Happy New Year from Harris County Precinct Three Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff at Kleb Woods Nature Preserve. January 1st is not just the day following December 31st. It marks the completion of Earth’s orbit around the sun and marks another full year. It also signals a new beginning and a chance for people to make all the usual New Year’s resolutions about losing weight, exercising more and the rest.

At the Nature Center, we’re taking stock of the year we just completed. We had record attendance. Our newsletter has wider distribution than ever. We have more regular volunteers than at any time in the past. We take all these as signs that you appreciate and enjoy the Nature Center and its programs. We are always interested in hearing your comments and suggestions to make our programs better. We resolve to continue to put our hearts and souls into our work and strive to help you discover the nature, culture and history. We hope you resolve to come visit us more often in 2016.

Volunteer activities
The Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare (YPN) Crew continues working on Mondays from 8 a.m. until noon. It is a great way to exercise with a congenial group. I hope you will join them. There is more than one season’s worth of privet and yaupon to clear. The Tuesday volunteer crew works on a diverse group of projects, including building displays, special tools, cleaning up the shop, barn and trails. We could not function without these handy folks. The gardeners get active this month. Be ready to share your green thumb with them.

History discussion group
The December discussion group was again led by Jim Wilson. Our focus was on so-called “filibusters” – fortune seeking adventurers who came to what-was-then Spanish Texas. The discussion included familiar ones, such as Philip Nolan and James Long. There was also talk of the lesser known “filibuster” Henry Perry and his feud with the colorful pirate Louis Aury, who ran a raucous settlement on Galveston Island. Once familiar with the variety of these early Texas settlers and invaders and their various aims, we then explored the possibilities of “filibusters” existing today. The next history discussion meeting will be Jan. 14th, at which time we’ll take a look at the limits of Spanish power in North America.

Closer Look at Nature classes
The Closer Look at Nature Classes in December was about Christmas Bird Counts. The tradition started in 1900. The idea was to go out and see how many species of birds you could find. Prior to 1900, it was common for people to have a Christmas bird hunt and many small song birds were shot to stuff inside one another. They were then stuffed inside the turkey for dinner. The conservation effort has grown to now include more than 70,000 participants counting birds in more than 2,400 designated 15-mile diameter circles across the globe. However, it is primarily an American tradition with more than 50,000 observers taking part in counts within the United States. Following an introduction to bird counts, the kids went into the park and counted the birds they saw. They tallied 132 birds of 24 species in about 30 minutes. Information on future classes can be found at the Nature Center or you can check the precinct’s website.

German classes
The three German classes, 1A, 1B and 2A are progressing nicely. Check the website for dates and meeting times. German 1-A and 1-B are the equivalent of high school German 1, while our German 2-A and 2-B are equivalent of high school German 2. If you would like additional information about these classes, please contact Linda Martin-Rust, education director, at klebwoods@pct3.com

Birding activities
December walks produced surprisingly high numbers of species with counts frequently reaching or exceeding 50 species. The walks have been highlighted by Golden Crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and both Rufous
and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. Sparrow numbers are still low but the diversity is good with five species often recorded on the walks.

At left, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird. At right a Red-breasted Nuthatch in winter quarters near the Nature Center. Photos by Kirsten Tucker.

The Wednesday birding program in December was ducks and their identification. The program covered all the regularly occurring species in Texas. Kendra Kocab detailed key features for each species and Fred Collins told about their historical occurrence in Texas and included anecdotes about particular species.

The senior birding bus trip in December was to Sam Houston National Forest in Montgomery County and then on to Cagle Recreation area in Walker County, where the group had a close encounter with a pair of White-breasted Nuthatches. They also had a nice flyby of an adult Bald Eagle there.
At left the group focuses on a winter flock of feeding song birds. Photo by Jerry Chen. At right, a White-breasted Nuthatches. Photo by Jan Liang.

Then it was off to Grimes County, where the group ate lunch. They then proceeded to Lake Limestone and visited parks on the lake in Robertson and Limestone counties. They found a good variety of ducks and other water-loving species.
At left, a Red-breasted Merganser. Photo by Jan Liang. At right, a Great Blue Heron. Photo by Kris Mikel.

At left a Belted Kingfisher. Photo by BeaAnn Kelly. At right, an American Pipit, formerly known as Water pipit. Photo by Kris Mikel.
The calendars for January and February can be found on the website. There is a link from the park web page or you can look under the Community Center events calendar. The website is www.pct3.com

If you have difficulty viewing this newsletter and the pictures included, please request a PDF file and we will send it to you.

If you would like to be removed from this newsletter distribution list, please use the reply and ask to be removed from the list and we will do so promptly.

If you would like to become a subscriber to this list simply email a request to fcollins@pct3.com. Please note: we do not add you to the newsletter distribution list without your specific request. Just because you attended a trip or class does not automatically sign you up for the newsletter.

Dog owners: Pets are no longer allowed in Kleb Woods. For your convenience and enjoyment, Precinct Three maintains five popular dog parks where your dog can run free. They are the Millie Bush Dog Park, 16756 Westheimer Parkway, in George Bush Park; the Danny Jackson Family Dog Park, 4828 ½ Loop Central Dr., near Loop 610 and Westpark; a dog park in Congressman Bill Archer Park, 3201 Highway 6 North; Deputy Darren Goforth Dog Park, 9402 Barker Cypress Road and Beverly Kaufman Dog Park located in Katy at Paul D. Rushing Park, 9114 Katy Hockley Road. The dog parks have their own set of rules. Please visit the Precinct Three website www.pct3.com for more information.