

Flashes of purple back in flight

Martins swoop in as Lewisville readies for roosts

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Kenny Crawford's annual guests showed up a few weeks early this year. But, as usual, the Grand Prairie man already had their rooms ready.

"I love the purple martins," he said. "I love their song. And they're so purple, they're black."

The insect-devouring songbirds — famed and at times con-



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WATCH KENNY CRAWFORD'S primer on purple martins.

troversial — are leaving their winter home in Brazil and returning to North Texas backyards, parks and neighborhoods. They hang out in North Texas for a few months and then gather in roosts before their return to South Amer-

ica in late July. And that is when their massive numbers and the massive amount of their droppings can be a nuisance.

Despite the downside, Lewisville is claiming credit as the home of the largest known purple martin roost in North Texas. City officials say Lewisville deserves the crown and they are wearing it proudly.

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A pair of male and female purple martins finds a resting spot in Crawford's backyard in Grand Prairie. The birds will gather in roosts by the thousands before they return south.

North Texas residents marvel at the martins

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A shopping center near Main Street and Civic Circle in the Denton County suburb serves as the roosting area for about 50,000 purple martins each summer. The sight of so many birds, famous for acrobatic flying, draws hundreds of North Texans to the spot each year.

"They are just something amazing to watch," Lewisville city spokesman James Kunke said. "They swoop and swirl and do the big spirals and the big curves. You're not going to usually mistake them for other birds."

On Thursday, city parks and leisure employees erected three purple martin houses near the Fred Herring Recreation Center. Each one contains about a dozen nesting units.

"More and more people are becoming aware of the martins in Lewisville," city parks and leisure services director Bob Monaghan said. "So we're trying to do more for the birds. They're probably the most sought-after bird in America."

And they're about to become even more visible in Lewisville.

The city set aside more than \$49,000 three years ago for a rebranding campaign to develop a new logo. Kunke said research and parallels between the bird and Lewisville residents led to a logo

AT A GLANCE

Purple songbirds

Colorful creatures: Purple martins are known for their distinctive deep purple and blue feathers. Many people find their singing intoxicating.

Aerial artists: The birds are also famous for their speed and agility in the air. They do almost everything from mate to eat while in flight.

Diet: They're also loved for their food choices because they feast primarily on insects.

It takes a village: While a mother and father typically raise the young, purple martin families often live in groups or colonies.

Roosts: The birds will gather in large roosts weeks before their migration back to South America. Lewisville officials estimate that a roost there usually includes 50,000 birds, though some estimate past roosts at 100,000 birds.

that prominently features the purple martin.

"A lot of people grow up here, move away and then move back to raise their kids," he said, likening the cycle to the bird's migration patterns.

"Lewisville residents like outdoor, environmentally friendly activities," he added. "There's so many connections we found with this bird. Gradually, this icon developed as a very positive image."



Photos by LARA SOLT/Staff Photographer

Kenny Crawford, a member of Purple Martin Landlords of North Texas, supplied housing for the speedy, agile birds that fly in from Brazil in late February. The insect-devouring martins are known for their distinctive deep purple and blue feathers and intoxicating song.