

the osprey

Monmouth County Audubon Society

www.monmouthaudubon.org

Over 50 Years of Birds and Conservation

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► Purple Martins (*Progne subis*)

by Nano Mardones

The Purple Martin, measuring 8 inches in length, a wingspan of 18 inches and weighing 56 gm, is the largest of the swallows found on the East coast of the United States. The adult male Purple Martin is colored a deep, bluish-black which can appear just black, depending on light conditions. The females are somewhat lighter in color, and first-year males (juveniles) are even lighter in their plumage.



Purple Martins like to nest in close proximity to each other, thus forming nesting "colonies" when and where they find a suitable place. Unfortunately such places are today almost non-existent, which recently has led to a sharp, precipitous decline in their numbers. To remedy this situation, nesting "houses" were installed in strategic locations to provide suitable nesting sites. These houses have 6-12 compartments, depending on the model. In addition, natural or plastic gourds are used (the region's indigenous people would place gourds around to attract Purple Martins because they would reduce the insect population in their camps). Volunteers set up the houses and gourds, and once the nests are established, the volunteers monitor them and record the eggs laid, eggs hatched,

and new birds that have reached adult size and fledge (leave the nest) successfully.

The diet of Purple Martins depends heavily on flying insects. Therefore, when fall arrives, they migrate south since in winter their

food supply disappears. It was not known for a very long time where they went during the winter. The mystery was solved serendipitously: a researcher working in the northern Amazon hired a local native to guide him through the jungle. He noticed the native wore a necklace of tiny aluminum bands, the kind used to band birds. It turned out that some of the birds the guide hunted for food with bow and arrow had these bands on their legs. Over time, he had collected enough of them to make himself a very fancy (by jungle standards) collar. The bands were those placed on the legs of Purple Martins in the United States and Canada. This migration route is about 3,000 miles, one way.

In recent years some Purple Martins have been fitted with transmitters, which allowed researchers to track their movements via satellite. This technique has

(continued on Page 3)

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Eggs Laid	62	61	70	70	86	72	69
Eggs Hatched	26	41	65	59	60	53	46
Birds Fledged	22	32	58	45	50	39	37

The table summarizes the results of nesting activities from 2010 to 2016 at a site in Colts Neck, NJ. The results fluctuate from year to year, reflecting the impact of various factors such as weather, House Sparrows, parasites, food availability and predation on whether hatchlings reach full maturity.



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The Osprey is published 5x per year by the Monmouth County Audubon Society, local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to promote the awareness, appreciation and conservation of natural resources through activism and educational outreach, and by representing the National Audubon Society in Monmouth County, NJ. Inquiries concerning the organization, newsletter, letters to the editor or material submitted for consideration are encouraged and may be sent to:

P.O. Box 542, Red Bank, NJ 07701

E-mail: info@monmouthaudubon.org

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➤ **In The News...**

MCAS team hopes to raise money for scholarship fund - for 22 years and counting

The World Series of Birding is right around the corner!

On May 6, five members of MCAS will compete in NJ Audubon's World Series of Birding to raise money for our scholarship program, the Ted Engberg Wildlife Conservation Scholarship. The scholarship awards \$1,500 to two or more Monmouth County high school students every year who are pursuing an education in a field related to wildlife conservation. This will be the team's 22nd entry in this event.

The team consists of members John and Dena Temple of Middletown; Rob and Lisa Fanning of Marlboro; and Debbie Stewart of Neptune.

The object of the competition is to identify as many different species of birds as possible within a 24-hour period. Our team takes it one step further, limiting their search to Monmouth County only, to highlight the natural diversity of our county. This is our organization's only fund-raiser, and we appreciate the support of our members.

To sponsor the team's efforts, please visit http://www.monmouthaudubon.org/wsb_pledge.htm and complete the online form. You can also email your pledge to info@monmouthaudubon.org.

The team's best score was 168 birds in 2004. Last year the team identified 143 species, with the day culminating in a spectacular thunder and lightning storm. New "war stories" are lived every year - and sponsors are treated to an exclusive diary of the day's events.

Erratic weather hazardous to American Woodcock

We enjoyed a brief window of warmer weather in early March, and American Woodcock took advantage, migrating to our area a little early and starting their unique courtship rituals in fields around Monmouth County. The second weekend of March cold weather returned, and then the snow and ice covered the ground - and the birds' food source, earthworms, became inaccessible. We started to receive emails about people finding woodcock in very unusual places, such as in the middle of Jersey City!

The Raptor Trust in North Jersey reported receiving more distressed woodcock by mid-March than they had received in all of 2016. On their Facebook page, they explain: "Having just returned from their wintering grounds in the southern United



American Woodcock / Steve Nanz / HarborLAB

States, the Woodcocks arrive in our area thin, stressed and very hungry after hundreds of miles of in-flight migration. That they have arrived to find no food has compounded the problem for them."

If you find a struggling Woodcock, please do what you can to get it to a wildlife rehab facility. We are hopeful that the situation will correct itself by the time you receive this newsletter.

Special thanks

We have quite a few people to thank this issue, including Caroline Huber for a very generous donation. Other donations included John Luthin, John Heidema, Karen and Mike Silva, Linda Papa (in memory of Wayne Hitchcock), Jane Eigenrauch, and Wayne T. Bell. Thank you all for your generosity.

by Harden Fowler

► **Earth Day, 46 years later**

As we celebrate Earth Day on April 22, we need to think about climate change. Scientists tell us that climate change will disrupt weather patterns, flood coastal areas, destroy wildlife and reduce crop yields, all at a time of population growth. Former Vice President Al Gore stated, "We have the means to secure our future. The question is whether or not we have the political will."

Americans citizens should get involved at all levels with our political and economic decision-makers, support protection of the environment, and make changes in our personal lives to reduce our carbon footprint. The dramatic changes in Washington make it more important than ever to join with others and voice your support. Small changes at home can mean a positive impact on climate change as well. On Earth Day 2017 and every day, we must work for a better environment, conservation of our resources and expanded use of clean energy.

Training May 7th for Shorebird Monitors at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park

Since 2008, the Monmouth County Park System has uses volunteer shorebird monitors at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park nesting sites - and this year, you can be one of those volunteers.

Each spring the shorebirds return and present new challenges at a very busy beach. Shorebird monitors observe the activity of beach nesting birds and act as an "educational buffer" to discourage public activity which may have a negative impact on the birds and their chicks. It's challenging and fun.

Volunteers are required to attend a brief training session by the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ about beach nesting birds (Piping Plovers, Least Terns and American Oystercatchers) on May 7 in order to provide information to beach users. At the training session techniques for monitoring, handout information and suggested equipment will be discussed. Newer volunteers can be paired with experienced monitors until they become comfortable in their educational role, the most effective enforcement. You may monitor as your schedule permits from May through August, but volunteers are especially needed during peak summer use and special events.

Please contact the Coordinator of Volunteers at 732-842-4000 ext. 4283, or volunteer@monmouthcountyparks.com for registration and information about the May 7 training, 1:00-3:00 pm at the Cody House in Seven Presidents Park.

Purple Martins (continued)

revealed that the birds, once they reach the Caribbean, either continue south following the Mexican and Central American coast, or they go island-hopping across the Caribbean until they reach the northern Amazon. Once there, they disperse throughout the area until it is time to return to North America for breeding.

Monitoring the colonies involves several steps. Every 5 or 7 days the houses and gourds, which are mounted on poles, are lowered and each compartment is opened and examined. The conditions of the nest and the hatchlings are observed. Dead hatchlings, if any, are removed, parasites are eliminated and, if the nest has become too soiled, the bedding (pine needles, dry leaves, twigs, etc.) is replaced with clean, dry material. The number of eggs laid, hatchlings and fledglings are recorded to look for trends – good progress to celebrate, or a budding problem to correct. At the end of the nesting season it is time to clean the houses and gourds in preparation for the next year.

Purple Martins face many dangers along their migratory routes: hawks, head winds, high tension cables, bad weather. Along the way they need places to rest and to feed; these are often degraded or destroyed by human activity or bad weather. Promoting, protecting and monitoring the formation of nesting colonies can help this species recover by increasing the numbers of new birds each year and, thus, overcome their losses.

Being a Purple Martin "landlord," that is, taking care of a colony, is a very rewarding experience. To see naked, pink little blobs develop into graceful adult birds is thrilling. Their lively chattering is cheerful, and their acrobatic aerial maneuvers are amazing. In fall, there is always a sad note when the last bird leaves the colony; but, in spring, one looks forward to their arrival that signals the beginning of a new cycle of life on our planet.





**Monmouth County
Audubon Society**
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➤ **Membership Application**

Please enroll me as a member of the Monmouth County Audubon Society (Q04) and/or the National Audubon Society. My check is enclosed for:

- \$10 **Regular Chapter** member
- \$20 **Chapter Sustaining member** - all funds stay in our area, helping us to support local efforts and provide services here in Monmouth County.
- \$20 **National Audubon Society** member - includes Chapter membership (rate for new members only; renewable at \$35)
- Please contact me regarding volunteer opportunities.
- Do not add my name to the mailing list; I will read the newsletter online.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

Please make checks payable to MCAS and return along with application to: Monmouth County Audubon Society, P.O. Box 542, Red Bank, NJ 07701.

Q04

Membership questions? Email us at info@monmouthaudubon.org.

Please check our website for updates on possible program cancellations due to weather.

➤ **coming up**

- Wednesday, April 12* 8:00 pm
"Understanding the Silent Flight of Owls," Justin Jaworski, Lehigh University
- Saturday, April 15 10:00 am
Spring birding on Sandy Hook; meet in Visitor Center parking lot
- Sunday, April 30 10:00 am
Shorebirds and shorebird monitors at Seven Presidents Park; meet in Skate park parking area
- Wednesday, May 10 8:00 pm
"Return of the Raven," Rick Radis
- Saturday, May 13 8:15 am
Warblers and migrants at Allaire State Park; meet in main parking area

* Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month September-May at the Knights of Columbus hall, 200 Fair Haven Road, Fair Haven. Meetings are open to the public, and refreshments are served.

Check our website or our Facebook page for updates on field trips, activities or cancellations due to weather.