

Project Demolition:



Purple Martin Birdhouse Advisory

Purple Martin Conservation Association
Edinboro University of PA
Edinboro, PA 16444
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Dear Property Owner,

We notice you have a Purple Martin birdhouse in your yard, and we applaud your good intentions in attempting to provide martins a place to nest. However, did you realize that by allowing your martin house to stand unmanaged, you are indirectly harming the very birds this house was meant to benefit? You are providing a breeding place for the martin's worst enemies — the European Starling and the English House Sparrow.

Sadly, the once-common Purple Martin has undergone a dramatic population decline during this past century. A major cause of this decline was the introduction of two destructive nonnative, cavity-nesting birds in the late 1800's — the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). These two aggressive "pest" species, the avian equivalent of Gypsy Moths, Norway Rats, and crabgrass, increased rapidly in number and then gradually spread across the continent, wreaking havoc on the Purple Martin. Starlings and House Sparrows are often referred to as "the vermin of the air," and are harmful to many native birds.

These two species are so aggressive and destructive that it is no longer possible to start a colony of martins simply by erecting a martin house and waiting for the martins to move in. Why? Because starlings and House Sparrows will move in first. Once established, their territorial aggression will repel all investigating Purple Martins. Unless you live in an area where martins are superabundant (and such areas are rare), your chances of attracting martins to your box without continuously evicting starlings and House Sparrows are slim to none.

More persistent and aggressive than martins, starlings and House Sparrows will not only prevent martins from nesting in your martin house, but they will also breed in the house themselves (producing more of their own kind) and will kill or chase away any martins that attempt to investigate or nest in the



An unmanaged, sparrow-infested Purple Martin house. The landlord of this house, although well-intentioned, is harming martins by raising their introduced nest-site competitors.

James R. Hill, III

house. The large number of neglected, starling-infested and House Sparrow-infested martin houses that can be found in backyards everywhere are a sad testimonial to a once robust population of martins. Many people who have a martin house in their yard would not be able to recognize a Purple Martin if it landed on it. That is unfortunate because martins are a beautiful, graceful bird, now very scarce or absent from large expanses of their former range. Again, an unmanaged and neglected martin house actually hurts rather than helps the Purple Martin.

Please help Purple Martins by taking steps to keep starlings and House Sparrows from breeding in your "martinless" house. If you are not willing to continuously evict starlings and House Sparrows

(by trapping, shooting, or nest removal) please consider taking your house down altogether. If you want to leave the martin house up as a decoration, but don't have time to control starlings and House Sparrows, please plug the entrance holes.

We hope this information sheet has not served to offend you. That was not its intention, and apologies are offered if it has. If you would like more information on how to attract Purple Martins, please contact the *Purple Martin Conservation Association*, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Edinboro, PA 16412, or visit our web page at www.purplemartin.org. Our e-mail address is info@purplemartin.org. Thanks!

This page, written by the PMCA, is designed to be photocopied and distributed to homeowners that have unmanaged, "martinless" houses acting as breeding sites for starlings and House Sparrows. It can be distributed anonymously if you like, but the PMCA suggests its members sign copies of this document and add their own address and telephone number. Perhaps you might also offer to help the homeowner dismantle their housing and give them a tour of your own (or a nearby) healthy colony site. Show them how to do it. Who knows, you might make a new friend!

