Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff invite you to welcome the arrival of spring at Kleb Woods. While spring officially starts on March 19, the groundhog did not see his shadow this year and we are already beginning to see signs of an early spring. Plants have begun blooming and growing fresh green leaves, and soon birds and other animals will begin nesting and raising young. The season brings warmer temperatures and new life to the preserve. We hope you will come out to enjoy it with us!

**Volunteer activities**

Our work parties continue to grow as more people discover the park and learn about our great group of volunteers. We are happy to welcome these newcomers and hope they will continue to help us preserve Kleb Woods for years to come. The Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare Crew continued their work to improve the Live Oak Trail by removing Privet and clearing around larger trees to maintain a healthy forest. The Tuesday Volunteers had a variety of tasks this month, which included rebuilding the forge in the blacksmith shop, touching up trail signs, tilling the vegetable garden, and clearing around the Chimney Swift Tower. The Woodworkers have completed their project of installing racks to store hundreds of feet of water hose. They also helped prepare birdhouse kits for the “A Closer Look at Nature” Class and a rocket activity for the “A Closer Look at History” Class. The Vegetable Gardeners have maintained a lush crop of mustard greens and bok choy throughout the winter. They are also planning the spring garden, which will no doubt bring a bounty of vegetables later in the year. The Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardeners tidied the orchard, planted Honey Locust trees, and continued to help put out birdseed for our growing flock of wintering sparrows. Our volunteers are essential for making Kleb Woods the park you know and love. If you would like to join them, just show up during one of our weekly work parties. The Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare Crew meets Mondays at 8:00 a.m., Tuesday volunteers meet around 9:00 a.m., and the Heritage Vegetable Garden Volunteers meet every Saturday morning shortly after 8 a.m.

**A Closer Look at History**

The “A Closer Look at History” program in February examined the history of space exploration. The unintentional launch of V2 rockets into space by the Germans in WWII encouraged people to look beyond the stars. The Space Race between the Soviet Union and the United States during the 50s, 60s, and 70s saw all sorts of rapid advancements in space technology. The first satellites and spacecrafts were launched, and animals and humans made the first of many journeys into space. The desire to explore space continues to this day with satellites journeying into deep space, the launch of a new Mars Rover later this year, and even the creation of a Space Force Branch of the military. At the end of the program, the kids built and launched their own rockets. There was much excitement as they watched to see whose rocket soared the highest.
A Closer Look at Nature
At the end of January, we had an "A Closer Look at Nature" program about birdhouses. We had a huge turnout, as families came to learn all about different types of birdhouses, the variety of birds that use them, and the benefits of having a birdhouse in their own backyard. Then each family was able to build their own birdhouse in our workshop. The kids enjoyed hammering the nails into the wood, while the rest of us had headaches from all the racket. Watching the families work together was very rewarding, and the birdhouses will surely be a valued addition to their backyards.

In February, our “Closer Look” class learned about symbiosis, a close and long-lasting relationship between two different kinds of living things. A rainy day made for an intimate audience with some very enthusiastic students. They learned that there are three types of symbiosis, called mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. After seeing examples of each type of symbiosis in nature, the kids gathered to play a game demonstrating a mutually beneficial relationship between a crocodile and a bird. The kids delighted in throwing the ball around as they learned what it means to be a part of a symbiotic relationship. Our next "A Closer Look at Nature" will be about tracking animals on March 5.
History Discussion Group
February’s Discussion Group, led by Barbara Pankratz, focused on the book Torpedoes in the Gulf: Galveston and the U-Boats, 1942-1943 by Melanie Wiggins. She examined both the German’s aggressive attack strategy and Galveston’s general lack of preparedness and planning left the Gulf a prime location for attack. Barbara discussed at length the personal elements of the book like the miraculous journey of a family of four surviving a U-boat attack, the conditions the young German men faced in the submarines, and the occasional acts of kindness by the Germans towards American civilians. Another guest speaker, Leticia Moran from Cypress Historical Society, spoke about some related research she recently conducted. Very briefly, in Torpedoes in the Gulf, a chapter discussed a possible “spy” in Galveston sending out radio signals to the U-boats. In reality, that could not have been possible, but the government did not know it at the time and frantically searched for the source of these signals and found the “spy.” This small bit of information fascinated the Kleb staff and the journey down the rabbit hole began. Leticia found a name and various documents about this spy and tried to piece together information about his life. This led to many thought-provoking questions. Was he simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, or really up to something suspicious? What was he doing? Did the government really send him to an internment camp? Unfortunately, no definitive answer was found, but it certainly led to some interesting discussions.

Our next discussion group will be on March 12th. Fred Collins will compare two books on the Texas Revolution. The first book, History of the Revolution in Texas, Particularly of the War of 1835 & ‘36 by Chester Newell, was published in 1837, only a year after the Revolution. The second book, Stephen Harrigan’s 2019 Texas history book Big, Wonderful Thing, details the Revolution as well. Did the information change drastically or stay the same? Join us and find out.

Plant Walks
In January, our visitors learned to find subtle identifying features on leafless winter trees. A closer look at bare branches revealed remarkable differences in buds, bark, and leaf scars. Some evergreen trees such as American Holly and Live Oaks were easy to identify while others were a little tricky. By looking at the leaf arrangements, visitors learned how to tell the difference between native Yaupon (Ilex vomitoria) and invasive Chinese Privet (Ligustrum sinense). We stopped along the way to admire the fungus among us. Then we continued our cold journey learning all about how to identify plants during the bare winter months.

Birding activities
The weekly bird walks in February were not ideal for fair-weather birders. The first Saturday bird walk had delightful weather, and participants of all ages came out to count the birds that day. However, the rest of the bird walks were more challenging due to rain, cold temperatures, and strong winds. Despite the weather, there are still nice birds to be seen if you look for them. A Red-breasted Nuthatch that has been wintering near the nature center since September is still seen on a regular basis. The Chipping Sparrows finally showed up in good numbers, with a flock of 40-50 individuals visiting the feeders across form the nature center. This has been a good winter for Golden-crowned Kinglets as well. Several are often seen somewhere in the park, usually in a mixed flock with Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Blue-headed Vireo.
The afternoon birding program in February was about Staff Naturalist Kendra Kocab’s recent trip to Southeast Asia. Kendra talked about the wide variety of birds she saw in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Some of the highlights were seeing (and hearing) Great Hornbills fly into a fruit tree to forage, sitting silently near a waterhole as a gorgeous pair of Kalij Pheasants came down for a drink, and seeing one of the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpipers (a species with less than 1,000 individuals still living). She also talked about the food, culture, and other points of interest that one should experience on a trip to the region.

The annual Winter Big Day was originally scheduled for February 12th, but it was quickly determined that the weather was not going to cooperate. On February 19th, we tried again. Unfortunately, the rainy weather returned. This made for a much shorter Big Day than usual. Only 56 species were tallied, one of the lowest counts for any Big Day. We did have a couple of nice sightings. A Dark-eyed Junco was briefly spotted near the nature center. This sparrow is an uncommon visitor to Kleb Woods and the first one we have seen this winter. One participant spotted a flock of five Purple Martins. These are some of the earliest birds to return from the wintering grounds. They will soon be nesting throughout the Greater Houston Area, so make sure your Purple Martin houses are ready!

**Birding Bus Trip**
The February senior birding bus trip started with a hunt for a rare bird. One Chestnut-collared Longspur has been wintering near Port Arthur, far from its normal wintering range in West Texas and the Panhandle. A wrong turn on the way to the Longspur turned out to be a fortuitous mistake. One of the first birds seen as we drove down the levee was a Brown Booby! These seabirds used to be a rare occurrence on the Texas Coast and were usually only seen offshore. Nearshore sightings have increased, but they are certainly not something you see every day. As the bus made its way down the levee, participants spotted numerous Ducks, Herons, and Egrets. The Buffleheads, Canvasback, and pair of Common Goldeneye were especially nice to see. Then the search for the Chestnut-collared Longspur began. This small, sparrow-like bird is challenging to find amongst all of the Savannah Sparrows. After an hour of searching, cries of “That’s it!” rang out. The Longspur had just flown in front of the bus! It was soon relocated, and everyone had great looks through the scope. It even flew directly over the group, calling and showing off its characteristic white tail pattern.
After a late lunch at a roadhouse-style restaurant, there was just enough time to drive to Sea Rim State Park to add a few shorebirds to the day’s list. After 30 minutes, the group had tallied Black-bellied Plover; Sanderling; Dunlin; Laughing, Bonaparte’s, Herring, and Ring-billed Gulls; as well as Forester’s and Royal Terns. Everyone also had great scope views of seven Snowy Plovers resting on the beach. We ended the day with a respectable 76 species. The Chestnut-collared Longspur was a lifer for many and well worth time spent searching for it.
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 March 27th trip to search for Golden-cheeked Warblers (5 a.m. to 5 p.m.), the April 3rd trip to Boykin Springs to look for Bachman's Sparrows, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, and nesting Warblers (5 a.m. to 5 p.m.), and the April 24th and May 8th trip to the coast for spring migrants. 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.