

FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

YOUR NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

WEEK OF JULY 29-AUGUST 4, 2009

www.FloridaWeekly.com

Vol. III, No. 19 • FREE

INSIDE



Marketing pros

Check out Florida Weekly's special section on area marketing professionals. **B1** ▶



Talking retro

Author Ralph Keyes' book explores the forgotten origins of American speech. **C1** ▶



Lobster season

Spiny lobster season in Florida opens this week. **A21** ▶



Home style

A master plan is key to designing on a budget. **D1** ▶

BEYOND CREEPY

Diving into the minds of sexual predators, serial killers and psychopaths

BY BILL CORNWELL

bcornwell@floridaweekly.com

THEY ARE THE MONSTERS of modern mythology — the things that go bump in the night, the gnawing fear in the back of our brain

that tells us to crawl out of a warm bed and make sure the door is locked, the window secured. They prompt us to sprint through dimly lit parking lots and cavernous garages and cast over-the-shoulder glances as we walk dark, deserted streets. They are why we tell our children to shun strangers and stay close.

They represent a peculiar brand of evil that has spawned an enormous volume of literature, some of it grand but much of it unseemly or worse, reaching back centuries. The fictionalized villains of the greatest of these works, from Grendel in "Beowulf" to Hannibal Lecter in "The Silence

>>inside:
Keep kids safe:
Expert tips on
spotting predators.
A8

SEE CREEPY, A8 ▶

745

NUMBER OF SEXUAL OFFENDERS LIVING IN LEE & COLLIER COUNTIES

47,000

NUMBER OF SEXUAL OFFENDERS LIVING IN FLORIDA

40

SUSPICIOUS PEOPLE IDENTIFIED BY LOCAL SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS

Thousands of purple martins roost downtown each summer

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

Greg Biolchini stood watching the orange sky over Hendry Street and Main Street in downtown Fort Myers fill blizzard-like with birds. Thousands of purple martins, a type of swallow, swirled down "like a tornado" and dropped "like raisins" into a one-block row of mahogany trees.

Mr. Biolchini, a handsome, 61-year-old painter, was with a group of birdwatchers outside The Bar Association, an eatery, bar and lounge. It's across the street from where the roost happens between 8 and 9 p.m. every night between mid-June and mid-August.

"They planted the (mahogany) trees the

SEE MARTIN, A13 ▶



EVAN WILLIAMS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

POSTAL CUSTOMER

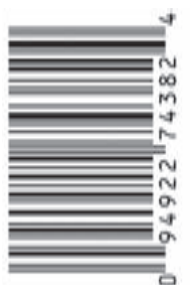
PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
FORT MYERS, FL
PERMIT NO. 715

ROGER WILLIAMS	A2
OPINION	A4
15 MINUTES	A6
BUSINESS	B1

ON THE MOVE	B4
NETWORKING	B15
ARTS	C1
EVENTS	C6 & 7

NANCY STETSON	C8
SOCIETY	C27 & 29
CUISINE	C31
REAL ESTATE	D1

DATED MATERIAL - PLEASE RUSH
POSTMASTER - REQUESTED IN-HOME DELIVERY DATE: JULY 29, 2009



MARTIN

From page 1

day I moved in to the Richards (Building) studio next door 31 years ago," said Mr. Biolchini. "Actually, to the day. They planted them that day I was moving in."

Mr. Biolchini moved out of that building last year and the city had decided to cut down the trees for various reasons, including concerns about bird feces on the sidewalk. But those plans have been put on hold — at least temporarily — because of renewed interest in the yearly roosting.

Mr. Biolchini estimated the huge flock of martins has used these specific mahogany trees for as many as 10 years; although by other anecdotes, the martins have been coming to the area since before it was settled. The birds like the spot downtown.

"It's the right combination where you've got the (Caloosahatchee) river, the food source and the trees downtown that meet their criteria for roosting," said Lee County Land Stewardship Manager Roger Clark. "They like those trees even though those trees have been pruned and they're struggling."

Bar Association owner Ron Kopko is celebrating this summer-happening with nightly Purple Martin drinks (champagne and pomegranate juice), martin-themed desserts and bird-shaped whistles. It will culminate in Fort Myers first ever Purple Martin Festival July 31. That same night, Mr. Clark will lead an "urban bird watching tour" through downtown, looking for other city birds including kingbirds, chimney swifts, Cooper's hawks and house sparrows.

Mr. Kopko said he was alarmed by the spectacle of birds after opening The Bar

Association 4 1/2 years ago.

"I thought they were bats," he said. "I thought, 'Oh my gosh, where did I open a bar?'"

As it turned out, people gathered nearby to watch — and they brought their friends downtown to see it. Mr. Kopko protested when the city planned to replace the mahogany trees with palm trees this summer, which would have ended the event.

"They really wanted the continuity of the palm trees," Mr. Kopko said. "They finally caved for us when we told them we'd have a Purple Martin Festival. It was like an 11th-hour, 12th-hour decision."

The martins summer roosting habits have resulted in festivals elsewhere in North America. Richmond, Va. has "Gone to the Birds." And in Cumberland County, N.J. there is "The Purple Martin Migration Spectacular."

Mr. Kopko enjoys the martins each evening.

"It looks like an IMAX Theatre or a scene out of 'The Birds,' an (Alfred Hitchcock movie)," he said.

About our summer guests

Purple martins are about 7 1/2-inches long, weigh 2 ounces and are naturally acrobatic from going after insects all day long, said Louise Chambers, a magazine editor for the Purple Martin Conservation Association.

The birds fly from South America and the Caribbean to North American locations to nest. And on their way back home to places like Brazil and the Caribbean, they spend a few months on vacation, predominately in the southern United States.

"They use this roost to gain some rest and relaxation," Ms. Chambers said. "They put on weight. The fledglings learn to feed. The roosts are definitely an end-

if you go

>>What: Purple Martin Festival & Downtown Field Trip

>>When and Where: The festival begins July 31, at 6 p.m. at The Courtyard Shops at 1611 Hendry Street. The urban bird watching Field Trip hosted by Roger Clark begins at 7 p.m. at the Uncommon Friends statue in Centennial Park and ends at 8:30 p.m.

>>Details on the Field Trip: bring binoculars, water and a camera. Call 433-5909 for more information.

>>Cost: Free. A \$5 donation to Audubon of Southwest Florida is accepted for the Field Trip.

of-the season, pre-migration phenomenon."

She added, "Roosts seem to be in cities, surrounded by people. It's warmer at night in the city, all the heat that's absorbed by concrete buildings and streets so it may save them some energy. The lights keep away predators — at least that's the theory, but I've seen hawks picking them off."

One of the largest summer martin roosts is in Lake Murray, S.C., where boat tours are held to see as many as 750,000 purple martins descend each night. Estimates on the number of Martins that roost in the mahogany trees in Fort Myers range from 2,000 and up.

"There are thousands of them," said Mr. Clark. "It's really hard (to estimate). Being able to say there's 2,000 or 3,000, that's tough because viewing is a little limited because of the view of the buildings and the skyline."

Splat: An 'unloading zone'

"It says loading zone," joked a man who stood on the sidewalk watching the purple martins come in over the streets. "It should say unloading zone."

Carol Newcomb-Jones, president of

Audubon of Southwest Florida, knows what he means. She parked her car under the mahogany trees one summer evening about four years ago.

"I was clueless to know I was parked under such special, special trees," she said.

Ms. Newcomb-Jones says the inconveniences, like washing the sidewalks or your car, are minor.

"We should really make this a wonderful feature of downtown Fort Myers," she said. "Like, wow, look what we have right in our midst."

For his part, bar owner Mr. Kopko is even offering a free drink to customers treated discourteously by the martins. And he plans to work with a local car wash to have "poop-on coupons" ready for people to get a discount car wash if the birds target their automobile.

"The birds are certainly a sign of the health of the ecosystem — there are a lot of insects (for them to feed on) — and they're helping to control the insects," noted land manager Mr. Clark. "If we didn't see the birds, that would be a real cause for concern because the environment would perhaps not be healthy enough to support them."

As they prepare for sleep, the birds sound like cocktail party chatter or something else.

"If you cup your ears, it's usually described as hissing steam," Ms. Chambers said.

Liz Badillo, 24, works as a parking attendant by the mahogany trees. Sitting in her booth across from The Bar Association, she noticed that although there still appear to be thousands of birds each night, some may have already left downtown.

"It was so amazing when they came down here about a month and a half ago," she said last Saturday. "There were so many more of them." ■

MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY **THURSDAY** FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

LADIES NIGHT

MOTOWN MUSIC

BY TAYLOR STOKES 6PM-8PM

LADIES DRINK FREE

9PM-12AM

WITH DANCE MUSIC

9PM-CLOSE

NOBLE JEWELERS
GOLD & SILVER
EVENT
JULY 30TH 6-9PM
BRING YOUR
GOLD/SILVER AND GET
PAID ON THE SPOT





RESERVE

Bar and Lounge

Private Memberships Available, For Details Visit www.ReserveCigarAndWineBar.com
239-210-0300
 10950 South Cleveland Ave • Fort Myers (Across from Page Field, just south of Boy Scout Rd)