

Spring is here, and nature throws a party

By Gary Clark | April 10, 2015

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Photo: Kathy Adams Clark

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Be on the lookout for purple gallinules on Moccasin Pond during Migration Celebration at the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge near Brazoria.

The late comedian Robin Williams quipped, "Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party!'"

In reality, nature is instead doing the enterprising work of regenerating life. But it looks like a party with dazzling yellow flowers, flashy green trees and vibrantly plumed songbirds singing plangent tunes. Call it a celebration of new life, and take the family out to enjoy it.

A great place to go is San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge near Brazoria

for the annual Migration Celebration April 18-19. The family-oriented event will leave no person, regardless of age, lacking for fun.

The refuge sits on a critical flyway where flamboyantly feathered migratory hummingbirds, warblers, tanagers and orioles land to rest after exhausting flights across the Gulf of Mexico from winter homes in Latin America. Hence the event's name, Migration Celebration.

One of the joys is seeing migratory songbirds up close as licensed banders capture them for both scientific study and for you to view in their hands. I've watched children's eyes light up like candle flames and adult's faces beam like sun catchers when they see these extraordinary birds.

Events abound in the fairground atmosphere. Activities include microscopic views of pond creatures, learning animal fur and tracks, bird banding up close, live hawk and owl shows, refuge tours, and fish casting and bow-hunting demonstrations.

You can watch falconers fly hawks over your head while explaining the life story of the breathtaking birds, and children can scoop up pond creatures and become awestruck as they look through microscopes at the diversity of critters dwelling in water.

Nothing beats the excitement of a mash buggy hayride across the levees of the Wolfweed Reservoir. A naturalist will show you the abundant bird life, including egrets, herons, ducks, ibises and grebes. You'll also learn about the lives of fearsome-looking alligators.

Take a van tour along the road encircling Moccasin Pond, a sweeping landscape hosting a dizzying variety of marsh-dwelling birds. You'll see the radiantly plumed, chicken-size purple gallinule, which migrates from Mexico to breed on the refuge and struts on water vegetation with giant yellow feet.

Quite likely a handsome crested caracara - folk-named "Mexican eagle" for its white head - will swoop through the sky. Be sure to bring binoculars - and sunscreen.

Enjoy a guided walk along the San Bernard Oak Trail, which traverses a unique bottomland forest. The woods are like a concert hall resounding with melodies of songbirds. But the star attraction is the San Bernard Oak, the largest live oak in Texas, which witnessed the arrival of 19th-century pioneering settlers led by Stephen F. Austin.

MORE INFORMATION

Migration Celebration

When: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. April 18, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. April 19

Where: San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, 6801 County Road 306, Brazoria

Tickets: Free; migrationcelebration.org
