



Fig. 1

Help Your Martins Beat the Heat

*Louise Chambers
Purple Martin Conservation Association*

The summer of 2009 was a tough one for southern landlords who had to deal with severe drought, extreme heat, or both. Many landlords reported poor fledge rates as hungry, heat-stressed young died or jumped from housing. Landlords scrambled to find ways to cool housing, using misters, cold packs, fans, and by adding shade. Here are some quick, fairly easy ideas to try if heat is a problem again this year.

Look for commercial products such as shadecloth or solar screening, to add lightweight shade above houses and gourd racks. Add shade panels above roofs and sunny sides of houses. Drill extra ventilation holes in gourds and houses, then insert PVC elbows. Freeze plastic water bottles, and put in empty rooms adjacent to or above occupied compartments. Or use the blue ice packs meant for use in picnic coolers. Instant air conditioning! The bottles will have to be replaced regularly, so may not work well with older nestings or some styles of housing, but for a quick fix and minimum amount of expense, they will help temporarily.

Fig. 1: Tulsa, OK, landlord Tom Martin equips all his housing with extra features to help his birds make it through the very hot summer days. This house has foam insulation sandwiched between aluminum walls. Extra ventilation holes are drilled in every wall—at backs of compartments, fronts, and sides. An oversized roof provides more shade. On some houses, when remodeling to provide oversize compartments, he adds screened openings that can be



Fig. 2

uncovered during hottest weather (not shown). Oversized porches can provide extra shade as well.

Fig. 2: Oklahoma City landlord Kelly Tanner credits her engineer husband with fixing up shade canopies for their house and gourd rack. Shade fabric was fastened to a hoop and mounted above the house and gourd rack. Extra space between the roof of the house and the shade canopy provided martins with a shady, ventilated area to perch and relax.

Fig. 3: Shown here on a woodpecker box in Corpus Christi, TX, at the colony of John Barrow, shade panels offer both shade and ventilation. Blocking sunlight on the roof and side exposed to afternoon sun means temperatures inside the box will be cooler. Allowing some air space between the box and the panel increases cooling effects of any breezes. The panels can be placed as close as 1/2 inch from the nestbox; these are spaced wider to allow for a nest camera mounted on top of the box.



Fig. 3

