August is hot and often humid. The oppressive heat seems to never end. But notice the deep blue sky in mid-morning or late afternoon. It is a vivid deep blue not seen during June and July. It signals the coming of fall. The deep blue is caused by the lower angle of the sun’s rays hitting the atmosphere. It signals to the birds and other migratory animals to hurry on their way to their winter homes. Early this month, the great rings of Purple Martins that roost in flocks of 50,000 or more will dwindle as these birds head to Brazil far in advance of cooler weather. Precinct Three Commissioner Steve Radack and the staff of Kleb Woods Nature Preserve hope you have enjoyed your summer and look forward to the fall and the many birds it brings. Please plan on attending our annual Hummingbird Festival on Sept. 10th.

Volunteer activities

The summer heat barely slows the volunteers down, but they do often find things to work on in the air-conditioned woodshop. Much of their time is spent on park maintenance and tending the vegetable garden. One of the nice accents the volunteers installed in the garden is a bean trellis reminiscent of those built in 1900. Kleb Woods benefitted in July from the service of local churches that sent us 64 youth and parent volunteers to work on our trails and vegetable garden. They built up low spots along the trails and improved the wetlands. They also put down mulch on trails and in the garden. We are most grateful for their work and generous spirit.

History Discussion Group

Our July meeting explored the events of July 1914, known as the “July Crisis.” It led to the Great Powers of Europe declaring war on each other in August 1914 and precipitated World War I. Popular opinion blames Germany and the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, in particular for starting the war. Our group discussed the possibility that the existing system of alliances at the time forced Germany’s hand. The unwillingness of Germany’s ally, Austria-Hungary, to negotiate for peace was looked at as a major factor in starting the war. Our discussion covered the period from the shots of the assassin in Sarajevo to the first shots of the war in Belgium five weeks later. The interactions of Kaisers and kings and czars and prime ministers, foreign ambassadors, foreign ministers and various heads of state had as much intrigue as reading an Agatha Christie novel.

A Closer Look at Art classes

The “A Closer Look at Art” classes for the summer are a series of watercolor classes taught by Gary Spessard. There was only one class in July. It was a sketch and wash class in which the kids sketched a snow cone and then colored it with their watercolors. They appeared to adapt the techniques displayed by their instructor and by the end of the class were
ready to find the nearest shaved ice stand. There are two watercolor classes in August. Check the precinct’s website calendar for dates and times.

“A Closer Look at Nature” and “A Closer Look at History” are on summer hiatus and will return in September. Information on future classes can be found at the Nature Center. You can check our calendar on the Precinct Three website at www.pct3.com.

**German classes**
The summer introduction to German classes are underway. Each class is similar and gives families an opportunity to see if they are interested in starting formal German language classes in the fall. These introductory classes are also helpful to adults who might be planning a trip to Germany. Formal classes resume in September.

**Birding activities**
July was hot, but each walk seemed to turn up a surprise. It has been amazing how many people ventured out in the heat. The family group of Swallow-tailed Kites was frequently seen from the hawk tower. These exquisite birds make any bird walk a success. Late in the month, participants began seeing signs of fall migration, like a Least Flycatcher. While July traditionally has some of our lower species counts, this month each walk had 33 or more species.

The July senior birding bus trip went to W.G. Jones State Forest on FM1488 near I45 to see the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. There we met Donna Work, a Forest Service Biologist. She told the group about her work to monitor and conserve the endangered woodpecker. She used her pole camera to allow the participants to look inside a nest hole high in a live pine. We walked the forest as she spoke about the woodpecker and we eventually found one feeding on a fallen pine a foot or two off the ground. Never in my 50-plus years of birding have I looked down on one of these birds. It was also a first for Donna and the others. The photographers put the opportunity to good use and many got great pictures of the bird as it fed on the bark of this downed pine.

Above, a Least Flycatcher, an early migrant. Photo by Kirsten Tucker.
At left, biologist Donna Works. At right, Donna and the group are distracted by birds. Photos by BeaAnn Kelly.

Left and Right, Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Photos by Jim Kelly.

The birdwatchers and photographers found many other interesting species.

At left, a Red-headed Woodpecker. At right, a juvenile Eastern Bluebird. Photos by Jim Kelly.
Following the success at Jones Forest, the group went to a well-known restaurant overlooking the Lynchburg Ferry. They scanned the bay and channel with the spotting telescope while they ate lunch. Due to the high and fresh water, few birds were on the bay. After lunch, participants visited several sites in Crosby and Dayton looking for Swallow-tailed Kites, but to no avail. The final attempt to see the kites was in Kenefick. There, watching Mississippi Kites in a church parking lot whose thermometer read 104, the group was rewarded with a single fly by. Fortunately, everyone was able to at least catch a glimpse of it. Several people got nice looks at our final target for the trip. After one more stop for ice cream, the group headed home.

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

There is now a waitlist for the Aug. 19th trip to Anahuac NWR, High Island, Bolivar Flats and a ride on the Bolivar Ferry on the way home. You may now sign up for the Sept. 16th trip to Quintana and the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge and the Oct. 28th trip to search for rice harvesting, where we expect to find many rails (this trip will leave late and return late). You may now sign up for these trips by emailing klebwoods@pct3.com or calling (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 August and September 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

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.

Save the dates: September 10, 2016 Hummingbird Festival and October 22, 2016 Diggin’ Old Stuff