

# House Sparrow Control Made Easier

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Any Purple Martin enthusiast who has a martin house manufactured by Trio has a decided advantage when it comes to controlling House Sparrows. The advantage comes from being able to use Trio's Spare-O-door trap (Fig. 1), undoubtedly the single most ingenious invention for controlling sparrows during the nesting season.

Trio houses have an access door that can be easily removed by sliding the door off the metal rod it rests on. The Spare-O-door can replace the access door in units where a sparrow is nesting. When used properly, the Spare-O-door can trap a sparrow quickly and efficiently. The authors experimented with various trapping methods utilizing the Spare-O-door. The results were interesting. Most notably, using multiple Spare-O-door traps were significantly more effective controlling sparrows than using a single trap. Why trap one sparrow when you can catch two, three or more using multiple Spare-O-door traps?

## Sparrow Control in Active Trio Houses

Fig. 2 shows two tripped Spare-O-door traps on a Trio Castle. This setup was tested at two active martin colonies when sparrows attempted to nest at the site. Traps were checked twice a day when used. Multiple sparrow captures were documented seven out of eight times when two Spare-O-doors were used. At one site where only trapping (and not shooting) was possible, four captures with two birds each time were recorded in four attempts, eliminating eight sparrows (four males, four females). At the second site, shooting was used in conjunction with trapping to eliminate 20 House Sparrows. Three of four trap settings recorded double captures, resulting in seven sparrows (four males, three females) trapped. The remaining 13 sparrows were shot, concentrating on the male sparrows. Once the males were eliminated, the females vacated the site.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Allen Jackson



Fig. 3

Tim Shaheen

## Portable Traps

Both authors are involved at numerous martin sites in New Jersey and experiment with portable traps at selected problem sites using old Trio Mussleman houses on telescoping poles. Each Mussleman house was fitted with four or five Spare-O-doors with the remaining units plugged with door stops (Figs. 4 & 5), dedicating the house to sparrow control.

Any Trio house can be used this way.

Author Jackson, with the assistance of Nora and Drew Gerbereux, trapped at five sites where shooting was not an option. Only one trap house was used per site. Two of the sites were at schools with Super-Gourds. Trapping was only done on weekends, erecting the houses after school on Friday and removing the houses Sunday afternoon. The other three sites were in residential areas, leaving trapping as the primary alternative to control sparrows. The sparrows did not appear alarmed that an additional house had been placed at their sites. In fact, they were quick to investigate the additional house. Approximately a dozen multiple catches of three sparrows were recorded during the twice-daily inspections. The setups were easily relocated from one site to another by using a crow bar to make a hole in the ground sized to hold the trap house's telescoping pole.

Author Shaheen designed a portable ground socket for his system using a 24-inch section of 6-inch PVC pipe (Fig.3). Tape the bottom of the PVC pipe; add 3 to 4 inches of concrete mix; position a metal ground socket pipe in the PVC using a piece of Styrofoam to hold the metal pipe plumb inside the PVC; seal off above the Styrofoam with newspaper; and, top off with another 3 to 4 inches of concrete to 2 inches from the top. The purpose of the foam is to keep the portable base light enough to lift. Drill a couple of holes in each side of the top of the PVC pipe to accept rope handles. This portable base can easily be sunk in the ground using a post-hole

digger. It can be pulled out of the ground and moved around as needed.

House Sparrows will nest multiple times during the season. Each time, the adult male sparrow becomes aggressive, adversely impacting the martin colony. However, the young, recently-fledged House Sparrows also become a problem, flying around in groups, investigating sites, potentially leading to conflicts with martins. During this time, the young sparrows can be relatively easy to trap. For example, on two consecutive days late in July, all four Spare-O-doors were tripped on the house (Fig. 5), resulting in the elimination of eight sparrows.

#### Built-in Spare-O-doors

If you plan to build your own wooden T-14 martin house, consider designing a 6 by 6-inch opening in the attic to incorporate a Spare-O-door. Modifying the house plans to allow for a Spare-O-door in the attic of each section will provide four Spare-O-doors in the T-14, significantly increasing your House Sparrow control capabilities. Author Shaheen developed his own wooden martin house design (Figs. 6 & 7) using this technique to keep a full-time sparrow trap in action.

#### Conclusions

Based upon trapping results encountered during 2003, our conclusions suggest that using multiple Spare-O-doors significantly increased the number of House Sparrows trapped. While there are many different ways to control House Sparrows, all avenues should be investigated and used to control these non-native species that have such adverse impacts Purple Martins.

The Spare-O-door trap has a small, sparrow-sized hole which prevents martins and most other bird species from entering. This feature should be used to your advantage. Make the effort to use multiple traps in active martin houses to quickly control problem sparrows or dedicate at least one compartment in your Trio house to be a full-time sparrow trap. If you can acquire a used Trio house, convert it into a permanent House Sparrow trap used solely within your martin colony for sparrow control. Placed in the middle of your colony with multiple Spare-O-door traps, it can be used throughout the season to concentrate on sparrow control without having to worry about trapping your martins.

This article should be used as a follow-up to our House Sparrow Revenge Syndrome [*Purple Martin Update*, Vol. 11(4)]. In that article, control methods and strategies were identified to get martin landlords thinking about controlling sparrows under different scenarios. No one scenario will completely control sparrows. Many methods work and should be used throughout the year to best control sparrow populations.

The Spare-O-door trap is an effective nest trap that needs to be included in every landlord's arsenal to control House Sparrows. Do not take sparrow control lightly. Make House Sparrow control a permanent management practice within your colony.

*Besides being a landlord and active mentor in northern NJ, Tim Shaheen is president of Builder's General Supply Company and an avid outdoorsman. Allen Jackson, a landlord and mentor from southern NJ, was the PMCA's 2002 Landlord of the Year. Allen recently retired from a career with the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Both Tim and Allen have contributed numerous articles to the Update.*



Fig. 4

Allen Jackson

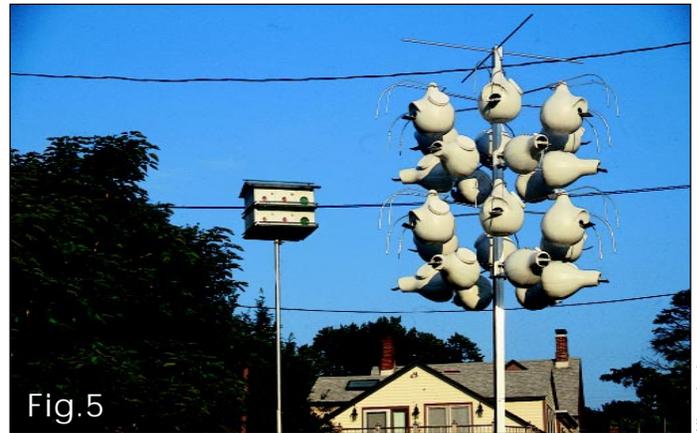


Fig. 5

Allen Jackson



Fig. 6

Tim Shaheen



Fig. 7

Tim Shaheen