**Welcome to the wonderful world of Purple Martins! We are delighted that you are interested in sharing Purple Martin education with your students. The PMCA has developed many tools to assist educators in becoming directly involved in martin conservation. We encourage you to use the lesson plans, student activity sheets and fact sheets to help motivate excitement for learning and make conservation come alive in your classroom! Included here is a brief introduction to the Purple Martin. For additional information, please refer to the resources at** [***www.purplemartin.org***](http://www.purplemartin.org) **or contact the PMCA Education Coordinator at** ***educator@purplemartin.org*****.**

What is a Purple Martin?

Purple Martins (*Progne subis*) are native songbirds in the swallow family. They are the largest swallow in the family and the only martin in North America.

The adult male is the only Purple Martin to have the iridescent purple feathers covering the entire body. Female Purple Martins are duller in color with gray on their head and chest, and a lighter lower belly.

Purple Martins are aerial insectivores, eating only flying insects. They eat large insects such as dragonflies, butterflies, moths, bees and wasps. Martins are fast fliers, foraging for food during the day, high in the sky.

Purple Martins are cavity nesters, building nests in hollowed out locations. Nests are shallow, constructed of thin twigs and straw and lined with green leaves. On average, martins lay 5-7 white eggs that hatch 16 days after the last egg is laid.

Where are Purple Martins?

Purple Martins are long distant, neo-tropical migratory birds. They spend the breeding months in North America, where they lay eggs, raise young, and prepare for migration. During non-breeding months, the birds can be found in South America, feeding over the tropical rainforest, rivers and farmland of Brazil.

In eastern North America during the summer, look for Purple Martins around man-made martin houses that many people put up in yards. In the West, you will find them nesting in natural cavities of trees and cactus.

Foraging Purple Martins hunt insects higher in the air than other swallows, but in the afternoon and evening they may feed low and close to nest sites. In late summer you might see enormous roosts of Purple Martins, particularly in the Southeast as they prepare to migrate to South America.

Purple Martins are secondary cavity nesters. They nest in a cavity, but do not excavate the cavity themselves. Instead, they use old woodpecker cavities, or natural cavities in dead trees, cliff faces or cactus.

Why are Purple Martins Important?

In the eastern half of North America, Purple Martins have undergone what is known as a tradition shift. Gradually, they have switched from using natural cavities to artificial housing humans supply for them. Native Americans started this tradition shift hundreds or even thousands of years ago, by putting up dried, hollowed-out gourds for the martins.

Today in the eastern half of North America, martins are completely dependent on supplied housing for breeding. They now nest only in gourds and multi-compartment wood and metal housing. This bond created between us and bird cannot be undone and without the continued support from people, purple martin housing will decline and along with it, the populations of these graceful, insect eating companions.

How to Teach about Purple Martins

1. **Integrate martin education into classroom lessons -** The Purple Martin Conservation Association offers a variety of FREE educational resources on our website ([www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org)). Integrate martin education into your existing curriculum or create a special unit based on these amazing birds!

1. **Visit a local martin colony -** There are thousands of martin colonies throughout Eastern United States. Many of these colonies are accessible for visits! To find a landlord (*a person who oversees the management of a martin colony*) with the ability to accommodate your group, utilize the PMCA’s forum or Facebook page. Simply post a request for a colony visit in your local area – and see what is available!
2. **Establish a Purple Martin colony on your property-** You too can become a Purple Martin Landlord! Colonies can be placed on private land or public places. They can be in the country, or among the suburbs. Landlords themselves can be old or young - one or many. Check out the Martin Market Place or request a free catalog to view supplies and equipment needed to establish your very own colony!

If you are indeed interested in becoming a Purple Martin landlord, be sure to check out the Buy One – Get One offer on the Lonestar Alamo Martin House System! Qualified applicants can be awarded a FREE second housing unit when purchasing the first!

**Purple Martin Conservation Association**

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