

□ Purple Martin Gourds

In mid-April, **East Lake Washington Audubon Society** installed gourds at Juanita Bay Park to encourage the nesting of Purple Martins. A total of seven gourds were placed in the Bay on the old ferry pilings off the causeway and on the pole of the Osprey platform. We're hoping that these large, beautiful swallows will discover these potential nest sites on their return from wintering in South America. "If you build it, they will come."



*Nesting Gourds installed at Juanita Bay Park
Photo by Ernie Brown*

□ Purple Martin/*Progne subis*

by MaryFrances Mathis



*Female Purple Martin
Photo by Kevin Li*

The Purple Martin, the largest swallow in the United States at 8 inches, is unlike most other swallows in that males and females have strikingly different plumages. The male is a glossy bluish-black all over, while the female is dingy gray-brown below with a gray collar and forehead.

Like all swallows, the Purple Martin has small feet and a small, wide bill, and forages almost entirely in the air. Insectivorous, they feed on a wide variety of insects, with dragonflies an especially important part of their diet.

Wintering primarily in the Amazon Basin in South America, martins return to our area in late spring to establish territories and secure nesting sites. They are cavity nesters, usually near water, and in small colonies. Native American tribes historically hung hollow gourds near their villages to encourage nesting to keep the insect population under control.

A beautiful, graceful and musical bird, and one that would be a welcome addition to the avifauna of Juanita Bay.

□ Kevin Li and the Purple Martin

by MaryFrances Mathis

Kevin Li, a biologist and water-quality specialist in the King County Department of Natural Resources, began his efforts to restore the Purple Martin to the Puget Sound area about 10 years ago. He worked tirelessly every spring installing and cleaning nest boxes and gourds, awaiting the arrival of the martins from their wintering grounds. Gourds and or boxes have been placed near Shilshole Marina, at Jack Block Park in West Seattle, Tracy Owens Park in Kenmore, and many other sites around the Sound. All of his installations have been successful, and the once rare Purple Martin is again becoming a regular breeder in the region. That one man could have had such an impact in the local distribution of a species is truly incredible.



*Male Purple Martin
Photo by Kevin Li*

Tragically, Kevin Li died at the end of January, while scuba diving in Puget Sound. He was a very nice, gentle man, and a passionate protector of our environment. He will be sorely missed, but the legacy of his one-man campaign is there for all to enjoy.