Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff wish you a Happy Mother’s Day. We suggest a family outing to one of our many beautiful parks to celebrate the day. April has been cooler than normal with sufficient rain to keep the flowers blooming and the birds and bees happy. Unfortunately, conditions have spawned a healthy mosquito population in the wetlands, so bring insect repellent to walk the wooded trails.

Volunteer activities
The Tuesday Volunteers have spread a lot of Christmas Tree mulch. They also constructed trellises for the vegetable garden. They have continued with the general maintenance of the grounds, trimming trees and bushes, picking up fallen limbs, removing unwanted plants, cleaning and touching up trail signs and a variety of other chores. The master gardeners have been removing invasive plants, transplanting native wildflowers and putting out plant identification signs. Our vegetable gardeners have gotten off to a great start, and the plants are rapidly growing. May and June promise some good harvest. Our woodworkers have been busy in the workshop, building cabinets and other appliances for their future work. Our blacksmith has also been active and creative, taking several pieces of dead wood from areas cleared by the yaupon crew this winter and turning them into works of art. Some of these are now on display in the lobby. He has also made some new branded trail signs to replace some that have rotted over time.

A Closer Look at Nature
The class about bats was in late March, so the report missed that newsletter. It was a great class and after the lecture the kids tried their own ears out in a bat echolocation game. The “bat,” a blindfolded child, would call out and the “moths” would respond so the bat could find them. The circle of kids were trees that kept the moth and bat in bounds. It was great fun, and the kids began to have some understanding of how bats utilize echolocation to catch their prey.

Above, the “bat” uses only his hearing to chase the “moths” while encircled by “trees.” Photo by Fred Collins.
The April class was about life in the pond. The kids visited two of our ponds to catch denizens and compared what they found in the ponds. The kids were enthusiastic and relished each new capture. They caught mosquito fish, water beetles, crawfish, bloodworms and various insect larvae. The critters, some of them seemingly alien in origin, were released back into the pond after everyone had a chance to examine them.

The kids found many interesting critters in the new water feature. Photo by Kendra Kocab.

The final class for the spring semester will be May 17: Aphids and Aphid Eaters (Ladybugs, Lacewings, and More!).

**A Closer Look at History**
The April class was called the Road to San Jacinto. The kids learned about the route and actions of Sam Houston and his Texan Army as they traveled from Gonzales to San Jacinto and to Texas Independence. Following the class the kids played a “Road to San Jacinto” game. They rolled dice to move along a route of activity stations where they shared some of the frustrations, bad luck and good luck of the Texas Army soldiers on the road to San Jacinto.

The final “A Closer Look at History” class for the Spring Semester will be May 3: World’s Fairs and Expositions.

At left, the lecture portion of the class. At right, the kids play a game of the Road to San Jacinto. The “training” station was popular. Photos by Fred Collins.
History Discussion Group

Fred Collins, park director and author, led the discussion of the book, *Gail Borden, Pioneer*. The book inspired Nina Hendee, local restaurateur and Texas historian, to declare Gail Borden as her favorite Texas hero. It is a biography of Gail Borden and his family. He and his brother Tom made the decision to come to Texas in 1822. Tom was waiting for Stephen F. Austin to arrive from Mexico City and establish the first 300 land grants. He became one of Austin’s most trusted surveyors. Gail arrived in 1829 with the balance of the Borden clan and worked for Austin, documenting land grants for the colony. The four Borden brothers were all active during the Texas Revolution; all except Gail fought at the Battle of San Jacinto. Gail was trying to move his printing press, the official voice of the newly declared independent Texas, from the advancing Mexican Army. Gail Borden displayed honesty, loyalty and perseverance during the revolution and republic era. His faith and his perseverance sustained him through several entrepreneurial failures but eventually allowed him to succeed as an industry pioneer. He patented an evaporated milk process, created Eagle Brand Milk and established the successful Borden Dairy company.


Special History Presentation

Thanks to Rosehill Christian School we were able to host a presentation by Amanda Danning in April. Amanda is a forensic artist and her work is focused on archeological finds, rather than criminal investigations. Using clay, she reconstructs the faces of historical figures from their skeletal remains. She has worked extensively with the Texas Historical Commission and is a consultant for the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. She presented “Skeletons in My Closet,” a program about some of her favorite and most fascinating subjects.

Houston Archeology Society Project

The society used a ground-penetrating radar to search for evidence of former structures on the property when they met for a workday on March 24. It is highly educational to watch them work and discuss the tools of their trade. Please check their website for future work days at Kleb Woods Nature Preserve.

German Language Classes

Formal German Language Classes continued with a German 1-A, and German 1-B. German 1-A and 1-B are the equivalent of high school German 1, while our German 2-A and 2-B are the equivalent of high school German 2. These classes will conclude in May. There will be three “Introduction to the German Language Classes” this summer. If you have been curious about taking German, we suggest you attend one of these summer classes to get a feel for the language. These classes are one hour and you only need attend one of the three. Please consult the web calendar for class dates and times. If you have any other questions, please contact Linda Martin-Rust at klebwoods@pct3.com.

Birding activities

The weekly bird walks in April are always interesting since migration is in full swing and each day is filled with anticipation. The migrant tally was impressive as always: Anhinga, Green Heron, Mississippi Kite, Swainson’s Hawk, Great-Crested Flycatcher, Red-Eyed Vireo, several species of Swallow, Indigo Bunting, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles and many Warblers: Tennessee, Nashville, Black-and-White, Hooded, Northern Parula, Magnolia, Chestnut-Sided, and Black-Throated Green. Migration can be dramatic and such an event occurred on April 11. A cold front passed and brought cold north wind and drizzle. A tired and cold flock of Chimney Swifts that had recently arrived from the Amazon Basin took refuge in our Chimney Swift Tower. The bird walk participants watched as dozens of Swifts took refuge during the middle of the morning. A couple weeks later, the bird walk tallied 212 swifts leaving the tower in the morning.

During the month we also had a Warbler identification workshop. The workshop featured 37 specimens of beautiful spring Warblers from the Texas A&M University Biodiversity, Research and Teaching Collection. The program used photographs and specimens to help the participants see the salient features of each species. They were able to closely compare several sets of lookalike species to better understand the differences to identify them in the field. Following the lecture was a “test.” A bingo game. Warbler photos were displayed on the screen which the participant had to identify and locate on their bingo card. It was great way to end the workshop. This workshop was timed so that the participants could use their new skills on the next two bus trips over the final weeks of Warbler migration.
The first April Senior Birding Bus Trip went to Emma Long Metropolitan Park and then Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park, both in Austin. These parks feature hill county habitats and birds typically not found in the Houston area. Spring in the hill country is always special because of the glorious array of wildflowers. The photographers took full advantage of them. The first stop was at Turkey Creek trail in Emma Long Park. This beautiful creek through the cedar and oak clad hills is perfect habitat for the endangered Golden-Cheeked Warbler. Some of the participants heard the Warbler and a few lucky people caught glimpses of the bird, but they proved rather elusive the morning of the trip. The participants saw other hill country birds including Black-Chinned Hummingbird, Ladder-Backed Woodpecker, Black-Crested Titmouse, and Bewick’s Wren. But for many, just the walk along the beautiful Turkey Creek made the trip worthwhile.

At left, Turkey Creek at Emma Long Metropolitan Park. At right, some of the many wildflowers which were a treat for all. Photos by Jean-Michel Lanskin.

The second destination was Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park on the Colorado River. This park has some cedar clad hills, but is mostly in the river bottom. In the big pecan and cypress trees the group found Yellow-Throated and Parula Warblers, Yellow-Throated Vireo and Summer Tanager. Other highlights in this park were Wild Turkey, Greater Roadrunner, a Great Horned Owl nest with an adult and two chicks, Golden-Fronted Woodpecker, Ash-Throated Flycatcher, Clay-Colored Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, and Lesser Goldfinch. All together the seniors totaled 70 species of birds on the trip.

At left, a view of the Colorado River at Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park. Photo by Jean-Michel Lanskin.
At right, participants enjoy a lunch break among the bluebonnets. Photo spontaneously generated by Vicki’s cell phone.
A highlight from the trip was a Great Horned Owl and its nest in a big Texas pecan tree. The owl and its young proved to be photogenic.

On most of our reports we talk about special birds we go on quests for, but all our trips feature common birds too. Bird watchers and photographers never tire of the common birds because they always see them doing something unexpected or otherwise touching. Male cardinals earn their rank in some ways by their ability to feed lots of young. They are always quick to show their ability and willingness to provide for their family. One of our photographers watched a male cardinal catch and “prepare” a juicy caterpillar which he then shared with his mate. Kind of reminds me of Lady and the Tramp.
The April Encore Trip was on April 27 during the height of spring migration to Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Houston Audubon’s High Island sanctuaries and Rollover Pass. Since the trip is so late in the month it will be reported on in the next newsletter.

**Signing Up for Senior Birding Bus Trips (Must be at least 50 years old to go on these trips)**

There is now a waitlist for the **May 11** trip which will go to the Sabine Pass area on the coast to look for spring migrants. You may also now sign up for the **June 1** trip which will be around the Greater Houston Area to search out exotic species like Egyptian Goose, Indian Peacock, Red-Vented Bulbul, Northern Red Bishop and Scaly-Breasted Munia. The **July 6** trip which will travel to Jones State Forest to search for Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and points east near the Lower Trinity River in search of Swallow-Tailed kites.

To sign up for these trips, email klebwoods@pct3.com or call 281-357-5324. You may only sign up yourself plus one friend/spouse. No multiple reservations. **You will get a confirmation e-mail a week before the trip if you have a seat.**

**The calendars** for May and June can be found on the [www.pct3.com](http://www.pct3.com) website at Community Calendars. There is also a link from the park’s web page.

**Dog owners**: Pets are not allowed in Kleb Woods Nature Preserve. The scent they leave negatively affects wildlife. For your convenience and enjoyment, Precinct Three maintains five popular dog parks where your dog can run free. The dog parks have their own set of rules. Please visit the Precinct Three website [www.pct3.com](http://www.pct3.com) for more information.