Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff invite you to start the month at his annual Diggin' Old Stuff Heritage Festival. The Houston Archeological Society will be here so your children may participate in one of the research digs they are conducting here at Kleb Woods. The Festival will be November 2, 2019 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. It is free and open to all. http://www.pct3.com/Portals/45/docs/news/old-stuff.pdf We also wish you a Happy Thanksgiving and a wonderful holiday season.

Volunteer Activities

Tuesday Volunteers continue to meet each week and help maintain the property and add new features for your enjoyment. They have been watering trees, building water berms for newly planted trees, and painting the barn and log bench with linseed oil to preserve them. The Woodworkers have been busy with several projects including water hose racks, repairs to birdhouses and other regular maintenance. The Vegetable Gardeners' Historic Garden is receiving new fall plantings for winter crops. The Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardeners have been working on an old grape vine that we think Elmer could have planted long ago. If so, it may be an improved variety of grape. We hope to train it to a trellis and see what it will produce. The volunteers remain active throughout the holiday season and welcome you to join them. Just show up Tuesday morning about 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.

A Closer Look at History

The Closer Look at History program in September looked at the history of the telephone. The kids learned when and how the telephone was invented and how it influenced our society. They had a chance to see many examples of older phones and try their fingers at dialing rotary phones. Most of them never knew phones had cords attaching them to walls and attaching the pieces one to another. They also saw pictures of early cell phones and came to understand that smartphone they know today is far more than a telephone. Then the children went outside for some timeless telephone fun: tin cans on a string! They found the simple contraption does, in fact, work like a telephone.

A Closer Look at Nature

The Closer Look at Nature program for September was about Hummingbirds. Unfortunately, rain from T.S. Imelda limited the attendance even though we received very little rain at the preserve. The kids learned about Hummingbirds' unique style of flight, their high metabolism, and other interesting aspects of their biology. They then ventured out onto the porch to play
the Hummingbird migration game. Each participant was a Hummingbird. As they made their way through the game, different stations depicted the trials of migration. Some stations had good news (like food and habitat), others bad (like poor weather or predators), and some forced the “Hummingbirds” to turn back and start again before completing their migration.

A Closer Look at German Heritage
Our inaugural “A Closer Look at German Heritage” program in October looked at three of the many German Festivals. The kids learned how two of these festivals have roots stemming from actual historical events. All three of the festivals came to the United States with German immigrants in the 1800s. Their American versions have grown and become widespread throughout America. As the kids learned about each festival, they also had fun with the games and activities that are a part of it. At the end of the program, they enjoyed performing a popular Oktoberfest dance – the Chicken Dance!

History Discussion Group
The October discussion was led by Barbara Pankratz, a former history teacher. She discussed the book The Storm on Our Shores by Mark Obmascik. This book revolves around the little known invasion of Attu Island in Alaska by the Japanese during WW2 and its subsequent recapture by the U.S.A. The book follows a Japanese surgeon and an American Army Sergeant from their youth to their eventual opposing military service. The surgeon was killed by the Sergeant on Attu, but he was not the typical Japanese military man. He was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who attended college and medical school in California. He was married with two children whom he had given English names because he loved the United States. He left behind a war diary, which the Sergeant found. It was translated and circulated among American troops, and caused the Sergeant and others to reevaluate their enemy. The Sergeant lived the next fifty plus years in turmoil over his actions during the Battle of Attu. He eventually met the surgeon’s daughter, who offered him forgiveness. He finally accepted it and forgave himself. The daughter and the Sergeant became lifelong friends. It is a great story of the atrocity of war, and the healing that only comes when you can forgive yourself.

Our November discussion will be led by Jay Gavitt. He will review and discuss the book Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War by Nathaniel Philbrick. This book describes the experiences of the Pilgrims of the 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 history stories. Jay will give us the true story of the settlement and that first Thanksgiving, and then tell us how it all turned out fifty years later. He will also refer to another book during the discussion, Making Haste from Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims and Their World: A New History by Nick Bunker.

Plant Walks
The October 16 plant walk was cool and cloudy yet pleasant for all the participants. The fall season has brought blooms to many plants around the preserve. The flowers seen ranged in size from almost microscopic to large and showy. A number of flowers in the Aster (Sunflower) family provided a nice opportunity to study the difference between ray flowers and disk flowers. One of the highlights of the walk were Goldenrod Stowaway caterpillars that were well camouflaged on a species of Bidens that is commonly known as Bearded Beggarticks or Tickseed Sunflower.

Our next plant walk will be November 20 at 1:30 p.m.
At left, the participants learn about two plants: one can cause kidney stones, and the other is believed to help break them up! At right, a well-camouflaged Goldenrod Stowaway caterpillar on Bearded Beggarticks. Photos by Megan Ahlgren.

Birding activities

The **Weekly Bird Walks** in October were a mix of lingering summer residents, fall migrants and returning wintering species. The early-arriving Red-breasted Nuthatch that was first found in mid-September has continued to be seen almost daily through October. The trails are now filled with the sounds of fall and winter. The scolds of House Wrens, electrical zaps of Brown Thrashers, and chattering of Ruby-crowned Kinglets are heard daily. Migrants like Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Least Flycatcher, Orioles, Indigo Bunting, and Dickcissel have also been observed passing through (or over) the park.

The **Afternoon Birding Program** in October gave participants a chance to get hands on with the eBird Mobile app. Participants learned how to enter checklists in eBird while out in the field. Gone is the need to scribble notes or try to memorize the birds you see until you get home to a computer. Anyone with an Android or iOS mobile phone can download this app and start reporting right away. It is a great tool that many birders find invaluable.

Houston Audubon held a **Swift Night Out** program at Kleb Woods at the end of September. This annual event is held to count the number of Chimney Swifts roosting in our tower as they prepare to migrate south. Houston Audubon staff started with an informative presentation about these aerial insectivores, before heading out to count the Chimney Swifts coming in at dusk. In the past years, we have watched as 200 to 300 birds swooped into the tower. This year the Swifts apparently didn’t get the memo. Much to our surprise, not a single bird came to roost in the tower. However, even this absence of birds is important scientific data, and we were still entertained by some other aerial insectivores - bats! Hopefully, we will have a better show next year.
The September **Senior Birding Bus Trip** was originally scheduled to visit the Hazel Bazemore Hawk Watch in Nueces County near Calallen. Sometimes birders get extremely lucky. We plan these trips six months or more in advance and reserve buses for a specific day. We can rarely change the planned day or destination. So just how lucky is it that the day before the trip, a super rare bird turns up in a park only two miles off our intended route! A Northern Wheatear was found in a Victoria County Park the day before our trip. This Eurasian species had only wandered to Texas twice before, the first in 1994 and the last one in 2010. We were at the location in Victoria before ten o’clock and quickly got on the bird, which was already located by other birders that had arrived earlier. We put the scope on the Wheater and all of our bus participants took a quick look. Then we worked for better looks and photos. Soon, the bird moved to a better location for our observations. After about a half hour, we were all satisfied and headed south to our scheduled destination. What luck! The bird was a “lifer” for almost everyone on the bus.

We arrived at the Hazel Bazemore Hawk Watch a little before noon. This Hawk Watch has the largest number of Hawks annually of any in the United States. The day we were there, the official count recorded 56 Black Vulture, 49 Turkey Vulture, 25 Osprey, 2 Swallow-tailed Kite, 324 Mississippi Kite, 2 Northern Harrier, 16 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 9 Cooper’s Hawk, 1 Harris's Hawk, 3 White-tailed Hawk, 4 Red-shouldered Hawk, 46,692 Broad-winged Hawk, 12 Swainson’s Hawk, 3 Red-tailed Hawk, 3 Crested Caracara, 12 American Kestrel, and 14 Peregrine Falcon. We did not see all of these species and far less than the 47,000 total Hawks, but we saw most of the species and more than 20,000 individuals. It was spectacular to see thousands of Broad-winged Hawks kettling above us at midday. This annual pilgrimage is highly predictable with the major push of Broad-winged Hawks, which nest across the eastern half of the continent, exiting North America during the last week of September. Between September 22 and September 28 this year, the Hawk Watch counted 268,703 migrating Broad-winged Hawks. The following week, the number had dropped to 92,752 and the following to 77,480. The total for the entire season will approach half a million birds, more than half of which passed through in the last week of September.
There were many more things to see at the county park besides the migrating raptors. The feeders near the platform were a constant form of entertainment. There were many south Texas species that are absent or rare in Harris County. Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, and Olive Sparrow visited regularly, allowing some of our photographers to take their picture. Other entertaining species were Northern Cardinals, a Dickcissel, Lincoln’s Sparrow, and Inca Dove. The hit of the feeder parade was a camera hog, literally!
At left, a Dickcissel hides among the House Sparrows. At right, a close-up of the Dickcissel. Photos by Smily Flores.

Above, a Javelina "hog" in the bird feeding area. Photo by Sid Ehlert.

The Hawk Watch is so famous among birders across the country that they set up booths to sell bird-related items, and there was a bird show to enjoy as well. The bird show featured some Texas raptors, but it also included an African White-necked Raven and an Australian Kookaburra.

At left, an African White-necked Raven. At right, an Australian Kookaburra. Photos by Sid Ehlert.
The park was highly entertaining and produced more than 50 species. One of the more challenging aspects was identifying the four species of Oriole that were there that day: Baltimore, Bullock’s, Orchard and Hooded. A fifth species, Audubon’s, is also in the area but alluded our birders. By mid-afternoon, the birders were hot and restless. We made an impromptu decision to go to Goose Island State Park on the way home and try for another rarity.

At Goose Island, we quickly found our target, a juvenile Sabine’s Gull. This small Gull is one of the most distinctively patterned of all Gulls, the juvenile even more so than the adult. It was most cooperative, to the delight of our birders and photographers. After a quick photo shoot, the Seniors all boarded the bus and headed for home. Almost everyone on the bus had seen two rare birds, which were “lifers” for most.

At left, the photogenic immature Sabine’s Gull. Photo by Sarah Kuzio. At right, the gull’s classic “M” upper wing field mark. Photo by Jerry Chen.

The final stop of the trip was Prasek’s in Hillje on Highway 59. It was a great end to a great day, which had tallied 88 species, including two rare species most participants will remember for the rest of their lives.

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 November 22 trip to the central coast to see Whooping Cranes, the December 6 trip to Lake Conroe and Lake Limestone and the January 3 trip to Williamson County to search for Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl and McCown’s Longspurs. 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 November and December can be found on the 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 for more information.