



PHOTOS BY GAIL CAMPBELL OF LEE COUNTY BIRD PATROL/SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS



## PURPLE MARTIN FACTS

Males are entirely bluish-black above and below; females are bluish black on their backs with gray-brown undersides. Weighing in at about 2 ounces, purple martins are between 7 1/2 and 8 inches long with a 15 1/2-inch wingspan.

The largest of the North American swallows, purple martin nest almost exclusively in nest boxes in eastern North America (including Florida).

Native Americans hung up empty gourds for the purple martin before Europeans arrived in North America.

The purple martin not only gets all its food in flight, it gets all its water that way too. It skims the surface of a pond and scoops up the water with its lower bill.

Purple martins are monogamous. Males and females cooperate equally in building the nest out of mud, grass and twigs. The female lays two to seven pure-white eggs and incubates them for about two weeks until babies hatch. Both parents feed the young for about a month until they fledge. The young continue to be dependent on their parents for food and training for another couple of weeks. It's not uncommon for the fledglings to return to their human-supplied housing at night to sleep during this period.

Purple martin housing should be placed in the center of the most open spot available, about 30-120 feet from human housing. There should be no trees taller than the martin housing within 40 feet, preferably 60 feet. Generally, the farther the housing is placed from trees, the better, though the birds may still nest in housing within 15-20 feet of trees. The height of the housing can be anywhere from 10-20 feet. Keep tall bushes, shrubs and vines away from the pole. Do not attach wires to a martin house, especially if they lead to trees, buildings, or the ground.

Houses or nest gourds should be painted white, or a light pastel color; trim can be any color. White housing seems to attract martins best and also reflects the heat of the sun, keeping nestlings cooler.

— Sources: Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, The Purple Martin Conservation Association

### IF YOU GO

**What:** See purple martins coming in to roost for the night.

**When:** Around dusk over the next several weeks — maybe. The birds are about a month behind schedule, because of the winter weather,

but they should start showing up soon, area birders think.

**Where:** Hendry Street in downtown Fort Myers, especially in the courtyard of The Bar Association, 1609 Hendry St. Until supplies run out, The Bar Association is giving away free bird whistles, too.

news-press.com



See a gallery of purple martin photos and hear their songs. Learn more at [purplemartin.org](http://purplemartin.org); [purple-martin.org](http://purple-martin.org); [pmcca.org](http://pmcca.org)

