

Ready for the 2007 Season? Tips to Help You Prepare

Louise Chambers
Purple Martin Conservation Association

It's time to get ready for the martins, or at least to plan what needs to be done when that white stuff on the ground is gone for good. Here are some reminders to help you get prepared for the coming season.

Keep it Safe: Check your equipment now to make sure it's in good working order—don't wait until martin time to discover your cable or rope has frayed, or that winches or pulleys are not in good repair. Keep yourself and the martins safe by repairing or replacing whatever looks questionable. And install a safety pin or clamp on your martin poles, and use them! If the worst happens and your housing system falls while being raised or lowered, a safety pin can save you from injury. Fig 1. shows a safety bolt being inserted in a T-14 pole.

Not only should your housing be in good repair, but there are features you can incorporate in your housing to give the martins a safer nesting site that offers them a chance for optimal nesting success. Provide large compartments or gourds, use starling-resistant entrances and use traps to help control House Sparrows and starlings.

Install a predator guard [Figs 2 & 3] before there is an unfortunate incident involving a snake or raccoon. Don't risk the welfare of the martins by adopting a 'wait and see' attitude. Owl guards on houses or gourd racks work best if they are installed before an owl or hawk has decided your site is the nearest and best restaurant to visit [Figs 4 & 5]. Once a predator has been successful at your site, it will be harder to discourage it by adding guards



Fig 1.



Fig 2.



Fig 3.



Fig 4.



Fig 5.

after the fact. Grease won't stop snakes or raccoons, but grease will stop fire ants—place it up under the pole guard to keep it away from the martins.

Be Prepared: There has never been a better time to be a martin landlord, with all the manageable housing options and innovations available to help us out—from starling-resistant entrances to better traps for House Sparrows or starlings, to management practices like supplementary feeding—we have a lot of tools to use at our sites. This is an ideal time to read up and get prepared, stock up on crickets for the freezer, and if possible, locate the nearest wildlife rehabilitator. [Figs 6 & 7]

If you're trying to attract martins to your site, be ready to deal with native birds that might take a liking to your martin house or gourds. Have single nest boxes or gourds available for bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and Great Crested Flycatchers to claim before the martins are due, to help minimize nest-site competition.

Enjoy the season & share your knowledge: Put up only as much housing as you can manage and enjoy, whether that's one system or two or ten. Help neighbors

get started if they are interested. Martins really benefit when an area has more than just one or two good landlords. Maybe holding a community open house, visiting a school, or contacting your local paper to come and do a story will help people find you and the information you can share [Fig 8.].

Spend time outside so the martins will be used to your presence. Practices like nest checks and supplemental



Fig 6. Mealworms in a feeder.



Fig 7. Eating eggs on a roof.

Below: Figs 9-11 show a House Sparrow nest on top of a nest tray, a martin nest with green leaves and eggs, and a European Starling nest and eggs that have been removed from a martin gourd. Photos by James R. Hill III or PMCA staff.

feeding are easier to carry out if the martins are used to you.

Enjoy your martins—take time to watch them and see how they are doing every day. If you don't make time for this step, you're missing out on the rewards of being a landlord. Plus it will allow you to become familiar with your birds and their behavior. If they act different from one day to the next, such as not wanting to land on the housing, do a nest check to see if there is a problem.

Nest checks & record keeping:

Monitoring nests and keeping records pay big dividends. We think you'll find it adds even more enjoyment to being a martin landlord, and will help your site be more productive for the martins. If you don't think you can handle keeping records for your whole site, try doing it for at least one system, and participate in Project Martinwatch, too. You'll learn how to tell a martin nest from a starling or house sparrow nest [Figs 9-11.] and you'll have an opportunity to share martins with kids and neighbors.



Fig 8. Future landlords.



Fig 9.



Fig 10.

Making changes: Well-established sites, and sites in areas where martins are abundant, are apt to accept changes better than birds at new or smaller sites. Landlords with just one or two pairs need to be more cautious—changing abruptly from all houses to all gourds, for example, might be too much of a change for a new site and could result in losing birds. Add new housing and wait a season, or until the martins are using the new housing too, before removing older housing. Watch to make sure they are handling changes in their housing, but also give them time to adapt. You may find you need to tweak things here or there to keep the martins safe and comfortable.

Don't be afraid to use newer but proven features, such as starling-resistant entrances, at new sites. With a 15-year track record, SREHs make good sense for any site where the landlord knows controlling starlings will be a challenge.

Online information: For newer landlords especially, you'll find an abundance of information in reprints from the *Purple Martin Update*: <<http://purplemartin.org/update/Reprints.html>>. On the PMCA's main web page, the download center, <<http://purplemartin.org/>> contains more articles for those looking for basic information. And you will find still more on the PMCA's Forum Archives, <<http://www.purplemartin.org/forumarchives/archives.html>>. We hope this collection of information, all of which was previously published in the *Purple Martin Update* or posted on the website or Forum, will help landlords have safe and successful martin seasons.



Fig 11.

