



BACKYARD nature center News

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John James Audubon once remarked as he traveled that “almost every country tavern has a martin box on the upper part of its signboard; and I have observed the handsomer the box, the better does the inn generally prove to be.” Before Audubon and the advent of the country tavern, Native Americans were also known to entice Purple Martins. They used hollowed-out gourds and hung them high in their villages. Because of this long association with man, martins on the east coast now only nest in man made structures.

So why have these birds been so sought after for so many years? Well, first off, they are wonderful to watch. Since they are members of the swallow family, their flight is both graceful and exciting. They nest in colonies which means we get to observe their fascinating social behavior. Oh... and they also eat tons of bugs!

Can you become a martin landlord? Well, let’s take a minute and think this one through. Since martins are swallows they feed on the wing. This means they must have unobstructed air space for foraging. Do you live in a place with some open land? If you have water nearby that is a plus as well.

If you think you have the right

Martin Mania

habitat (and come in and talk to us about your yard, we can help you decide) then you can pick a house. Typical martin houses will have



between 8 and 24 compartments. The houses need to have adequate ventilation and they need to be easy to clean. For most birds, we would not recommend metal bird houses, but for Purple Martins, white aluminum houses are super. They are lightweight, and last for years.

Once you have picked a house, you will need to pick a spot in your yard.

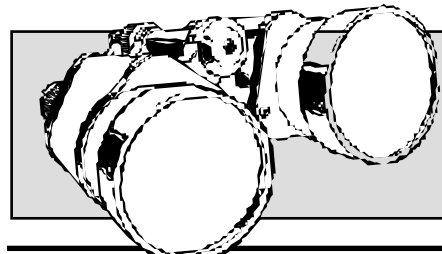
The martins seem to like their homes placed at least 40 feet from any buildings or trees and they like them about 15 feet in the air. (Telescoping poles really help with this.) We have found that houses placed close to humans do better than those placed farther away.

Get the houses up now. The first scouts will start returning from their winter in South America soon. The migration starts as early as late January in Florida and the birds move north even up to Canada and arrive there by April. The birds who nested the year before in a house seek that same house again. The yearlings (those hatched the year before) are the ones seeking new homes. They are usually four to six weeks behind their elders.

Attracting martins takes a bit of effort and the colonies start off slowly with one or two pairs of birds nesting. But if your habitat proves to be martin friendly, your patience will be rewarded! And your summers will be blessed with these beautiful birds.



 Please join Nick for a Purple Martin Lecture at Botanica on Wednesday on February 20. 



The BACKYARD nature center is your local resource for Alpen binoculars. We offer expert advice while providing you with quality optics.

The Arm Chair Birder

by Cathy Clausen, Avid Backyard Birder and Master Gardener

Not unlike the armchair quarterback, the armchair birder is equally as athletic and enthusiastic! He's armed with a bird book, a pair of binoculars and of course, a cup of coffee. He's alert and on top of things. His daily routine starts at first light, dutifully topping off his feeders with nuts, sunflower, fresh suet, cracked corn and millet in the ground feeder for the juncos, and native sparrows. With fresh water in the birdbath, let the rumpus begin!

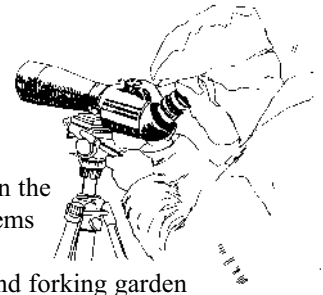
As we come into early spring, the armchair birder will have a great opportunity to watch early cavity nesters preparing for their first brood of the season. Cleaning out the boxes is an activity well worth the effort as chickadees, tufted titmice, nuthatches, eastern bluebirds, and woodpeckers are searching out homes as early as late February! Not every feeder and nest box can be right outside the same convenient windows for viewing, the birder puts on his fleece and gets outside, feeling a hint of that fragrant spring essence that gets us so fired up for working in the yard. He's inspired by singing birds, pairing up for the mating season, and takes his chores cheerfully. Hormones racing, the birds get a little crazy sometimes. Cardinal males start exhibiting strange behavior, by smashing into clean windows, trying to push the competitor he sees in his reflection, out of his territory.

It is such a great time of year for the armchair birder. Such hope for a beautiful year in backyard birding! How can he ready his yard for more activity? What new species will he invite? Is his yard suited for woodland birds or is it open and perfect for purple martins? Does his yard back up to a wild area with natural prairie grasses where he may be able to attract eastern bluebirds? The possibilities are endless in this great state! There is no lack of diversity here. Maybe he'll call the BACKYARD Nature Center for an evaluation of his situation. They'll know something, I'd bet.

Nick and I are just such birders. No time to travel to exotic places in search of an elusive species, we enjoy the bounty of fabulous birds outside our windows and in our garden. Each year, figuring out ways to enhance our bird activity, we long for the local nurseries to bring in new bushes and plants that our birds and wildlife will find attractive for nesting and raising their young.

As the seasons change and temperatures warm up, Nick and I relocate from the armchairs with the good views to the screened porch right off the kitchen. There we can hear as well as see the birds at their feeders. Coffee and tea in hand, we settle in to some cushioned plastic Adirondack chairs that fit us just perfectly. We enjoy the activity for a while then go out to the garden to make sure the night raiders have not dug up any of the vegetables,

turning on the drip systems where needed and forking garden beds, adding more compost and planting rows of good veggies to enjoy all summer long. Robins are following us around wherever we dig, looking for freshly exposed worms. I love it! Overhead, the tufted titmouse flies in for a fresh peanut. It's funny, but I can watch the time and it's almost always right around 8:30 a.m. when the action starts. For us, working in the garden with the wildlife all around us, is heaven. One of us yells out "tea time"! We drop our tools and head to the shady back porch with the best view of our little world! It's good to take pause, enjoy your hard work, stop a moment to hear the birds and be thankful for the opportunity to do so.



Did You Know?

1. Did you know that you could go to www.purplemartin.org to watch the arrival of adult purple martins, sometimes called "scouts", as they are documented arriving on their way north to their nesting sites. Also, you will be able to see, on a map, when to expect the young, first year male and females, as they are moving north to nest for the first time. Those first year birds are called sub-adults.
2. Did you know that purple martins have only one brood of young and that their eggs are pure white. The day before they lay that first pure white egg, they line the nest with supple green leaves. Biologists believe that deteriorating leaves produce a non-toxic gas that acts like a natural insecticide helping to control mites on the baby birds. Amazing!
3. The purple martin is the largest of the swallow species in North America, measuring in at 8 1/2" from beak to tale. He should not be mistaken for a barn swallow who has a rust colored underbelly and is a substantial 1 1/2" smaller.



10% OFF
any Purple Martin
house in stock

C130301; Expires 3/31/2013.
Not to be combined w/ other offers.

Feeder Trade In!
Bring us your tired & worn
and we will give you
10% OFF
a shiny new feeder

C130302; Expires 3/31/2013.
Not to be combined w/ other offers.

Who is nesting in your yard?

Considering how many birds there are in North America only about 85 nest in cavities (holes in trees). Since cavities are harder to find these days (we tend to chop down snags and rotting trees) we can convince many of these birds to use nest boxes.



Most popular backyard nesters?

Well, the House Wren has to top this list. These tiny guys LOVE to use any hole they find and once they set up house-keeping they are very gregarious neighbors.



Titmice and Chickadee are also apt to use our manmade cavities. They create the softest nests... strew some cat or dog hair around your yard and they will pick it up and line the nests with it!

Bluebirds are very desired in backyards. These birds, described by Thoreau as “having the sky on their backs” or by Disney as the “bluebird of happiness” are wonderful to behold! They prefer open habitat over treed areas.

Sometimes larger birds can be enticed to nest as well. Woodpeckers certainly will although they seem to prefer to “make” their own cavities. Small birds of prey like kestrel and screech owl might also take up residence.

Come in to the Backyard Nature Center and let us know what kind of habitat you have in your yard. We can then steer you to the right house for your backyard friends.



Folklore says that you will have good fortune all year long if a wren selects your yard to nest in!

Springtime is no time to take down your feeder

Contrary to popular belief, filling backyard feeders for wild birds is at least as important in the spring as during the winter months.

During the fall and into winter, more natural sources of seed and berries are available than during the spring and summer. By spring, most of these foods have been eaten, and new crops of these natural foods won't mature until next fall.

Spring feeding is appreciated by birds we consider permanent residents, such as cardinals, goldfinches, chickadees, and others that have been using your feeders all winter. It also helps migrants and birds that arrive early to their breeding grounds. When migrating birds see other bird activity in your yard, they are more likely to check it out, if only for a drink of water. In late spring most birds begin to nest. At this time they need extra energy as the males define and defend territories and the females build the nests and produce eggs. Later you may get to see parents bring their fledglings to the feeders, and you can watch the young, awkward birds as they beg for food and learn how to feed themselves.

With your continued support, birds will bring interest, joy, sound, and color into your yard all through the year.





For people who feed and care for backyard birds

The Shops at Tallgrass

8336 E. 21st Street, #500 • Wichita, KS 67206

www.backyardnaturecenter.com

316-683-2121

STORE HOURS

OPEN 7 DAYS WEEK

Monday–Friday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m.

Return Service Requested

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:

WWW.BACKYARDNATURECENTER.COM

BI-ANNUAL BIRDSEED SALE

February 16-28

Twice a year we present our greatest savings offer to keep your bird-feeders full of the best quality seed! You have two ways to save. The Early Bird Seed Storage Account is one of the best. You deposit a minimum of \$150 on your account and pick up your seed, suet, nuts, meal worms when you need them at a whopping 20% off while your money lasts. During the sale week, you can come in and purchase all bulk seed 20-50lb bags at the sale discount of 20% and we will happily carry it out to your car. Plan well, spring is just around the corner and the birds will be getting very busy in your yards and seed is vital to their nest building and feeding their young.

