

Hoy Audubon Purple Martin Project

By Helen Pugh

Hoy Audubon Society, Inc., a small chapter of National Audubon in southeast Wisconsin, is an energetic group that actively supports programs in bird conservation and public education. One of our two key conservation efforts involves the Eastern Bluebird. In cooperation with the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, we installed 203 Eastern Bluebird nest boxes in the Racine area over the last three years. The nest boxes are monitored weekly by Hoy Audubon volunteers over the course of the season. The results of these Bluebird "trails" have exceeded our expectations and have contributed to an increase in Bluebird populations in southeast Wisconsin.

Our second key conservation project is focused on reducing the decline of Purple Martins (PM) in Wisconsin. According to Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Wisconsin (2006, Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, Inc.), the Breeding Bird Survey showed that Purple Martins in Wisconsin declined at an annual rate of 4.8% from 1966 to 2002. However, Sauer et al. (2003)* estimated a more dramatic annual decline of 8.4% for Purple Martins in Wisconsin.

Since Racine's location on Lake Michigan is ideal for attracting

PM's, Hoy Audubon installed a PM house on the lakefront property of the City of Racine's Water Department in 2006. A second PM house was added in the fall 2008 when occupancy of the first house had reached 80%. PM's established nests in this second house by mid-May and we anticipate that by the end of the season we will have our second breeding colony at this location.

The success of our initial efforts provided the impetus to further expand our PM program. The Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) announced a "Buy One Get One Free" offer for the Lonestar housing assemblies (the model we had previously used) and awarded Hoy a grant for 2009. We were thrilled!! With the grant and a donation from one of our generous members, we installed three additional Purple Martin housing systems this past March at locations along Racine's lakefront: a public park, a public golf course and a local university. As of May 31, we do not yet have PM's residing in these new



Helen Pugh checks a Purple Martin house at the Racine Water Dept.

houses. However, we continue to monitor them with great optimism. We know that the Chicago Park District, our neighbor to the south, installed 15 purple martin houses along their lakefront in 2002 and all were colonized within a one to two years. Thus far, we have seen PM's investigate one of the new sites and we anticipate they will colonize it next year.

At present, we are pursuing a grant for public education signage at our current houses and for two additional locations to be selected for next year's expansion. We are enthusiastically committed to increasing the number of PM's on our lakefront, and hope to have positive data for PMCA next year.

* Sauer, J.R., J.E. Hines, and J. Fallon. 2003. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966-2002, Version 2003.1 US Geological Service Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD.

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Keith Kennedy photos

