

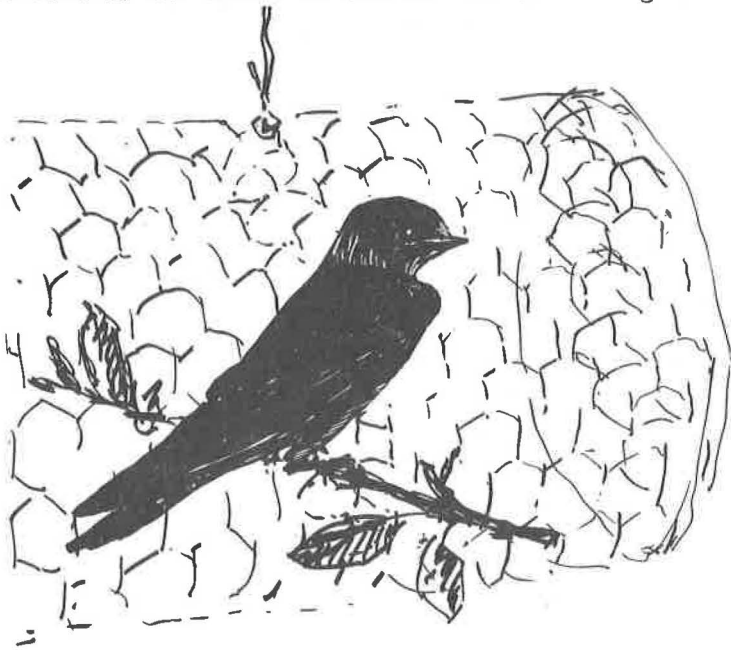
## AN INJURED PURPLE MARTIN

By Anne Shreve

While opening nets in a Purple Martin roost one evening in late August, I noticed a female Martin sitting motionless on the grass. Walking slowly around her in an attempt to flush her toward the nets, it soon became apparent that she was going to make no effort to fly. I picked her up, and when she opened her bill in protest, the mouth lining looked gray and anemic. She was extremely thin, unlike the fat, migrating Martins we had been handling. One eye was closed and swollen. The obvious diagnosis was that the bird's injured eye had prevented her from triangulating on flying insects, thus she became weakened from hunger and was unable to fly.

Upon returning home that night, I mixed the nearest thing to an insect diet that could be found in the refrigerator - mashed chicken liver, hard boiled egg yolk and vitamins. She seemed to sense the presence of food but, of course, could not revert to her nestling instinct of opening her mouth to receive it.

As I pried her bill open, our daughter, Honey, pushed bits deep into her mouth with a plastic curler pick. A large gulp and a look of satisfaction followed. Apparently it was necessary for the food to touch a muscle in the back of the throat to set off the swallowing mechanism. In-



Drawing by the Author

sects taken while flying would undoubtedly have the same effect. The first few feedings were a struggle, but later, hamburger, flies and ants were accepted calmly.

We all know that birds can replace fat rapidly during migrations, but to see our offerings turning to thick, yellow deposits beneath her wings was unbelievable. By the third day her mouth lining was bright yellow-orange and her eye was normal. She began showing signs of restlessness in her cylindrical, chicken-wire cage. Between 5 and 7 pm., she flew repeatedly against the southeast end of the cage. The fourth and fifth days her Zuginruhe became more acute.

We felt that she could probably fly now, but would never make the long flight to Brazil where Martins winter. Yet, within the next few days all of the Martins in the roost would be leaving. Also, this delay might cause her urge to migrate to pass before she could reach a tropical food supply.

The day before we decided to let her try her wings, we stuffed her with ground steak and more vitamins (quantities were judged by the amount of food found in the stomach of a Martin which had been struck by a hawk a year earlier). The sixth day was warm and sunny. We took our charge to the clothesline where she perched half a minute or more. Her head tilted and she seemed to be scanning the skies. I had mixed emotions about banding her. Her fate might have been learned, but I decided against adding the extra weight to her slim chances of a successful migration. She stretched and took off stiffly like a Spotted Sandpiper. As she circled the lawn, though, the swallow-like beats became smoother. She went southeast.

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The 5-meter  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " net ordinarily sells for \$2.00 but the price to you until January 31, 1968 will be \$1.25. The 5-meter  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " net is listed at \$1.65 but is on sale for \$1.00. These are NOT tethered nets.

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