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***Final 2023 Meeting – October 21<sup>st</sup> at Orchard View Golf Course, Ruthven.***

Thirty-one members attended our closing meeting. A feature of this meeting is always the “go-around”, when everyone can talk about their colony results for the season, and share the highs and lows of being a Purple Martin landlord.

Here’s some of the discussion:

- Many people mentioned that they had attended the April 27th “**Martin Night**” at the home of John Balga in Essex, and found it to be wonderfully informative.

*(This was the first of a new event designed to feature specific topics throughout the martin season.)* John’s “Martin Night” was all about feeding, and that evening all of his birds were happy to show off their feeding skills at the buffet he provided. His yard was full of hungry birds including tree swallows, bluebirds, and martins, all of which put on a good show of how birds are able to adapt new skills to survive.

- Discussion about **SREH** – John used a book from the lending library table to demonstrate the many types of Starling Resistant Entry Holes. Someone had mentioned that starlings have been breaching certain styles of SREH in our area. It was mentioned that SRE doors should not be placed on compartments that haven’t been enlarged – they make the compartment too restrictive for the martins to get into the position to use the leverage that the SREH forces them to use.

- An exciting event for our members Fern & Linda Bellavance was when cliff swallows took up residence at their home this year. About 10 pairs made their unique tunnel shaped nests on the ledges and under the eaves of their house. Very exciting, as they are a unique member (*and also a species of concern*) of the swallow family, which build their amazing structures from clay and mud.
- Dennis mentioned the benefits of **Trio housing, sparrow control**, and suggested that people check out what the Harrow Feed Store has to offer. He also encouraged people to put up homes for **tree swallows**, which are also beneficial and beautiful birds of the swallow family.
- **Collection of annual colony results from members:** OPMA is now reverting to a previous method of collecting yearly data from our members and everyone who had brought their data was asked to transfer it to the forms provided on the tables, to make collection easier. We will be reporting, at a minimum, the total # of fledges produced by our OPMA members; this is what we did for many years prior to the more detailed information requested by Nature Canada.

Paul explained the reason for the change in collection of data: Nature Canada is no longer running their “Save the Swallows” campaign, and that is where our previous collection for many years was sent, via John Balga. NC required lots of information. John shared that he tried to find out what the final destination of all that information was, but as of yet has had no response from NC.

Paul asked anyone interested in taking on the task of summarizing the data given by members, to let us know.

- Paul mentioned that we need someone to take over the **management of the website**, as John, who created it and has maintained it since then, wishes to step down from this role. John would guide someone through the process. If no-one volunteers, we’ll need to hire someone to manage it. It is a vital part of the OPMA’s ability to get our message and mandate known publicly, and it must be continued, one way or the other.
- **Dues** remain at \$20 and are payable in January for 2024. (Our Treasurer Al Hamill prefers payments in the year to which they apply, for the sake of the book-keeping.)
- An advisory position is still **vacant on the OPMA Board**. Anyone interested, let us know.

## **Martin Festival 2025**

Mary provided some background about the potential of OPMA holding its 2<sup>nd</sup> Purple Martin Festival in 2025:

**2018:** Our first ever Martin Festival was a one day event, held on a Saturday in July at Colchester Park. It was quite successful, with a lot of interested people strolling through our space. We offered displays of PM information and housing, presentations on specific topics, bird-banding, and about a dozen vendors took part. Also, we had representation from organizations such as PIBO (Peelee Island Bird Observatory) and NC (Nature Canada).

Our local OPMA members gave wholehearted support, volunteering for tasks such as providing tables for displays; preparing a children's games program; taking care of set-up and take-down; taking photographs, and many more.

It was a perfect day weather-wise, and we benefitted from the foot traffic already in this busy public park. About 130 people signed our guest book at the Welcome table, but we estimated that attendees were likely above 200. Following this success, the OPMA's plan was to hold this event every other year.

**2020, 2022:** COVID changed our plans 😞.

**2023:** OPMA Board considered the possibility of a Martin Fest for **2024**, but quickly realized that we no longer had a venue because Colchester Park had made some changes that would reduce the available footprint space for our event, as well as increase the general activity level of the park. (Changes included some seating and telescopes quite close to our Martin housing, and a Splash Pad area.) Parking was already limited at the park, so apart from the plus of having an active PM colony, it would no longer serve for a Martin Festival. So now we needed to look for a for a new location with an active PM colony!

Then we learned from our member Carol Quick that just a short walk/drive down the road from Colchester Park is a large green space which is used for a community garden and farmers' markets. For these events there is plenty of room for numerous vendor stalls as well as parking. But, there is NO existing Purple Martin housing.

This area, with its historic schoolhouse, has been designated as a Heritage Site, and the Heritage Site Board oversees its maintenance and any restoration needed. Carol, who had spent some time on the Heritage Site Board, provided this further information to the OPMA:

- Some renovations are underway, including the schoolhouse washroom facilities.
- A Chimney Swift colony resides in the school's chimney, and some restoration was done to the chimney specifically to keep the chimney swifts happy and safe!  
( .. .. Added bonus at a Purple Martin Festival ! 😊 .. .. )

- The idea of having a Martin Festival at this site was raised with the Heritage Site Board who reacted very positively to the idea. So the OPMA is pursuing this for **July 2025.**

**To-Date:**

- OPMA board members visited the site along with Heritage Board member/s and a location for PM housing was identified.

*(The T14 at Colchester Park will remain in place. The Trio Grandpa, which had been vandalized and damaged several times, has been removed.)*

- Members John Balga, Fern Bellavance, and Al Hamill have built a new T14 for installation at the new site.
- Permission has been obtained from the Town of Essex to go ahead with the installment of the housing. Installment may yet be done in 2023, but if not, the units will be installed prior to the return of the birds in spring 2024.
- With the installation of a T14 and a Trio Grandpa (donation from John and/or Fern), we will have replicated the set-up at Colchester Park.

We feel confident that Martins will have populated the new site by the time of our MartinFest in 2025. They will have 2 springs to discover the new housing, and the abundance of Martin activity locally *(the existing Colchester Park T14, as well as numerous colonies on the lakeside across from the Heritage Site)* will be an attraction for them.

**Martin Fest Committee:** A 2025 Martin Fest committee has been formed, and will have its first meeting in January 2024. We'll keep everyone up-to-date as plans develop.

Thank you to those who volunteered for this committee!

***Carol Quick .... Mary Wilson .... Fern Bellavance .... Karen Padbury  
Sharon Johnson .... Tim Shortridge .... Carolyn Recker .... Al Hamill.***

Martin Festivals have been held for years in the US, and they are a very important way to reach people who might become involved with PMs and help this species survive. So it is very exciting to be planning for another one here in Ontario, where we can share our mission with large numbers of people at a fun event !

## 2023 Colony Results

We have received results from 33 colony sites, and the total fledged is

**3,689**

Some respondents included how they felt their colony fared compared to the previous year:

***Increased – 10 .... . Decreased – 10 .... . No Change – 4***

And here are the general comments that some included with their stats:

- “A lot of birds died at beginning of the year.”
- “Many adults died due to lack of food in spring. Numbers are down in 2023 due to this.”
- “Decreased by 25 or more.”
- “Colony lost due to a raccoon.”
- “New tray feeder – starlings a problem but I think the Martins learned to feed from tray by watching starlings! Martins came 2 weeks earlier than last year. Had to feed them in June – hot, dry, and smoky! No Bugs!”
- “In summary, the numbers are down from last year due to a cold spring. Many adults died from lack of food. One house had zero hatchlings. For some reason, the adults abandoned the nests in late June. No eggs hatched. Strange behaviour.”
- “Colony outcome was about the same as last year, but with a slower start due to early adult losses from cold weather.”
- “From a horrible start to the year, with over 60 dead adults that we found, and assuming many more that we did not find, the colony seemed to rebound very well. However, we drive around the bay looking at the other houses and noticed many houses with little or no activity from the weather bomb in early May. Let’s see what next year brings.”
- “Very few Cooper’s Hawks again this year. Starling pressure reasonably normal. Very little HOSP pressure. Lost 9 adults during the cold snap (that we found – guessing a few more that we didn’t find).”
- “Year two and almost the same as last year – two successful broods with 4 each; one pair of subbies went 1 for 4 – 3 were left behind and perished.”

Thank you to all who provided their stats. If anyone still would like to forward their results, please send them along to [helenmwilson@yahoo.com](mailto:helenmwilson@yahoo.com) .

## *Message from our Chairperson:*

Hello everyone! It has actually been a full year since I have had a submission to the Chatter. Where has the year gone? We have had our five meetings, a number of Martin nights, Festival of Hawks, a new beginning for our own Martin Fest, many new members and of course the Martin have come and gone.

It looks like from the reports that have been submitted to Mary the Martins fared fairly well in our reporting area. As usual, there were many challenges during the year, the worst being the cold snap we had early when the Martins were arriving. Many colonies reported large numbers of deceased birds. Even though there was great sadness because of the deaths, landlords made the commitment to trudge on and were pleasantly surprised by the results they had at the end of the season. It is quite obvious that these birds have a great desire to survive in the new environment and with our continued interest and efforts the future looks good for the Martin.

I now want to give a shout out to John Balga. As many of you know, John is one of the founding members of our association and it was through their efforts that the association was formed. Over the years John has been vice-president, treasurer, consultant to the board, a board member, and the creator/maintainer of the website. He has certainly been a driving force for the success of the Ontario Purple Martin Association.

John has decided to take a step back from the responsibilities of helping to run the association, and has resigned from the board. It is hard to put into words just how much John has contributed to the success of the club. At this time, all I can say is **THANK YOU** John for all you have done for our association. We hope that we will still see you at some of our meetings in the future.

A big **THANK YOU** goes as well to Teo Salgado and Masha Solorzano - our recently joined new members who volunteered to take over the website maintenance. The website is very important to our outreach, and we are grateful to Teo and Masha for taking this role!

On behalf of the Board, I would like to wish everyone a happy holiday season and a joyful New Year. See you at our next meeting in March.

*Paul Hamel Chairperson OPMA*

