

PHOTO JIM WILLIAMS



Female and male parents share in building the nest to raise their young

### IN NEW YORK STATE, PURPLE MARTINS HAVE DECLINED BY 39% SINCE 1985.

#### Help Reverse the Trend!

The National Audubon Society suggests the following ways that you can help to conserve Purple Martins:

- Purchase or construct and install appropriate martin housing, including predator proofing. Housing standards can be found at **www.purplemartin.org**
- Protect martin colonies from European Starlings and House Sparrows by trapping or otherwise removing these non-native nest site competitors.
- Plant native trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses which attract more insects than non-natives. In fact, they support almost 30 times more insect diversity than introduced plants.
- Avoid applying pesticides that kill or poison flying insects that martins eat.
- Create a dragonfly pond to attract and breed these and other insects preferred by martins.
- Maintain a pile of small gravel or sand in an open area for grit.
- Offer dried, crushed chicken egg shells on an elevated tray for egg-laying females.



Adult female on the left shown with two of its young

### CHECK OUT THESE WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PURPLE MARTINS:

- [www.friendsofiroquoisnwr.org/purplemartins/media.html](http://www.friendsofiroquoisnwr.org/purplemartins/media.html)
- [newyorkwild.org/martin/martin\\_video.htm](http://newyorkwild.org/martin/martin_video.htm)
- [purplemartin.org](http://purplemartin.org)
- [birds.audubon.org/species/purmar](http://birds.audubon.org/species/purmar)



#### Project Partners

- New York State Ornithological Association
- Buffalo Audubon Society
- Buffalo Ornithological Society
- Purple Martin Conservation Association
- Friends of Iroquois NWR
- New York State Bluebird Society
- Orleans Bluebird Society

#### If you have questions about caring for a Purple Martin colony, please contact:

- FINWR c/o Carl Zenger  
1101 Casey Road  
Basom, NY 14013  
Carl Zenger: cpzenger@gmail.com 716-434-7568
- Celeste Morien : nyspurplemartins@gmail.com  
585-721-8202
- Pat Lynch: duck736@aol.com
- Rick Marx or Alan Grethel:  
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- David Seiferth: davidseiferth@gmail.com  
585-455-1304



**PURPLE MARTIN Status: Declining**

PHOTO: LARRY LEONARD

## New York State Purple Martin Project

A collaborative effort of partners dedicated to educating and engaging citizens in the conservation of Purple Martins, with the goal of increasing martin populations throughout New York State.

## PURPLE MARTINS

With a length of 7-8 inches and a wing span of 16 inches, the Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) is the largest swallow in North America. Its plumage



PHOTO JIM WILLIAMS

varies from grayish-brown with light bellies to dark blue-black with an iridescent sheen, depending on the age and sex of the bird. In different light conditions this sheen can appear blue or purple.

## Habitat

Purple Martins breed from British Columbia to Nova Scotia southward, but are absent from the interior western mountains and Great Basin. Preferred habitats include open wetlands, residential areas, and agricultural lands.

Woodpecker holes in trees were once the chosen nest sites of martins. Today, martins in the eastern half of North America are almost entirely dependent on gourds and martin houses for nesting. Attracting martins is not always easy and needs to be done correctly to enhance chances of success. Standards for Purple Martin housing are available at [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org).

## Our Vision

Our Purple Martin Project was started in 2012, to support the Purple Martin Conservation Association activities in New York State and establish a Purple Martin landlord database, linking landlords with our organization, to promote best Purple Martin housing and management practices throughout New York State.

## Food

Purple martins eat primarily flying insects and catch their prey in mid-air. Contrary to what many people think, the martins do not eat many mosquitoes as these insects generally only fly at lower heights than where martins tend to feed.

To help digest their food, martins regularly swallow small amounts of sand or gravel as grit, or crushed eggshells provided by the colony landlord.

## Nesting

Martin nests typically have from five to six white eggs. Incubation lasts about 15 days but may take longer in cool weather. The young fledge about 25-35 days after hatching.



PHOTO RON WINDINGSTAD

Martins are colonial nesters and prefer housing mounted on a pole 10 to 17 feet high and placed 30 to 120 feet from human housing.

Purple Martin houses should be about 50 feet away from trees to provide a clear glide path for approaching martins.

Purple Martins are geographically loyal and will return to the same nesting site year after year if it is still suitable.



Martins prefer dragonflies



Color varies between genders and age

PHOTOS LARRY LEONARD

## Predators

The Purple Martin's worst enemies are the European Starling and the House Sparrow. Both of these species are aggressive toward martins and may attack or kill birds in competition for nesting sites. Other enemies include owls, snakes, raccoons, hawks, squirrels and feral cats.

## Migration

As martins prepare for their migration to South America, they form roosting colonies that may have tens of thousands of birds. In Fall 2012, a roosting colony at Buckhorn Island State Park on Grand Island, NY had an estimated 4,000 martins.

In the Spring when returning to North America, there is some variation in migration timing. Older males are usually first to migrate back to their summer grounds, followed by older females and then younger birds. As a result, older birds typically choose the better nesting sites. ✂

## DID YOU KNOW THAT PURPLE MARTINS . . .

- are not actually purple
- are the largest swallow in North America
- may feed their nestlings up to 60 times a day
- migrate about 5,000 miles to South America taking 2-3 months to complete
- different ages and genders migrate at different times of year
- began using gourds hung out for their nesting by Native Americans centuries ago