



The Purple Martin Society of Collier County

Purple Martin News Volume 21 No. 3

March 2010

On the web at www.NaplesFlPurpleMartins.com

The next meeting of the PMSCC:

Monday
March 15, 2010
11:45 AM
At the
Foxfire Clubhouse
1030 Kings Way
Naples, FL

The entrance to Foxfire is located on the north side of Davis Boulevard about 1 1/4 mi. east of Airport Road

Just a reminder:

Foxfire is a private club and has a dress code. Casual attire is fine, but denim shorts or jeans are not permitted. Men should wear shirts with collars. Knit golf shirts are fine, but no t-shirts, please.

Foxfire Club accepts payment by major credit card only.

Room at the Top

This year has certainly been a strange one so far. With temperatures averaging ten to fifteen degrees below normal since the beginning of January, I wonder if this is still Florida. It's hard to believe that just a few years ago Bill

Dietrich reported the first egg laid at the Extension Service Colony on March 3.

At least Martins have arrived at many of our colonies and their chatter is encouraging. From what has been reported, it appears that some pairing and pre-nesting activity is going on, but no indication of actual nest-building has been reported as yet.

The weather, along with the low water table seems to have affected other species,



Two Purple Martins enjoy the view from the top of a Norfolk Pine

too. Woodstorks are not expected to nest here this year and wading bird rookeries have been slow to materialize.

But it's March and soon enough the Florida sun will heat up the action. There'll be non-stop nest building, egg laying, baby feeding, and fledge training. Right now it's nice to sit in the top of a tall tree and gain a little perspective. - Leslie

PMSCC Minutes from February 15, 2010

The February meeting of the PMSCC was held on February 15, 2010 at the Club at Foxfire.

Fourteen members and three guests were present. Members in attendance were Bill Hintz, Jack and Barbie Swisher, Jim Klusendorf, Dale and Ruth Graft, Bill Dietrich, John Jensen, Sandy Masters, Jim Connell, Carter and Josina Smith, John Sager and Leslie Burgess.

Bill Hintz introduced his guests, Don and Judy Heeb. Don is president of Mendham Golf & Tennis Club, Bill's club in New Jersey. He is also chairman of the Bird

Committee there. John Jensen's guest, Millie Macy is a winter resident of the Lely Saratoga community who is, coincidentally, from Saratoga NY. She will be helping monitor the colonies at Lely and hopefully will join us as a new member.

President Bill Dietrich called the business meeting to order at 1:00 pm. The minutes for the January 18 meeting, were approved as published in the February newsletter. Treasurer Jim Klusendorf, reported that the balance in the treasury as of the end of January was \$836.02.

(Minutes continued on page 2)

(Minutes continued)

Bill Dietrich shared a copy of the Nature Society News which featured Scout Reports from several of our members on the front page.

OLD BUSINESS:

Display Boards

Bill Dietrich brought one of the currently used foam core display boards to the meeting. He has obtained a strong plastic material to replace the foam core, but is looking for assistance in having the pieces cut to size.

The Conservancy's Earth Day celebration is scheduled for Saturday, April 17. Our display there is a pretty simple one, using table space provided to us in a sheltered location. Although the current info boards will work, we would love to have the use of new boards.

NEW BUSINESS:

There was no new business on the agenda.

GENERAL DISCUSSION:

Effects of Cold on Eggs and Hatchlings

Growing out of reports from John Sager and Jim Connell who both experienced loss of young Martins due to the sudden cold weather, came a discussion about which of the young nestlings are most severely affected.

Since cold weather greatly reduces the insect population, loss of food supply is the greatest danger for birds like Purple Martins who feed entirely on insects. Some landlords had the experience of losing many more young birds which had already grown feathers, while a few that survived were relatively new hatchlings.

Under normal circumstances, adults will first feed themselves and then bring food for their young. When food is scarce, they may be able to sustain the youngest of the hatchlings who demand only a tiny amount of food, but adults are unable to gather enough for hungry teenagers. Surprisingly, eggs laid just prior to cold weather may hatch successfully up to a week late if the eggs have not been incubated. However, once incubation begins and the development process is in progress, chances of the eggs hatching would decrease if the adults spent more time away from the nest to find insects in cold weather.

Following reports from the members, the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 pm.

MEMBER REPORTS

Bill Dietrich (Golden Gate) has not noticed much increase in the number of Purple Martins since the last meeting, possibly due to the continuing cold weather we have been experiencing.

Bill's statement: "The ones I see don't appear to be happy campers and I can't blame them because I'm so ready to see this cold weather end."

Jack Swisher (Goodland) Early Monday morning, Feb. 15, Jack had a happy group of twelve Purple Martins checking out the gourds and chattering. The Swishers have had Martins around in the morning and evening, with several staying overnight in the cavities.

The birds seem more interested in a birdhouse Jack is using which was originally built by Ken Swartz using pieces of 6-inch diameter PVC piping. The units were originally 14" deep cylinders with an entry hole at each end and a divider in the middle, making two cavities, each 7" deep. The divider had been

removed and the entry hole at one end closed to offer 14" deep cavities instead. Unfortunately, Starlings were attracted by the larger cavity and moved in.

Denise Campbell (Port Charlotte) has been away from home, so hasn't been able to watch the Martins much, but reports that as of February 25, it appears that there are 3 pair of Martins in residence. Denise sent a great photo of MANY Tree Swallows in her back yard!

John Jensen (Saratoga, Lely) Also reported seeing large numbers of tree Swallows on the golf course recently at Lely. "They were everywhere," said John, "in the trees, on the ground, overhead." They are also seeing Martin scouts from time to time.

Bill Dietrich commented that Tree Swallows winter here in Southwest Florida, largely in the Everglades, and do not compete with Purple Martins as they tend to hunt for food at a lower level than Martins do, and eat both berries and insects.

(note: It's good to hear that the Tree Swallows are here. They were one of the species counted in surprisingly low numbers in the Christmas Bird Count in December.)



A huge flock of Tree Swallows filling the sky over Denise Campbell's lanai

...and More Reports



Sandy Masters (Bonita Springs) is back in business with her 12-gourd rack and Trio Castle. "I started out with two male scouts, but no females on February 3," reported Sandy. "A week later I got another male. On Sunday, February 14, I saw two females cuddling with the boys."

Now that's a great report for Valentine's Day! As of the February meeting on the 15th they were all still there.

Carter and Josina Smith (Isles of Capri) The Smiths arrived from East Pennsylvania on Saturday, February 6. Sunday morning, they raised the 8-gourd pole and house. On Tuesday they had three Martins, two ASY males and one ASY female. The three birds have stayed to roost overnight ever since. "We replaced the Snyder Excluder doors with obround entries in our modified Trio Grandpa. Bad Move! A small (but villainous) female Starling entered the house with great ease. So we must replace the obround doors again and reinstall the Snyder Excluder entries."

The Smiths are also battling the effects of a large palm on their neighbor's property, but getting too close to their Martin housing.

Hal Dowell (Foxfire) says, "This year's scouts arrived during the second week of February and now, there is much activity around the colony. Noted several females recently at our 10-gourd colony which we placed last year."

As a sideline, Hal reports that there are now two nestlings in the Eagles' nest and that they appear healthy and competitive. This is the 13th or 14th Consecutive year that Foxfire has been privileged to have an active aerie. Fifty-five Bluebird boxes are ready to go and the Bluebirds are courting.

Lawrie Thomas (Grey Oaks) The Thomases have 8 gourds on a 15-ft. pole next to a large pond in Grey Oak with no sightings or nest building as yet. They also have two large houses on their dock in Wisconsin. The birds show up there in late April and they usually have about 3 dozen nests. *Welcome to the PMSCC, Lawrie & Barb!*

Bill Hintz (Mendham Golf & Tennis Club in New Jersey) reported that the club had a good year. They maintained 137 nesting sites, 60 for Purple Martins and the remaining units for Bluebirds. The "bird team" monitored every week and during the Purple Martin nesting season, they checked the housing twice a week. Over 500 young birds fledged.

Bill Clifford (Silver Lakes) sent an e-mail report on March 1. "No wind, cold but sunny brought the Purple Martins out so I could at least get some sort of count. I have eighteen houses and this morning I would say they will be mostly filled up if they all showed up at once. They come and go out of the trees in the area and there appears to be nesting activity on some of the houses."

Dan and Terry Wilson (Fakahatchee Strand) Terry writes: "We are enjoying the sweet songs of the Martins returning and busily choosing their condos. It's hard to figure out what's going on at this point but it looks like we're going to have full houses. I bet they are as confused about the cold weather as we are."

"This will be our fourth year with nesting Martins. It's been a learning experience! The first year was great. We watched them flying around and singing their beautiful songs and life was good. Then... we learned about nest checks!! Now I have a great respect for the Martins and when I am feeling sorry for myself, I think about their lives and my trials are not so difficult. We know we can't eliminate all the dreaded Starlings, but Dead-Eye Dan is watching for them so he can do what he can to keep them from reproducing." While waiting for the Martins to visit, the Wilsons have been keeping track of other wildlife around their



Florida panthers photographed by a remote trail camera on Dan & Terry Wilson's driveway near Fakahatchee Strand

house. In November, three male Florida Panthers came courting a female they are able to recognize and refer to as "Scarlet". Terry shared a photo captured by one of their cameras of Scarlet followed by the prevailing suitor.

John Sager (Wisconsin) shared news of his colony in Wisconsin. He maintains 192 Purple Martin gourds, and also hosts Swallows and Bluebirds. The season got off to a good start with about 200-250 birds, but like

many colonies in the northern mid-west states, the sudden spell of cold weather in early July took a terrible toll on John's young nestlings. Over 300 young were lost but many of the adults survived and stayed. John also had 125 Wood Duck nests. John is also using cameras on his property.

Jim and Barb Connell (Pewaukee WI) here in Florida now, reported on their past Purple Martin season in northern Wisconsin. "After fifteen years of trying, last year we finally had five Martins show up in Maon our lake property in northern Wisconsin," says Jim. "I had to leave due to medical problems and didn't return until August. At that time, we found one Martin feeding three babies, but a few days later found three dead young and no adults. I checked with other landlords and found that all in the Midwest had a bad year." Sad ending for a good start. The Connells hope for better luck this year now that Martins have found them.

Matt Patterson (The Villages) reports that he did his best to provide a little extra food during the cold weather but doesn't think the Martins appreciated his cooking. As a creative approach, Matt purchased two dozen large crickets and knotted them about two inches apart on a long thread hung from the Martin house, but apparently the birds preferred hunting for food around the golf courses.

What's on the Menu?

If you are asking about Purple Martins, there are more opinions on this topic than you might expect

Purple Martin landlords have a habit of taking on a good deal of responsibility for their charges. Like any good parent, they worry about a lot of things they really can't control. The recent cold weather certainly made me worry about how our birds will get enough to eat. They must be finding something, because they leave in the morning and come back at sunset. Since they don't stay around, it doesn't seem likely that offering them food would help. During January, according to Bill Dietrich, they could have just taken a jaunt to a warmer part of Florida where flying insects are more active.



"It better be good whatever it is!"

Since food supply is about the greatest factor in Martin survival at this point in the season, I thought I would do a little research on just what they like to stoke up on. The following are some random topics under the heading of Purple Martin dietary habits I found interesting. No scientific conclusions here and my apologies if I oversimplify.

What Do Martins Eat?

According to the FAQ's on the PMCA's website, "Purple Martins are *obligate aerial insectivores*, which is a fancy way of saying they eat only flying insects, and they take them only on the wing, not off the ground. Martins eat beetles, flies, dragonflies, midges, mayflies, bees, stinkbugs, cicadas, flying ants, damselflies, butterflies, moths, grasshoppers, and wasps. Martins are generalists, and do not specialize in taking just one or two types of insects, to the exclusion of others." They hunt where they want and don't defend a feeding territory. What they eat for themselves, then, may depend on whatever is available wherever they are flying at mealtime, which is usually over water, open fields and marshes and above the level of the canopy.

How About the Kids?

This recipe for the young'uns came from Wild Birds Unlimited: "Purple Martin parents bring food back to the young nestlings in the form of a tightly compressed ball made up of hundreds of small insects. As they continue to catch insects, the ball is compressed and held against the roof of the mouth by their tongue."

We already know about the big things we can see being delivered to the nest – large insects like beetles and dragonflies. According to comments by Steve Kroenke on the PMCA website, "Those large 'meaty' dragonflies seem to be their specialty and a definite favorite to feed their young. Dragonflies are carnivorous insects and excellent sources of protein. Large insects provide more protein, more calories and are more filling for the Purple Martins' hungry and growing young. While adult Purple Martins feed on a variety of both small and large flying insects, particularly

early in the season when large prey such as dragonflies are not common, parent Martins concentrate their hunting activities on larger insects to feed their growing babies."

Mosquito Mania - Fact or Fiction?

This battle is still ongoing. Google this topic and many references will quote a study by Herbert W. Kale, II published in the quarterly journal of the American Ornithologists' Union, Vol. 85(4). Kale dispels the notion that Purple Martins consume huge numbers of mosquitoes. Analyses of the food found in the stomachs of both adult and nestling Martins in several studies indicated that mosquitoes comprised a very small percentage of the birds' diet and in some cases, none at all. Furthermore, Purple Martins' flight and feeding behavior is not at all compatible with a diet of mosquitoes. Martins are active from shortly after dawn until shortly before dusk and rarely, if ever, feed near the ground. Mosquitoes fly close to the ground and favor cool, damp areas during the day and are most active at night.

It all seems pretty logical when you think about it. Martins consume plenty of insects, but mosquito control, they're not! ...except in places like Annapolis MD where their *Mosquito Control Brochure* under "Here's what you can do" states, "Be friendly to creatures that eat mosquitoes including bats... and Purple Martins! Why not mount a Purple Martin house in your own yard?"

The September, 2009 issue of the *Nature Society News* headlines an article (reprinted from a 1994 issue) "Martins Vacuum Up Mosquitoes" followed by another article by Weldon Vickrey, describing how a Martin found hit by a car was harboring 47 mosquitoes in V-shaped pockets under its wings which it could later pick out and eat. Who knew?

In Memoriam

George Moore

Sadly, we received notice that George Moore passed away February 20. The Moores have been members of the PMSCC for more than 20 years and they have been Purple Martin landlords here even longer than that. George was elected vice president of our club in 1994 and served every year since then through 1009.

We send our sincere condolences to Joanne and all the family. George will be very much missed by all of us

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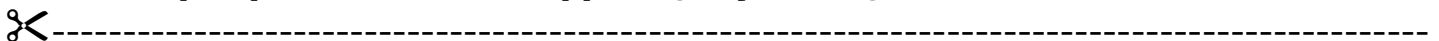
Corkscrew Swamp Receives Ramsar Designation

In recognition of its environmental significance, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has been declared a *Wetland of International Importance* under the Ramsar Convention. Corkscrew joins three other Ramsar sites in Florida: Everglades National Park, Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge and Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

The Ramsar Convention represents a treaty now joined by 156 nations pledging “the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and International cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.” Corkscrew is recognized for its work to protect cypress swamps, wet prairies, hydric pine flat woods, and seasonal hydrological areas – the valuable wetlands of south Florida.

(information taken from the Ramsar Website)

Please keep us posted on what’s happening in your neighborhood!



PURPLE MARTIN OBSERVATIONS

Please mail to: Leslie Burgess, 3700 Saybrook Place, Bonita Springs FL 34134 or bring to PMSCC meeting
Or you can e-mail info to: Lmburgess@comcast.net or billd@naples.net or call Bill Dietrich 455-0201

Name _____ Location _____

What’s happening at your colony? Tell all about what your Martins are doing!

GALLERY

This month's gallery was inspired by photos of Martin Houses in the fall Manitoba Purple Martin Club Newsletter received by Bill Dietrich showing the beautiful style of martin house used there. The pictures were too small to reproduce here, but the photo at the right is similar, although not in as fine condition and usually they are red & white.



Web photo

Just for fun here are a few quite creative and different houses, some new, some old. Not too practical for landlords in Florida, but interesting to look at. Enjoy!



Currently available from a number of sources, this house is cedar. It houses 12 families in small 5"x5" apartments. Starling resistant crescent entries cost a little more and you had better have a good pole because this one weighs in at 25 lbs.



Available at yardenvy.com this plantation style Clubhouse for Purple Martins is on sale for \$269.95, but don't get too excited. It may not be quite the thing for our Florida climate. It's constructed of plywood and has a shingle roof. Weight? Doesn't say.



Independence Hall



The Library

These exquisite houses are the work of J. Warren Jacobs whose company manufactured Purple Martin Houses in the early 1900's.

The 2 sepia photos were taken by Jacobs in 1907.