



Purple Martin colony caretakers share their experiences

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Sunset Point is a community park on Barnegat Bay in Ship Bottom, NJ, which is located on Long Beach Island. A highlight of the park is a very successful Purple Martin colony that has been producing an average of 70 or more birds in recent years. This is the story of that colony.

Many years ago, as a Boy Scout pursuing merit badges, I was required to earn a badge called "Nature." The merit badge counselor, Mr. Russell, took me on several field trips and we observed Purple Martins while he taught me the history and habits of these marvelous creatures. This experience was then stored in my memory vault where it lay dormant for 45 years.

In 1998 the Ship Bottom Garden Club was formed. Their goal was to take a sandy patch of land formed by the shore of the bay and the edge of a lagoon and to make it a patch of floral beauty complete with a walking path and gazebo. Contributions of time and money were solicited and enthusiasm was high.

It was at that time that I was inspired to make a Purple Martin house our family's donation to the garden. I started by purchasing a T14 martin house from the PMCA. Adding gourds would come

later. The house contained 14 apartments and I became a full-fledged landlord and waited for the birds' arrival. Others watched and waited too! We all waited and waited and waited. Where were they? The location was perfect. It met all of the criteria.

I tried decoys. I got up at 4 AM to play the dawn song. I tried mirrors in the boxes. All these techniques were tried season after season with no success. Then, in 2005, they finally arrived and they continue to return each spring.

As a seaside resort and a recognized, natural destination, Ship Bottom attracts thousands of vacationers. Many of them end their day by watching a beautiful sunset while the energetic martin colony settles in for the night. They have discovered that mornings are an exciting time too! We all are very nostalgic when the birds leave in late August and eagerly await their return each April. The rhythm of nature is a beautiful thing.

