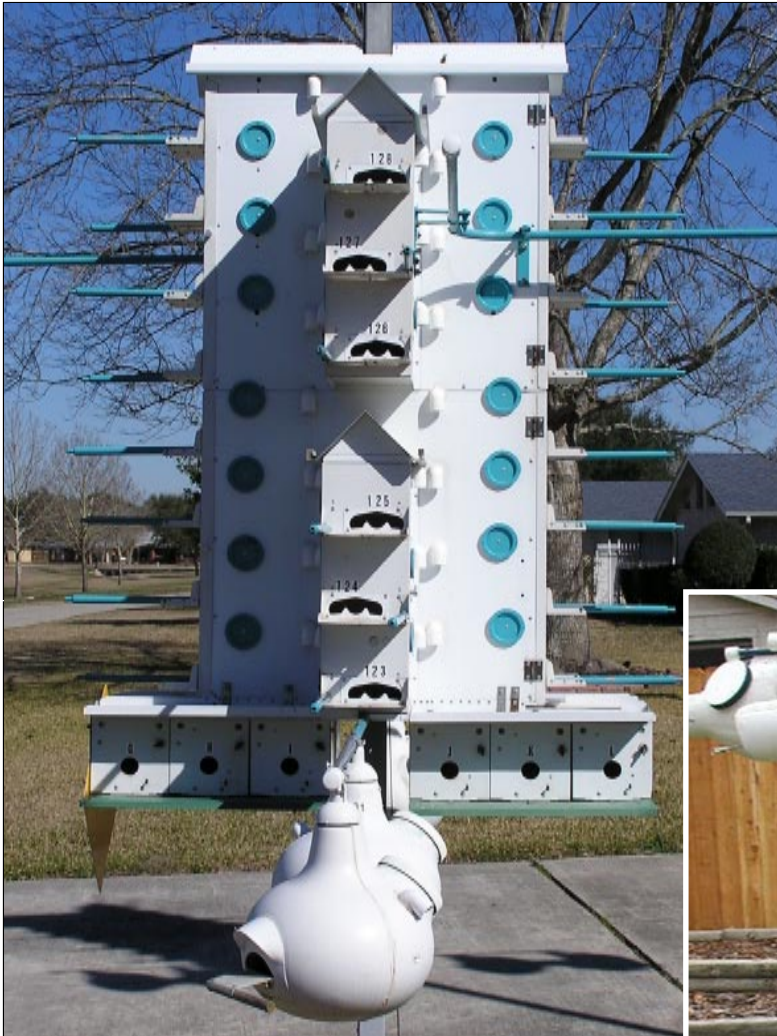


Landlord Profile: Tony Frederickson, a Lone Star Legend

*Louise Chambers
Purple Martin Conservation Association
Edinboro University of PA
Edinboro PA 16444*

M eet Purple Martin landlord, Tony Frederickson from Seguin, Texas. While he may not have accumulated as many air miles as some adult martins, he has spent a lot of time in the sky. A retired US Air Force Lt. Colonel, Tony is a Vietnam veteran who was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), plus a slew of other medals and decorations during his 23+ years of service. Besides enjoying martins, 58 year old Tony is an avid runner. He used to enjoy golf and fishing, too, at least until the martin bug bit him. His continuing annual mission is to fledge as many young martins as possible. His "partners" in this mission are his wife, Sharon, a 4th grade teacher, and Gabby, a beguiling dachshund. Other family members also have deep ties with the martin world, as you'll learn as Tony's story unfolds.

Tony has been a martin landlord for nine years. Beginning in 1995 with a wood house and a Trio Castle, he hosted two ASY and one SY martin pairs. His fledge total to date is 4,478 Purple Martin fledglings. Helping the martins produce those 4,478 young in just nine years is the motivation that fuels what Tony does year after year. To trace the story of how he became so successful so quickly and what caused his initial interest in Purple Martins, we have to go back to late 1970s. Here is his story, in his own words:



Above: A double Alamo, ARIZONA 1BW, rides atop a House Sparrow 'alcatraz'. Young martins depart happily in any direction they choose, sparrows depart, "left face!" 30 feet to the curb!" Tony's modified the base floor of this house to hold 12 Spare-O-Door traps.)

Right: If Tony's working with his martins, you'll usually find him smiling. He says martin work keeps him in shape, too; cranking that heavy equipment keeps a man lean and mean, err, sweet. The martins stimulate Tony's urge to help their cause, he says, and adds that it's a mighty good one!





Purple Martin 'Disneyland'. A variety of color on each Lonestar promotes housing 'ID' for the martins. Notice predator guards along the fence, ready for installation in mid-March. A crushed oystershell pile sits in the lower right of the photo.

"I experienced Purple Martins for the first time on a visit with Sharon's grandparents in Rhineland, Missouri in April of 1979. Grandpa Zeno Van Booven had been a martin host for a number of years. How many, he couldn't really remember. His two martin "boxes," each with 12 compartments, had big round entrance holes, and so many paint layers, they probably weighed fifty pounds a piece. Their five foot poles, rusting galvanized steel water pipe, were mounted atop the old garage. The arrival of the first "scout" caused Grandpa to beam. His smile and voice inflection revealed an almost reverence, if not love for that bird. Then I asked the big question - why do you like your martins? Grandpa's face quickly lit up with a smile as he issued this friendly reply, "Cause they eat mosquitoes, and they always come back here. It's sad when they leave, because they seem like my friends." A slight tear in his eye and a voice cracking with emotion said much to me. I remembered this about Grandpa, and find it among many reasons to call him a sweet man. This gentle human being made such a large impression on me, and I never forgot how special martins were to him. And so the seed had been planted. All it needed was the time and the place to grow.

During June 1994, some three years since I had retired from active duty in the Air Force, Sharon and I were on a weekend vacation in Fredericksburg, Texas. Armed with a pocketful of Father's Day money, I stumbled across a retail store merchandising expensive bird feeders, books and martin houses. My atten-

tion was quickly fixed on a green and white, four story model. The attached price tag said it all: Martin Castle, \$399! My eyes lit up and a memory took me to Grandpa. What would Grandpa think of this? After much deliberation and consultation with Sharon (she said, "Buy it!"), I decided to wait and think about it. Eventually, I purchased a Castle and the Dawnsong tape along with an \$85 cedar house, 3 stories, 18 compartments, and the "required" 6" x 6" x 6" compartments. The seller, a nice guy, said, "All you got to do is put this up on a tall post and the martins will find it!" Yeah, right! Anyway, I was armed with the two houses for my first attempt to attract Purple Martins.

One morning in mid-March of 1995, with the "Dawnsong" tape playing away, I looked out to see three martins, two dark males and a gray female, checking out the newly-installed Castle in my backyard. My backyard! I was so elated, telling a friend, "you can't even believe how cool these birds are!" Anyway, I ended up with 2 ASY pairs and an SY pair. The more aggressive ASY pair took possession of the entire Castle for the rest of the season. Their aggressiveness even meant little or no resistance from starlings, despite the fact a pair of starlings had an active nest in the cedar house, in a top floor compartment facing my kitchen window and patio. From these two vantage points, I attempted to shoot the starlings with a Daisy BB gun. I eventually hit the male squarely in the chest. The female eluded me, so I waited until her eggs hatched. My very strong brother-in-law,

Steve Van Booven, helped me lower the wooden house by tilting it over as it did not raise and lower vertically. I removed the starling nestlings and nest, and discarded them. Luckily, the martins, two pairs, had not started nest building. And, the lesson that stuck with me from my first year was that if I was to continue working with martins, luck was not reliable enough. Fortunately, for me, Steve, and the martins, that cedar house met its demise when it crashed to the earth one fall day during a cleaning operation and shattered into many small pieces. Steve felt bad, but I was very relieved; now I could begin shopping for a replacement! The replacements took the forms of another Castle and two Trio Grandpa houses.

1996 was my second year. I again played the Dawnsong in the mornings, and then on February 8 an ASY female represented the first bird of the year. As the year progressed, I realized that I was attracting martins from down the alley, down the street, and from two and three streets north. Each of these sites had a single Trio martin house. The caretakers were somewhat hands-on managers, i.e., some sparrow control was seen at two locations, however, all were compromised in varying degrees by trees. My efforts included attracting these other martins, and at the same time hoping for the return of my 1995 birds. I must have succeeded, since the second year total was 27 successful nesting pairs. My conscience was not cluttered with guilt for "stealing martins," by the way. I concluded that, the more we humans compete for nesting martins, the better it will be for the martins. This became a motto of mine, and remains so to this day. A final note for 1996, my good friend and brother-in-law, David Van Booven, took the remains of the wood house home, and put it back together again, erected it, and attracted one nesting pair in his first effort at martineering. The next season would prove to be big!

1997 will always be remembered as the year I joined the PMCA, and I'm still smiling about it today. Lessons learned included doing timely nest checks and nest changes. Also, PMCA promoted expanded compartments, a shift away from the 6" standard. Prior to the season, I renovated the two Grandpas by removing interior walls, creating 12-inch deep cavities. I lacked the courage to "cut" into the Castles, however. The four Trios



The martins know this housing unit trimmed in dark blue as #5BW, PENNSYLVANIA in honor of the PMCA. Also — the USS PENNSYLVANIA/BB38 was one of eight battlewagons at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

were enjoying their final season as my primary equipment. David Van Booven, one of the most talented technicians I've ever met, caught on to the dream of not only having a Purple Martin colony in his backyard, but also to making correctly sized equipment, i.e., 12-inch deep cavities. He asked my opinion on numerous occasions as he went on to put together the Lonestar Company. I take particular pride acknowledging myself as being his Purple Martin mentor. He will acknowledge having mentored me on all things mechanical, since I now pride myself as being the highly skilled maintainer of all of this equipment. Since 1998, the inaugural season for testing Lonestar equipment on this site, my accumulation of Lone Stars has leveled off at two Little Texas (6 compartments), six San Jacinto (8 compartments), 16 Alamos (14 compartments), and two Goliads, each modified to have seven stories. All of the houses have been modified and combined in various configurations to fit into the yard, while still accommodating a lot of martins. There are also 20 SuperGourds, 27 Natureline gourds, four Troyer Horizontal Gourds and three TG12 Grandpas. This site has grown steadily to this size, a point of great pride by me and gratitude to David, and I certainly believe that if those Lonestars were never conceived, developed and assembled by my friend, that there would be fewer happy martins in the world. Wherever smiling Progne subis subis's may have found a Lonestar, breeding success is hard to avoid.

Using excellent equipment is only a beginning to this story. Yet another is placement and location for the martin houses. A

backyard full of trees in the beginning presented a challenge, however, as time went on the trees either attrited themselves, or my inferior pruning technique made them so ugly they became expendable. So, by 2000, the tightly-bunched grouping of Lonestars and Trios were finally spread out to their current positions; two neat rows from east to west in the backyard, and one row South to North in the front yard. The two TG12 Grandpas in the backyard each have four 6-inch stock cavities equipped with Trio SD-1 Spare-O-Doors. The remainder of the cavities are double rooms with 2 1/8 inch connector holes. The third Grandpa is modified into two separate single stories, individually attached to the underside of a double A l a m o , front yard.

All 12 cavities are equipped with SD-1 Spare-O-Doors. Capturing House Sparrows is one-third of my three S (3's) program: Sparrows, starlings and snakes.

In order to have success with Purple Martins, I have engaged the enemy, pitting myself against House Sparrows, starlings, and snakes. The martins can't defend themselves against the exotics and the uninvited snakes. I have systematically planned and put together a trapping program for House Sparrows, Starling Resistant Entrance Holes (SREH) for preventing entry by *Sturnus vulgaris* , and predator guards on the 15 poles to protect against snakes.

The House Sparrow neutralization program includes trapping with two ST-1s and one PMCA Universal Sparrow trap. Additionally, I use 26 Spare-o-Doors and two other types of insert traps. These are especially useful to strategically trap the peskiest House Sparrows. These live specimens are used as decoys in the repeating traps mentioned earlier. Approximately 200 House Sparrows are neutralized annually. These and the European Starlings are quite numerous locally and they must be dealt with.

European Starlings are occasionally trapped with a cage insert trap. Mostly, careful use of an RWS-24 pellet rifle with scope is implemented when starlings are present. Beginning with the 1999 martin season, I added some obround SREH to the Natureline Gourds and a Lonestar Goliad. Successful prevention of starling entries into those cavities resulted in a continued conversion. Year 2000 saw many more SREHs to include metal crescents on TG12s and all Lonestars. In 2001, additional Lonestar housing was

purchased, all with crescent entries. Fourteen Excluder plates were installed on one double A l a m o house. The configuration consisted of the uppermost 14 being Excluder entrances and the lower 14 crescent. The Excluders outperformed the crescents. The eight successful nesting attempts

Year	Nesting Attempts	Successful Nesting Attempts	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Young Fledged
1995	3	3	12	12	12
1996	28	27	135	109	91
1997	34	34	179	164	158
1998	75	67	404	374	293
1999	67	66	362	340	335
2000	139	127	704	606	567
2001	209	193	1120	979	931
2002	257	232	1371	1190	1050
2003	267	238	1423	1161	1041
Total	1079	989	5710	4635	4478

Above: The results of Tony's nine years as a martin landlord.

Below: Scoutboy sings to Girlscout, a recent arrival in this late January, 2004 photo.



resulted in 41 eggs laid, 38 eggs hatched, and 38 nestlings successfully fledged. As a result, I continued converting to the Excluder. 208 more Excluders were added, resulting in 222 Excluders for 2002. The martins continued to prosper and enjoy protection from starlings. The 76.65% fledged rate for Excluder cavities was higher than the overall fledged rate of 76.59%. This provided enough comfort to me to continue the program in 2003, changing only the remainder of the crescents on the Lonestars to creob, an

SREH entry resulting from riveting an obround over the crescent. The creob has proven useful since there have been zero wing-hang incidents for two consecutive years, an improvement over the two incidents per year occurring prior to 2002. The 234 Excluders, 86 creobs, and 30 crescent gourd entrances work well enough against starlings to provide the returning martins with good security for 2004.

The third leg of the triple S threat, snakes, must be avoided. Landlords of Purple Martins should not do all they can do to attract the birds and then not go the extra mile and protect them

against rat, bull, corn, and any snake likely to be a threat. Effective predator guards are inexpensive and easily maintained. They are absolutely required. Too many cases happen where entire colonies are ravaged when protection is overlooked or ignored. All 15 of my poles are equipped with Lonestar predator guards and they have worked. How do I know? Because I have caught snakes almost every year either in my sparrow traps or trash cans following the scent to dead sparrows or starlings. These same snakes were likely in the yard because of the martin colony, and since the colony is adequately guarded, they have found sparrows instead. This aggressive triple S program's purpose is to spare the martins the losses that they would otherwise endure, and to instead greatly enhance their maximum propagation potential.

Nest checks are performed virtually on a daily basis. Even before nest building begins, I inspect the cavities periodically for safety's sake. During February, numerous martin fights ensue within the SREH cavities. Rarely do I find multiple martins trapped inside, however, I check to be safe. When nest building begins, nest checks of each cavity are performed at least every five days. This interval is maintained to make sure I can find the egg-laying data (date of penultimate egg) for each mated pair. From that point, dates are calculated with the PMCA's Prognosticator. Nest checks reveal any and every scenario from this point. Most importantly, hatching dates are known. I try to check each nest on hatch date in case there are capped eggs. A dozen capped eggs are discovered each season. Most of these successfully hatch after the cap is removed.

Keeping predators and competitors from entering cavities is important, however parasite control inside the cavity is also a must. A proactive nest change program is employed, performing these at the 10 day and 20 day nestling age point. The purpose is to interrupt the breeding cycles of parasites. Nest changes are easier with the 350 nest trays which I make and maintain. Each nest change is scheduled in advance, based on nest check data that I have recorded as to what is occurring in each cavity.

Nest checks are stopped for a particular house when there is a nest with young 21 days old and over. Lowering the house is avoided, except in the event of strong thunderstorms, when the equipment is carefully lowered two to three feet below the pulley to give the pole a margin of safety in high winds. Saving the equipment from wind damage can save the season. Phone calls are made to new mentees to remind them to lower poles as

necessary, or until they have gained the experience to judge the situation for themselves.

I enjoy mentoring interested martin enthusiasts. All have learned something, while others like Wanda Fisher want to know everything I can teach them. Wanda, who lives out in the country, asked for assistance four years ago when her son was a fourth grade student in Sharon's class. I went out to her farm to do a site visit that spring. What I saw was amazing; an old Heath House on a rusting, heavy gauge pole about eight feet above the ground. Twenty head of cattle roamed about, at times rubbing against the pole. The Heath House was in disrepair with most flooring gone from the first floor. Despite this, she indeed had three or four pairs of martins. House Sparrows were also present, although not in

abundance. And, a starling was acting guilty on a power line 100 yards away. After an hour of coffee and donuts, I used an eight-foot step ladder and checked the nests. I found two martin nests, the first with one nestling and the second with two nestlings. They appeared to be stunted and behind in feather development. Mrs. Fisher related that the birds had fended for themselves ever since the Fisher's had moved there eight years before. My assessment was that they were on



Behind every good Purple Martin landlord, outstanding love and support is revealed. Here are Tony's two girls — Sharon and Gabbie.

their last legs, and successful fledging of martins might not occur henceforth, due to sparrows, starlings, and an unmanageable housing system. Adding still more pressure to the martins in residence, two weeks later Dr. Fisher removed a rat snake from the house. That fall, David Van Booven and I installed an Alamo for the Fishers. We added porches and flush-mounted obround entrances. The following season the Fisher site attracted a late SY martin pair which hatched four young in mid-June, which is late for Texas. The nestlings prospered until 12 days old, then they disappeared and I strongly suspected starlings as the cause. The next year the entries were replaced with Excluders. These, along with a predator guard, have allowed Wanda to enjoy two consecutive successful martin seasons, the most recent rendering five successful nests. This year, I erected a six compartment Little Texas (Lonestar original) with Excluders. Wanda called recently to report her martin "scouts," by far her earliest arrivals. Wanda does nest checks and records each on a Martinwatch Data Sheet.

In addition to mentoring, I actively present martin lectures to groups and clubs (Lions, Rotary, Beta, Audubon, and nursing homes). Field trips are hosted here in the spring; two scheduled for this May are a visit from Sharon's 4th grade class and one with the Wimberly Bird Society."

