

July-August

## A Bird Bander's Diary

by  
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July 3 .... Our hottest day since 1962. Our official temp. is 98 degrees, and according to reports, many areas in the eastern U. S. are having temperatures in the 100-plus range. We have now had two weeks of very hot weather. This extremely hot weather is hard enough on our Bluebirds (the young all died in 2 of our boxes) but seems to be much worse on nestling Purple Martins. I noticed last week while banding our young Purple Martins that some were already quite dehydrated. The Martins sure have had their troubles this year .... first the cold late spring and now the very prolonged period of hot weather.

Martin box owners have called to ask what to do about the young that crawl out of the boxes (to get away from the heat) and fall to the ground. I found 7 young under one of my boxes one day and all were dead when found. Formerly, I always tried to find the proper compartment and put any young back. But I found that often it is wasted effort as once I put one back 3 times in one day (and later found it dead anyway). Now I usually advise not to try and save them, not only because it causes such a disturbance, but if the young are not put back in the right compartment, the old Martins either refuse to feed them, or may even dump them out again. Young Martins that fall out of the nest box can be hand raised if one has the time and patience. Ground beef seems to be an excellent food.

July 31 .... Wesley Knisley and I are checking on local Martin boxes. We are making a survey of the boxes in our county (in the south-western corner of Pennsylvania) and look for boxes whenever we get the chance. So far we have checked on 95 boxes containing 2049 rooms at 65 different locations. We found 1926 adult Purple Martins (963 pair) nesting at 75 of the boxes (20 boxes were empty). There are at least 7 boxes in the county we have not yet checked, and these are not included in the survey.

The size of the boxes varied greatly. The largest box contained 104 rooms and the smallest one 6 rooms. Credit for the Purple Martin in this area goes back to 1896 when Warren Jacobs put up his first "martin box" .... then made and sold similar boxes to his neighbors. While his influence still remains, only a few of his boxes have withstood the ravages of time and weather.

The idea for this survey started when the Charleston, W. Va. banders asked me how many Purple Martins did I think left for the south every fall from this immediate area and if I thought they flew southwest toward Charleston. There is a large Martin roost near Charleston estimated to have contained close to 30,000 Purple Martins during the fall of 1964. EBBA members Connie Katholi and Anne Shreve made plans to try to capture and band some of the Martins in this roost. With the assistance of Charles Handley, the Kiffs and Ballentines, a total of 138 Purple Martins were banded that fall. Armed with a lot of "know how" the project was continued in the fall of 1965 and was quite successful as 670 Martins were caught and banded. This is planned to be a 5-year project, and the result will be published. One of the ideas behind the project was to see if any of those Martins carried bands. As luck would have it, one of their captures on Aug. 12, 1965, was an im. Purple Martin that had been caught in a net and banded here at Clarksville 26 days before, approx. 200 miles to the northeast.

Whether all the Martins from this area stop at the big Charleston, W. Va. roost is still a big question. There is some evidence that there may be a Martin roost near the Monongahela River close to the Pa.-W. Va. line (about 20 miles southeast of Clarksville). During the past 2 years, the last Martins seen in the fall have been in the above mentioned area. This year some were seen as late as Sept. 5, a date when the roost in Charleston is being abandoned. One thing seems apparent, however, and that is that most of the late August migrants from farther north are heading for the Charleston area as they pass over our farm. This year a very large flock of Martins was noted flying south the last of July. This flock was estimated to contain at least 10,000 birds (it took 15 minutes to pass over). Two days later a large influx of new Martins was noted at the roost in Charleston, W. Va.

Seldom are Martins seen in the immediate area after the middle of August except those that are migrating from northern areas. Here are a few observations that were taken from my notes on Aug. 22, 1964: 70 degrees early a.m., calm. No fog as rain is due p.m. High thin clouds. 7:30 a.m. - 12 Martins stopped at our box. Soon left going west-southwest with a few Swifts and at least 2 Barn Swallows. 7:40 a.m. - 4 Martins going south-southeast at 600 feet. Did not stop (this was one of the rare times that Martins have been observed going any direction in late August other than south or southwest. 7:59 a.m. - At least 7 Martins going due south at 500 feet. Came down for one look at my boxes and then continued on south. 8:07 a.m. - 8 Martins made several passes over one box, then left in southwest direction. Quit observing as some work needed done, but did notice 5 Martins on TV aerial at 9:08 a.m. Family groups and small flocks up to a dozen birds are often seen migrating each fall. By using binoculars they can often be seen long before they can be noted with the naked eye.

One of the nice things about taking the Purple Martin survey was the chance to talk to the owners of the various boxes. Each had a story to tell as to why they liked Martins, but the sentiments of all could be summed up by the words of Joe Petros. Joe would bring his family to our place several times each spring to watch our Martins and wonder why he could not get them to nest. Finally, 2 boxes and 3 years later, the Martins started nesting in his boxes. Now his wife often tells me about how Joe will wake up at dawn and upon hearing his Martins, say "love those birds."

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Above: This Martin box (miniature courthouse) in Somerset town square has 140 rooms - considered half full this past summer. Railing is to keep the young Martins from falling to the ground.

Top right: Beautiful home made Martin box. Martins in all 8 rooms.

Right: 2 of 5 boxes in this yard in Greene County. 150 pair estimated here. These are both Jacobs boxes.

