

purple martin

Progne subis

FEATURES

The purple martin, at seven to eight and one-half inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen), is the largest North American swallow. The feet and bill of this bird are extremely small. The wings are long and pointed. The male has blue-black feathers on the upper and lower sides of the body. The female is more gray in coloration than the male and has even lighter gray feathers on the belly.

BEHAVIORS

The purple martin is a common migrant and summer resident in Illinois. It feeds over open areas like bodies of water, fields and forests. It may also be seen in cities. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in late March and early April. Males arrive before females to establish a territory. Eggs are produced from mid-April through July. The purple martin once nested in natural cavities in rocks and trees but now most often nests in boxes provided by humans. The nest consists of grasses, twigs, bark, leaves and other materials and is lined with fresh, green leaves. Both the male and female work to build the nest. Three to six, white eggs are deposited by the female, and she alone incubates them for the 15- to 16-day incubation period. After nesting, purple martins form large roosts away from the nesting colony. Fall migration begins in September. The purple martin winters in South America. This bird glides in a circular pattern to catch insects while flying. Its call is “tchew-wew” or “pew pew.”

TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Hirundinidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

ILLINOIS RANGE



Migrating



Summer

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male



female

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan; marshes; peatlands; rivers and streams; swamps; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie