Purple Martins in King County and Beyond: Results of Grass-Rooted Recovery Efforts
November 2003
Purple Martin (*Progne subis arboricola*)

- Largest swallow in the Americas
- Feeds on flying insects: dragonflies, bees, termites, etc.
- A cavity nester, nesting originally in snags, old woodpecker holes.
- Arrives as early as April, departs about early September
- Migrates to South America, Amazon
- Lives up to almost 14 years, typically much less
Conservation Status

- WA WDFW status: Candidate Species
- BC: Red listed
- OR: Sensitive in the Critical Category
- CA: Species of Special Concern
- CO: Sensitive Species, US Forest Service Region Two (174 martins counted in 1999)
Possible Factors in the Decline

• Competition with European Starlings and House Sparrows
• Lack of suitable dead trees/snags
• Timber management practices, in regard to fire and harvest
Approximate Spring Arrival Dates

(Map from Purple Martin Conservation Association)
Nest Cavity suggestions

• High & exposed, preferably near water
• Free of house sparrows & starlings
• Suggested nest box entry dimensions: 2 3/4 inches wide, 1 3/16 inches high
• limit access from predators: gulls, herons, crows
• Accessible, should cleaning be necessary
Purple Martin - *Progne subis*

Legend:
- Confirmed breeding evidence
- Possible breeding evidence
- 1980-1986 breeding records
- Habitats in core zones
Washington

- Population estimates are very rough; most nest over salt water
- Vashon Island (60+)
- Woodard Bay (60?)
- Commencement Bay (40?)
- Seabeck (20?)
- Camano Island (15?)
- Fort Lewis has some nesting in natural snags
- Columbia River, Hood River & west (200?)
British Columbia

- All known nests are in nest boxes, largely on Vancouver Island and southern B.C. marine shores
- ~95% of all known nestlings are banded by government biologists or volunteers
- 1985: only 3 pairs known in B.C.
- 2003 a record year, with 205 pairs
BC Purple Martins
Sources: Bruce Cousens, Cam Finlay, Laura Darling

Active nests
Oregon

- 1998 surveys were conducted by Eric Horvath
- 784 pairs in 112 colonies, all west of the Cascades
- 88% below an elevation of 125m
- 75% in man-made martin housing
- 1977 Surveys by Tom Lund estimated 168 pairs; nestbox programs a likely cause for the increase by 1998.
Purple Martins in King County 2003

- Vashon Island (60+ pairs, thanks to Rich Siegrist)
- Shilshole Bay (8)
- Lower Elliott Bay: Jack Block Park (8)
- Lower Duwamish River (3-4?)
- Pier 90 (1): a new record!
- Lake Sammamish/Marymoor Park (2-3?)
Seattle Purple Martin Nests

Bar chart showing the number of Seattle nests from 1996 to 2003.
WDFW Martin Cam

Pigeon Guillemots
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