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Welcome to our new members !

*Judy Wootten... Toronto
Jim Nicholson... Grosse Pointe, Michigan
Lynn Johnston*

Twenty seven members attended our final 2024 meeting at Orchard View Golf Course in Ruthven on October 19th.

Many members shared their colony stats at this meeting, and others had emailed their results in response to the request we made earlier. Thank you all.

The **Go-Around** is always a great time of sharing. Here's some of the discussion:

- John Balga wore a shirt with a new OPMA logo that he had done by **Silver Stitch** in Windsor. Any shirt can be modified with a logo for about \$10.
- Fern Bellavance looked after the newly installed housing at the Colchester Schoolhouse Heritage Site this season. He reported **8 pairs in our first season** for this colony site. This bodes well for 2025 when we will host our 2nd ever Martin Festival there.
- Dennis Shady reported the very unique experience of having a pair of stunning **Northern Yellow Shafted Flickers** nesting close to his house.
- Ron Delcourt reported that **329 Purple Martins were banded** at Mitchell's Bay by HBMO (Holiday Beach Migration Observatory).

- Mike & Tiffanie Rajki reported that a **starling breached a Conley entrance**. *Unfortunately we are hearing more reports of this happening each year.*
- Dennis Shady mentioned that **fence posts** – 7 foot length, and similar to a T-bar - are available at Home Hardware and Feed Store in Harrow. They are reasonably priced, have a point on the end for easier installation, and tree swallow / bluebird houses can be attached with muffler clamps.
- Carol Taves read an interesting newspaper item from the “**Looking Back**” column in the South Point Sun newspaper of February 7, 2024. Here it is from the archives online:

From the Wheatley Journal
August 3, 1899

The sidewalks on Erie St. North have been repaired and pedestrians may now walk along at night without fear of broken limbs or sprained joints.

—

Sparrow bounty paid at Paw Paw Co., Mich., for the half year represents more than 15,000 birds. Basing an average on Van Buren's figures, the state pays \$50,000 a year for the destruction of sparrows.

- Several of our members reported that they **still are waiting** for martins to call their site home. And they were given some encouragement by our next speaker:

Purple Martin Attraction and Maintenance

Fern Bellavance presented important principles for getting visiting martins to stay at a new site. He urged everyone still waiting to not let discouragement set in.

- Date of return in the area of extreme south-western Ontario is early April. It is the **Sub-adult** martins (those born the previous year) that will populate a new colony, and they arrive **3-4 weeks** after the first adult birds return.

So don't be discouraged if your neighbour's long established colony has birds and you don't get any. Adult martins – those which already have a home colony – will return to that colony.

Of course if anything has happened to it, they will seek out a new home, but the very strong site loyalty of PM's explains why we often see martins still inhabiting colony sites that have been left unmanaged, overgrown by trees, etc.

- **Where to place housing?** New housing should be about 40 feet away from trees and buildings, and should be at least 10 feet high.
- **Keep doors closed** and entries plugged until the martins return. Open more as more birds come back. This helps discourage house sparrows.
- **Remove any house sparrow nests. Don't let them breed in your housing. !!!**

(House sparrows can have up to five broods in a year, depending on the weather. At an average of 5 eggs per nest, it is easy to see how their population exploded. In a mild season, the earliest of those baby HOSP can themselves be breeding by the end of the year. Within a local area – like your back yard – or a golf course – the number of sparrows can be kept very low by simply never allowing them to hatch their eggs.)

- Try the “**dawn song**” CD’s to attract martins down to a new site (*available from our lending library*).
- **Importance of lowering housing:** Don't be afraid to do this - martins will not abandon their young. You can then be aware of what is going on in your colony. Do this once a week and your martins will become very comfortable with you.

You'll be able to spot problems, such as severe mite infestations. These tiny insects can cause nestlings to jump. This is when the landlord can help them survive by doing a nest change.

- **At end of season, clean out the housing if possible.** Dawn dish soap with a little bit of bleach added will kill any leftover mites / fleas in the nest. *If not possible to clean this way – for instance at a remote location without a close water source – remove gourd lids or housing doors and floors. Scrape out old nests to remove the bulk of the nest material, dirt, and bugs. Lower the gourd rack / housing and leave it open to the winter rain, snow, and winds. They will be quite clean come springtime!*
- Springtime can bring **bad weather for martins.** When they return, pre-nesting with pine needles - especially in aluminum or plastic housing/gourds - can help them to conserve warmth and strength by keeping them from direct contact with these cold materials.

If weather persists in a “no-insect” temperature range, martins can starve. People have been training them since the early 1990’s to accept food offerings. Supplemental feeding can save your colony. Lots of information on this can be found online, and on our OPMA website.

Fern closed by showing us a **sample Tree Swallow house** that he made, emphasizing the depth of the house which keeps the birds safe from the long reach of cats and raccoons. Also, he stressed the importance of having grooves on the inside of the house underneath the entrance hole, to help the nestlings have a grip to climb out when ready to fledge.

John's experience with a Great Horned Owl

John Balga recounted his first experience with a Great Horned Owl in his backyard:

This much feared visitor to a PM colony showed up one night at about 10 pm. John did some research and learned that the GHO's hunting area covers a 100 square mile radius! That's a lot of territory!

These owls can decimate a martin colony. Martins are noisy in their nests at night, and owls have keen hearing. They can land on a house, or cling to a gourd, and cause martins to fly out by shaking or rocking the unit. They also have a long and strong reach with their claws and have been known to rip the doors off aluminum housing to get at the birds inside.

Many methods and devices have been promoted as providing protection from these top-tier predators. Here's a few that John mentioned:

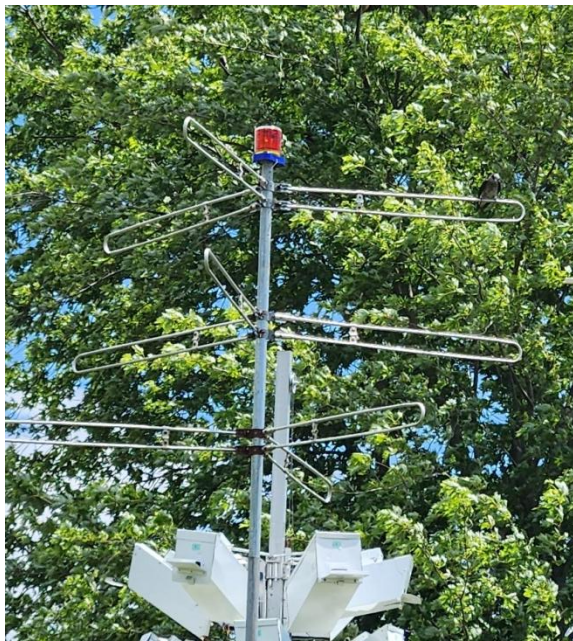
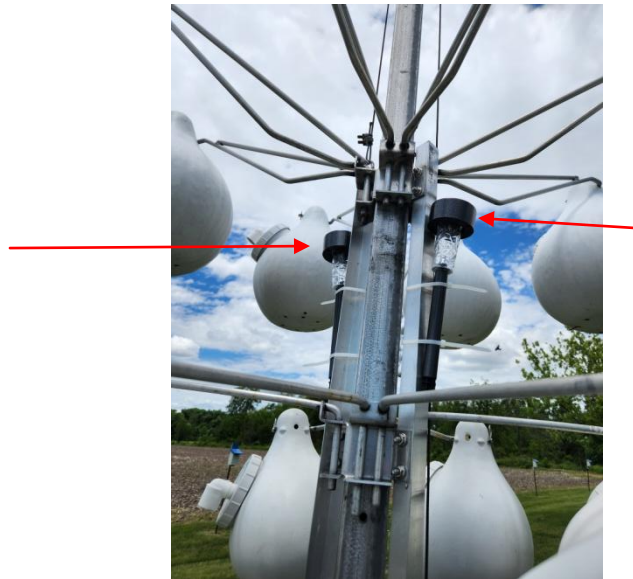
- Avoid putting housing too close to trees.
- Use only deep compartments with **SREH** (Starling Resistant Entry Holes) which reduce the hole size, making it difficult for the owl to reach in.
- Tunnels on gourds are a great protective device.
- Consider "bars" for housing and gourds, such as the owl guards available to purchase for the "Excluder" gourds. Some landlords have attached metal rods vertically to houses, or encased houses with cages made from fencing with 4" spacing. There are photos online of such cages which surround an entire gourd rack.
- "White noise" devices can mask the nighttime noises of a PM colony – even a radio set to play static.
- Place an OWL decoy somewhere outside of the circumference of your colony. This could deter another owl from moving in. (GHO's have a very diverse carnivore diet, which apparently even sometimes includes other GHO's!)

John's own experiment was with lighting.

- 2 LED lights from the dollar store were attached to each of the two poles.
- A red light (Amazon \$25 construction light) was attached to the top of the perch.

All lights turned on automatically at dusk.

Here are pictures of John's experiments, which he was happy to say seemed to put a halt to the owl's visits !



A previous Chatter included John's instructions for installing a Blink camera in a gourd.

One of the many things John observed with this camera was that new fledglings would fly into gourds where younger birds were still being fed, and **steal the food** the parents brought in!

T14 Building Instructions: Our members Al Hamill and Fern Bellavance built a new T14 for the Colchester Heritage Site and documented the process thoroughly with pictures and step-by-step details. This will be uploaded to the OPMA website in the near future. Keep a lookout for that if you're one of our handy members in search of a winter project! 😊

Chairperson Paul Hamel let everyone know that although OPMA was represented at the annual **Hawk Festival** at HBMO in September, a changeover in personnel at HBMO resulted in lack of information being shared in time for the OPMA to get the news out to members (as we have always done). We were still able to put up a booth and had enough volunteers from the board to cover our time there.

Here's a picture of some of said volunteers (*Al Hamill, Dennis Shady, and Fern Bellavance*) which was forwarded (*thanks John Balga*), caption included 😊.



“Quiet Saturday for the three amigos”

Christmas Message from Paul

As 2024 comes to an end, I find that it's a good time to take a pause and reflect on what happened this past year. It actually was a really good year for our organization. There was good weather for the Martin's return. I can remember Mary Wilson commenting that she had to do very little feeding and has lots of crickets left for 2025. The number of pairs and the number of fledglings remained stable or increased at most colonies. This is good news for the continuing success of the Martin in our area.

Housing was put up at the Heritage School House in Colchester with the hope that a colony would be established before Martin Fest next year. To our surprise, we had approximately 8 pair take up residence. This should even increase in 2025. I might mention that a brand new T14 house was donated and will be put up in the spring. Fern Bellavance and Al Hamill will be building the pole which will be paid for by our association.

*We are grateful to **Darlene Rojek** of Colchester for her donation of this T14, and are glad that we were given the approval to add it to the newly established colony at the Colchester Heritage Schoolhouse Site - the home of our next (and perhaps future 😊) Martin Festivals.*

Your generous contribution is much appreciated!

OPMA continues to have a strong membership of 87 paid up members. Our finances are in good shape thanks to Al Hamill our treasurer.

We now have a full board thanks to Ken Winter and Ted Postma filling the two recent vacancies. We had our five meetings where we were able to try out two new venues. I have to thank Al and Anne Hamill for hosting the very successful pot luck in June. Hopefully, 2025 will continue this positive path.

We can now start to look at 2025. It is going to be a very interesting year. **First**, it is the association's 25th anniversary. Who would have predicted that we would still be meeting and discussing Martins? We are looking at ways to celebrate this event so stay tuned for further information. **Second**, this is the year for Martin Fest. Plans are being made by the committee and more information will follow as we get closer to the July 12th date. Meeting dates have been set and member host meetings have been arranged. Most important, the Martins will be returning for a brand new year starting in late March and early April. We definitely have a lot to look forward to in the New Year

Finally, on behalf of the board of directors let me wish each and every one of you a joyous and peaceful holiday season.

Paul Hamel - Chairperson OPMA





Rambling around on GOOGLE, and found this site! Lots of PM stuff here – except for housing LOL !

<https://www.zazzle.ca/purple+martin>



Thank you to members Marie & Lyle Hall for sending this message and photo:

“This is what you can do with your naked bird pole when the martins have flown south and on our wish list we can ask Santa for a safe return next spring for our feathered friends.”

Safe and Happy Holiday wishes to all !