

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Purple Martin *Progne subis*

Purple Martins, the largest swallows in North America, breed in North and Central America from southern Canada and winter in South America (AOU 1983). Because it nests in specially designed martin houses and hollowed-out gourds, the Purple Martin is a familiar backyard bird in open rural and suburban areas and even in city parks. Purple Martins are popular birds because of their pleasant chattering, diet of flying insects, and the male's brilliant dark-blue plumage.

Habitat. Purple Martins originally nested in tree cavities and probably a few still do, but the vast majority of the birds in Florida breed in artificial nest sites near human habitation. In addition to the houses and gourds provided for them, Purple Martins will nest in broken street lights, traffic lights, tile rooftops, and even rocking pumps in oil-well fields (Maehr et al. 1988).

Both sexes line the nesting cavity with soft materials, such as grass, leaves, paper, and mud. The usual clutch of 4 or 5 (Stevenson and Anderson 1994) white eggs is incubated solely by the female for 15 to 18 days. Both adults feed the young, which leave the nest when 24 to 28 days old (Harrison 1978). One brood is raised per year.

Purple Martins feed almost entirely on insects captured in flight.

Seasonal Occurrence. The Purple Martin is the first migrant breeding bird to return to Florida. Scouts are often seen by early February, sometimes even in early January. Eggs have been found from 26 March to 11 June. By April, breeding is well underway, and many young birds fledge by the first week in June. Fall migration begins very early, usually by the middle of June (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), when large flocks may be observed. On 18 June 1987, 1,000 birds were estimated in a flock over Ochlockonee Bay on the border of Franklin and Wakulla counties (B. Stoutamire in Paul 1987).

Status. The Purple Martin is a common summer resident throughout Florida. It is absent as a breeder only in the Keys and the southern tip of the mainland. The Atlas accepted all Purple Martin records up to 1 July; therefore, some "possible" breeders and even some "fledged young" were mistakenly counted after they had moved away from their breeding sites. Even so, these isolated records do not substantially affect the Atlas map, which differs little from the breeding range described by Howell (1932). The large gaps in the Big Bend area and elsewhere illustrate the difficulty of finding Purple Martins in sparsely populated, forested areas.

Bill Pranty

Sponsored by Barbara S. Chase

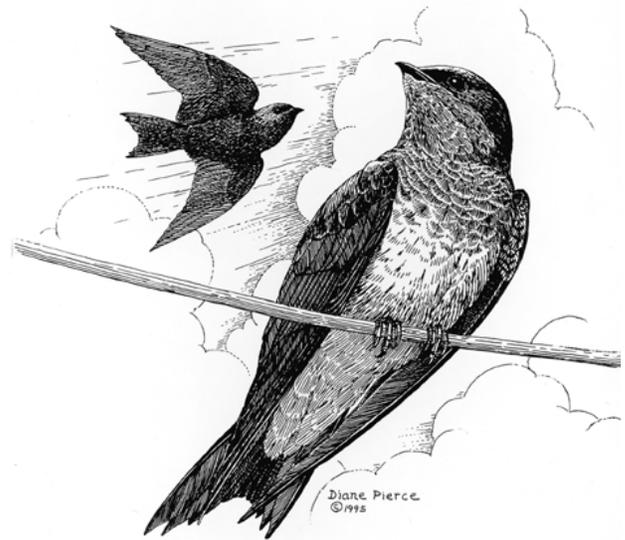


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Purple Martin

