Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff wish you a happy May Day, a memorable Mother’s Day, a celebratory Graduation Day, and an enjoyable Memorial Day. Commissioner Radack will again host a ceremony on Memorial Day at 2:00 p.m. at the War Memorial in Bear Creek Pioneers Park, and we invite you to attend and remember those who died protecting our freedoms.

May is a wonderful month to enjoy the Precinct Parks, and we hope you take full advantage of the many parks Commissioner maintains. Wildflowers reach their peak in early May, and the woods are full of bird songs and busy birds that are feeding young during the month. We have a full schedule of programs this summer, including Discovery Days which should provide your children with some interesting and novel experiences learning about history and nature.

**Volunteer Activities**

During April, we benefited from three service projects. Two were done by groups of Boy Scouts and the other by a local church group. One of these projects helped put down newspaper and mulch in the vegetable garden while the other two made a major dent in the mountain of recycled Christmas Tree mulch by spreading it on our trails. **Tuesday Volunteers** continue their weekly contributions to the maintenance and improvement of the preserve and historic farm. They have assisted the Gardeners by building trellises for the growing vegetables. The dominate structure in the back of the garden is for the luffa gourds. It may look stark now, but watch for more pictures in the coming months. We only hope it is big enough! The crew has also trimmed and mulched trails, watered transplanted trees, and kept up with general maintenance of fences, boardwalks and structures. The **Woodworkers** have continued repairing the siding on our 100-year-old barn by installing “new” batten boards where needed. It is challenging since the “new” siding is 100 years old as well. The **Vegetable Gardeners** have a beautiful garden which is growing rapidly. The beans are climbing, tomatoes blooming and starting to produce fruit. The **Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardeners** have been busy cleaning up beds from winter slumber and nurturing the spring growth. They have sprouted several tree seeds which we hope to plant during the month of May. 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**

This month’s class focused on Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement of America. The students learned about the settlers’ long journey to the New World, and their troubles upon arrival. After several difficult months, the settlers began
to build a fort, which they named Jamestown after the current King of England. Conflicts arose with the Algonquian Native Americans under Chief Powhatan, but a marriage between the chief’s daughter and John Rolfe, a leader of the Jamestown Fort, brought a period of relative peace. When John Rolfe introduced a new type of tobacco plant that was easier to farm, the settlement was able to thrive and grow, and eventually become a Royal Colony. Following class, the students tried their hand at games played by the children of Jamestown, like hopscotch, marbles, pickup sticks, and button whizzers.

The final class of the Spring Semester will be about the Missions of Texas on May 2. The kids will make real adobe bricks -- so be prepared to take home muddy children. Should be a stompin’ good time.

**A Closer Look at Nature**

The April Class was about how fast baby birds grow. The kids learned about the babies of many different types of birds, how different they can look after hatching, and their developmental stages leading up to maturity. The class saw how a baby bird grows in the egg and after hatching. They were impressed with how some birds can go from helpless, tiny chicks to fully feathered birds in little more than two weeks. Their favorite portion was a video of Hooded Merganser Ducklings leaving the nest hole in a tree where they hatched. The ducklings make a bold leap, falling fifty feet through the air and landing with a bounce on a cushion of leaves on the ground. The squeals and giggles impressed us all with a reminder of how wondrous childhood is. Baby birds are not the only things that grow up fast.

At the end of last month’s class, the kids watched as a staff member set Henrietta the Hen on a dozen eggs. Following this class, the kids went into the Young Naturalist Room and saw the eleven chicks she hatched. They marveled at how cute they were, and probably asked the Easter Bunny to leave one for them in their Easter Basket.

At left, Henrietta with her chicks. At right, kids experience holding a week old chick. Photos by Megan Ahlgren.

The final class for the spring semester will be “All About Spiders” on May 16.

**School Visitation Groups**

On April 17, the fourth grade from Westwood Elementary in the Spring Branch ISD visited the Nature Center. The 92 students, accompanied by 12 teachers and parents, had an active day as they visited four different stations for nature and history activities. They visited the Kleb Home, did a nature walk, explored the Young Naturalist’s Room, met Papagalla the Parrot, and learned about the life of Sam Houston, who was the Hero of San Jacinto. It was a memorable and educational day for the kids, who had a chance to learn things away from the pressures of the classroom and test scores. We hope it excited them to learn more about history and science.

**History Discussion Group**

The April discussion was led by Historian Karli Pitman. She reviewed the book *Custer’s Fall: The Native American Side of the Story* by David Humphreys Miller. The discussion covered some biographical information about Custer and his military record. The group talked about the causes for the military action against the Lakotas and other tribes in the Dakota Region in the mid-1870s. One of the participants, who had read the book and visited the battleground, added to the discussion. While it is easy to blame the massacre on Custer, he followed military protocol and tried to complete his mission. However, he had inaccurate information and was leading under the false premise that the Native Americans would disperse and disappear as soon as he and his troops were discovered. Unfortunately for Custer, instead of running away they ran to fight, and he was overwhelmed.
Our next history discussion on **May 9** 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 led by Albert Holba who will review World War II in the Pacific. His focus will be the major naval actions and the personalities that dictated the events. The **July 11** 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 will conclude the Spring Semester in May. The students are preparing for their finals. 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. Watch for a new German series in the fall, “A Closer Look at German Heritage.”

**Plant Walks**

There was one plant walk in April. It was an excellent one since it was close to the peak of spring wildflower blooms. All of the participants were full of questions and curiosity, and left the walk with much more knowledge about the plants they see around them every day. A lack of rainfall in March has depressed some flowering plants, but showers have returned in April, so May flowers should highlight our final plant walk of the spring on May 15.

**Earth Day**

On April 13, in celebration of Earth Day, we held a series of activities to educate people about small things they can do to be environmentally conscious. Visitors learned about building a rainwater harvest system, making eco-friendly household cleaning products, using old T-shirts to make grocery totes, and planting vegetable and native wildflower seeds in egg cartons. One of the most popular activities was starting their own worm farms to decompose compost and improve their gardens. In addition, visitors enjoyed touring the Kleb House and seeing blacksmith demonstrations in the barn. A highlight on the day’s plant walks included seeing Monarch Caterpillars on our Milkweed, as well as a Monarch Chrysalis and newly emerged butterflies. As always, the activities were a big hit among kids and adults alike. We hope you will join us for the festivities next year.
At left, a volunteer helps kids plant seeds in egg cartons. At right, the group learns about various hummingbird flowers on a plant walk. Photos by Albert Holba.

Above, a volunteer shows these families how to turn their old t-shirts into reusable tote bags. Photos by Albert Holba.

**Birding activities**

The weekly bird walks in April are always filled with anticipation of spring migrants. This year's April walks were all well attended and filled with interesting birds. The first walk of the month was attended by three birders visiting from California. Their most sought after birds were Blue Jay and Tufted Titmouse. They were not disappointed and left in high spirits with tips from our staff on where to find their other targets. We also had an Ohio visitor who was delighted to get some birding tips as well. I have no doubt that all four of the visitors thoroughly enjoyed Texas and remember our hospitality.

We had an afternoon birding program in April by Dr. Gary Voelker, Associate Professor and Curator of Birds at the Texas Biodiversity, Research and Teaching Collection at Texas A&M University along with Ms. Heather Prestridge, Staff Curator of the Texas Biodiversity, Research and Teaching Collection at Texas A&M University. She presented a program: "Staying Relevant; The role of natural history collections in a major University and beyond." The talk covered the history of the biological collections, their current status, and current projects and visions for the future. They also brought some bird specimens that helped illustrate the role of the collection as well as specimens that are at the center of some of Dr. Voelker’s research. Dr. Voelker presented research on how cryptic, undiscovered species were found during his African research
utilizing DNA analysis from blood samples. Those birds were put in the collection. Subsequently, when DNA evidence showed them likely to be unique species, he returned to the specimens. He compared and documented morphological differences that had formerly gone unnoticed. The collected specimens were the key to confirming the new species. In his work, he discovered a pattern among ecologically similar species and helped scientists understand the pattern of speciation among forest animals on the African Continent. Understanding these unique populations is the most important element in conserving African wildlife in this region.

The March Senior Birding Bus Trip went in search of Golden-cheeked Warblers. Since the trip was March 29, too late for the April newsletter, it is reported here. The Seniors boarded the bus extra early for a 5:00 a.m. departure from Kleb Woods. They traveled to Pedernales Falls State Park, southwest of Austin. Their target, causing the early morning departure, was the fabulous Golden-cheeked Warbler. The Warbler sings to establish its territory on spring mornings in late March and early April. The group arrived and dispersed looking and listening for the call of the special Warbler.

Above, the group sets out in search of Golden-cheeked Warblers. Photo by Jerry Chen.

They soon found a bird and had it in their scope by 9:30 a.m. Almost all thirty of the participants got a brief but clear look before the bird moved to another perch in a different border of its territory. For the next several hours the birders walked the park finding at least 5 of the songsters.

At left, a Golden-cheeked Warbler in full song. At right, the same bird prepares to move out. Photos by Mark Lear.

The wildflowers were lovely and in good variety. Everyone enjoyed the floral display of the Hill Country in spring.
At left, phlox and bluebonnets. Photo by Albert Holba. At right, a Texas Yellowstar and verbena. Photo by Barbara Pankratz.

At left, a prickly pear cactus with a high rise address in a mesquite tree. Photo by Albert Holba. At right, a Hedgehog Cactus. Photo by Barbara Pankratz.

The photographers even found the insects on the flowers to be photogenic. A couple of examples are included here. A Pipevine Swallowtail and a peculiar fly which is a bee mimic.

At left, a Pipevine Swallowtail. At right, a fly which mimics a bee. Photos by Dana Butters.
The water drip and feeders at the bird blind in the park allowed for some more leisurely photography targets and the birders spent a good amount of time there. As you can see, they had a good deal of success.

At left, a pair of House Finches visit a feeder. Photo by George Valdez. At right, a male Black-chinned Hummingbird. Photo by Albert Holba

Unfortunately, Pedernales Falls State Park is a good three and a half hour drive and it was too early when the Seniors had to bid farewell the wondrous birds and blooms of the Texas Hill Country.

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 May 3 trip to coastal sites for spring migrants. You may now sign up for the June 7 trip to look for exotic species in the greater Houston area and the July 12 trip to search for Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Swallow-tailed Kite. 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 May and June 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.