Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff wish you a Merry Christmas. We hope the season brings you many fond memories with your children, families, and friends. Part of our staff’s Christmas season traditions are Christmas Bird Counts. These bird surveys are sponsored by the National Audubon Society and include several of our Precinct 3 Parks, such as Bear Creek Pioneer Park, George Bush Park, Paul Rushing Park, John Paul Landing and Terry Hershey Park. This year more than 70,000 people worldwide will participate in about 2,400 counts. You can learn about the counts by contacting us here at Klue Woods Nature Center or visiting the Houston Audubon Society website.

Volunteer Activities

The Tuesday Volunteers have welcomed the cooler weather by working on some construction projects. They are building a quaint gated and fenced enclosure around our potting table for native plants. They also finished a French Drain to help provide extra water to the Bald Cypress by the porch of the nature center. While not much to look at in the completed photo, the drain is more than three feet deep, lined with hardware cloth and holds a cubic yard of bull rock. Since the drain is near the downspout off the nature center roof, it will allow close to 50 gallons of water to deeply water the roots of the Bald Cypress with only a small amount of rain. It will be fun to see how the cypress responds.

Our woodworkers have some new projects which will take them several months to complete. One is a new cabinet to hold the snake terrarium, and the other is a reproduction of the original Whitney cotton gin. These should be challenging projects which will benefit the nature center for many years to come. The vegetable gardeners have planted sweet potatoes which are running all over the garden. It will be exciting to see how many potatoes they harvest. They have also transitioned to a winter garden with mustard, Swiss chard, fennel, and cabbage.

The gardeners who have been working on the hummingbird and butterfly gardens are seeing real dividends with loads of winter flowers for our wintering Rufous Hummingbirds. Some Master Naturalists came out this month and spent all of a Saturday morning pulling Chinese Tallow trees from one of our wetlands. These invasive plants can destroy wetlands if not controlled. The Master Naturalists were able to remove a large number of tallows, and we were blessed to have their help. The “Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare Crew” will resume work on Monday December 4. I hope you will come join in the fun.

A Closer Look at Nature

The November class was about crows. This group of birds are highly intelligent. In this class the kids learned about many experiments and tests that have been devised to study intelligence in crows. They even tried to solve some of the tests themselves. It was a fun learning experience as the kids used their problem solving skills to achieve a reward.
**A Closer Look at History**

The November class was about failures in flight. The class examined man’s desire to fly and the development of his ability to do so through centuries of failures. Finally at the beginning of the 20th century, various individuals began to succeed with gliders and powered flight. The Wright brothers also overcame many failures, some of which were almost fatal. The kids judged some of the staff’s paper plane designs and voted which they thought would fly. Each design was then tested to see who was right. After class, the kids tried their hand at airplane design and then tested their design and piloting skills.

At left, a girl tries a crow intelligence puzzle. Center, kids design and fold a paper airplane. At right, they test their designs. Photos by Margo Herman.

**History Discussion Group**

The discussion in November was about some of the extraordinary disasters and near disasters of the cold war, particularly the Cuban Missile Crisis. We examined in detail October 27, 1962 which became known as Black Friday. Not even President John F. Kennedy knew just how close we came to an all-out nuclear exchange that would have altered the world far into the future. The near nuclear holocaust actually ended on the evening of October 27 when Soviet submarine B59 decided to surface and not fire its nuclear torpedo. Kennedy and the US forces had no idea the submarine carried such a torpedo, nor how close it came to firing it. The decision not to fire prevented an all-out nuclear exchange between the US and the USSR. The missile crisis officially ended on Nov 2, 1962 when Kennedy went on TV and explained that the Cuban installations were being dismantled. Many US documents were released 50 years after the fact in 2012, and information from the USSR did not begin to surface until after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Scholars are still combing these documents and looking for others which are now declassified and available for study. The 13 days of October were even more dangerous than either side knew at the time. The December meeting will discuss the history of many of our favorite holiday foods.

**Conservation Pioneers**

Our November program was about Therese Hershey, one of Texas’ great conservationists and name sake of Precinct 3’s Terry Hershey Park. A native of Fort Worth, she eventually married Jake Hershey and moved to Houston. The couple spent many months away from Houston yacht racing and making memories. However, the near destruction of Buffalo Bayou in her backyard led her to intervene and set her down the path to becoming Texas’ foremost environmental activist. Although she shunned that label in favor of conservationist, she had a positive impact on our quality of life that will impact our Nation, state and community as far as one can see into the future.

**Houston Archeology Society Project**

The Houston Archeological Society had a workday here on November 4. HAS members and Rosehill Christian Academy students began work on an excavation site which we suspect was some type of building or corral. Towards the end of the day, a Boy Scout group visited the excavations. Overall, it was not only a great event for HAS members, but a chance to share with community members. In addition to researching the property, these work days help train new members in proper archeological techniques. All activities are supervised by a professional, permitted archeologist. Look for future opportunities to participate with HAS at Kleb Woods on their Houston Archeology Society website.
German language classes
Formal German language classes continue with a German 1-A, a German 1-B class, and a German 2-A. German 1-A and 1-B are the equivalent of high school German 1, while our German 2-A and 2-B are the equivalent of high school German 2. Please consult the web calendar for class dates and times. If you have any other questions, please contact Linda Martin-Rust at klebwoods@pct3.com.

Birding activities
The weekly bird walks in November witnessed the last of fall migration and the settling in of our winter avifauna. Geese and ducks have been seen flying over the preserve and a couple of bird walks have been fortunate enough to see beautiful Wood Ducks. One of the more unusual sightings was in late November when two Yellow-throated Warblers were spotted in the same winter flock. This was the first ever November record for the park for this beautiful warbler. That same bird walk produced 5 Bald Eagle sightings, representing at least 4 individuals, all soaring in a beautiful blue fall sky. Winter residents that returned in November included Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow and American Goldfinch.

The November 6 Senior Birding Bus Trip visited Mitchell Lake Audubon Center in San Antonio. The center includes a series of water treatment ponds and their surrounding thorn scrub woodlands. The participants were able to observe many species not typically found on the Upper Texas Coast. One of their favorite was the Verdin. This small gray bird, somewhat reminiscent of a chickadee, builds a small globular nest that it places at the end of a long branch on a thorn shrub. It uses its nest as a dormitory as well, so it maintains the structure year round. One of our participants watched a Verdin work on its nest, adding a green leaf to the interior lining.
Water birds were one of the main draws of Mitchell Lake as well, and the photographers particularly enjoyed the many White Pelicans. One of the ponds had extensive shallows which attracted shorebirds by the hundreds. The group found American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Dowitchers, Stilt Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least and Baird Sandpipers. For some the highlight of the day was the large number of butterflies. More than 100 Queen Butterflies were around the visitor center alone.

An unanticipated stop extended our drive home, but it was not so bad thanks to some off-the-cuff bird quiz games that challenged all the participants and made the time pass quickly. This final stop was highlighted with a beautiful moonrise that the photographers especially appreciated.

**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 December 15 trip to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to look for Whooping Cranes. You may now sign up for the January 5 trip to Williamson County in search of Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owls and longspurs and the February 23 trip to search for Northern Gannets, ducks and gulls in Galveston and/or the Blue water highway in Brazoria County. 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 November and December can be found on the [www.pct3.com](http://www.pct3.com) website at Community Calendars. There is also a link from the park’s web 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](http://www.pct3.com) for more information.