

BEAT THE HEAT

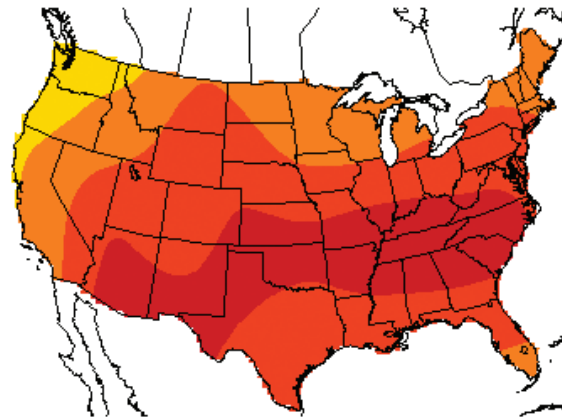
Louise Chambers
Purple Martin Conservation Association

Much like the summer of 2009, the summer of 2012 challenged martin landlords to find ways to help the martins at their colonies survive day after day of record-breaking heat. The heat wave that started in late June and continued through early July saw thousands of records broken at the time when nestling numbers were just past their seasonal peak. Landlords had commented earlier in the year that their birds nested as much as two weeks early; this meant that many sites had fledged most of their young before the heat wave smothered much of the country.

Nestlings bore the brunt of the temperatures, some jumping from housing to escape the heat, or because of hunger. Parent martins ceased feeding young during peak temperatures in the afternoons, but resumed feeding in the evening hours.

Landlords unleashed their creativity in finding remedies. Some added emergency sunshades (Figs. 1, 2 & 3), set up misters (Fig. 4), or put frozen water bottles and small ice packs into empty rooms, so their cooling effect would reach young in adjacent rooms. Extra ventilation holes were drilled in houses, elbow vents were added to gourds. An Ohio landlord opened all the doors on her Trio house and left them that way, much to the nestlings' relief. Some landlords are planning to add insulation and more ventilation to houses or gourds over the winter months.

The extra ventilation, shade, and cooling helped the nestlings and their parents. Since parents seemed to have difficulty finding food, especially in the afternoons when temperatures peaked, some landlords provided supplemental food, putting dead crickets or a container of mealworms into rooms or on porches. The heat wave was the only negative in a pretty good martin season, overall.



Maximum temperature, Jul 01, 2012 13:00:00 PM EDT
<<http://www.hpc.ncep.noaa.gov>>

Fig. 1: Sunshade showing spacers to allow air circulation.



Fig. 2: Sunshades above and on west side of box.



Fig. 3: Umbrellas shade Donna Bailey's site in Texas



Fig. 4: Nanette Mickle in Virginia added misters from FarmTek Growers Supply.