Commissioner Steve Radack and the Kleb Woods Nature Preserve staff would like to wish you a happy and prosperous New Year. 2016 was a good year at Kleb Woods, especially if judged by attendance and participation.

We ended the year by increasing our attendance by 12 percent more than last year – a new record. We appreciate your support and look forward to your continued participation. We invite you to visit the park and Nature Center and take full advantage of the classes and other programs offered free of charge.

Volunteer activities
The volunteers were all but rained out in early December, yet they persisted in working on many projects. The Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare Crew continued clearing brush and controlling invasive Chinese tallow trees and Japanese privet bushes. The woodworkers are in the midst of several projects, including a special roost box for Winter Wrens and a cabinet for the young naturalist room in the Nature Center. The mid-December freeze has put an end to most of the garden and now the group will focus on winter greens and thinking of spring.

As they have done since 2006, the volunteers celebrated Christmas with their annual potluck dinner. The North Harris County Dulcimer Society again joined us and provided beautiful music for the gathering. The food was wonderful and the desserts were spectacular.

German language classes
German classes ended the fall semester by making greeting cards in German and singing traditional German Christmas songs. They also savored traditional German baked goods typically available only at Christmas time. Classes will resume on Jan.5th. Classes meet 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. to 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 Dec. 8th meeting’s topic was about the day that “lives in infamy”: Dec. 7, 1941 – the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and forced the United States to enter World War II. Over the years, much has been written to claim that President Franklin Roosevelt knew of the attack and did not warn the troops in order to have Congress vote for war. History has cleared Roosevelt of the charge, but many people still believe the story. The group discussed the actual events and communications that led to this suspicion and the vindication that Roosevelt was unaware of the impending attack.

Saturday Movie Matinee
This new series explores historical topics through film. We look at not only the movie’s topic, but also how that topic was viewed and depicted at the time it was made. The movie in December was City Lights, a 1931 silent starring the great Charlie Chaplin in a heart-warming holiday tale. The matinee also featured a poignant Red Skelton holiday short, Freddie
**The Freeloader and the Yuletide Doll.** Historian Jim Wilson concluded the matinee with his insights about the movie and its era. The next film will be in February. Watch the calendar for details.

**A Closer Look at Nature class**
The Dec. 1st class was "A Closer Look at Reindeer". The kids learned what life is like for these arctic animals and how the reindeer is adapted for cold climates. Reindeer are the same species as caribou but some of these Old World representatives have been domesticated. In Eurasia, they are sometimes used as beasts of burden as well as for food, milk and hides. Participants learned about attempts to even use reindeer to deliver pizza in Japan. As an activity, the kids made Christmas tree ornaments that recounted all of the topics they learned about this year.

**A Closer Look at History class**
The December class was about the first trains in Texas and how they transformed people’s lives. The first railroad in Texas was the local one from Houston to Cypress – the Houston & Central Texas Railroad. The kids considered how far it was from Houston to Cypress without a good road or means of transportation beyond their own feet, a horse or a wagon. They considered the power and advantages of a locomotive over horses. They saw how the railroad transformed people’s lives by allowing them to travel and have goods brought to a nearby depot from across the nation. The class also saw examples of how railroads influenced space travel and how the railroad system caused Cypress to be what it is today.

**Conservation Pioneers programs**
Conservation Pioneers was on hiatus in December. Our next program will feature Gifford Pinchot, who was instrumental in forming the U.S. Forest Service as we know it today, and who helped invent the profession and identity of a forester. He was also a close ally of President Theodore Roosevelt. This program will be presented on Jan. 18th from 3 p.m. until 4 p.m. and will be again Jan. 21st from 10 a.m. until 11 a.m.

**Birding activities**
December was wet and, on occasion, seasonally cold. Widespread snow across the northern and central U.S. should finally force birds south to Kleb Woods. Early indications are that this will be the winter of the Golden-crowned Kinglet. The bird walk on Dec. 14th recorded 30 of them – ten times the typical numbers. A Red-bellied Woodpecker has made a new home in a dead tree next to the wetland trail boardwalk. Some days he is rather photogenic. He did make a mess carving his new home.

There were two afternoon birding programs in December. The first was by Bob Honig. He talked about his and his wife’s experiences participating in an Earth Watch research program in Utah. They spent a week studying Flammulated Owls. Their field work was often in the dead of night. They learned some interesting things about these tiny, deep-voiced insectivorous owls of high mountain forests. The second program was by Fred Collins, who talked about “Birding the Katy Prairie in Winter.” This program was timely, as it helped those who attended to find some good birding spots close to home in western Harris and eastern Waller Counties.

The Bear Creek Pioneers Park bird walks continued in December. Future walks will be Jan. 26th and Feb. 23rd. The monthly walks are from 8:30 a.m. until 10 a.m. and meet at Koch and Golbow Drive.

The December Senior Birding Bus Trip went to the Katy Prairie. The field trip focused on sparrows. Their first stop was a tall grass pasture of a private land owner in southern Waller County. There they we able to scare up only one LeConte’s
Sparrow but fortunately it posed for pictures. The two Grasshopper Sparrows were not so cooperative and the seniors raced after them trying to encircle the elusive birds for photos but the birds would only pop out and fly away another one hundred feet or so to tempt the group into trying again. Unfortunately, the seniors’ legs gave out before the birds’ wings did. Down by the creek the group called up a cooperative Pileated Woodpecker and then later an unusual Ash-throated Flycatcher. After a long hike in tall grass, the birders went to lunch at a local restaurant.

At left, a LeConte’s Sparrow. Center, a Sedge Wren. At right, an Ash-throated Flycatcher. Photo by Jan Liang

Following lunch, the group went to another section of the same private ranch and found other species of sparrows. They also found a egrets, high-herons and ducks at the land owner’s ponds. They departed the ranch and went to visit the rice field on Buller Road. The rice stubble is flooded to attract ducks for waterfowl hunters. The group found a large flock on Snow Geese and many ducks. They also found about 1,200 shorebird using the fields.

Above, a large flock of Snow Geese take to the air. Photo by Albert Holba.
The goose flock had three species along with the blue color morph of the Snow Goose. The adult Snow Goose is all white as it the diminutive little Ross’s Goose. The Snow Goose also has a “Blue Goose” form. The adult blue goose has a white head and blue-gray body while the immature blue goose is a dark gray throughout. The third species present was the Greater White-fronted Goose known to hunters by the name “speckle belly”. They were not photographed on the trip but a few were in the big flock.
The group went for an afternoon snack and then tried several large grassy pastures in hopes of finding Short-eared Owls but the misty, warm weather was not conducive to their search and after visiting two locations gave up and called it a day.

**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 Jan. 6th trip to Williamson County to look for Mountain Plover and Burrowing Owl. You may now sign up for the Feb. 3rd trip to Galveston and Surfside to look for Gannets, as well as the March 3 trip to see the Attwater’s 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 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](http://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](http://www.pct3.com) for more information.