

# How to be a Successful Purple Martin Landlord

Now more than ever birds need our help. Storms are increasing, water tables are going down, droughts are spreading, and habitats are shifting due to climate change. All these are having a dramatic impact on migratory birds. **Purple Martins** in particular are feeling the pressure: in addition to the stressors that all birds have to face, martins are also competing for nesting space with non-migratory, non-native birds such as House Sparrows and European Starlings. **But we can help with the housing shortage.**



**Did you know that east of the Rocky Mountains, Purple Martins depend 100% on human supplied housing?** If you would like to install a Purple Martin house on your property or if you want to be a successful Purple Martin landlord with your present martin house, here are the basics of what you need to know.

## **Some basic guidelines to help you successfully attract and keep Purple Martins year after year.**

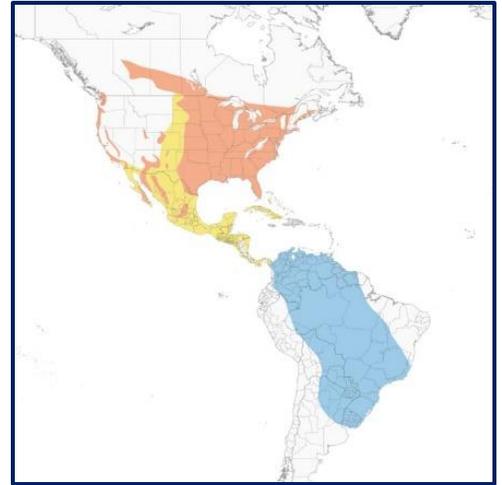
1. Purple Martin housing can be the multi-compartment “apartment building” style or the single family gourd design.
2. Martin housing should be placed at least 30 feet from human housing and at least 40 feet from any trees that are higher than the house. Generally, the farther housing is placed from trees, the better.
3. Purple Martin houses should be pole-mounted at a height of 10–20 feet. The pole should be telescoping so that the housing can easily be lowered to monitor the houses for competitor nest removal or periodic nest checks. Nest checks will not cause martins to abandon their nests and can help in identifying predation.
4. A **pole predator guard** should always be used. Predators can include owls, snakes, raccoons, hawks, or crows. Houses that have larger compartments will allow martins to build their nests further from the entrance, and this can add extra protection from aerial predators such as hawks and owls.
5. Purple Martin houses in suburban areas should have **starling-resistant entrance holes (SREH)** to deter European Starlings from nesting. These can be found in several types. With all types, the dimensions are crucial: too large by a hair will allow Starlings to enter. They are not without risks, and no SREH (to date) is 100% starling proof.
6. Purple Martins typically return to Texas starting in February. Houses should be kept lowered and compartments kept closed until Purple Martins return. This deters House Sparrows and starlings from claiming nesting cavities before the martins even have a chance.

## **No Longer Want Your Purple Martin House? Bexar Audubon Can Help!**

1. If you no longer want your existing Purple Martin housing, Bexar Audubon Society would love to take it off your hands. Please consider donating your housing to us. If it is repairable, it will be rehabbed and placed in suitable habitat. If it is not fixable, Bexar Audubon Society will recycle or dispose of it properly.
2. Unmonitored Purple Martin houses are a breeding ground for invasive bird species. House Sparrows (HOSP) and European Starlings (EUST) do not migrate; they stay put here in the San Antonio all year long. They often claim nesting sites first, with pairs nesting up to four times in the spring. Removing unwanted housing will help us control these birds and give our native songbirds a better chance.

### Fun Purple Martin Facts:

- Purple Martins are the largest swallow species in North America. Males are dark glossy black all over; females are bluish brown on the back and light underneath.
- Purple Martins eat insects (*insectivorous*). They are acrobatic flyers, catching their food in flight as well as drinking in flight.
- Purple Martins are migratory birds that breed in North America and winter in South America (see map).
- The first martins that return are called "scouts"; these are the older male or female birds that migrate first. They are not scouts in the sense of returning to the US to find nesting sites and then returning to South America to report their findings!
- Purple Martins exhibit a high level of **site fidelity** and typically return to the same housing year after year. No matter where you live, be sure to keep your houses up through August. Martins may arrive as late as the end of June anywhere in the United States, and in July and August the current year's young will be looking for next year's breeding sites.
- At the end of the breeding season, Purple Martins gather in huge flocks and make their way to South America to spend the North American winter.
- Native Americans hung up empty gourds for the Purple Martins before Europeans arrived in North America. Martin lovers are continuing this tradition by providing housing.
- For more information about Purple Martins, check them out on [All About Birds](#).



### Want More Information?

The [Purple Martin Conservation Association](#) has a wealth of information about establishing, maintaining, and monitoring your Purple Martin colony. Their [Download Education Center](#) online has many specific helpful information sheets available for FREE Download, including the [How to Identify, Manage, and Attract Purple Martins Information Booklet](#).

Information about the local Purple Martin Project sponsored by Bexar Audubon is available on the [website Conservation News page](#). The [South Texas Songbirds](#) website is specifically dedicated to Purple Martins in South Texas. You can ask questions, join the mailing list, shop for martin houses, and [download the FREE Texas Parks & Wildlife Booklet, The Purple Martin and Its Management in Texas](#).

**FOR ADDITIONAL LOCAL INFORMATION OR  
TO REQUEST ASSISTANCE WITH YOUR CURRENT PURPLE MARTIN HOUSE,  
PLEASE CONTACT PROJECT LEADER ALLISON HAYNE: [PM@BEXARAUDUBON.ORG](mailto:PM@BEXARAUDUBON.ORG).**

**HELP BEXAR AUDUBON SOCIETY  
HELP PURPLE MARTINS**

**We ♥ birds**