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The Purple Martin.—Robin Doughty and Rob Fergus. 2002. University of Texas Press, Austin. 128 p. ISBN 0-292-71615-X. \$19.95.

This slim “gift book” as the publisher describes it is intended for the many backyard Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) enthusiasts of North America. Now nesting almost exclusively in artificial martin houses in backyards throughout much of the eastern U.S. and Canada, Purple Martins have become extremely popular birds with the public. It has been estimated that over a million people have at one time or other installed houses for Purple Martins. This interest in the species has given rise to several organizations and numerous print and electronic newsletters through which martin fans communicate their observations and share tips on how to best care for their martin colonies. Perhaps reflecting the widespread interest in martins by non-biologists, the only available books about martins (J. L. Wade’s *What You Should Know About the Purple Martin*, 1966, Trio Manufacturing Co., Griggsville, IL; R. B. Layton’s *The Purple Martin*, 1969, Nature Books, Jackson, MS; and D. Stokes et al.’s *Stokes Purple Martin Book: The Complete Guide to Attracting and Housing Purple Martins*, 1997, Little, Brown, New York) have made little effort to present information in a scientifically rigorous way. Instead these books have mostly repeated lore and in some cases inaccurate biology about the birds, and consequently they have been of little use to ornithologists and of dubious use to martin fanciers. Unfortunately, this book continues that tradition.

Doughty and Fergus’ book is intended, apparently, to provide both basic information on martin biology and to chronicle the interest in the species by the public. It contains chapters on classification, migration and range, early interest in martins by Native Americans, and life history. The final chapters describe the various societies devoted to martin conservation and propagation, list the martin “landlords of the year” designated by the Purple Martin Conservation Association (individuals who have either had very large martin colonies or developed new methods of managing colonies), and describe the development of the martin-house industry by various manufacturers. Throughout, the discussion is superficial and provides essentially no new information that would be of value to either biologists or non-biologists interested in the species. Given the intense interest of many in developing new methods of managing martin colonies (e.g., enlargement of nesting cavities, starling-proof entrance holes, porch dividers to increase occupancy rates, owl guards) and the voluminous literature reporting these methods and their refinements, there is a clear need for a book that fully describes these developments and evaluates them critically. Doughty and Fergus’ book does neither, and their treatment of these techniques is less substantive than in most martin newsletters.

This book’s review of scientific information is mediocre. Like many books on birds written for popular audiences, little if any credit is given to scientists who reported many of the results included in the chapters on the martin’s biology. Most statements are unreferenced, making it difficult to impossible to get additional information on a topic if someone was interested. For example, the authors include a discussion of martin vocalizations and a table taken almost entirely from a 1984 publication of mine (*Condor* 86:433-442) but with no attribution. There are many other similar examples. This sort of shoddy use of published work would qualify as plagiarism by most definitions (and would send a college student before a disciplinary hearing), and it is surprising that a university press would allow such poor scholarship in one of its books. In addition to inadequate referencing of the peer-reviewed literature, Doughty and Fergus rely too much on non-peer-reviewed newsletters and magazines about martins, especially the *Purple Martin Update*, as (often unattributed) sources. The *Update* is a widely circulated, attractive, quarterly magazine that reports considerable useful information from martin enthusiasts on their experiences, including new ways of improving martin nesting houses and the birds’ success. But it is not peer-reviewed, and much of what it contains

is of dubious scientific value. Doughty and Fergus seem to treat the *Update* as gospel and do not critically evaluate material published there or elsewhere. For example, they repeat an unsubstantiated tale from the *Nature Society News* about a family of martins wintering in Kansas as apparent fact. Such an event would be extremely unlikely and would require convincing documentation. This is the sort of information that often shows up in newsletters but would require critical evaluation by anyone writing a book about martins.

This book is of little use to either scientists or martin enthusiasts, although I suppose it might serve as an introductory primer for someone who knows nothing about martins. While we wait for the definitive book on martins to be written, I recommend sticking to the *Birds of North America* species account (1997, no. 287) for comprehensive information on Purple Martin biology, and for information on the many newly developed management techniques, one still must go through the back issues of the *Purple Martin Update*.—**Charles R. Brown**, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74104-3189.