

NEWS RELEASE June 27, 2007

Contact: Coastal Carolina Purple Martin Society (CCPMS)  
PO Box 172, Manns Harbor NC 27953  
Alisa Esposito, Chair  
(252)-394-6205  
E-mail: [purplemartinroost@gmail.com](mailto:purplemartinroost@gmail.com)  
Web: [www.purplemartinroost.com](http://www.purplemartinroost.com)

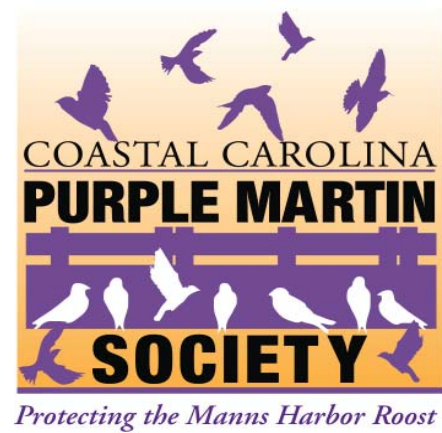


PHOTO: Purple martins like these seen last week in Manns Harbor are tending to nests in houses maintained by “landlords” throughout North Carolina’s coastal plain. In July, when the young have learned to fly, thousands of martin families in the region will head to roost nightly under the Old Manns Harbor Bridge until they are prepared to take their annual migratory flight to Brazil.  
CREDIT: Coastal Carolina Purple Martin Society.

### **Purple Martins Have Begun Roosting at the Old Manns Harbor Bridge**

To protect roosting purple martins as well as motorists, a reduced speed limit will be in effect at dawn and dusk July 1-Sept. 15 on the western end of the William B Umstead Bridge near Manns Harbor. Motorists will be warned to slow to 20 mph on that section of the bridge only when signs flash a yellow caution light.

The annual roosting at the bridge has already begun, according to the Coastal Carolina Purple Martin Society (CCPMS). The organization’s volunteer has begun counting birds that have been killed on the bridge. The first recorded death was on June 25th, right on schedule according to past year’s research.

Slower traffic will help protect a purple martin roost that has been unique to Manns Harbor for about 30 years. Each year from July through mid-September, as many as 100,000 of the graceful birds roost overnight here with young fledglings that were raised in the many martin nesting houses maintained by “landlords” throughout the North Carolina coastal plain.

This season’s safety measures at the roost have been supported by the new Coastal Carolina Purple Martin Society based in Manns Harbor, as well as the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), N.C. State Highway Patrol, Senator Marc Basnight, and Dare County’s Commissioners and Sheriff’s Office. The Sheriff’s Office and Highway Patrol will be monitoring traffic and enforcing the speed limit. Drivers have the option of avoiding the roosting site by crossing Croatan Sound on the Virginia Dare Bridge. This summer, dawn will occur from about 5:45-6:45 a.m. and dusk at about 7:00-8:15 p.m. during the roosting season. The flashing yellow light on signs erected by NCDOT is similar to school-zone lights and will operate on a solar-powered timer. The reduced speed-limit signs will be removed on Sept. 15.

The Coastal Carolina Purple Martin Society has planned a series of free educational events to take place in the parking area of the Roanoke Island Freedmen’s Colony historical site at the northeastern foot of the Old Manns Harbor Bridge. Meet on Thursdays, July 19-26, 7:30 p.m.; Aug. 2-9, 7:15 p.m.

Martins rely 100% on people for nesting quarters and reproductive success. Most birds return to the same colony each year. After nesting, martins may travel up to 150 miles from their breeding colonies – ranging from the Outer Banks to Williamston, Elizabeth City to Belhaven -- to reach the Old Manns Harbor Bridge roost. The bridge offers the birds extensive ledges underneath in the form of exposed I-beams and support girders. It is a low structure situated over water, preferred by martins because there are no land-dwelling predators nearby. At dawn the birds leave in search of their favorite food—insects—available among the vast agricultural fields, wildlife refuges and wetlands of the coastal plain that supports this large population of pre-migratory birds. The birds are so numerous at this exceptional roost that their morning departure can be seen on Doppler radar. They return at sunset to sleep under the western span of the bridge, building up fat stores in preparation for their 2,600-mile migration back to Brazil in September.

Traffic on the bridge affects the martins. In 2004, after the new Virginia Dare Bridge had opened, more than 1,500 martin bodies were retrieved from the bridge surface, and an estimated 3,600 birds were killed. In 2005 a research team estimated 1,700 birds killed by traffic.

Because the roost has become a bird-watching destination, motorists were endangered in greater numbers each year as visitors crossed the bridge during heavy roosting activity. While some motorists traveled at 50-60 mph, others stopped on the bridge or slowed to a crawl to avoid hitting or to observe the birds. The roosting martins themselves caused a distraction to motorists who were unaware of their presence as they swooped around their vehicles by the hundreds.

Martins have been called America’s most beloved bird, says Alisa Esposito, chair of CCPMS. “Residents of Manns Harbor and Roanoke Island have a long history of providing homes for these birds,” she says. “Generation after generation of residents and visitors alike are rewarded annually with pleasant martin chatter and the added benefit of natural insect control. The Manns Harbor martin roost is a truly unique natural phenomenon in Dare County and we are privileged to be part of it. These 100,000 martins grace our community each year because our coastal open spaces and waterways provide these birds with such spectacular habitat.”

To assist in protecting the roost and the birds or to learn more, contact CCPMS at [www.purplemartinroost.com](http://www.purplemartinroost.com).