Volunteer activities

Tuesday Volunteers have been enjoying the cooler weather that makes their days more productive and pleasant. There is always new maintenance to be done. Kleb Woods is 130+ wooded acres and there are constantly downed limbs and trees to remove from the grounds and trails. With more than 800 feet of boardwalk, some now ten years old, carpentry work on it is now a regular maintenance item as well. The Woodworkers have remained busy as well, reworking the pump on our rainwater collection system, building and installing our water hose racks, and other regular maintenance. The Vegetable Gardeners’ historic garden is mostly resting for about 60 days, but winter greens of several varieties are growing nicely. The Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardeners have been helping with activity preparation for some of our “A Closer Look at Nature” classes in addition to their regular tasks. The volunteers remain active throughout the holiday season and would welcome you to join them. Just show up Tuesday morning about 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. The heritage vegetable garden volunteers meet every Saturday morning shortly after 8 a.m. if you would like to join them.

An Eagle Scout Project was completed in October. A young man did some wetland restoration work on the north wetland. He and his crew removed invasive Chinese Tallow trees. These trees dominate and shade wetlands making them unavailable for naturally occurring vegetation and the myriad of animals that live there. By removing the trees, the natural vegetation flourishes and the wetland is again useful to frogs, crayfish and wading birds.

Diggin’ Old Stuff

Our Annual Fall Heritage Festival was November 2 and was again well received by those who attended. Kids tried their hands at old-fashioned woodworking, cotton ginning and combing, working copper with the blacksmith, making rag dolls, writing calligraphy, playing 19th century games, weaving bracelets from yarn, tying knots, punching their names or designs into metal, making candles, dying cloth, and listening to dulcimer and bluegrass music. It was a busy day.
At left, a child uses a wood plane to create a smooth edge. At right, a young boy removes cotton from the comb. Photos by Martha Burchard.

At left, the blacksmith heat-treats a child’s project. Photo by Fred Collins. At right, Scouts make rag dolls. Photo by Amber Leung.

At left, a ride in the Emmett’s wagon is a favorite activity. At right, a girl is happy creating a bracelet of woven yarn. Photos by Amber Leung.
However, the most important activity of the day was “diggin’ old stuff” with the Houston Archeological Society. The Society’s work here at Kleb Woods Nature Preserve is led by professional archeologist, Ashley Jones. The Society had a variety of displays and activities for kids in addition to allowing the kids to participate in the excavation work. It is a wonderful opportunity for the kids to see how a professional dig operates. They helped dig artifacts from the ground and sift through the dirt removed from the excavation site. It was a fun, hands-on learning experience for them.
A Closer Look at History
The “A Closer Look at History” program in October was about the great race to complete the transcontinental railroad. That race had the western leg cross the forest and tunnels of the Rocky Mountains while the eastern leg quickly crossed the gentler plains. They met in Promontory Point, Utah in 1869. The kids also learned about the effort to build a train from Houston north in the Brazos Valley cotton fields in the 1850s. That train went through Cypress as it worked its way to Hempstead, Bryan, Waco, and Dallas. After class, the kids had their own version of a railroad-building race and experience being a railroad worker. One team had to wind their way toward the finish line, clear a “forest” and tunnel through a “mountain”. The other team had a long smooth run but almost twice the distance of the more difficult route.
At left, a team encounters a “forest” to clear. At right, the team must tunnel through this “mountain.” Photos by Fred Collins.

At left, the team’s pace quickens as they near the finish line. Photo by Fred Collins. At right, the other team was comprised of younger children. Photo by Megan Ahlgren.

Above, with a little supervision from a mom, the team began to grasp the task and work together. Photo by Megan Ahlgren.
Above, the younger team was soon laying track together and making a race out of it. Photo by Megan Ahlgren.

A Closer Look at Nature
The “A Closer Look at Nature” program in October was about weird and wonderful bugs. The kids were shown many examples of bizarre insects and other arthropods. They enjoyed learning how to say Armadillidae, the family name for the familiar pill bug. They saw a curious video of click beetles and learned how the big beetle “clicks” to startle a potential predator. They also saw the “scary” false eyes of moths, again a predator defense for a harmless big moth. Following class, the kids ventured into the nature preserve to search for real live fascinating insects. They had great success, and spent a good amount of time looking carefully for bugs all around them.

At left, a young boy learns about using a net to catch a prize. At right, an older boy has perfected his catching technique. Photos by Fred Collins.
History Discussion Group
Jay Gavitt led our November discussion. He reviewed the book *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* by Nathaniel Philbrick. This history book describes the experiences of the Pilgrims of the Ship Mayflower and their difficult experiences settling in Massachusetts in 1619. While most of us know the legend of the Pilgrims, much of the reality is left out of our popular stories. Jay relayed the true story of the settlement and the First Thanksgiving, and then told how things became much less congenial fifty years later. Jay is something of an expert about the Mayflower since he had a distant relative on the Ship. He also referred to another book during the discussion, *Making Haste from Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims and Their World: A New History* by Nick Bunker. This book covers the same ground, but is more up to date and includes more information about the Pilgrims’ daily existence.

Our December History discussion will be a lighter one: Favorite Christmas Movies, Generation by Generation. We hope you come and share your favorites with us.

Plant Walks
This month’s plant walk was an exciting one as our guide, Paul Roling, took everyone to see the first ever Orchid found at Kleb Woods, called “Nodding Lady’s Tresses.” While not the showiest Orchid, its delicate white flowers were a delight to see. Our next target was perhaps the complete opposite of the Orchid, a Stinkhorn. This odd-looking fungus gets its name for the unpleasant smell it gives off. Flies are attracted to the smell and can often be seen foraging on Stinkhorns. Lastly, Paul spent time talking about fall colors. The Houston area is not known for its fall colors, and in fact a lot of the color you do see comes from invasive Chinese Tallow trees. Paul used Tallow leaves to explain how the colors go from green to yellow to red. The day after the plant walk, many trees from Black Locusts to Sycamores seemed to change color over night! Perhaps they were encouraged by Paul’s talk.
Birding activities
The weekly bird walks in late October and November saw the balance of wintering species arrive and the last of the fall migrants depart. We held our traditional Halloween bird walk on the last Wednesday in October. The walk was highlighted by “Grave Boo Heron”, “Blood-bellied Woodpeckers”, and “Blue-gray Body-snatchers” -- the special names given for Halloween. As usual, Kendra was close at hand to hear any slip of the tongue when participants failed to use the special Halloween bird names. When this happened, she sentenced them to sample her “evil bag” of “trick or treat” jellybeans.

This month’s Wednesday afternoon bird program was called “As a Matter of Fact: Fun and Sometimes Useless Bird Facts.” Staff Naturalists Kendra Kocab and Megan Ahlgren regaled the audience with amusing facts involving bird biology, taxonomy, biomimicry, and more. Participants learned about the amazing flying capabilities of Frigatebirds, Common Swifts, Bar-tailed Godwits, and Ruppell’s Griffon Vulture.

The October Senior Birding Bus Trip went to Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary, then the Quintana and Surfside Jetties, and ended the day at Lafitte’s Cove in Galveston. The weather was good, with sunny skies and tolerable temperatures. There were a good number of migratory songbirds at Quintana Sanctuary, including Eastern Wood-Pewee, a small Empidonax Flycatcher, 3 species of Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, House Wrens, many Gray Catbirds, Chipping and Field Sparrows, at least six species of Warblers, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Indigo and Painted Buntings.
The jetties had the regular assortment of Brown Pelicans, Cormorants, Gulls, Terns, and Sandpipers. Notable birds included American Oystercatchers, Caspian, Royal and Sandwich Terns, and 119 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. In my 50 plus years of birding on the Texas coast, I have never seen such a large congregation of that species.

Above, a resting group of gulls and terns. There are 50 Lesser Black-backed Gulls in this picture. Photo by Truman Louderback.

At left, a Caspian Tern. At right, a Snowy Egret hunts on the jetty granite rocks. Photos by Smily Flores.

After their picnic lunch at Surfside Jetty, the bus continued to Galveston and the Lafitte’s Cove Bird Sanctuary. This stop had many migrants as well. The group had about two hours at the site and were busy watching birds the entire time. The birds were similar to those found in the morning at Quintana, but with larger numbers and better variety at the larger site. Eastern Wood-Pewee was numerous, several Empidonax, four species of Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, six or more species of Warblers, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and many Indigo Buntings.
Above, some of the Seniors took advantage of a gazebo overlooking a pond to relax at Lafitte’s Cove in the afternoon. Photo by Smily Flores.

At left, a male Summer Tanager. At right, a female Scarlet Tanager. Photos by Smily Flores.
The final stop of the trip was the Buc-ee’s in Texas City on highway 45. It was a filling end to a full day, with lots of nice birds. The trip participants tallied 110 species for the day.

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

You may now sign up for the December 6 trip to Lake Conroe and Lake Limestone, the January 3 trip to Williamson County to search for Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl and McCown’s Longspurs, and the February 14 trip to the coast to look for Gulls and Gannets. 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 December and January can be found on the [www.pct3.com](http://www.pct3.com) website at Community Calendars or a link may be found on the park 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.