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Frequently asked questions about Purple Martins

What do I feed martins to attract them?

Nothing! Purple Martins eat only flying insects. They will not come to your feeder, bird bath or fountain. They eat and drink water on the fly.

How high should the house be?

From 10 to 12 feet high and martins will take residence. Many years ago it was believed that the pole should be at least 18 to 25 feet high. The ideal situation is to have it high enough for the birds to be comfortable but low enough for us to enjoy them. There have been cases where a house was only five feet off the ground and had plenty of martins. Our pole will extend 12 feet and telescope down to five feet for easy cleaning and maintenance.

Is it too late to put up a house this year?

NO! Anytime is a good time to install a martin house. Even if the birds have been around for awhile, they see the house and the chances are better for a good colony increase next year. If you put it up too late for the current season they will come back next year and possibly nest. We have seen martins begin nesting as late as the second week in May in Louisiana and have reports of birds beginning nesting in New Jersey and Ohio as late as mid June.

Are martins messy?

Martins are probably the cleanest bird around. They are known for going away from the nesting yards for dropping excrement. They will also take the nestlings excrement sacs away from the nest and drop them in open areas.

I had birds a few years ago, but they don't seem to be coming around anymore. Are there as many martins as there used to be?

Yes, even more. Possibly you have a wooden or plastic house, because of the heat factor, the birds favor the cooler aluminum house. The characteristics of aluminum cause heat to dissipate, which keeps the compartments cooler. Many people associate metal houses with steel in a car body. The alternator in your automobile is made of aluminum, which protects the electronic components from the heat. Wood is an insulator and absorbs rays of the sun, making the house very hot during the long summer. The survival rate is much better in aluminum houses versus wooden structures. The lack of martin activity around your house may be from trees growing too close to the house. Trim the limbs at least 25 feet from the martin house. Predators, such as snakes, owls, and hawks may also be present and can greatly affect the martin's interest in your house.

How can I keep the sparrows out of the martin houses?

Wildlife conservationists ask us to do anything and everything we can to eliminate sparrows. They were not native to this country and should never have been imported. Sparrows are extremely prolific and persistent with nest building. You need to be more persistent with nest removal.

We make it easy to remove them from the houses by providing:

1. Telescoping poles to lower the house to eye level.
2. Hinged doors to open and clean the nests out easily.
3. Door plugs to close the compartments for the winter, when the martins are in the South American continent.
4. We also sell a very good sparrow trap. Call or log on to bestbirdhouse.com for details.

We also recommend lowering the house every 7 to 10 days for sparrow nest removal. The idea is to allow time for the sparrow to lay eggs, and then we have control over them. If you take the nest out too early, the sparrow will go elsewhere to lay the eggs and raise their young. Remember, the sparrow is treacherous and will do great harm to the young martins by pecking their eyes out and other cruel things. The martin nest will be flat, generally no higher than the threshold and will have leaves and possibly mud around the entrance. The sparrow nest will completely fill the compartment and have a little hole leading to the back of the nest where they lay their eggs. Generally, the sparrow nest is made of straw, grass pieces, feathers and bits of paper, etc. The sparrow egg is brown speckled and smaller than a martin egg. The martin egg is pure white.

What about starlings?

The martins strongly prefer the aluminum houses while the starlings do not. (Possibly because of the white color and metal construction.) Though it is not impossible for a starling to nest in an aluminum house, it is highly unusual. The only time this will happen is when the starling has no other suitable place to nest, like the attic of your home; out of desperation, it will accept the aluminum house. Coates, being a leader in the industry introduced the SREH door in early 2001 to help eliminate the starling problem. The new SREH entrance may look a bit different but it is very effective in eliminating the starling entrance 99.8% of the time. The entrance is built just large enough for a Martin to aggressively fly in and out.

I have bluebirds nesting in my martin house. Is this common?

Not common, but ok. This does happen when you have bluebirds in the area and not enough housing designed for them. They prefer single housing units on a six foot pole or fence. If you don't have a place for them, they will adapt to the martin house and nest there. Many people enjoy this beautiful bird and allow them to stay. They don't seem to pose a problem to the martins.

I think I have martins nesting under my patio!

Martins do not nest under roofs, patios, or barns. The bird that does is a barn swallow. It is blue on the back and has a rust colored throat and cream breast. It is a member of the swallow family, as is a martin, but smaller than a martin. They are a desirable bird for insect control but tend to leave a mess on your patio.

Does it bother the martins when I do nest checks?

NO! You will do the martins a great service by checking the house regularly, especially if

you have nesting sparrows. Sparrow nests must be removed regularly. Also, we encourage you to allow children to see and even touch martins during the entire nesting cycle. This will help the children take an interest in the birds and care for them in the future. Remember, the martin is “people oriented” unlike most other birds who may abandon the nest if touched. The martins trust humans and will immediately begin feeding their young as soon as you finish the nest check. You will have a healthier colony of Martins if you check on them regularly.

How do I keep owls and hawks from getting my martins?

The WatersEdge suite model was designed to help eliminate the attack of owls and hawks. The suite allows the bird to escape to the right or left side of the nesting cavity, allowing plenty of protecting. You may also install a predator guard on any model we manufacture. This consist of aluminum rails mounted around the porches to keep large birds from entering the porch area, thereby eliminating the chance of them reaching in and getting young martins. Please call or log onto www.bestbirdhouse.com for details.

What is the life cycle of the fledglings?

Martins will nest only one time per year in the spring. The nesting begins a few weeks after arrival. They lay from 1 to 6 eggs in a clutch, but normally average four eggs per nest. Incubation for martin eggs is usually 16 days. From hatching to fledglings is normally 28 days. The parents will continue to feed fledglings for about two weeks, or until they are able to catch food for themselves. Young birds continue to return to the nest site each night until they leave for the pre migratory staging areas prior to migration to South America. A high percentage of martins will come back to the same house each year.

Will I get martins immediately if I put up a house?

It is possible if you have the right conditions for them. Also, if you are in an area that is already attracting them, your chances are greater. Sometimes it takes a season or two to begin attracting them if they are not accustomed to coming around your neighborhood, Make sure you have clearance from tree limbs before erecting your house.

I found a young martin on the ground. What do I do with it?

Normally, the parents will attend the fallen youth. However, if fallen in a yard with animals it is wise to try to find the nest it came from. If you don't know where it belongs, you may find a nest with other nestlings that appear to be the same age/size as the fallen one. The mother will feed the hungry mouths in her nest.

Where do the martins go when they leave my place?

After the martins have completed their nesting activity and have the young ones flying, they begin congregating for the flight back to Brazil for the winter. They will gather in small groups and then larger groups until they are in very large groups in different parts of the country. For example, in the Louisiana flyway, which serves the central part of the United States, the birds from Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, etc, will gather in smaller groups in these areas and then larger groups in Arkansas and even larger gatherings (one million or so) in Shreveport, Louisiana en route to the giant gathering at the Pontchartrain Bridge in New Orleans. From there, they will launch out across the Gulf of Mexico to Brazil. These migration patterns usually begin in July and continue into August of each year.

The Martins do not house while in Brazil. They do go through molting and build up their body to return to your backyard the next season.

Why do Coates Houses seem to attract more martins.

We believe our house attracts more martins because of the design. The house is built where you have only two families living on a floor separated by one porch divider. The porch divider and rails along the outside allow for a quick entry and return. The house also has been designed to dissipate heat, attracting more birds because of a cooler house.

10 reasons why people lose their Purple Martins.

1. Weather extremes.
2. Parasite infestations.
3. Inferior housing not suitable for martins.
4. Not enough human activity.
5. Neighbors get your Martins.
6. Trees or vines too close to house.
7. Not enough housing offered.
8. Failure to remove door plugs on time.
9. Local pesticide use.
10. Relocation of house during nesting season

**Please call our toll free number or visit our website
for a Free Color Catalog!**



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