

Purple Martin Facts

- Adult martins are about seven and a half inches long and weigh one and a half to two ounces. Wingspan is fifteen inches. They are the largest of the swallow family.
- Mature males are glossy iridescent blue-black all over. Females and immature martins (both male and female) are blue-black on top of the head and back, gray on chin, breast, and abdomen.
- Purple martins are entirely dependent on flying insects for food.
- They are the only bird species in the world relying almost totally upon humans for nesting sites.
- They prefer nesting in specially built apartment buildings mounted high off the ground.
- Choosing to nest in the company of other martins, purple martins are “colony nesters.”
- Martins are loyal to their homes; once they have nested successfully at a site, they usually return year after year. Young fledged from the colony site will return to the same vicinity the next year.
- Aptly termed “semi-domesticated,” martins show a marked preference for nesting near human activity.
- Martins have been clocked flying more than 40 miles per hour.
- Their beautiful song, not easily described, is a favorite bird song of their enthusiasts.
- Martin houses should have a two and one-eighth inch entrance hole one inch from the floor.
- Houses should be mounted in the open, at least 30 – 40 feet from anything as tall as the house, but placed within 100 feet of regular human activity.
- The oldest documented purple martin lived more than thirteen years.
- Martins are “neotropical migrants,” wintering in South America (chiefly in Brazil), and then migrating to North America (most states east of the Rockies, lower parts of Canada) to nest.
- They typically spend around five months in their North American nesting grounds, leaving four months for migration both ways.
- Once martins arrive in full (two to four weeks from scout’s arrival), they begin nest building. They lay four to five eggs that hatch in about fifteen days. Purple martin babies normally take 28 days to fledge. (from hatching to flying)

This information comes from Nature House, Inc. (now ERVA Tool & Manufacturing Co.)