

Minsi Lake Update: FOML, NorCo Parks & LV Audubon Society

By Michael Ortoski / Co-Chair Friends of Minsi Lake
 UPPER MT. BETHEL - The three groups collaborated this past weekend to Install Friends of Minsi Lake (FOML) 3rd Purple Martin Nesting Tower at Minsi Lake. It is located about 25' from the first martin tower on the West Shore of Minsi Lake. "We did this to expand & increase nesting structures for this local migratory breeding bird species of great conservation concern both here in PA & across its North American range.

Martin populations have tanked throughout their range in the past several decades for a number of reasons, including loss of nesting habitat. Martins feed primarily on flying insects like dragonflies, which are abundant near large bodies of water, like Minsi Lake" said Jim Wilson Secretary for FOML.

Project funding provided by FOML. Project administration provided by NorCo Parks. Project installation provided primarily by LV Audubon Society's Habitat Committee, which literally consists of two of the most active bird conservation volunteers in the Lehigh Valley: Scott Burnet & Mike McCartney. Scott & Mike provided all the tools, equipment & technical & construction expertise to get it done. In addition to project admin, Jim Wilson also provided labor under Scott & Mike's supervision during project construction.

Two Purple Martin nesting towers were first installed by this partnership on the shores of Minsi Lake in early spring 2020: one tower each on the East & West Shores. Last year, one pair of martins successfully raised & fledged 3 young from the nesting tower on the West Shore. A number of other, nonbreeding adults spent the summer "hanging out" and roosting in the towers at Minsi Lake.

The 3 martins hatched at Minsi Lake in 2020 were officially recorded & banded by a federally licensed bird bander & that data was submitted to the USGS Bird Banding Lab in Laurel, MD. This year in 2021, our breeding Purple Martin population at the two Minsi Lake nesting towers exploded: some 70 adult martins occupied the 36 nesting gourds on the two towers (18 gourds per tower) and in total, over 60 Purple Martins were hatched & fledged from Minsi Lake this year. Most of them were officially recorded & banded before they fledged.

This represents an increase of nearly 2000% in successfully fledged Purple Martin young at Minsi Lake in just one year. From 3 in 2020, to 60 in 2021. Build it & they will come! Purple Martins are among the most gregarious & socially communal songbirds on the planet and will readily move into artificial nesting structures where established in prime habitat.

Establishing nesting habitat for martins at lakes like Minsi—where they feed on abundant aquatic insects, like dragonflies—will only serve to support & expand this bird species of conservation concern here in PA & across North America. Educational signage at the nesting towers & live in-person banding presentations for the public at Minsi Lake only add to a better understanding & appreciation of these amazing international migratory songbirds. We all look forward to next spring & summer & the increase in Purple Martins nesting at Minsi Lake thanks to our partnership & this this 3rd nesting tower!

The group also removed the 36 PVC nesting gourds on the original two towers (18 on each tower), cleaned them out & stored them overwinter at NorCo Parks Maintenance Shed at Minsi Lake.



Clockwise: A fisherman caught a little bass, while I was there. Probably one of the fingerlings stocked over the past couple years.

A Great Blue Heron scratching an itch on one of the east side post clusters.

PFBC pulled their docks out of the Lake for the winter.

An American Coot cruising around the Lake just off the east shore.

