Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff wish you a wonderful spring and a happy Easter holiday. Texas in April is a paradise for birdwatchers. Each year millions of Neotropical migrants travel from winter homes in South and Central America into North America to breed. More than half of these birds that fill the vast expanses of the continent travel through Texas on their way north, and about 80% pass through in April. The movement is much like a wave that crests in late April. Cold fronts and thunderstorms ground these travelers and give birdwatchers a chance to see them. So while April showers will bring May flowers, what they bring immediately is a variety of colorful songbirds. If you go outside and look in your trees right after a storm hits this April, you will likely see a small representative of this annual passage.

**Volunteer Activities**

The “Yaupon's Worst Nightmare Crew” completed another highly productive season, with two significant areas cleared for reforestation and dozens of trees cleared of competitive brush. They also cleared some mist net lanes for a future bird monitoring program that will begin this May. The forest is a bit healthier because of their efforts. We thank them for their strenuous and powerful work.

The Woodworkers have been repairing the siding on our 100-year old barn. It is challenging since the “new” siding is 100 years old as well. They also have moved the whirligig to the corner of the barn, which was not a simple task. The Tuesday Volunteers continue their productive contributions. This past month they have worked clearing stumps and snags in newly cleared areas, made two new cedar-bordered flowerbeds, and performed a multitude of maintenance tasks. The Vegetable Gardeners were able to plant the summer garden before the end of the month. This year they planted tomatoes, peppers, watermelon, sorghum, black-eyed peas, cucumbers, and okra. Some of these would have been grown by the Kleb family. This small group of dedicated volunteers will tend to these seeds and plants throughout the growing season. They will then reap the benefits of the delicious vegetables they produce, as will the many visitors who learn from this demonstration garden. Whatever your knowledge or skill level, the Vegetable Garden Volunteers would love to have you join them. Garden Volunteers are welcome to come any time. Call us for more information. The Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardeners have been busy cleaning up beds from winter slumber and nurturing the spring growth. If you would like to join this productive group, just show up Tuesday morning about 9:00 a.m. and join the fun.
A CLOSER LOOK AT HISTORY

The March Class was called “Going West with Stephen F. Austin’s Colony.” Amid Westward Expansion in 1821, Austin took over his father Moses’ Empresario Grant from the Mexican government to begin settling families in Texas. These first settlers to Austin’s colony were known as “The Old Three Hundred.” The class learned how the State of Texas was a prime example of Westward Expansion, and why Austin became known as “The Father of Texas.” Austin’s land grants were the best offered in Texas because of his surveys and consolidated map. Consequently, the kids did a mapping activity following class. They first learned about map scales and map keys. Then they determined how many of their steps equaled 50 feet, which they used for scale on their maps. The kids took to the Farm Trail to “map” it and jot down defining landmarks as if they were the first settlers to discover the trail.

Future “A Closer Look at History” classes will be about Life in Jamestown and the Missions of Texas.
Closer Look at Nature
The March Class was all about eggs in nature. The program covered the great diversity of animals that lay eggs. The kids saw some of nature’s most bizarre eggs, some with names like “mermaid necklace” or “mermaid purse”. They also learned about the many ways eggs are cared for until they hatch. After class, the kids watched as staff members set Henrietta the Hen on a dozen eggs. Henrietta is on view in the Young Naturalist Room at the nature center. The eggs should hatch in early April, just in time for our next “A Closer Look at Nature Class” on April 4. With luck, participants coming for that class might get to watch the chicks hatch!

At left, a staff member explains how the eggs will be placed under the hen. At right, the hen sits contently on the eggs. Photos by Megan Ahlgren.

The final “A Closer Look at Nature Class” for the spring semester will look at how fast baby birds grow and at spiders.

School Field Trips
We again hosted the 7th graders from Rosehill Christian School for their Annual Texas Independence Day Field Trip. This year we presented a class about George Washington’s Secret Six Spy Ring. The students really liked the story, and as a follow-up activity tried their hand at writing with invisible ink. They used feather quill pens to write a hidden message which was revealed by heating the paper over a candle. They also visited the farm house and took a nature walk along the Farm Trail.

On March 8, the Third Graders from Keith Elementary in Cypress visited the Nature Center. Accompanied by 25 teachers and parents, 177 students had an active day as they visited six different stations for nature and history activities. They visited the Kleb Home, saw a blacksmith demonstration, learned about the life of Sam Houston, did a nature walk, explored the Young Naturalist Room and met Papagalla the Parrot, and played a bird migration game. It was a memorable and educational day for the kids.

At left, the kids from Keith Elementary arrive. At right, the students enjoy a nature walk. Photos by Linda Martin-Rust.
History Discussion Group
The March discussion focused on WWII in the Pacific and specifically the Marines and their experiences. The discussion was led by Fred Collins and Fred used his father, an infantryman in the 4th Marine Division as a focal point for the discussion. Many of the participants in the discussion also had fathers who served in the war and all had similar experiences of their father not telling them much about their war experience. The group looked at specific actions of the 4th Division and how incidents that the Marines witnessed were so horrific that it was little wonder they did not want to remember the experiences by talking about them. World War II topics are popular with our participants, and we will return to the subject later in the year. We were able to utilize a new flat screen TV as a computer monitor for this group and show charts, maps, and photos that the group could all see and discuss together. It is a great addition for the discussion group.

Our next history discussion will be April 11. Historian Karli Pitman will review the book: Custer's Fall, The Native American Side Of The Story by David Humphreys Miller. The May 9 discussion will be led by Historian Paul Scott. He will review the book: A History of the World in 6 Glasses by Tom Standage. The June 13 discussion will be about the removal of the Buffalo from the Great Plains in the 1869-1879 period. It will draw from several books including The Buffalo War: The History Of The Red River Indian Uprising Of 1874 by James L. Haley published in 1976 and The Border And The Buffalo: An Untold Story Of The Southwest Plains by John R. Cook published in 1906

German Language Classes
Formal German Classes are well into the Spring Semester including German 1-A, German 1-B and German 2-A. The students are looking forward to their graduation test and orations to complete the various courses. 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. If you have any other questions, please contact Linda Martin-Rust at klebwoods@pct3.hctx.net.

Plant Walks
The first walk of the spring was on March 20, an appropriate date since it was the official first day of spring. The walk began with an examination of various tree buds brought in by one of the leaders. It then progressed to a lengthy discussion about the Hercules Club Tree across from the steps of the nature center. The walk then continued down the Wetlands Trail to Myrtle's Pool. The good-size group learned ways to identify many plants, including the confusing Water Oak which can have leaves shaped like almost every other Oak. One of the highlights was finding a Little Mermaid wetland plant.

At left, the plant walk participants learn about the Hercules Club, also known as the Toothache Tree. Photo by Albert Holba. At right, many were delighted to find out that this wetland plant is called Mermaid Weed. Photo by Megan Ahlgren.

Birding activities
The Weekly Bird Walks in March saw the dwindling of winter species and the return of summer residents and spring migrants. A Red-breasted Nuthatch continued through the end of the month. Some wintering species, like Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Hermit Thrush, are beginning to sing, preparing for their journey north. Other notable March sightings include two Bald Eagles, Great Crested Flycatcher, Black-and-white Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Northern Parula.

We had an afternoon birding program in March. David Sarkozi presented "Allow Me to Get Technical." The program focused on eBird, a Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology computer program that allows your personal observations to be used in a database that tracks bird populations worldwide. It also gives the user many personal benefits that allows the
observer’s bird sightings to be summarized and for various lists to be created automatically. The phone app for this program permits a birder to keep and update their sightings as they walk a trail or travel a route. The program is so popular that it has now accumulated over one million checklists by US observers alone.

The March **Senior Birding Bus Trip** went in search of Golden-cheeked Warblers. Since the trip was March 29, it will be reported 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 waiting list for the **April 12** trip to Boykin Springs to look for Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman’s Sparrow. You may now sign up for the **April 26** and **May 3** trips to coastal sites for spring migrants as well as the **June 7** trip to look for exotic species in the greater Houston area. To sign up for these trips, email **klebwoods@pct3.hctx.net** 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 April and May can be found on the **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** for more information.

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