

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE SKIES!

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If you've been by Silver Lake Park recently and noticed a large contraption by the Earthship, no we're not calling out to Martians. We're calling out to Martins...Purple Martins!

These exciting migratory songbirds are members of the swallow family and have specific nesting requirements. Dawn Denner, a SLNC volunteer, birder, and nature photographer extraordinaire partnered with Bucks County Birders and made it her mission last spring to make Silver Lake a prime location for them to take up residence. Her photo of a scout checking out the nesting area last spring event made it on the cover of the Troyer Gourd Magazine and in its 2024 calendar!

Each spring the migration begins from South America and the Purple Martins begin their journey north. Sending a "scout" ahead to find a site that has a plentiful food source, primarily flying insects. And is safe from predators. Martins like high open nesting in open areas where they can outmaneuver potential predators. To attract the birds to that location a decoy bird is placed on top of the nesting area and a recording is played in the early morning hours. Ironically called the "Dawn Song"!

Females lay 3-8 eggs in the spring. Incubation time is only 15-18 days. Both parents feed the nestlings searching for insects. The young birds leave the nest in about 26-31 days after hatching.

Adult males are the only Purple Martins to have iridescent, purple feathers covering the entire body. They won't get their full plumage until they are 3 years old. Adult females have more purple on their head and back than subadult females. Their undertail feathers are much darker than subadults—all brown/grey feathers with a white rim on the outer edge. They will **not** have any purplish feathers on their chest, belly, or undertail.

Subadult females have a much lighter purple to brownish color on their back feathers. The under tails are all white or light-colored feathers with brown pinstripes down the center.

The sex of a hatching year or juvenile bird cannot be determined by sight. Hatching year Purple Martins will have a stubby tail—shorter than the wing feathers. They are a dull brownish-grey color and still have yellow inside their beak.

As the hatchlings grow, both they and the adults will eat as much as possible to prepare for their long journey back to South America. If conditions were good, there is hope that they will return to the same nesting site again the following year.

If you're by Silver Lake, keep your eyes on the sky! You never know who will come flying by.