

Birds-I-View is a Wild Bird and Nature Store owned by Steve and Regina Garr.

Steve has been a Purple Martin Landlord since 1979 and has maintained colonies in ten separate locations in two different states. He has enjoyed presenting educational programs on Purple Martins throughout the Southeast and Midwest for over 30 years!

*Steve & Regina have spent many years actively promoting the care and conservation of all native cavity-nesting species-Purple Martins included! They assisted in co-founding two separate State Bluebird Societies. Steve is a past President, Vice-President and Board Member of the North American Bluebird Society, and is a life member of that organization. He is the current President of the Missouri Bluebird Society and Regina serves as their Secretary and Newsletter Editor. Steve spent nine years as a **Columnist for the Nature Society News**. The Nature Society was dedicated to educating others about our native wildlife and Purple Martin landlords **everywhere** are in their debt for the decades of important research they conducted!*



A proper Purple Martin nesting system allows for the installation of Predator control items as needed—such as the Raccoon/Snake baffle pictured left.

Keys to a Successful Colony

- **The Right Martin Housing** that will adapt to circumstances as needed and will easily raise & lower vertically for proper monitoring
- **Good Flight path in & out of house** (See inside brochure for more details!)
- **House Sparrow control before and during the season**
- **Abundant Perch Area**
- **Supply Nesting Material**
- **Recordings of Martin Vocalizations & “Decoy” Martins** have proven extremely successful in attracting Martins to new housing where there is not an existing colony—they cannot take the place of proper house maintenance & monitoring, however.
- **Monitor at Least once per week**
- **Talk to your Martins!** They like people and will generally choose to occupy a house close to human activity if given the option!



BIRDS-I-VIEW
Jefferson City, MO

Purple Martins!



Committed to providing products & information that benefit wildlife.

573-638-BIRD(2473)
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Purple Martins

A Proper Purple Martin House & Placement

- Raises and lowers **vertically** to allow for proper and thorough inspection DURING the nesting season.
- Accepting of sparrow control (ie in-house live traps)
- **Individually opening** compartments
- **Guard Rails** to protect young as they prepare to fledge
- **Proper ventilation** Aluminum is cooler than wood & aluminum roofs reflect the heat better than wood or plastic. Colder temperatures earlier in the season are only an issue with regard to available flying food, not for keeping martins warm. Keeping the house cool during nesting season is a much more critical issue.
- **Adequate flight path & height.** Due to the natural gliding practice of the purple martin as it leaves the house, a minimum height of ten feet is essential. The Nature House poles put the house at a proper 12-14 feet above the ground. Make certain there is 30-40 feet of clearance for the flight path into the entrance holes, AND consider how the birds glide to leave the house. Is there anything blocking their downward glide from the house, or any place that a cat or other predator could hide there?
- **Place the house near People Activity—Martins Like us!**



A few other issues worth consideration:

1. Baby Martins that prematurely “jump from the nest” often have an issue with mites. Look into Natural Enzyme cleaners.
2. It has been our experience that the only martins that *appear* to “coexist without incident” with house sparrows are in houses that are rarely monitored during the season by opening the nest compartments. These ten to be colonies in which the martin colony dwindles away and the house sparrow population increases.
3. Remember to check for wasp nests in areas of the house *besides* just in the compartments (ie roof ventilation, etc) If NO birds ever use or go near your house, wasps could be an issue.
4. Snakes can & do climb 14 foot (or higher) poles! A proper Baffle can make the difference.

Monitoring your Purple Martin House is FUN and Rewarding!

We monitor our purple martin houses because, like most native cavity-nesting birds, a well-monitored nest will almost always raise more and healthier babies than one that is not routinely monitored. It is much easier to address any



problems as they arise instead of trying to “play catch-up”, especially given the introduction of non-native species that compete for martin housing.

And nest box monitoring is fun! It does help to know what you are looking for: The top

photo shows two purple martins. The one on the right is the **adult male**. He is iridescent black in color, while the females and immature males are lighter breasted.



Often, but not always, some adult males arrive to houses first (especially established colonies). In areas where a new colony is being attempted, usually immature birds will occupy the house first. Generally

these immature birds arrive into an area later than the first birds at established colonies—sometimes months later, so keep your houses ready! **Nest-building** may take up to 4 weeks to complete and the nests are compact and neat, often with a little mud. An average of **4-6 white eggs** are laid,



successively one per day, until the last egg is laid at which time incubations begins. The eggs **hatch in about 15-**

16 days and the babies **fledge in approx. 28 days.** However, unlike some other cavity-nesting species, young Purple Martins do a good deal of wing-stretching and practicing prior to actually leaving the house. We call this stage “flight school” and it is recommended that you not lower the house



for inspection during this period.

After the babies have fledged, do not instantly plug your house up—often other martins will come and “visit” or roost in the house during migration.

What are Purple Martins?



The Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) is the largest member of the Swallow family. They are Neotropical migrants, spending the winter months in Brazil and returning to North America in the spring to nest. They are about 7 1/2 inches long and prefer to nest in the company of other martins (they are “colony nesters”). Their natural food is flying insects found near the nest site.

Feeding Purple Martins : When and Why

During times of stress for Martins (such as cold weather, extremely hot or dry weather, or after migration) it may be necessary to supplement their usual diet of flying insects. It is much easier to train martins to eat supplemental food (such as mealworms) when they are NOT stressed. **Lots of perch area** on a martin feeder appears to be critical in training the birds to try an alternative food source. (see photo below)



A Purple Martin feeder mounted on a telescoping pole

Left: Purple Martins enjoy both perch area and a snack of mealworms at Steve Garr’s mid-Missouri Martin Colony. Providing Nesting material (such as pine straw) in this “feeder” can also be very beneficial.

Steve & Regina Garr

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