

Purple Martins

A Signature Bird at High Cliff State Park

The Purple Martin (*Progne subis*), a Special Concern species in Wisconsin, is the largest of North American swallows with a large head and chest. The males are covered entirely with a glossy bluish-black plumage. Females have the blue-black plumage on their back with a light gray chest and belly. While found throughout the state, the species is predominately concentrated in the southeastern and east central regions of the state.



Photo by Bob Ring

The Purple Martin is generally found in open habitats and areas close to water, particularly near or in human settlements. Humans now provide nearly all nesting sites used by this species to include established structures like birdhouses or nest boxes and gourds. Natural tree cavities were utilized historically and in a few cases to date. The nesting period is from late April to mid-summer. During this period, three to eight white eggs are laid that are incubated by the female for 15 to 18 days. After hatching, the hatchlings are tended by both adults.

High Cliff is home to approximately xxx nesting pairs of Purple martins in gourd racks and T-14 nest boxes near the Butterfly Pond. There are numerous other private colonies nearby. The colonies are monitored and maintained by volunteers. Funds to purchase the homes has been provided by individual and Friends of High Cliff through a C.D. Besadny Conservation Grant and other donations.



The best time to view the birds is while they are out catching flying insects in the morning and later afternoon from mid-April to early August. They have an unmistakable, chirpy sound that fill each summer day. When the birds leave the park in late August, their songs are noticeably absent.