



WESTERN PURPLE MARTINS



GORGE WATERWAY NATURE HOUSE



Adult male Western Purple Martin

Biology

Western Purple Martins (*Progne subis arboricola*) are the largest member of the swallow family in North America. They have a short slightly-hooked beak, broad chest and forked tail, and a wingspan of 15-16 inches. They migrate to Vancouver Island from warmer regions down south, around mid-April and start to find a suitable place to nest like natural cavities in trees. Their nests are constructed of straw, twigs, and mud, lined with green leaves. Male scouts can arrive before the nesting period to find a good place for nesting and attract other Purple Martins to the area. Martins are aerial insectivores, consuming insects during flight.



Habitat:
Often Western Purple Martins live in nesting boxes put up by humans. In the wild, they often nest in hollowed-out trees or gourds. They prefer to nest in areas near to bodies of water, and in open spaces with no large trees nearby so they can access their home from at least two vantage points.



Purple Martin in flight



Adult male (left) and adult female (right)



Western Purple Martin Hatchlings

Threatened Species:
Western Purple Martins are a threatened species, and they have invasive competitors like European starlings and house sparrows. Nest boxes need to be monitored to make sure one of the exotic birds hasn't taken over. Purple Martins are vulnerable to aerial predators such as hawks and owls, and ground predators such as raccoons, snakes, and squirrels

