

Purple Martin Beneficial Practice Guide for Ontario Rural Residents



Purple Martin colony with gourds and T-14 at Holiday Beach, near Windsor, Ontario

Male Purple Martin using a birdhouse to nest

Timing of migration and breeding activities in southern Ontario:	
Spring arrival	Early to Mid-April
Fall departure	August
Nesting dates	Late May to early June until late July
Nest cycle (average number of days):	
Nest building	4-6 weeks
Incubation	15-16 days
Fledging (when young leave nest)	26-32 days after hatching
Parental care – post-fledging	Up to 1-2 weeks after fledging
Post breeding roosts	August
Migration to wintering grounds	September

Why help Purple Martins:

Purple Martins are our largest species of swallow, and are frequently seen flying high above open areas in pursuit of flying insects to eat. Purple Martin populations have experienced steep declines across Canada, especially in the east, possibly due to reductions in available insect prey and loss of habitat. Purple Martins play an important role in pest management – they eat hundreds of insects each day!

Habitat requirements

Nesting: East of the Rocky Mountains, Purple Martins nest only in housing provided by humans, such as gourds and condominium-style birdhouses. Purple Martins prefer nesting near open areas close to water. They build a nest out of twigs, stems, leaves, and mud inside birdhouses.

Beneficial Practices

➤ Provide nest houses:

Provide Purple Martins with nest housing, such as gourds or condominium-style houses, near water sources (e.g., pond, lake). Martins prefer nest houses made of wood with deep cavities (11 inches or 28 cm), and ventilation, with a white exterior colour. Position individual compartments to prevent older babies from moving to adjacent compartments to steal food (called kleptoparasitism), and include entrance hole attachments to [exclude Starlings](#). For easy access during nesting season, nest houses should incorporate a winch and cable system, individual cavity entrances that can be opened



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independently, and predator guards (e.g., baffles on supports) to deter climbing predators. The [T-14 design](#) is currently one of the best for condo-style housing (14 individual compartments). Gourds are also very successful and prevent kleptoparasitism. Housing should be located at least 10 to 20 metres away from trees, buildings, and other structures to reduce predation.

➤ Reduce nest competition:

House Sparrows and European Starlings may take over nest houses and prevent nesting by Purple Martins. Preventative measures include installing [starling-resistant](#) entrance holes on the entrances and keeping the bird houses closed until Purple Martins arrive in the spring. Humane trapping and removal of House Sparrows and European Starlings by hand is also recommended.

➤ Be a good colony steward:

Before Purple Martins return in the spring, clean out nest cavities and remove House Sparrow and European Starling nests. During cold snaps food is scarce for Purple Martins. To help the colony, you can try to provide supplemental food by flinging mealworms or scrambled eggs into the air with a spoon when the Martins are nearby and can observe you.

➤ Maintain foraging habitat:

Place Purple Martin housing in open areas near water and other habitats that have healthy insect populations. Avoid using pesticides near Purple Martin colonies or water sources as they can reduce the availability and the quality of food for the birds.

For more information about Purple Martins, visit:

Nature Canada: www.naturecanada.ca or Contact info@naturecanada.ca or call 1 613 562 3447

Bird Studies Canada: <https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai> or Contact lpurves@birdscanada.org or call 1 888-448-2473

Ontario Purple Martin Association: <http://essexpurplemartins.ca/>

Purple Martin Conservation Association: <https://www.purplemartin.org/>

Birds of North America: <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/purple-martin>

If you would like to build your own Purple Martin Housing, you can select one of the links below:

[Build a T-14 Purple Martin Housing](#)

[John Balga's Canadian Double Taverner Purple Martin House](#)

