

A TRAVELERS' HOME

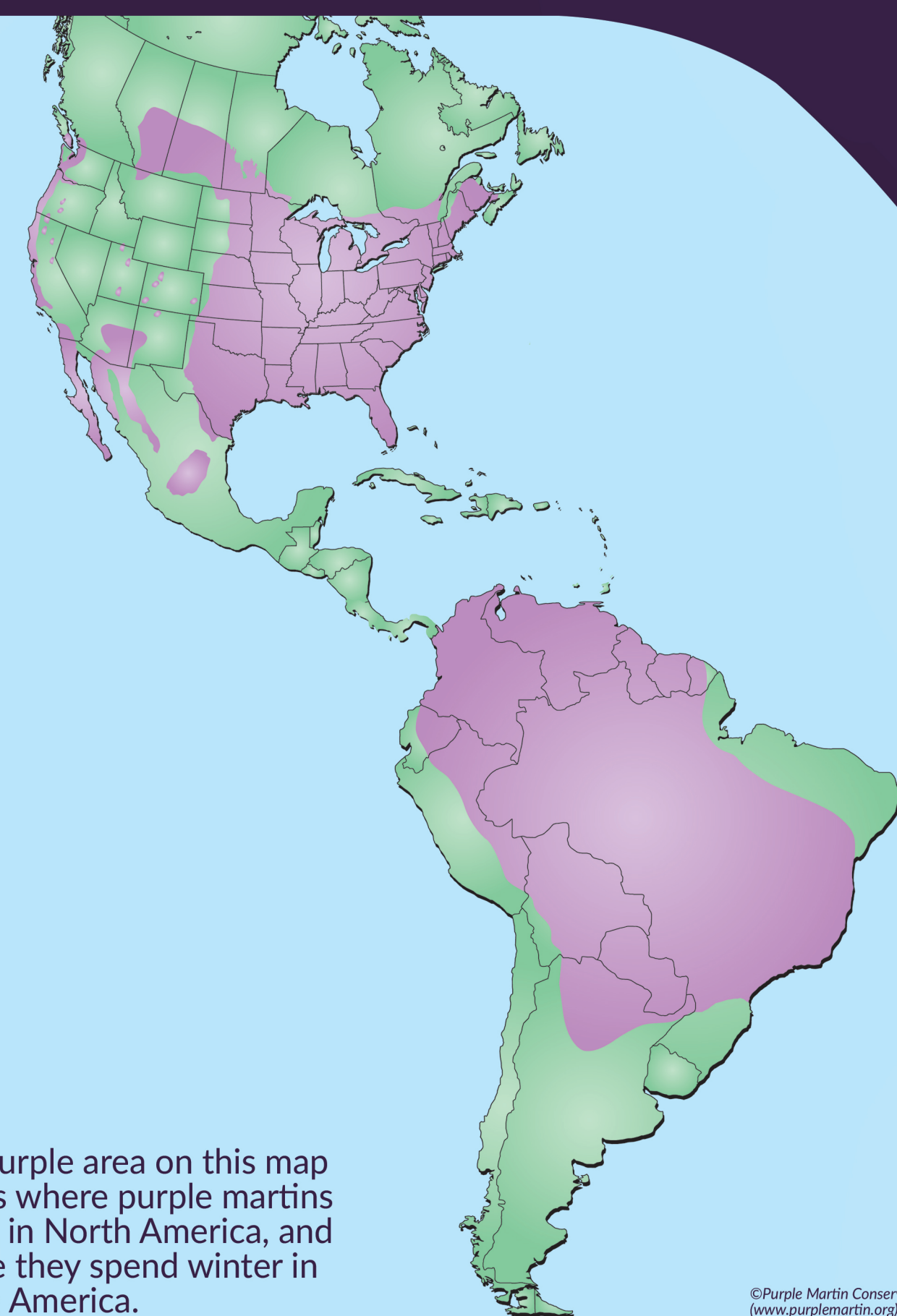
Each spring and summer, these gourds are a flurry of activity as purple martins nest in them.



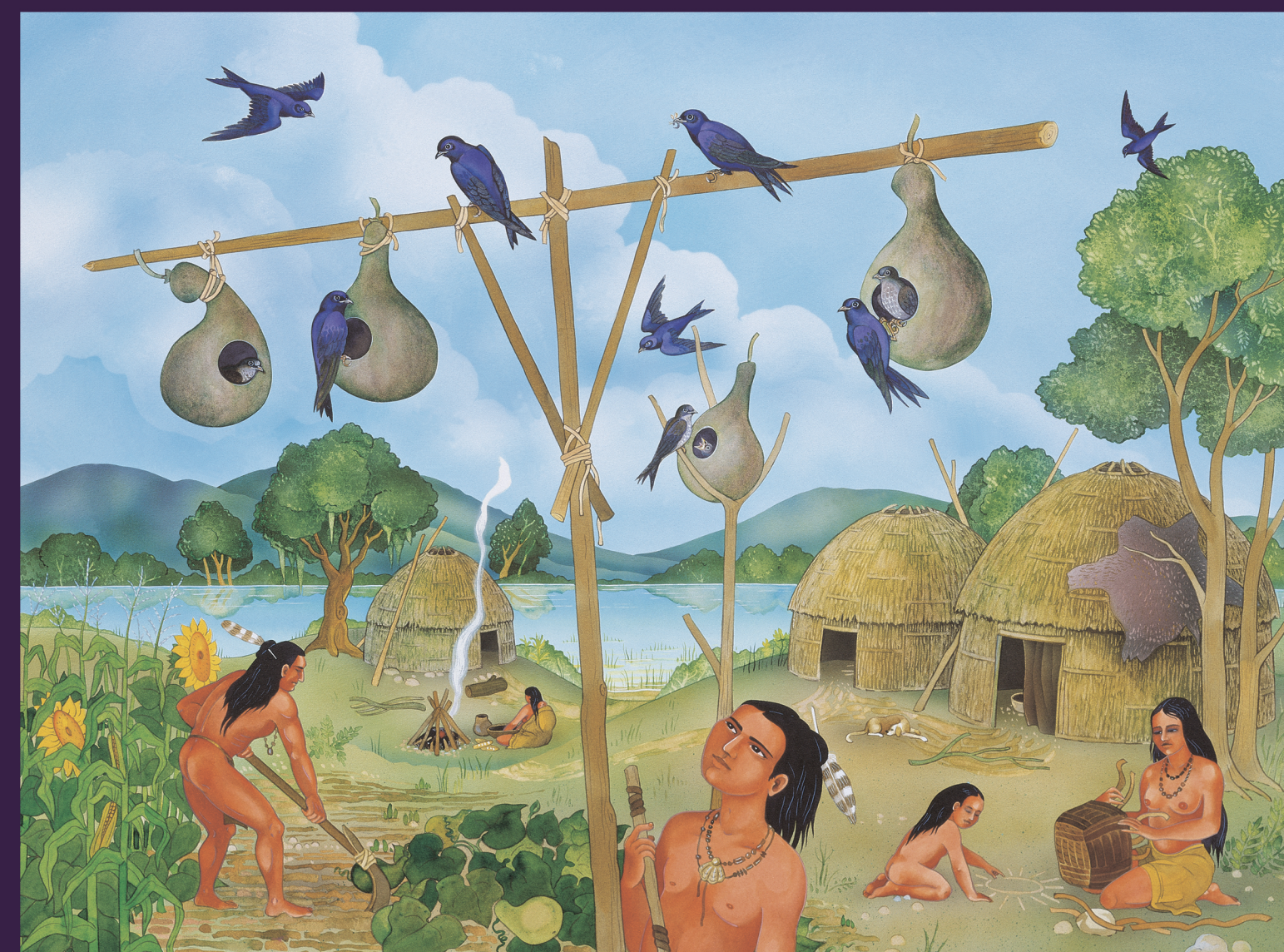
VJ Anderson, Wikimedia Commons

Purple martins are secondary-cavity dwellers—meaning they nest in holes that already exist (like tree hollows).

Loss of habitat and availability of man-made structures like these mean **purple martins in eastern North America rely on humans for nesting cavities.** Those in the western part of the continent still nest mostly in natural cavities.



The purple area on this map shows where purple martins breed in North America, and where they spend winter in South America.



©Purple Martin Conservation Association (www.purplemartin.org)

Native Americans made the first purple martin homes centuries ago—possibly due to the birds' diet of flying insects.



Image courtesy of Richard Albertson

A female (left) and male perch on their specially-designed home. These gourds only allow purple martins to enter—thwarting competitors like non-native house sparrows and starlings.

Purple martins are picky about their surroundings.

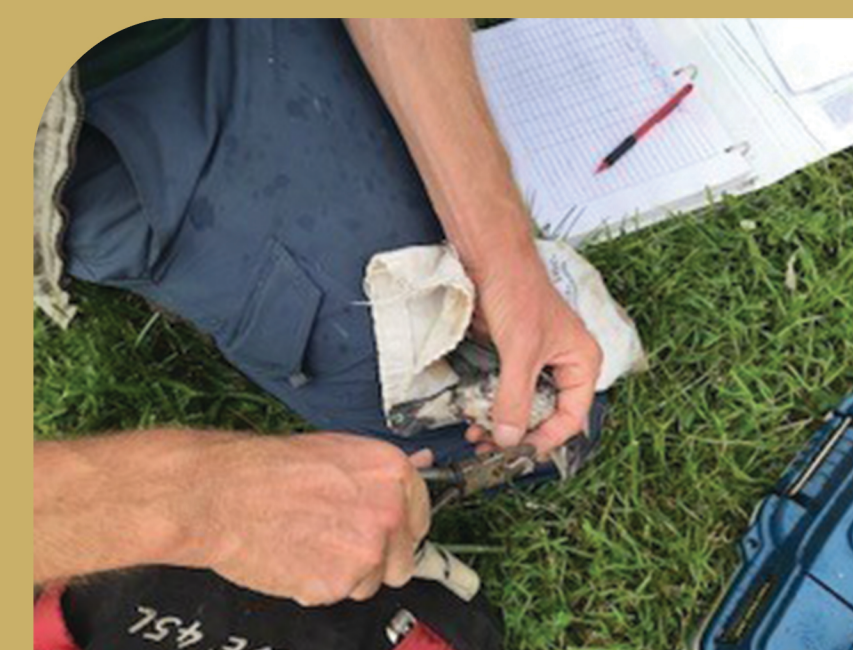
- These swallows live in colonies, so they prefer multiple housing structures.
- The structures must be placed in an open area at least 30-40 feet away from buildings and tall trees.
- The birds need a substantial water source nearby (not just a bird bath).

Bellevue's gourds are surrounded by wide-open meadows and a nearby pond—perfect real estate for purple martins.

These gourds were donated by Charles Shattuck of Wild Birds Unlimited.

Purple Martins only use these gourds during nesting season (April- July). Once the young can fly, they no longer use the gourds.

Martins that nest here leave for South America in late summer. Martins migrating from farther north may be seen in the park through mid-September.



A researcher carefully places a light metal numbered band on a purple martin at Bellevue. Banding allows scientists to identify individual birds and gather important data.

You can get involved with purple martins at Bellevue. Each spring, the park works with ornithologists (bird scientists) to band and count these swallows. Check out our parks website below to learn more.