



PMLNT
Annual
Survey

2017 Season

2017 COLONY DATA REPORT

2017 PURPLE MARTIN SEASON-A SUCCESS

By all accounts, the 2017 Purple Martin season was a big success. This is our 11th Purple Martin Landlord of North Texas Survey. We continue to have a strong core group of enthusiastic landlords that share their stories of backyard trials and tribulations of being a Purple Martin steward.

In our 11 years, we have reported 18,694 eggs yielding 15,127 fledged young. We average a total of 59 young per member reporting. This only represents the members that submit their data, so the real number is much larger.

The year's weather pattern started out normally although one member noted that the "birds were late in coming, I think they knew the weather was not good for them". The PMCA Scout Report indicated that the vast majority of the migrating birds had a similar pattern of return to previous years. We also only had one report of unhatched eggs this year which usually indicated they were frozen. One member said "I had 8 eggs pecked and another did not hatch".

We exceeded the number of available compartments from last year by over 50% with 473 compartments reported this year. Our occupancy was much better than 2016

too with 66% of available compartments occupied by a breeding pair. You may recall in previous surveys, which we tried to see if occupancy was higher in larger colonies versus smaller colonies with less available compartments. As before, there does not seem to be any correlation between the size of the colony and occupancy rate. There is, however, a direct correlation of the level of occupancy and the age of the colony. As one would expect, a new less established colony will not have as many birds, normally, than an older colony with many returning birds. We also had a landlord with an established colony report that "we will need to move our housing for next year because the trees are now blocking one complete side".

The number of breeding pairs shot up this year as well, with a healthy 311 pairs reported. This was the 5th largest number of pairs for a given survey year. We lost a few to predators. One member reporting, I found 4 hatchlings dead in the same nest and I assume the parents were killed by a Coopers Hawk". It is a very positive sign and a further indication of a successful year to have many more pairs.



2018 Board Meeting



One member reported "I had only one pair the previous 2 years, but this year I had 5 pairs. Hopefully your colony will continue to grow similarly through the coming years. Our largest colony report 66 breeding pairs, which represents 92% of their compartments occupied.



Overall, occupancy reaches 66% in total for 2017. This is one of the best ever for our survey. In 2014 we reported our lowest of just 38% so this is a nice bounce back. One landlord commented how he increases occupancy, "all nests were pre-built with pine needles and dried oak leaves. All gourds have upper air vents installed. We have found for several years that all 20 gourds fill up first before the wood house does". We had a total of 1,411 eggs for the season with



six landlords reporting over 100 egg colonies. One member had close to 300 eggs (297) for a remarkable year. Our best year for egg production was way back in 2007 when we topped 3,092 eggs, but we did have more members reporting that year. A more relevant number is the average eggs per member at 73.

2017 was also a pretty good year for fledged young with 83% birth rate. One member called it a "Bumper crop this year". This was our 6th best year with 1,178 young birds fledged for their first journey to Brazil. Their migration is grueling and

with high mortality rates which make our stewardship that much more important. It's fun to think that if all our 44 members had an average of 79 young (2017 avg/member) we could have released approximately 3,476 new birds back into the wild. Then if you add in some of the "over achieving" landlords like Tim & Ginny Hammond or Noelyn Isom, the Purple Martin Landlords of North Texas are a sizeable blip on the radar screen.

The dreaded Starlings and Sparrows (S&S) were reported as less or the same by 73% of members and only 27% experienced more.

Conversely, other predators seemed to be more of a problem with only 20% of members reporting less activity than previous years. We also reported 53 Purple Martins killed by predators this year. One comment "This was not an easy year with the HAWK family north from us – neighbors NOT helping me. Blue Jays, my air police, giving warnings to all other birds". Additional, 12 babies and 1 adult found dead in the gourds from 5 different houses. No clues as for the reason was not reported.

Mites did not appear to be troublesome in 2017. One member said "we noticed that there weren't many mites this year and we did not pre-treat the nests with anything". (Some members use diatomaceous earth beneath the nest material to keep mites at bay.) Mites can be handled very effectively with a poultry protector product which kills the mites but does not affect the birds.



It was very encouraging to see a number of comments regarding members committing to more effective monitoring. "First year to track dates, eggs and fledge dates and I was unable to adequately monitor in the past, but will attempt to do a better job in the future". These were a few of the comments.

The 2018 season is well underway with many member reporting in with activity. Please continue to keep accurate records as they provide an important roadmap of our bird's behavior and helps others to gain from your valuable experience. Thank you for all those that participated in this year's survey.

John Pearson

