

Ladysmith Maritime Society Purple Martin Policy

Approved by the LMS Board of Directors on February 20, 2016

Since 1989, the Ladysmith Maritime Society has been committed to seeing the Western Purple Martin population recover from near local extinction. LMS co-operates with the BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program by attaching nest boxes to dock pilings, watching for the spring arrival, and helping to count adult birds and band nestlings.

The Purple Martin nesting colony at the LMS marina is currently the largest on Vancouver Island and one of the largest in BC. In 2015, 80 martin pairs raised about 300 nestlings. Martins raised here disperse to other colonies in the Georgia Basin, making a significant contribution to overall population growth and recovery.

Concerns have been raised about Purple Martin bird droppings on boats moored at the marina. In addition, during a dry summer, the Town of Ladysmith may impose Stage 3 water use restrictions, which do not permit boat washing.

The LMS Board of Directors approved the following motion on September 9, 2015:

The Ladysmith Maritime Society re-confirms its support of the Purple Martin Recovery Program and directs staff to work with GBEARS (Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society) to develop a strategy to mitigate problems related to the birds in high traffic areas of the marina.

LMS Purple Martin Policy

The Purple Martin Policy provides guidance to LMS staff in dealing with matters related to the Purple Martin nest boxes located at the LMS marina.

1. The Ladysmith Maritime Society:
 - acknowledges the ecological importance of the LMS marina site;
 - recognizes the educational importance of Purple Martins to the local community, students, land-based tourists, and visiting boaters;
 - wishes to continue participation in the BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program; and
 - wishes to maintain a supportive relationship with Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society (GBEARS).
2. Purple Martin nest boxes will be retained on the LMS marina docks within water lot DL2016 to facilitate maintenance, research, and public education.

3. LMS staff will consult with GBEARS to identify nest boxes that could be relocated either on the marina docks or elsewhere within water lot DL2016.
4. The location of nest boxes will be determined in consultation between LMS and GBEARS.
5. The design of nest boxes will conform to standards approved by GBEARS.
6. Marina staff will consider requests from boaters with annual moorage contracts to move their boats to other mooring slips as they become available.
7. The LMS Managing Director is responsible for administering this policy and is authorized to represent LMS in all matters pertaining to this policy.

Purple Martin Recovery Program

This section provides background information on the Purple Martin population in BC. The content was copied from two websites:

- Western Purple Martin Foundation
<http://www.saveourmartins.org/index.html>
- Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society
<http://www.georgiabasin.ca/puma.htm>

Western Purple Martin

Purple Martins are the largest swallow in North America. They migrate from South America (SE Brasil) to the USA and southern Canada in the spring, breed during the summer months, and return south in the fall. Western Purple Martins breed along the West Coast of North America from California to British Columbia and are genetically distinct from their eastern cousins. Western martins are a Species of Concern from California to Washington, and a Species At Risk (Blue-listed, Vulnerable) in BC.

Nearly Extinct in BC by 1985

In BC, Purple Martins once nested in loose colonies in cavities in old trees and snags as far north as Campbell River. Their colony sites were either in open treed areas with little undergrowth such as recently burned areas or bordering fresh water. Purple Martin numbers decreased due to loss of nesting habitat from logging, agricultural land clearing, fire suppression, urban development and severe competition for remaining natural nest cavities from introduced bird species (European Starlings and House Sparrows). By 1949, Purple Martins had disappeared from the BC Lower Mainland and by 1985, there were only about 5 breeding pairs remaining on Vancouver Island.

Population Recovery

A volunteer nest box program to rebuild the Purple Martin population was started in 1985 with the installation of nest boxes at Cowichan Bay, where martins were seen nesting in piling cavities. By 1989, 14 nesting pairs were located at 3 nest box sites and 1 piling location on southern Vancouver Island, and by 2000 these numbers had grown to about 200 pairs at 16 colonies.

In 2002, the nest box program was renamed the BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program when Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society (GBEARS) assumed responsibility for the program. In 2015, after a summer of very warm weather and a plentiful supply of flying insects, about 1150 pairs in 90 colony sites successfully raised 4000 nestlings. This is the highest number of pairs and young documented in the 30-year history of the nest box recovery program.

Nest Box Design

While eastern Purple Martins like to nest in multi-compartment houses in people's back yards, these houses are not accepted by Purple Martins in BC. Western Purple Martins use individual nest boxes, which are usually clustered together on marine pilings near or on the water. The clustering is important to prevent other competing territorial-nesting species (sparrows and starlings) from occupying more than one or two boxes in a cluster, leaving some boxes available for martins to re-establish their colonies in the spring. The nest boxes should also be at least 50-100m away from trees and other tall structures on the foreshore that might provide hunting perches and approach cover for ambush predators, mainly small hawks.

Future Recovery Plans

Western Purple Martins in BC are currently completely dependent on human-provided nest boxes and would not be nesting in the province at all without them. Almost all occupied Purple Martin colonies in BC are located on pilings along the marine coastal foreshore in bays, estuaries, and marinas, within or beyond the intertidal zone within the Georgia Basin. Freshwater nest box sites were started in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley area in 2005 and on the east coast of Vancouver Island in 2006.

Historically, Western Purple Martins nested in woodpecker holes in old trees or snags in open woodland areas or near fresh water. One long term objective and major challenge of the Stewardship and Recovery Program in BC is to re-introduce martins to nest sites in their original habitat, where they may become self-sustaining. Recovery results so far suggest this goal is very likely achievable in time, given a continued strong stewardship effort, continued population growth and the existence of sufficient natural cavities in snags in suitable habitat in the wild.