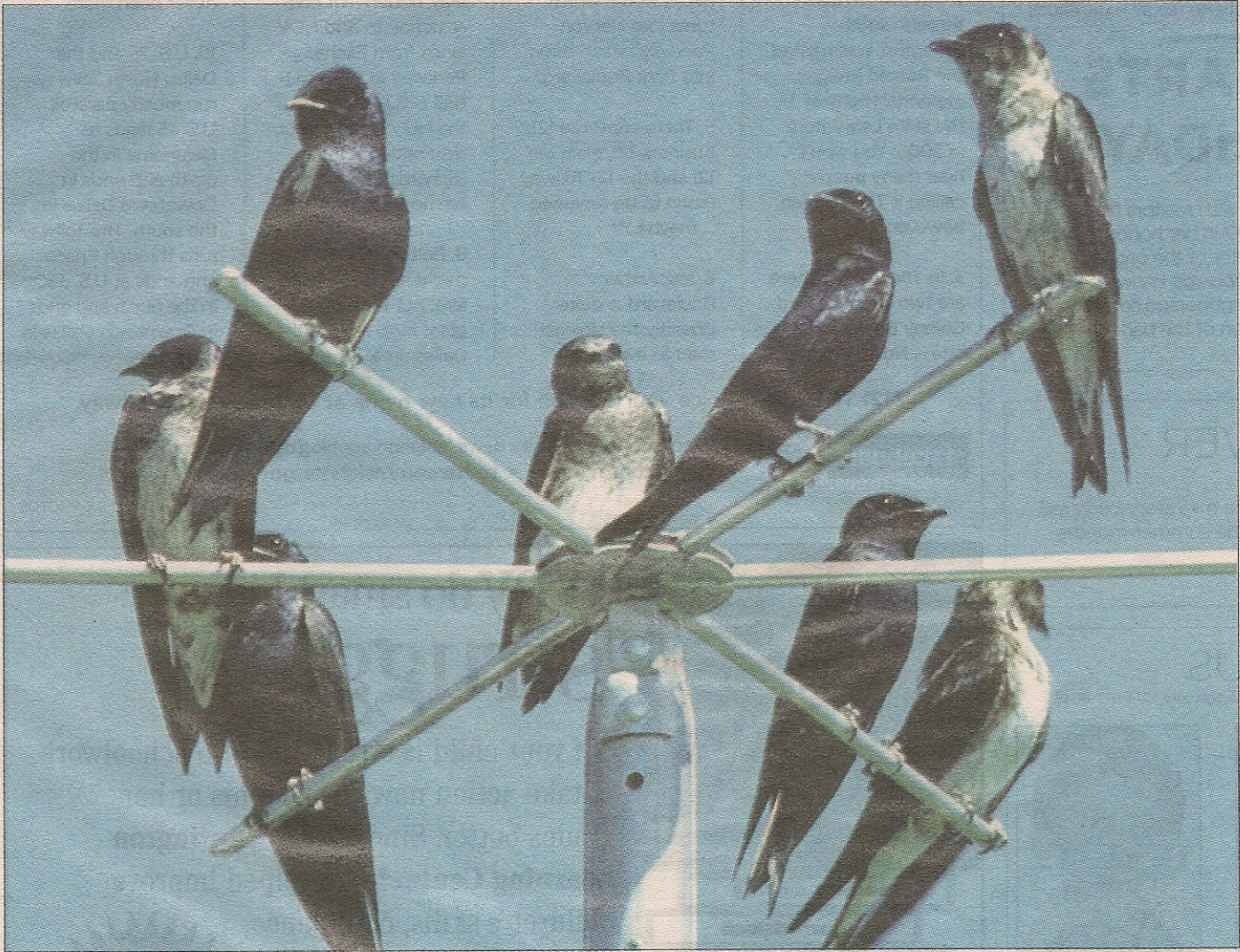


WINGING IT

City welcomes
purple martins'
return>>13



Neighbors Go * March 6, 2009 * Cover

Birds return to roost

Residents greet house-hunting, migratory martins

BY RUTH HAESEMEYER
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Each year, Bill and Paula Scott of Lewisville are visited by special guests. The Scotts provide them lodging, watch over them and even help them raise their babies. Often, these children come back the next year to start their own families.

The Scotts play host to purple martins each year, giving the birds a place to nest in four gourd houses in their yard. They spotted their first visitor of the year in February and since, Bill Scott said they have been visited by “a whole mess” of the house-hunting birds.

East of the Rocky Mountains, purple martins depend on humans for their housing, according to the Purple Martin Conservation Association’s Web site, purplemartin.org.

“They’ve undergone this tradition shift,” said Louise Chambers, who handles outreach and education for the association, adding that

it was the Cherokee Indians who first discovered the birds would nest in gourds. “They have become really dependent on people.”

Housing is the only way to attract the birds, she said, because these members of the Swallow family feed on insects.

“They’re looking for living quarters, not for food,” she said.

Lewisville is laying claim as the home of the largest-known purple martin roost in North Texas. Chambers said it’s great to see people supporting the birds, as the city has.

A new city logo incorporates the bird’s image, and city parks and leisure employees set up three houses for the birds Feb. 26. About 50,000 of the birds are known to roost near Main Street and Civic Circle at the end of each summer, just before they return to South America.

Bill Scott said it has been much easier to attract the birds in Lewisville than it was when he lived in DeSoto. He said the birds like being near the lake, which attracts bugs.

“The more bugs, the more martins,” he said.

As the birds get settled, nest and lay eggs, the Scotts keep a careful eye on them.

“Every week, we do a nest check, pull it down and look to see if we’ve got anybody hatched yet,” Bill Scott said.



DMN FILE PHOTO

Lewisville Parks & Leisure Department workers Jason Walker, left, and Randy Johnson put in a birdhouse for purple martins near the Fred Herring Recreation Center Feb. 26.

They also count and chart the eggs and take pictures. Chambers said the birds don't mind this kind of contact.

"They're very agreeable to study," she said.

The Scotts continue their watchfulness until the young birds have learned to fly, sometimes

rescuing and returning a fallen baby bird to its nest.

"People form these really deep bonds with them," Chambers said. "It's such a unique relationship; they depend on us, but people love and nurture them."



PHOTO BY
JAMIE HILL III/
PMCA

Purple martin fun facts

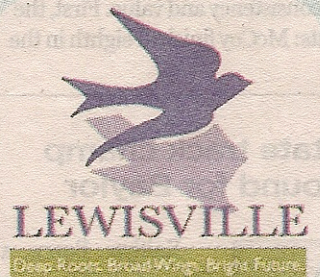
"There's a lot to purple martins, but they sure are fun," said Louise Chambers, of the Purple Martin Conservation Association, who offers these fun facts:

Markings: Males are iridescent blue-black, females have a grey belly

Song: A "cheerful, gurgling voice" that ends with a bubbling creaking sound. "It's such a funny but happy sound," Chambers said. You can hear purple martins singing at purplemartin.org/main/vocalization.html.

Migration: The birds generally reach Florida at the end of December and move north as the weather warms. Their progress can be tracked at purplemartin.org/scoutreport.

Watching: Best bet is to visit a neighbor with a purple martin house, Chambers said. In Lewisville, you can also check out the new houses set up near the Fred Herring Recreation Center, 191 Civic Circle.



Bird brand: A purple martin plays a prominent role in the city of Lewisville's new logo.

For more information about purple martins and to request a booklet of information, visit purplemartin.org or call 814-833-7656.