

Connecticut Purple Martin Newsletter

Spring 2014, Issue 1

Greetings! This is the first of edition of what will become a semiannual Connecticut purple martin newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide updates, future plans, and helpful tips to purple martin colony managers and enthusiasts across the state. In Connecticut, we have been steadily increasing our focus on purple martin conservation and our work is being noticed both regionally and internationally. Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) executive director, John Tautin, recently pointed to the Connecticut model as a shining example of what needs to be done throughout the Northeast to reverse the population declines across the rest of New England and into Canada. The Connecticut model has been successful mostly because of you; the colony managers, the banding volunteers, and the purple martin enthusiasts and advocates.

Color Banding Study

Purple martin chicks were again color banded all around Connecticut this past summer as part of an ongoing [research project](#) investigating dispersal patterns of second year birds. Adult martins are believed to return to the same breeding locations year after year, but young martins returning from their first winter in South America are more likely to find new locations for nesting. By banding chicks with a unique color for each colony, future sightings will yield insight into how they are spreading out across Connecticut. This information should help with strategic placement of additional martin housing to create new colonies and increase the population of this state-listed species.

This project, now entering into its fourth year, has steadily increased in size and effort. In 2011, 541 birds were banded at six colony locations. That number jumped to 16 colonies and 904 chicks in 2012 and again up to 18 colonies and 990 chicks in 2013. All of the same colonies were not banded every year. Several of the smaller sites could not consistently attract martin pairs or produce chicks. Additionally one of the larger privately owned colonies was not banded in 2013 because of

access restrictions. In total, 22 colonies have been involved at least one of the three years. Only five colonies (23%) have been banded all three years. Eight sites were banded two of the three years and nine (41%) were banded only once.

Colony size has been highly variable across the state. In 2013, a new colony in northwestern Connecticut only produced three chicks while another well-established site along the coast had over 200 juveniles. The average number of chicks banded per colony was about the same in 2013 (55) as in 2012 (57). This slight drop is likely the result of some chicks being either too old or too young to band when the colonies were visited. There was a wide spread in nesting times, coupled with a condensed banding season, which made it impossible to band every chick.



This martin was banded as a juvenile at a colony in Guilford in 2012 and later seen nesting at Hammonasset Beach State Park in 2013. Photo by Terry Shaw.

As this project continues to gain momentum, the hope is to get most, if not all, actively managed colonies involved. When the project began in 2011, the area covered was limited to four coastal

and two inland colonies in western and central Connecticut. Now, there are 13 coastal colonies from Greenwich to Stonington and nine inland colonies, including sites on both sides of the state, that are participating in this study. With more color banded birds on the landscape, it is more likely that they will be seen again later. So far, approximately 50 birds have been spotted and reported to the Wildlife Division. The early results reveal an interesting pattern. The vast majority of birds reported either returned to their natal colonies or were found at another established colony less than 11 miles from their natal site. So, the general trend seems to be for the second year birds to stick close to home. However, there are always exceptions. Some birds did relocate to colonies that were much farther away, either in Connecticut or other states. Two birds banded along the Connecticut coast in 2012 joined a colony in Cold Springs, New York, and successfully raised young in 2013. Another bird banded at Connecticut Audubon's Milford Coastal Center relocated to Mashpee, Massachusetts.

The success of this project is dependent on your participation. Despite winter's strong grasp on Connecticut this year, spring is officially here and the first martin scouts have begun arriving back in Connecticut. (Check out [PMCA's Scout Arrival Study](#) for the most up-to-date information.) If you see any color banded birds, please report them to the Wildlife Division either by email (Geoffrey.Krukar@ct.gov) or by phone (860-675-8130). The key information to report is the date, location, color (or colors) of bands, and band numbers, if possible.

Other Projects

Some of you may not know about this, but other purple martin projects are going on as well. One of these projects involved putting up new housing systems around existing colonies to assess how far martins are willing to travel to establish new colonies. In 2011, six Alamo purple martin nesting box systems (box, pole, winch, predator guard, and perching rods) were purchased through a grant

from the Connecticut [Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off](#) (ITCO) program. The boxes were obtained from the Purple Martin Conservation Association through a special "Buy One Get One Free" program. Prior to the 2012 nesting season, the houses were erected at locations within certain distance bands around the known colonies in Kent. As of 2013, only two of the six have successfully attracted nesting martins. A third, which was moved to better habitat in early 2013, drew some interest from martins but resulted in no nesting attempts. Not surprisingly, the two boxes closest to the original colonies were the first to be successful. Both were less than one kilometer from an active colony. The use of nesting trays with nest starter material appeared to assist in attracting martins to the two successful colonies. Hopefully nesting trays can be purchased or constructed for the remaining boxes by 2015.

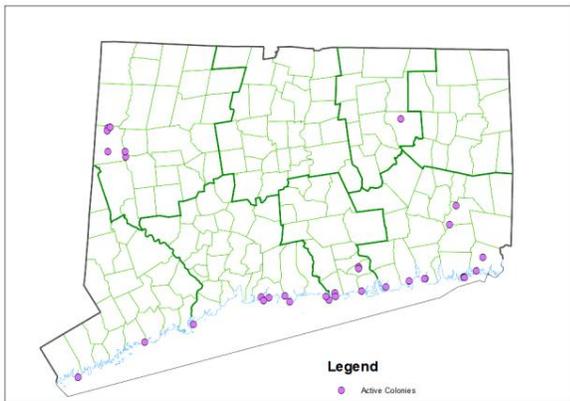


One of the six new nest boxes with the Income Tax Check-off logo was up and ready for nesting martins. This box was successful in both 2012 and 2013. Photo by Laurie Doss.

Another project that has been going on longer than the banding study is the inventory of all historic and current colonies. This is an extremely important step in the overall conservation plan for this species. Knowing how many colonies exist, where the colonies are, how many breeding pairs of martins there are, and how many chicks fledge each year is necessary for determining statewide population numbers. Plus, by knowing where active

colonies are we can better focus our efforts at expanding colonies in those locations rather than wasting resources in areas where no martins are likely to be found.

Locations of Active Purple Martin Colonies Reported to CT DEEP 2010 - 2014



Thank you to everyone that has reported locations of colonies to the Wildlife Division (either your own or other ones). The list of active colonies has now grown to over 30 statewide! Please keep the reports coming.

Useful Tips/Hints

This section will be focused on addressing some of the many questions that have been asked during banding sessions. Each issue will focus on one topic. This issue's topic is how to collect and record data of nesting martins and what to do with that data.

The best place to start is with PMCA's [Project Martin Watch](#). Some of you colony managers already participate in this project, but those of you that do not should give serious consideration to joining. The complete project description can be found on PMCA's website at: <http://www.purplemartin.org/pmw>. You will be provided with the data forms and materials that you need, including step-by-step instructions. Nest checks should occur at least every 5-7 days during the entire nesting season until the chicks have fledged. One of the benefits of frequent nest checks is that potential problems, such as nest parasites, can be addressed early. Another benefit is that you

will be better able to determine the approximate age of the chicks. This information is extremely helpful when it comes time for banding (more about this in the next section). But, perhaps the greatest benefit of collecting information in this fashion and sending it to PMCA is that your data can be combined with data from hundreds of other colonies all across the continent. With that much data, folks from PMCA can begin to answer important large scale questions like how the overall population is changing. Your data matters.

Plans for 2014

With martin season just around the corner, it is a good time to get everyone on the same page. A fourth season of color banding juveniles is planned for late June and into July. Once again, the banding dates will be determined by the ages of the chicks. The ideal age range for banding chicks is between 9-20 days old. Colony managers that want to participate should keep track of their sites and determine when the chicks will be the right age for banding.

Also planned for 2014 is a bigger focus on creating a platform for fostering communication amongst all the stakeholders. This newsletter is just the first step. A webpage is currently being developed that will contain useful information about all the purple martin research being conducted in Connecticut. Updates during the season will be posted on both the new webpage and the CT DEEP's [Fish and Wildlife Facebook page](#). In addition, if there is enough interest to make it worthwhile, an online group will be created to allow CT's purple martin stakeholders to share information directly. If you are interested in participating, please let us know.

| | |
|--|--|
| Connecticut Purple Martin Program: | |
|  | Geoffrey Krukar |
| | DEEP – Wildlife Division |
| | P.O. Box 1550 |
| | Burlington, CT 06013 |
| | Geoffrey.Krukar@ct.gov |
| | 860-675-8130 |