

Report on the Birds

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If you have purple martin houses with nesting birds, it is probably obvious that the young of the season have reached the point that they are ready to leave the nest. The squawking young birds meet the parents at the nest hole to receive their insects and they will soon be venturing out to try their first attempt at flying. The result is both charming and chaotic.

Unfortunately, you can expect some problems in the transition from nestling to flying individual. A few young may end up on the ground where cats and other predators will make a meal of them. Intervention is usually not successful but if you intervene try to place the birds having trouble flying on a shady tree limb or the porch of their house. The parents may try to help them.

Most of the young will fly off to the nearest wire and then become part of the flock of youngsters assembling for the trip to South America for the winter. The adults will also start spending time at assembly points in between short visits back to their houses. When it is clear that the martins are on the trek, lower the houses so they can be cleaned out and English sparrow nesting can be ended.

Some purple martin experts recommend that purple martin house landlords not be too quick to lower the houses and block the holes because some of the purple martin activity in early July is to allow young and adults who were not successful with nesting this summer to scope out potential housing for next year. Expect all the martins to be gone before August 1.

Some of the hummingbirds may still have young in the nest, but most have finished their nesting. This end to nesting means the adult birds are less territorial and more likely to spend time at your sugar water feeder where they will be joined by the young of the year.

Maximize hummingbird action by hanging at least one sugar water feeder off the eaves or a trellis in a location that it can easily be viewed from the kitchen or patio. Select a feeder design that is easy to fill and clean. My favorite brands are BEST 1 Feeders manufactured in Poteet and Perky Pet Feeders. Fill your hummingbird feeder with a mixture of one-part sugar and 4 parts water by volume. Red food coloring is not necessary.

Rinse the feeder out every week and refill it with fresh sugar water. Put the old solution in a shallow dish for the butterflies and bees to consume.

Hummingbirds will also respond to nectar sources such as firebush, pentas, and porterweed planted in containers on the patio. Firebush and porterweed grow best in full sun. Use penta for shady areas.

On the butterfly front it is rare to see a Monarch until later this fall, but the closely related Queen butterflies are flying in large numbers. They also lay their eggs on milkweed. The most popular nectar sources are mist flower, zinnias, porter weed, and milkweed. Recognize a Queen caterpillar from a Monarch in that they have a mid-body antenna-like structure in addition to the structures on both ends like the Monarch. Giant Swallowtails and Black Swallowtails are also noticeable. They like the same nectar sources as Queens, but the Giant Swallowtail lays its eggs on citrus trees. The caterpillars look like

bird “dodo”. The Black Swallowtail lays its eggs on parsley, dill, or fennel. Other good nectar sources for butterflies are duranta, lantana, salvia, Mexican flame vine, mint marigold, and fall aster.