

## **Purple Martin/ *Progne subis***

The Purple Martin is North America's largest swallow. They weigh approximately 1.75 ounces and have a wingspan of approximately 15 inches. Males do not acquire their adult plumage until their second winter. Adult males are a glossy, blue-black above and below, and females are duller, with a sooty-gray forehead, gray neck and grayish under parts. Subadults returning to Texas for their first nesting season are known as second-year (SY) Martins. The adults are referred to as after-second-year (ASY) Martins.

Purple Martins make their appearance in Texas during the first half of February, depending on the season they may appear as early as January. Males generally arrive before the females of their same age. The oldest Purple Martins (5 to 7 years old) generally are the first to arrive. Followed by the 3 to 4 year old adults, and then the 2 year old adults. The SY Purple Martins arrive approximately 5 weeks after the earliest ASY Martins appear. It is these SY Purple Martins that establish the new colony. The colony will usually last until the end of September.

Both adults construct the nest. The nest usually consists of materials such as twigs, straw, pine needles and coarse grasses. Prior to egg laying the nest cup is lined with green leaves from surrounding trees. New green leaves are added as older leaves lose their color throughout the egg laying and incubation period.

Purple Martins will lay between 3 to 7 eggs and are incubated by the female, but the male Martin may assist until hatching (usually 16 days). Young Martins will fledge in about 28 days. After this they will return periodically, usually at night or during stormy weather to their nest for the next couple of weeks.

Maintenance and monitoring of the house needs to start a couple of weeks prior to ASY Martins arrival. Houses need to be cleaned, open and ready for the arrival of the SY Purple Martins. At this time the house needs to be monitored weekly for Martins and other predator birds. Predator birds would include other swallows, wrens, sparrows and starlings. Predatory bird nest's and abandon Martin nests need to be removed and discarding immediately.

[Apply to become a volunteer to monitor the Purple Martin House](#) (pdf)

Maps for area Purple Martin Houses (pdf)

- [FJ Red Kane Park](#)
- [Kelley Park](#)
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