



www.ontariopurplemartins.ca

Welcome to our new members!

*Bill Petruniak, Amherstburg
Nick Verzoc, Kingsville*

1st Meeting of 2024 – March 16th – Essex Sports Complex

This was our first time at this spacious and bright venue, and 35 people attended.

OPMA member **Fern Bellavance** gave a presentation covering several topics. Fern emphasized that although experienced landlords are familiar with many of these points, it is important that we always share them with people new to the hobby, to help them increase their chances of success in attracting and keeping these birds.

- Don't get discouraged! A brand new colony will be populated only by SY Martins (Second Year – those born the previous year). The SY birds return weeks later than the ASY (After Second Year), so if established colonies around you have Martins and you don't, be patient!
- Play the "Dawnsong": a cassette available from the OPMA library (or can be purchased online). It is a recording of the song Martins sing in early morning which helps to draw Martins down to explore a site.)
- In spring – pre-nest with pine needles. This keeps the birds off cold plastic or metal surfaces which can rob them of their warmth and strength quickly in poor spring conditions.

- Open up only a few compartments when you first see Martins in the spring. *This helps to minimize sparrow problems. Open more as needed.*
- Check the housing every 5-7 days. *You can spot trouble, such as a dead nestling which should be removed. Doing this also allows record keeping that lets you know how your colony is doing.*
- How to do nest changes if a nest is infested: *remove all nesting material and replace with clean pine needles or whatever you're using.*
- HOSP (House Sparrows) and STARLINGS: *The OPMA does not advise our members on lethal control of these species. Be discreet with whatever steps you take.*
- SREH (Starling Resistant Entry Holes): *These will keep out most starlings. Starlings are destructive to Martins. If you have gourds or housing with 2" round holes, starlings can easily get into them.*
- Types of Housing: *Harrow Feed Store has a variety of housing products. Martins are attracted to both gourds and houses. Wooden houses, like T14's, keep the birds warm and if you are handy you can build one much cheaper than buying one.*

Fern expressed appreciation for the OPMA, its members, and all efforts made towards keeping it up and running.

Before closing, he did a Question & Answer session, in the form of: "**DO YOU KNOW?**" questions from Fern to us !

Q: How to properly paint a wooden house?

A: Two coats of a good acrylic sealer is essential for good results.

Q: How to prepare eggs for martins?

A: How Fern prepares them: break eggs into a bowl; do not add anything. Microwave till firm enough to slice into thin pieces. Put on a feeding platform if you have one.

Q: How high to put up a Tree Swallow house?

A: At your eye level, for easy checking & maintenance.

Q: What size should a TS entry hole be?

A: 1 ¼" works 1 1/8" still admits TS, but is better at keeping out HOSP.

Thank you, Fern, for an informative and entertaining presentation!

Martin Festival 2025 Update

The MartinFest Committee held its 1st meeting in January 2024. A timeline was established and our first tasks will begin this fall.

The housing planned for the Colchester Heritage School site is now up and ready for Martins! The old site, just down the road, still has the original T14, so those Martins still have a home to return to.



The installation team at the new site, after putting up the new unit built by Al Hamel & Fern Bellavance.
L→R: Al, Fern, John Balga, Ron Delcourt, and Dennis Shady

Thank you to member **Tim Shortridge** for his generous donation to offset the cost of this build!



The 2nd unit at the new site, installed by Al & Fern, and donated by Fern.

Thank you to everyone involved !!!

We now have 2 springs ahead of us for Martins to colonize this new site, and hopefully have a nicely established colony for our 2025 Martin Festival !

Updates from Henry Wolting

Henry gave us an update on **the Walpole Island Roost**. This year the roost moved to a new location within the vast marsh area – far from where it was in 2022. It was difficult to find, but they eventually located it, about 5 miles deeper into the vast area of marshland and reedy islands. So, since they have been going to Walpole, the roost has been in 3 different locations in the last 8 years.

Henry told us that the move of the Martins may have coincided with the controlled burn of phragmites which have invaded the area and crowded out the native rushes. When first found, the roost was collecting in phragmite islands. John Balga confirmed that the Point Pelee Roost, which had been viewable for several years, suddenly disappeared and has not returned. He thought there had been some controlled burn efforts there as well.

“When phragmites are burned, do Martins move?” The Walpole Island Roost, when re-located, was found to have moved to another area of phragmite islands. Phragmite, as an invasive grass, has been reviled, but perhaps the Martins find some redeeming qualities in it!

Henry also updated everyone on what he and Elaine keep busy with:

- 130 compartments at their home 68 units at Rondeau Park 32 in Shrewsbury bringing the total to about **230**.
- as well as 55 Tree Swallow boxes installed at home and around their neighbour’s pastures.
- At Rondeau Park, they plan to install this spring:
 - 30 Barn Swallow ledges go up on April 1
 - 20 Tree Swallow boxes have been installed around the perimeter
 - Bat houses with Chimney Swift Chimney is next on the agenda, pending approval and funding, within the same area... ..
 - hoping to get Cliff Swallow nests that will be attached to the Barn Swallow buildings either this year (if they get some in time) or next year for sure.

Henry & Elaine also had Cliff Swallows nesting at their house this past season: 7 nests made, 3 nests made it to fledging, the other 4 were abandoned as they arrived on July 1, which was late. The jury is still out if they return this year, but they hope that they do.



A Comparison of Crickets vs. Mealworms (by Mary Wilson)

Last spring, I bought dried mealworms for the first time. Our usual 7,000 crickets sometimes don't last very long, when we are feeding the returnees to our 2 locations at local golf courses. We have a total of 98 gourds and full occupancy, so in a prolonged or late spell of poor weather, we can sometimes be feeding lots of Martins.

The mealworms I bought appeared to be good quality. I particularly liked that they had a good shelf life of about 2 years.

They can be reconstituted in water, which I did by putting them in a plastic container with a tight fitting lid, and filling it to the brim with water. By the time we got to the golf course sites, they had been soaking for about 15-20 minutes. After pouring them through a strainer, they went into the feeding tray. Soaking them makes them a little heavier, so they probably don't blow out of the tray so easily. And maybe it helps with hydration for the birds, too. Since this was a new item on the menu for them, I gave them an appetizer by sprinkling a few crickets on top 😊.

It was extra peace of mind to having a back-up to my cricket supply, so in February this year I placed the very same order. They arrived quickly, and the "best before" date is September 10, 2025.

This is what I ordered, from an online site called "**Chubby Mealworms Canada**".



**1.82KG (4LBS) CHUBBY
DRIED MEALWORMS**
\$51.99

\$58.75 (including tax). No shipping charge.

Out of curiosity, I worked out a cost comparison of crickets versus my purchase of mealworms, using PMCA's recommendation of **40 crickets / day** for an adult Martin to maintain its weight if crickets are all it is eating.

CRICKETS:

- 1,000 crickets cost **\$24.54** (including tax).
- A bag of 1,000 frozen crickets weighs roughly **240 grams**.
- 40 crickets weigh about **10 grams**.

∴ There are **24 single feedings** in a box of 1,000 crickets, and each one costs **\$1.02**

MEALWORMS:

- Using the equivalent in weight: 10 grams of mealworms:
- 4 lbs (64 oz.) of mealworms is = to **1,814 grams** and costs **\$58.75** (including tax)

∴ There are **181 single feedings** in this order of mealworms, and each one costs **\$0.32**
(*** And, 10 grams of mealworms fill a 1/3 cup measure to just below level. ***)

Unfortunately, as of March 29th, Chubby Mealworms Canada is **sold out of all mealworms** except for the (newly added option of) mealworms produced in Quebec.

Amazon Canada appears to have some very good options. And here are several specific locations that I checked out which also are economical:

- Harrow Feed Store: 400 grams for \$19.95+tax - each feeding costs **\$0.56**
- Peavey Mart: 850 grams for \$22.49+tax - each feeding costs **\$0.30**

Crickets are definitely the best option for training Martins to accept food – they flip easily and Martins can spot them easily, whereas mealworms are too light to flip. Cricket flipping introduces the skill to newer birds that may end up at your colony, and it provides a wonderfully unique interaction with your Martins. For that reason alone I'll always have crickets on hand! But once your birds are trained to accept food, mealworms are a great and economical addition to a feeding tray. And some landlords have had success putting them into the compartments inside a small container.

Hopefully this is useful, particularly for members with very large colonies, or who are unable to take advantage of the volunteer cricket service.

Food for thought.

