

# Purple Martin Predators

Predators are everywhere. Whether a martin colony is located on a public park, at a school, or in your own backyard, Purple Martins are vulnerable to aerial predators such as hawks and owls, and ground predators such as raccoons, snakes, and squirrels. Being aware of the signs of predation can help determine what kind of predator you have and allows you to take steps to take to prevent the issue from happening again. The best time to protect your Purple Martins is before there is a problem. Guards should be installed on ALL active housing.

## Location

Make sure your martin colony is located in a clear area, away from any tall trees. There should be no wires leading from the ground or a building to the martin housing, do not place the housing close to a fencepost, and keep the ground below the housing cleared of any tall vegetation in which predators could hide.



## Aerial Predators

### Signs of Aerial Predators

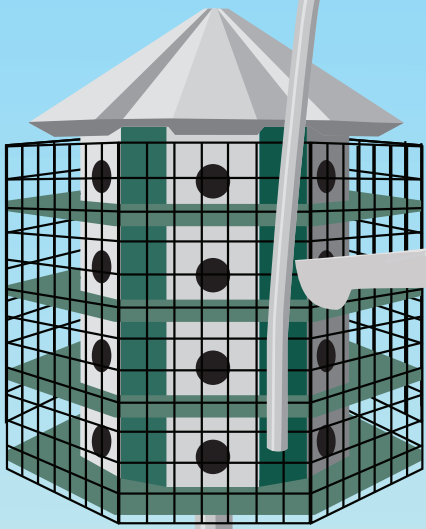
**Hawks, Owls, Crows**

- Multiple feathers or wings below martin housing.
- Decoys turned upside down, or ripped off.
- Doors of housing ripped off or opened.
- Owl pellets (regurgitated pellets of non-digestible feathers and bones) below housing.
- Missing young or adults.

### Guards and Cages

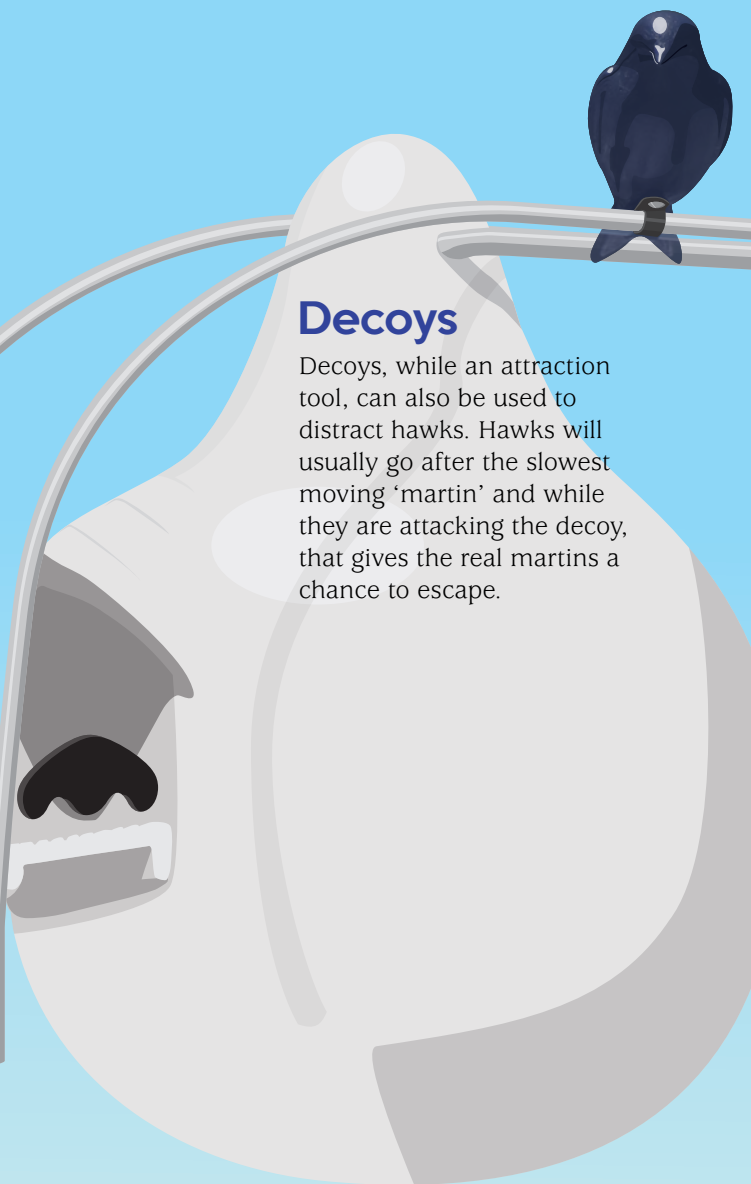
Guards placed in front of the cavities and wire cages surrounding the cavities will help prevent the predator from reaching in and grabbing nestlings and adults. Guards should ideally be placed 8" from the entrance to allow maximum protection. Cage guards can be purchased or made from 2"x4" hardware cloth.

Like Purple Martins, all species of hawks and owls are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is illegal to shoot or harm these native species.



### Decoys

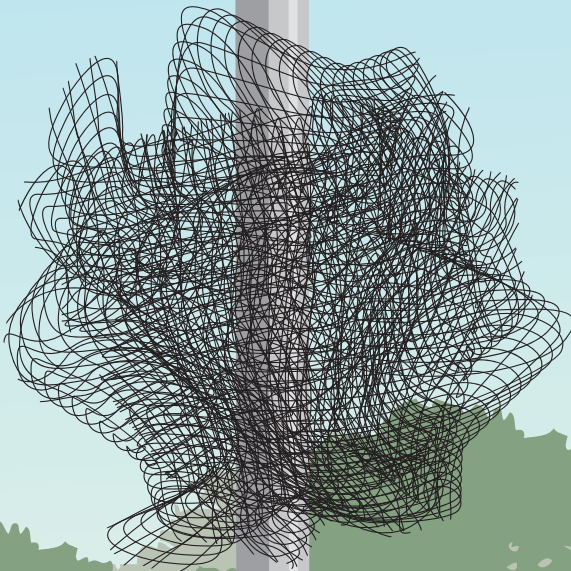
Decoys, while an attraction tool, can also be used to distract hawks. Hawks will usually go after the slowest moving 'martin' and while they are attacking the decoy, that gives the real martins a chance to escape.



## Ground Predators

### Signs of Ground Predators

**Snakes**—Missing eggs or nestlings; snakeskin in cavity or below martin housing; snake inside cavity.  
**Raccoons**—Blood on or in housing; wings or body parts scattered around martin housing.



### Netting

For those in areas with large snakes 1/2-3/4" bird netting can be used as a secondary line of defense. Netting should be placed above the predator baffle in puffy layers, ensuring there is no space for the snake to climb between the netting and pole, or over the netting, wire can be used to create a form for the netting.

To remove any captured snake, hold the snake by the head while wearing gloves and use scissors to cut the netting away from the body. Snakes should be removed unharmed and released a few miles away from the colony. Netting does not prevent raccoons from climbing the pole and should always be used along with a baffle. Netting is a trap, rather than a guard—like all traps, it needs to be closely monitored to ensure that any species caught by the trap are removed and released unharmed.

### Pole Baffles

Cylindrical or conical in shape and help prevent raccoons and snakes from climbing the pole. These predators can climb any pole; round or square, metal or wood, no matter how tall. Pole guards are commercially available (we recommend a Quick Release Predator Guard for ease of use) or you can make your own. Guards should be at least 8" in diameter, 2' long, and installed at least 4' above the ground—higher if possible.

