



Helping Minnesota's *PURPLE MARTINS*

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I have been captivated by the sights and sounds of nature, especially birds, from a very young age. My interest began when my Grandma and Grandpa Pangerl purchased a thistle feeder for me when I was about 8 years old—the rest is history. For my tenth birthday I asked for “one of those big, tall bird houses that has lots of holes.” I received what I asked for, and I eventually learned it was a Purple Martin house. Unfortunately, I didn’t attract Purple Martins, only starlings. However, I thoroughly enjoyed hosting the starling family, which nested in the same compartment for many years.

While in my high school years, my interest in Purple Martins grew. I checked out bird books from the library to learn about the birds I was trying to attract; I also consulted internet sources. Late in the summer of 1998, I built a gourd rack based on Chuck Abare’s design. The following summer I built a small 4-compartment wooden house of my own design. I placed the gourd rack and house near a tall pole shed and close to several large trees. I played the dawn song throughout the summer, but I only saw one martin.

My “official” start at trying to attract martins came in 2000, when I ordered a PMC2000 from Del McKinnon and built a gourd rack that held 12 SuperGourds—my quest to

establish the Rock Creek colony site had begun. I located the housing in a very open spot in my neighbor’s yard —thanks Dale and Carol! I had many visitors that summer.

For the 2006 season I moved the housing to an even more open spot, which has resulted in an increase in Purple Martin activity.



Top left and right: the Memory Lake Park site in Grantsburg, WI. Center: Daryl at the Snake River site in Pine City, MN/photo by C. J. Gustafson/Pioneer Press. Above: Daryl’s home site in Rock Creek.

My current housing consists of a PMC2000, a T-14, and a New Creation T-12; all three houses have natural gourds hanging below them. Each of the three wooden houses has WDC entrances. During the spring of 2006, I had an SY male that attracted a serious female. As a pair, they tried out several compartments for several minutes at a time—I could even hear the male chortle to his prospective mate. This was the first time I had witnessed a female and male enter a compartment together—I was elated! As the sun lowered in the sky, the male tried intently to lure the female back into a compartment but she left, never to return. He continued to recruit more females for many weeks, but none of them were quite as interested. Hopefully he

will return for the 2007 season to establish his colony.

Over the years, the number of Purple Martins in east-central Minnesota has decreased dramatically—over 1.5% according to the Breeding Bird Survey. My own survey of the area confirms the lack of Purple Martins. This decline is probably

the result of people no longer erecting housing or not maintaining the housing as in years past; the tradition of hosting a colony of Purple Martins is no longer being passed down to younger generations. When I saw a chance to rescue a declining colony in a nearby community, I couldn't pass it up.

Rescuing the Memory Lake Purple Martin Colony

Memory Lake Park is a beautiful public park located in the middle of the small village of Grantsburg, WI. The park has hosted an unmanaged colony of Purple Martins for many years. The colony was struggling and its numbers were declining, so I offered to manage the colony with hopes of increasing its success rate. I offered to build and maintain the house if the Village Board would pay for construction materials. They agreed, and I built a traditionally-styled wooden house that incorporates 7"x12" compartments. The old house was removed in the fall of 2004 and the new house was placed in a better location near the lake. The following spring the martins eagerly moved into the new house. During the first two years the colony consisted of ten pairs of Purple Martins. With the cooperation of the Village Board, I have continued worked to manage the colony as a volunteer for the past three years. During the 2006 season the housing was completely full with 12 ASY martin pairs.

The entire process of rescuing and managing the colony has gone very smoothly. My biggest challenge has been finding time to enjoy the colony. The site is about 16 miles from my home, thus it is difficult to find leisure time to enjoy my efforts. I do however find time to conduct weekly nest checks, which I find very enjoyable, rewarding and educational. While conducting nest checks, I often have people tell me how much they enjoy watching these birds. I usually give them a peek into the nests to view the eggs and young. In addition, I bring my neighbors' kids along to see the eggs and nestlings. They thoroughly enjoying seeing the nestlings grow week by week.

This spring I contacted the Village of Grantsburg to ask if they would like to add another house to the site. The Village Board was willing to provide funding for a T-14 and four Excluder gourds. The T-14 will be placed on a metal pole. I'm hoping the colony will show dramatic growth this season.

Starting the Snake River & ECE Colonies

Late in the summer of 2006 I wrote to the city of Pine City to see if they would be willing to pay for materials for a T-14, to be placed near the public boat landing in Voyageurs Park, but the city declined. Fortunately, the Hinckley-Pine City Flames Snowmobile Club was willing to donate \$1,000.00 for the project. I built a T-14 and installed a Super System 24 from Creative Universe Enterprises that is fitted with 16 Excluder gourds. The site is located in an open area on the edge of the Snake River on the north side of Pine City. Hopefully this site will be established this spring.

East Central Energy (ECE) in Braham, MN currently has several very old and unmanaged Trio Castle Purple Martin houses that had a few pairs of Purple Martins during the 2006 season. I also wrote to the supervisor of ECE to see if they would be willing to pay for materials to build a T-14 and let me remove the unmanageable Trio Castles. They agreed and provided \$600.00 towards the project. The location is out-



Daryl's 91 year old grandmother, Emma Lindstrom, looking at eggs and nestlings at Memory Lake Park. Before she saw the martins here she honestly believed martins had vanished from the area. She had enjoyed the martins on her family farm when growing up but hadn't seen any since then. She said the martins' songs sounded just as gorgeous as they did when she was a girl.



The neighbors' kids, Mariah and Keaton, enjoy helping with a nest check at Memory Lake Park. They both eagerly look forward to the martins' return each spring.

standing—it's very open and near a pond on the edge of town. With the addition of a T-14, this colony should flourish nicely this spring.

The ECE colony is located near the Braham elementary and high school and thus would be a great resource for the schools; students would enjoy a spring field trip to witness an active Purple Martin colony. In addition, an active, healthy and productive colony of Purple Martins on the property of ECE would undoubtedly provide a very positive image for the company in regards to the environment.

With the establishment of these four sites across east-central Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin, martin populations should grow over the next several years. It is my sincere goal to help increase the Purple Martins' population.

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