready, I was allowed to do **ONLY** what was absolutely necessary. I was to work alone, be there only on week days during the regular business hours of the greens staff, and to let the staff know whenever I was on the grounds. What a relief when the housing was up, pre-nested, and (after explaining the need for supplemental feeding), it was agreed that I could go there for that purpose as needed. After a slow start, all was well.

The Martins started pouring in and by the beginning of May, we had quite a good number.

Then the Mother's Day weekend arrived. On Mother's Day it rained quite hard in the evening and into the night, and it had rained the night before, I believe. On Monday morning the 11th, I went to the colony at about 10:00 am to feed the birds and check on them. I took down all racks, found several dead martins in the 1st three, but when I got to the 4th rack, I could see tail feathers sticking out of 2 gourds. To my horror, these 2 gourds were packed FULL to the top with Martins - all wet. Some were dead and some alive. I put the live ones in my bucket and rushed home with them - 13 in all. I dried them gently with a hair dryer, set up a system of 2 plastic totes, and began a feeding process which would end 5 days later with 3 birds still alive. When I fed a bird, I moved it to the other tote. This process continued until all the birds were in one tote. The next feeding time - approximately 2-1/2 to 3 hours later, the process was repeated to the other tote. Each day, some expired. They were too far gone.

The remaining 3 (2 females and 1 male) - were doing quite well. As they got stronger, I put a perch in the tote for them to actually clutch with their feet rather than sitting on the towels on the bottom. It didn't take long for all 3 of them to figure it out - they hopped onto it and perched there like canaries. Two of them had learned to open their mouths whenever I brought a cricket close to them - they gaped and I just stuck it down there with my tweezers and this was repeated each feeding time until they had enough. **So much less stressful for both the birds and the landlord.** The other one didn't ever quite get the hang of it, so I had to force feed her right to the end.

The end would be soon. They had been in my care since Monday afternoon. On Friday night, they seemed different - they resisted my attempts to feed them, and seemed restless somehow. I weighed them, and although they were still a little underweight, it seemed to be time for them to go.

The forecast showed a good day for Saturday, with a less than optimal forecast after that. But they were ready to go, and would have to take their chances now that they *hopefully* could fly again.

On Saturday morning we took the tote down to the colony site. They knew they were home. It was the first time in 5 days that they had been in fresh air and sunshine, and as soon as they heard the sound of Martins close by, got very restless. We put all 3 into a gourd and raised the rack so they would be at a good height when they took off. We watched each one go, flying strong. A small victory.

Saturday was a nice day, but the forecast following wasn't great, so I went down to the course on Sunday to see if any more were grounded, and to put food in the tray. To my surprise, the sky was full of Martins, soaring and singing, obviously catching food. There had been some sort of **bug hatch**, and they were fine from that day forward.

Dozens of Martins were lost at Erie Shores, despite twice-daily feedings on most bad-weather days. Why were so many found crammed into only 2 out of 84 gourds? Why was Erie Shores so different from Orchard View Golf Course, where only 3 (known) were lost, when in all other years, weather-related losses were very similar at both locations? There are some things that can't be answered.

*(One of the lost birds was **banded**. After reporting the band number, I learned that it had been banded in 2018, near Graham Side Road, Kingsville (Coordinates: Lat: 42.03361; LON: - 82.69500). Bander was with the Holiday Beach Migratory Observatory.)*

Thankfully, nature has prepared well for the PM's ultimate survival. The older birds always return first, followed by the staggered arrival (starting about 3-4 weeks later) of the "sub-adults" (subbies) aka last year's birds. The "subbies" replenish the losses, and have "flown into the gap" in 2020 for colonies that, like Erie Shores, suddenly and sadly had vacancies.

And to end this story on a happy note, I am optimistic for a good year, because 78 of 80 gourds at this location, at last check, were inhabited by our favourite purple birds!

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
..... Vice-Chair
Al Hamill 519-738-6932.....alhamill70@gmail.com Treasurer / Finances
Mary Wilson..... 519-326-1710.....helenwilson@yahoo.com Secretary / Member Records

(Board) Directors-at-Large:

Fern Bellavance 519-257-0013.....fern.bellavance@gmail.com
Gilles Breton
Audrey Festeryga ... 519-712-9708.....afesteryga@yahoo.com
MarieAnne Knapp .. 519-726-6180.....marianne1937@yahoo.ca
Lyle Papps..... 519-354-6404
Ron Delcourt
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
Lyle Papps..... (see above) Natural gourds
Nancy Robson..... 519-326-8557.....nancyrobson@gmail.com Media
Carolyn Recker..... Goodwill Ambassador
Dennis Shady (see above) New Member Advisor
Mary Wilson..... (see above) Newsletters / Cricket Ordering

RESOURCES

Remember to check the wonderful OPMA website maintained and provided by John Balga, our **website** manager. www.essexpurplemartins.ca or 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
- ❖ **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/>