Winter is upon us.
The days shorten to the shortest of all on Dec. 21st – the winter solstice. This celestial event is quickly followed by Christmas and a new year. At this time, we often take stock of our blessings and share them with family and friends. If you would like to share your blessings, please remember Precinct Three Commissioner Steve Radack’s Kleb Woods Nature Preserve and other precinct locations are drop-off locations for Toys for Tots again this year. If you would like to participate, please bring a new, unwrapped toy to any of the locations before Dec. 16. Commissioner Radack and his staff of Kleb Woods would like to wish you a Merry Christmas. May your season be blessed with the warmth of family and friends.

Volunteer activities
The volunteers continue to work in record numbers. This month the Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare (YPN) Crew started up work again. This exuberant group tackled some hefty tasks, like clearing brush and controlling invasive species like Chinese Tallow trees and Japanese privet bushes. They also removed dead trees from problem areas, like the water oak that fell into Myrtle’s Pool this summer. It was a mighty effort to remove debris in the pool to help prevent it from silting up over time. The woodworkers have been making a new batch of bird nest boxes for the preserve.
Our gardeners are busy tending a fall vegetable garden and planting wildflowers we hope to see bloom in the spring. They are also planting seeds in our grow-out table so we will have several new trees and wildflowers next year.
We were blessed with a scout group service project this month. The American Heritage Girls found a unique way to help clean mold and algae off the wetland trail boardwalk. They put play sand on the boards and then performed many dance steps and moon walks to sand each board clean. They did a great job, but we need more dance steps to clean the entire 800 feet of boardwalk in the preserve.
German language classes
The fall classes are underway. Each class meets two Thursdays a month. German 1-A meets from 12:30 p.m. until 2 p.m., German 2-A from 9:30 a.m. until 11 a.m. and German 2-B from 11 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. 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. For more information, contact Linda Martin-Rust at KlebWoods@pct3.com.

History Discussion Group
Our November meeting’s topic was a “What if?” discussion about a presidential election. Not the recent one, but the presidential election of 1912 that put Woodrow Wilson into power. The discussion focused on “What if Teddy Roosevelt had won the Republican Nomination?” He surely would have been elected, especially since the Republican vote was split between his Bull Moose Party and Taft, who was the Republican nominee. A united Republican Party would have clearly outpaced Wilson and the Democrats, who garnered 40 percent of the vote. No doubt, Roosevelt would have handled the U.S. role in events leading to World War I differently than Wilson. Our next discussion group meeting is on Dec. 8th and will look at the many facets of Dec. 7, 1941.

Saturday Movie Matinee
This new series explores historical topics through film. We’ll look at not only the movie’s topic but also how that topic was viewed and depicted at the time it was made. November’s film was The Great Debaters. The movie for Dec. 3rd will be a classic: City Lights, a 1931 silent, starring Charlie Chaplin in a heart-warming holiday tale. The matinee also features a poignant Red Skelton holiday short: Freddie the Freeloader and the Yuletide Doll.

A Closer Look at Nature class
There was no class in November but the Dec. 1st will be “A Closer Look at Reindeer.” It should be educational, if not magical. Hope you will join us.

A Closer Look at History class
The November class was about the explorations of Conquistador Coronado and his search for the Seven Cities of Gold. The moral of the story was that while one may fail in their primary objective, what they discover and learn in the failed attempt is often of greater value than what they sought. Following class, the kids learned to measure their steps as the conquistadors did to plot a course and determine how far they traveled. The Dec. 15th class will be “The Railroad Comes to Texas: The Houston & Central Texas Railroad.”

Conservation Pioneers programs
The November program examined the conservation efforts of Theodore Roosevelt. The program not only looked at this legacy, but also examined the naturalist/conservationist aspects of his personal life. Theodore Roosevelt, while president, created 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game reserves, five national parks and 18 national monuments. In total, he preserved more than 230 million acres of public land for future generations to enjoy. He is an iconic American original and the conservation legacy he left still shapes the country.

There will be no December program. Our next program will feature Gifford Pinchot, who was instrumental in forming the U.S. Forest Service as we know it today. He helped invent the profession and identity of a forester. He was also a close ally
to Roosevelt. This program will be presented on Jan. 18th from 3 p.m. until 4 p.m. and repeated on Jan. 21st 10 a.m. until 11 a.m.

**Birding activities**

November finally ushered in cooler weather here and cold weather across the northern United States, which finally drove the wintering birds back to our area. November bird walks were highlighted by White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Sparrows have been noteworthy in their absence. Several people have inquired about the lack of birds at their personal backyard feeders. We have had low numbers as well at Kleb Woods. This is explained by several factors, including a poor nesting season due to excessive spring and summer rains. Also, an abundance of natural food, compliments of the same rain, and warm conditions up north have allowed many birds to stay north of our area. By late December, we will all see many more birds at our feeders.

There are two afternoon birding programs planned in December: Dec. 7th, “Flammulated Owl Studies in Utah” by Bob Honig; and Dec. 14th, “Birding the Katy Prairie in Winter” by Fred Collins.

The November **Bear Creek Pioneers Park bird walk** was highlighted by a large mixed flock of wintering species, including Chipping Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Future walks will be Dec. 22nd, Jan. 26th, and Feb. 23rd. The monthly walks are from 8:30 a.m. until 10 a.m.

The November **Senior Birding Bus Trip** went to Aransas and Refugio Counties. The target bird was Whooping Crane. These stately birds have just returned to their winter homes after spending the summer in or near Buffalo Lake National Park in south central Canada. On 8th Street off Lamar Beach Road, near Goose Island State Park, we found five adults. But sadly, no youngsters accompanied them this year. We hope this is not a sign of a more widespread nesting failure.

The seniors enjoyed the cranes for some time and, as rain closed in, they enjoyed the flocks of blackbirds that swirled and landed on the wires. While most were Red-winged Blackbirds, we also saw a few Brown-headed and Bronzed Cowbirds among them. There were flocks of Great-tailed Grackles as well. The flocks and the weather were dramatic experiences.

After spending some time with the cranes, we had to improvise due to heavy rains. We left the rain behind and drove west to Refugio, to the delightful Lions/Shelly Park. It is a well-known birding spot that last year had three mega-rarities for Texas. Our seniors found a nice winter flock that included Wilson’s, Black-and-white, Nashville and Orange-crowned Sparrows.
Warblers along with kinglets, gnatcatchers and both White-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos. They also found some typical south Texas birds that included Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Couch’s Kingbird.

The kingbird was soon replaced with the common and widespread wintering Eastern Phoebe. If you have sharp eyes, you might have seen the wasp in the photo with the Ladder-backed Woodpecker. It is unusual for the insects to attract as much attention as the birds, but such was the case at Lions/Shelly Park in Refugio. The park has a tropical feel with its south Texas vegetation, and the birders immediately noticed an ant trail. It was a tell-tale sign of leafcutter ants. There are many species in the tropics but only one in Texas, *Atta texana*. In this instance, they had littered their path with the bits of leaves they harvest to deposit in the colony’s compost pile. They use this compost to grow a special fungus which is the colony’s sole food. There were many butterflies active as well, including a tropical *Heliconius*, the Zebra Longwing.
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 Dec. 16th trip to the Katy Prairie to search for sparrows. You may now sign up for the Jan. 6th trip to Williamson County to look for Mountain Plover and Burrowing Owl, the Feb. 3rd trip to Galveston and Surfside to look for Gannets, as well as the March 3rd trip to see the Atwater Prairie Chickens. To sign-up for these trips, email klebwoods@pct3.com 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 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.