

Birds in the Hot Weather

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It was a good summer for purple martins large numbers of young have been produced. The young and adults are grouping at various assembly points around the area prior to their trip to South America for the winter. Since the martins have completed their nesting it is recommended that the martin houses be lowered and the nest boxes be cleaned out. In most cases you will find that the martins shared the houses with English sparrows and that there are still some active sparrow nests in place. I clean them out and leave the houses in a lowered situation to discourage the sparrows from raising more broods. It is also not unusual for hornets or wasps to move into empty nest boxes. One year I even had bats move in. I was amazed how many of the little mammals emerged from one nest box. It was one of those pant-wetting experiences!

In addition to lowering the house on its pole, some houses have plastic covers that fit into the nest box holes to keep out new occupants until you put the house back up for the martins in March. To see if your house brand has the covers, Google "purple martin nest box covers" to find them on the internet. Some gardeners make them out of aluminum foil or other materials.

Based on the attendance in my martin houses and the discussions with folks who call Gardening South Texas radio show, the last few years have been excellent for martins. Well timed rains, mild temperatures, lots of foliage, large flying insect populations and many young were raised. You can expect the adults that survive the winter back but if you want a large number of those young raised in your houses and new adults to also move in, it is most likely to happen if you increase the number of nest boxes that are available. Put up new aluminum houses, or try something different like gourd shaped houses.

The martins are leaving for the season but there are still large numbers of individuals and species of birds trying to survive in our yards this summer. To help them to survive and to bring them in for easy observation, place one or more bird baths in your landscape. Water is a limiting factor when the weather is dry and most day's heat up to over 95 degrees.

Place the bird bath in an open area 6 feet away from shrubs and other thickets. The drinking and bathing birds will escape to cover if hawks fly over the bird bath but if the thickets are too close, cats can launch themselves at the birds from the cover.

Shallow masonry bird baths work best but even garbage can covers and plastic bird baths work well. Ask your favorite bird supply store or nursery about drippers for the bird bath. They are inexpensive and the moving water increases the attraction for the birds.

The evaporation rate is high and the birds splash some of their water out of the birdbath so you will have to refill it every single day.

Hummingbirds will frequent bird baths for a drink. They are also less territorial now, and young of the year are everywhere so you should get lots of action at sugar water feeders. Hang one or more on the eaves where they can be observed from the patio or house window. Obtain feeders that are functional and easy to clean. They need to be rinsed and refilled once per week. I like the locally (Poteet)

manufactured “Best 1” feeders or the “Perky Pet” brand. Mix one part sugar with four parts water by volume. The birds find the sugar water whether it is clear or dyed red with food coloring.

Let the bees share the sugar water with the hummingbirds. Move the feeders around if the fire ants find them.