

FIELD NOTES

Mortality Among Returning Purple Martins: In 1958 I put up a martin house on my property on the Cold Brook Road, Homer, and that year one male and four female Purple Martins took up residence, with each of the females rearing young. It appeared that each female was mated to the one male. In succeeding years the colony has grown, so that in 1960 and 1961, 24 adult birds returned to the nest. In 1958, the first year the house was up, no martins were seen until May 2, when one male came. In 1959 and 1961 the first returning martin (always a male) came on April 15, and in 1960 on April 14. Expecting that they would again return on that date this year, I intended to wait until then to put up the house. However, a single male martin was seen sitting on the electric wires near where the house is located, on April 8, 1962. We put up the house that day. On April 10 a female arrived to join the male, on the 12th there were two pair, and on the 14th a total of six birds had returned.

The weather was uncommonly sunny and mild during all of March and the early part of April, which is the probable reason for these birds coming back so early. However, on April 12th it rained most of the day, and on the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th it was cold, and snowy. We saw little of the birds on the 15th and 16th. Late in the day, on April 17th I saw two martins. On the 18th I saw only a wing moving from one of the openings. On the 19th one male was seen flying and landing on the house. On the 20th I found one male dead near the house, and on the 21st my son, who is light enough to climb a ladder placed against the pole, removed two dead females and a dead male from three of the compartments. No others were found in the house.

Although Tree Swallows are often reported over our lakes in Cortland County late in March, where they evidently find insects in flight near the water, it may be that martins cannot survive so prolonged a period of inclement and cold weather as described above. The colony on my property is about one mile from the nearest lake or pond other than a small farm pond.

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Spring Broad-winged Hawk Flight at Mexico, N. Y.: The Derby Hill region in Mexico, New York, at the southeast corner of Lake Ontario, appears to be one of the best places north of Texas to watch the spring Broad-winged Hawk flight. These hawks are unwilling to cross large bodies of water, due to the lack of thermal air-currents over the water which are so vital to their flight. So the groups of Broad-wings tend to become larger and larger as they reach the water-barrier of the lakes and drift eastward, looking for land to continue on their migration northeastward.

From April 25 to April 27 (½ day only) I counted 13,020 hawks migrating within an area of four or five miles around the Ontario Shore. The most favorable wind direction is southwest; and even very slight variations in this direction can change the entire migration line of flight, driving the birds two or three miles farther inland. Thus, when the flight appeared to stop at Derby Hill about 1:30 PM on April 26, by moving inland on Fort Leazar Road I picked up about 1000 more.

On the morning of April 27 the sky was almost cloudless, and the hawks were difficult to see. However, there were two or three white puffy clouds toward the lake-front, and we were able to see the Broad-wings stream across these small clouds and head northeast. In an hour and a half, I saw by far the largest concentration of hawks that I have ever found in spring flights. Usually it is possible to count fairly accurately by 10's or even by 50's; but for 45 minutes these birds moved so steadily and in such large groups that one could only estimate the size of masses of Broad-wings circling north of the Derby Hill road, and attempt to count one enormous group as is stretched 50 or 60 abreast from zenith to horizon.

By about 11:00 AM I had counted 6580, in round numbers, with groups of 200, 1000, 750, 2000, another 1000, 500 and 750; and at this time the flight stopped abruptly, leaving the observer with the feeling that the actual peak of migration had just swept past, and the flight had stopped only because there were no hawks left to go. — Frances T. Elkins, 303 Mill Street, Belmont, Mass.