

<b>English and Scientific names:</b>	Brown-chested Martin <i>Progne tapera</i>
<b>Number of individuals:</b>	1
<b>Locality: LOUISIANA:</b>	Cameron Parish
<b>Specific Locality:</b>	Fruge Road area between Chalkley Road and Pine Pasture Road; .4 south of Pine Pasture Road.
<b>Date(s) when observed:</b>	September 6, 2009
<b>Time(s) of day when observed:</b>	About 4:53-5:00 pm
<b>Reporting observer and address:</b>	Paul Conover Lafayette
<b>Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):</b>	None
<b>Other observers who independently identified the bird(s)</b>	None
<b>Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light):</b>	Overcast with storms in the area. Lighting wasn't that great. Bird perched to W of me, and on telephone line. It was late afternoon and what light there was, was directly behind bird although it was cloudy for most of the sighting.
<b>Optical equipment:</b>	Zeiss 10s, Sony 60x videocam, Nikon D50 with 200 mm lens. I never used a scope because the videocam was on the window mount.
<b>Distance to bird(s):</b>	From ca. 60 yds down to perhaps 25-30 yds.
<b>Duration of observation:</b>	About 7 minutes according to the duration of the video.
<b>Habitat:</b>	Area of ricefields, pastureland, and marsh.
<b>Behavior of bird:</b>	Perched on line preening or looking around. Didn't flush when many other birds did. Sat tight and upright; didn't appear overly jumpy but was alert and clearly aware of my presence. Somewhat typical martin behavior.
<b>Circumstances of sighting:</b>	I may have seen this bird a few minutes before at a different location. I saw a martin on Chalkley Road with a large group of swallows but the distance and angle didn't allow for a good look. A truck and then a Cooper's Hawk flushed the birds. After the hawk passed, the flock abandoned the area.

At about 4:50 I encountered a large flock of swallows along Fruge Road. Among the flock there were about 200 Bank, perhaps 50 Tree, a few Cliff and Barn Swallow, and one martin. The birds were lined up tightly on lines running N and S. The lines were on the W side of the road. I was approaching from the S, thus the birds were visible from the driver side window. The martin was in the middle of the flock on the highest line.

I stopped short of the flock and started scanning. The martin looked interesting but was too far to prove anything. I started to count the birds, first by 10s. After I did a rough count, I approached a little closer and was even with the S edge of the very long flock. I was able to see spaces between individual birds from this perspective and started counting by ones. My scan reached the martin and I thought I saw a paler patch on the chin and throat that wrapped behind the rear edge of the auriculars, not unlike a female Purple Martin, but it also appeared to have a fairly broad transverse band of brown across the upper breast, and there appeared to be a thin blotted line running along the keel line. In short, the bird appeared to have the key field marks of a Brown-chested Martin, in particular the migratory subspecies, *P. tapera fusca*, which I had long been generally aware of, and had by chance spent a good deal of time studying the evening before.

Although I thought it looked suggestive of that species I was still a bit distant, and I realized that the somewhat variable Purple Martin needed to be eliminated, especially as it was possible I was being biased by the article on rare martins I had read the night before. I approached a little nearer and began to videotape just in case, although at a bad angle. The bird was preening and on much of that section of tape the field marks are obscured. Because of the angle, direction, and light (I was looking to the N-W, into an overcast but bright afternoon sky— basically badly lit birds against a badly lit sky), I

wasn't able to confirm the field marks to my satisfaction, so I pulled up even with the bird.

The distance was better, as was the angle, but I was now looking W at a backlit bird against an overcast sky. The marks looked good, but I was afraid that I might be seeing a female-type Purple Martin with the dusky areas washed out and appearing white in the poor light, and perhaps wet feathering on the breast mimicking the pattern of a Brown-chested. In hindsight I realized that part of the problem was that the malar region was actually not white but dingy brownish-white, and the white area of the throat was narrowly confined to the center. In profile the dingy malar area sometimes blocked the narrow white areas of the throat and chin giving an appearance more or less resembling a female Purple Martin. Thus, the best field mark appeared only intermittently depending on the bird's posture.

**Description:**

A martin (thus a large swallow) clearly a few inches longer than any of the swallow species present (Bank, Barn, Cliff, Tree). Long-winged with long primary projection. Wings reached almost to tail tip. Superficial appearance brown above and white with darker markings below.

Brown of back dull, not very different from the dorsal color of Bank Swallows. Flight feathers of wing and tail darker but without strong contrast to dorsal color. A few tertials fringed noticeably in white.

Pure white of chin and throat constricted on sides by combo of broad, indistinctly darker brownish-white malar and submoustachial stripe which formed "jowls," or a sort of offset echo pattern running parallel to the clean brown lower edge of auriculars. The dingy brownish-white of the malar area continued rearward on the sides of the neck and wrapped broadly behind the rear edge of the auriculars in a noticeably pale but not strongly contrasting partial collar. This pale collar was interrupted posteriorly by the broad brown stripe of

the nape. In direct profile the bird appeared capped at times.

A broad brownish transverse band, well-defined but with blurry edges ran completely across the upper breast (somewhat as in Bank Swallow). Below this band, following an interruption of perhaps 1 cm, a longitudinal stripe of dark-based feathers with whitish edges ran along the keel of the bird.

Because of the whitish edges, this stripe was largely concealed and was noticeable more as a suggestion than a distinct stripe. Had I not known to look for this mark, I might have written it off as just a cleft in the breast feathering. The flanks were dark brown, concolorous with the breast band, forming a short of opened vest that just barely extended beyond the folded wing and was thus only slightly exposed. Underparts below breastband (except for stippled keel stripe) clear white through the undertail coverts. Undertail coverts long, exposing only a short length of dark tail tip.

Bill about as in Purple Martin, perhaps as long as distance from front of eye to bill base, slightly curved downward along length. Eyes dark. Legs dark.

**Voice:**

Not heard.

**Similar species:**

My biggest concern at the time of sighting was the possibility of aberrant, faded, or wet **Purple Martin** but this individual unambiguously shows the field marks of Brown-chested. No other martin species are completely brown-backed without gloss at this age.

**Bank Swallow:** This bird dwarfed the ~200 Bank Swallows it was with

**Photographs or tape recordings obtained?**

Photos, video

**Previous experience with this species:**

None in life, but long familiar with the species through photos.

<b>Identification aids:</b>	I had coincidentally read the article on martin ID from a 2002 Birding the evening before the sighting.
<b>This description is written from:</b>	Fresh memory.
<b>Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain:</b>	Yes. The bird is consistent in all regards with Brown-chested Martin.
<b>Date and time:</b>	September 06, 2009 @ 11:20 PM

Darker photos are the originals, lighter versions have had “Brightness” adjusted only.







