



May 13, 2022

Joint Statement from the Office of Mayor John Cooper, Nashville Symphony, Nashville Tree Conservation Corps and The Nature Conservancy:

Conservation of Nashville's greenery, protecting our city's environment and cultural assets, and making decisions that put sustainability and resiliency at the forefront are fundamental values shared by each of our organizations. That's why we came together to find a solution to the property damage and public health hazards caused by 150,000 Purple Martins that have roosted in the trees surrounding Schermerhorn Symphony Center for the past two summers.

Together, we have sought guidance from experts at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services Program, The Nature Conservancy, Tennessee Wildlife Federation, the BIRD Program of Friends of Warner Parks, the Nashville Tree Conservation Corps (NTCC) and representatives from several Metro departments, all of whom have advised on our course of action.

Through all this, the Nashville Symphony has been steadfast and collaborative in its efforts to find a solution that respects and honors the interests of all involved. They have devoted countless hours to researching the situation and have committed to being an active and engaged partner in local conservation efforts.

Central to our joint plan is the critical importance of preserving the Purple Martin population, which is protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act; preserving the urban tree canopy, which has dwindled significantly in recent years; and protecting the Nashville Symphony, which faces meaningful economic harm if we don't act quickly.

Details of our solution are below. In short, the Nashville Symphony will redirect the Purple Martin roost by removing the trees on their campus and replacing them with trees less likely to attract the birds in the future. The trees owned by Metro on Demonbreun Street will remain in place, and the additional trees owned by Metro on Symphony Place adjacent to the Schermerhorn will be the focus of a number of non-harmful diversionary tactics intended to keep the roost from returning to the Symphony site.

In exchange, the Nashville Symphony will provide nearly 150 replacement trees to be planted both onsite and offsite by the Symphony and Metro Parks in coordination with the NTCC, as well as a contribution to the Friends of Warner Parks BIRD Program. These actions set a historic precedent for tree mitigation and replacement, as well as a new path for addressing the challenges brought at times by large migratory bird roosts in an urban setting.

We cannot entirely predict where the Purple Martins might roost if they are successfully diverted. It is possible they could settle nearby, and businesses in the area should be aware this could happen and take their own precautions (by dimming lights, pruning trees, or other non-harassing techniques), if desired.

If our diversion tactics work, the trees on Symphony Place will also stay in place. However, if our efforts are unsuccessful, those trees will have to be removed, and we must be realistic about this risk at the outset. However, removal would occur before arrival of the roost, avoiding harm to the Purple Martins and diverting the roost to another location. Additionally, if these trees must be removed, native species trees would be replanted in their place.

All participants are deeply committed to doing everything possible to make these tactics successful and to help the Nashville Symphony succeed.

We sincerely appreciate the community's input and understanding as we navigate this challenge, and we are all grateful that this group of different interests and perspectives could collaborate and find a solution that works for everyone.

Below you can read more about our plan:

- 1. The Nashville Symphony will redirect the Purple Martin roost by removing the trees on the Schermerhorn Symphony Center property.** Balancing the interests of tree and bird advocates can be challenging. To avoid distressing the Purple Martins, ornithological experts maintain that removing the trees is preferable to leaving the trees in place and using harassment techniques to drive the birds to another location. BIRD Research Coordinator Laura Cook explains, "Purple Martin populations have declined by 23% and migration can be the most dangerous time in their life cycle. Using harassment techniques at a migration roost is not effective and potentially detrimental to these vulnerable birds." Tree removal as the safest and most effective approach for the Purple Martins has also been validated by Johnathan Walls, Nashville District Supervisor for the USDA.
- 2. The Nashville Symphony will replace all 31 trees removed from the Schermerhorn campus.** Working with landscape architect Hawkins Partners, Inc. and a steering committee of local stakeholders, we have developed a replanting plan that will use native trees to provide canopy for downtown residents, workers, and visitors, and that will be less attractive to Purple Martins.
- 3. The trees owned by Metro along Demonbreun Street will remain in place. The trees owned by Metro along Symphony Place will likewise remain in place, subject to dedicated efforts to divert the Purple Martins elsewhere prior to arrival of the roost.** These non-harmful diversionary tactics will include tree pruning, dimming area lights, and other non-harassing techniques approved by ornithology experts. A trained observer will be engaged to monitor these trees in the months of June and July for any appearance of Purple Martins. If there are any signs the birds are scouting the Symphony for a return, the trees will be removed from Symphony Place immediately to divert the imminent roost to another location. If removal should become necessary, these trees will be replaced with native species.
- 4. Recognizing the vital importance of the urban tree canopy, the Nashville Symphony will donate 115 additional trees to Metro Parks for planting downtown and elsewhere in coordination with the NTCC.**
- 5. Working with the BIRD Program of Friends of Warner Parks, the Nashville Symphony will provide for the acquisition of radio transmitters to track the Purple Martins.** This contribution will support ongoing research efforts to better understand the Purple Martin population and migration behavior and represents the Nashville Symphony's gratitude to the local conservation community for their partnership.

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