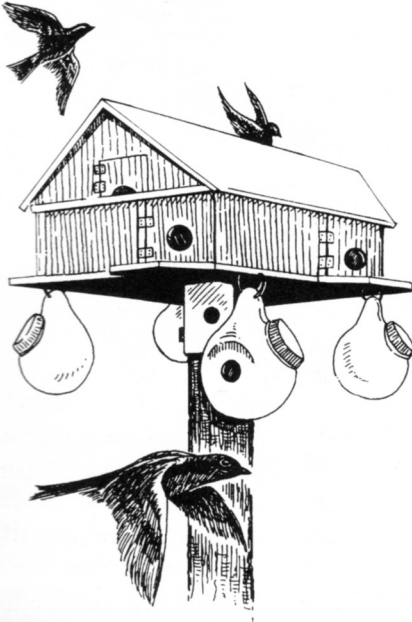


# SECTION A - OPENLANDS AND WOODLAND MARGINS

## Purple Martin

Plan 7, 8 & 8A (pages 37, 38, 39 & 40)



Attracting Purple Martins is the ultimate challenge to a backyard bird enthusiast. Some people will put up a martin house in the spring and attract martins with relative ease. Others may maintain martin houses for years in apparently good habitat, but have no luck in attracting them.

The Purple Martin is the largest member of the swallow family. It eats only flying insects. Males are glossy black with purple iridescence. Females are somewhat duller, having a gray belly. Young males, which typically colonize new sites, resemble females. Martins are great neighbors; their aerial acrobatics are delightful to watch.

Martins are declining in the northern half of their breeding range. It is a species that has become totally dependent on man-made housing. *But do not build and erect a Purple Martin house if you don't have time to manage the site.*

**Important caution:** Weekly care is a must, if for no other reason than to evict English Sparrows and European Starlings. Too many well-intentioned individuals are, in effect, raising these aggressive species in neglected Purple Martin houses. So instead of helping native species, (e.g., the martin, bluebird and flicker), we're adding to their housing shortage by raising non-native competitors.

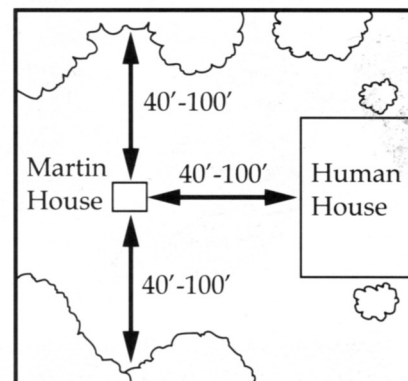
**Housing:** The plans in this book are for starter colonies. The 10 family unit (6 apartments plus 4 gourds) is not difficult to construct. A second floor, 4 more apartments, can be added if you're reasonably confident that you can attract and maintain a fairly large colony.

Gourds are often a best bet to get a new colony established. This is why we included plans for a rack that will hang up to 16 gourds. Start with 8 gourds. Add more later if needed.

We've illustrated the plastic "Super Gourd." (see Plan 8) It's top of the line. You can also buy or grow your own gourds. For about \$5 you can order seeds and a pamphlet titled "Growing and Preparing Gourd Homes for Martins," plus a catalog of products related to Purple Martin conservation (includes the Super Gourd). These items are available from the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA). The address is found on page 62.

Construction details are provided with Plans 7, 8, and 8A. Though our box plan illustrates the use of conventional round entrances and starling resistant entrances, we recommend that all holes be made starling resistant (Plan 8A) if starlings are particularly common in your yard.

**Location:** Martins need limb-free air space--lots of it. The major reason people fail to attract martins is improper siting of the house. The house or gourds should be placed in the center of the most open spot available, about 40 to 100 feet from human housing or an outbuilding. There should be no trees taller than the martin house within 40 feet, preferably more.



**Height:** The height of the house can be anywhere from 10 to 20 feet. For the "fixed height" house, we recommend using a 14' x 4" x 4" pressure treated wood post. Set it 3 feet deep and secure the base by pouring a small batch of concrete in the hole. This box can be maintained using a step ladder. Another option for this relatively lightweight box is to use a commercially available, telescoping pole. Thus you can lower the box for cleaning and inspections without the need for a ladder. A 16 foot post can be used for the gourd rack because rack and gourds can be easily lowered for nest checks and maintenance. Never let vines or shrubs grow at the base of the pole.