



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

## ***Welcome to our new members!***

*Neal Imeson, Cottam*

*John Ursu, Harrow*

*Debbie Austin, Dorchester*

*Martin Mendez Hennink, Kincardine*

*Karen Padbury, Belle River*

*Martin Verbeek, Kingsville*

*Kristene Verbeek, Kingsville*

*Norman Long, Woodslee*

Our **first Meeting of 2023** was held on Saturday March 18<sup>th</sup> at Heritage Village, Essex. Thirty-five people attended. Some general discussion took place prior to a slide presentation titled:

### **“Purple Martins – Getting Acquainted**



***This power-point presentation of 100 slides is a good overview of Purple Martins and is available to any members who may wish to present it to a local club, school, etc. Contact the Board.***

# *Hello Purple Martin Friends! ..... by John Balga*

I am sure many of you are familiar with the [Life Cycle of the Purple Martin](#) and have read something about it. But for those of you who are new to the hobby, here are a few facts to get you up to speed.

## Adult Arrival—January to May

The first adult Martins to arrive at their breeding grounds are termed “scouts” - the oldest birds, male or female, returning to their nesting site from the previous year. Throughout North America, the timing of the return of adult Martins varies from year to year. Adult **(ASY)** Purple Martins arrive in Ontario at the end of March or the first two weeks in April. Some adult Martins will continue to arrive at colonies into the beginning of June. So, you can even coax a pair to nest in June at your colony.

**ASY:** Bird banding term for "After Second Year." This is a bird in its 3rd (or greater) calendar year of life.

## Sub-adult Arrival—Begins 4-12 weeks after the Adults arrive

Ontario sub-adults **(SY)** are birds that fledged the previous year and are now returning to North America to select a site and breed. They will begin arriving at the end of May or the beginning of June. Sometimes, and rarely, sub-adults arrive at the beginning of May. If you haven't been successful in attracting a pair, these young birds may start your first colony. Often there are more male sub-adults arriving than females and they seem to cause much distress to older birds.

**SY:** Bird banding term for "Second-Year." This is a bird in its 2nd calendar year of life.

## Nest Building - 4-6 weeks after arrival

Nest building begins about four to six weeks after Martins arrive at their final breeding site. Since the first Martins arrive during the first week in April, usually, older birds start nest building in stages. By the second/third week in May, nest building may be complete. Weather has a lot to play in this process. Nests are generally built out of twigs, pine or bean straw, corn fodder, and are occasionally lined with mud. A mud dam may be constructed at the front of the nest. Final nest construction can take three to four weeks. The last stage of nest building is lining the nest with green leaves. The function of the green leaves is still unknown, but is thought to act as an insecticide or may help in regulating the temperature and moisture levels in the nest.

## Laying Eggs, Raising Young, Migration

It will take up to two months to complete this process and to be ready for their migration south. After fledging, juvenile Purple Martins, as well as adults and sub-adults will congregate at a roost. Large flocks of Martins gather to spend the night at these roosts, which are usually situated near water or in trees. Martins will then form smaller groups and begin the migration from these roosts. Although individual roosts remain active for six weeks or longer, individual birds may only stay at a roost for an average of four weeks. They then begin their long migration back to South America. Roosts in Ontario may occur in different places but Walpole Island, Point Pelee, the Grand River, and Long Point are some places to visit. Many of our landlords know the precise location to assist you in finding these locations.

\*\*\* Average # of eggs is 4-6. Incubation lasts 15-16 days, and hatching may spread out over 2-3 days. The young will fledge (leave the nest) between day 26 and day 32.

## South American Migration

Most Purple Martins overwinter in Brazil, in large urban roosts, the rainforests, or on rivers in the Amazon Region. While in South America they undergo their annual molt. Though they begin molting in North America, they don't molt their flight and tail feathers until they have reached South America. Sub-adults will gain adult plumage, hatching-year birds will get their sub-adult plumage, and adults will get a new set of adult feathers. Molting replaces damaged feathers and also helps rid the martins of parasites.

## WOW!

Now that you are up to date with your background reading about Purple Martins, it's time to get out a notebook and begin a log of your daily colony activities and events and create a history book to look back on next year. You can use this as a diary to determine the best time to put up housing, record approximate dates of arrival for your colony, detail the number of **ASY** and **SY** Purple Martins present, track the number of nesting attempt failures and successes and record the number of eggs laid and hatched. You can also document when the hatchlings begin to leave their nests.

And now you know why Martin Landlords are so impatient and anxious when their birds don't arrive on time - they want their birds to make the long journey successfully. The 2023 year has been peculiar as the early warm weather these past few weeks has adversely affected landlords. Those that didn't clean their housing in the fall are tired after cleaning and getting their housing units ready on such short notice. The weather has been unpredictable and the Martins' returns have been staggered.

It's time to just sit back and enjoy as our friends return after such an arduous journey.

**Have a great Year and enjoy your Martini! 😊**