Happy New Year from Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff at Kleb Woods Nature Preserve. May your prospects be bright and your resolutions steadfast. We have a full calendar of programs, classes, and events for people of all ages and hope you take full advantage of them in the New Year.

Volunteer Activities
The Tuesday Volunteers have been busy and productive in spite of some poor weather and holiday excursions. In addition to many weekly maintenance chores, they completed the cedar fence around our planting table for native plants. They are now designing artistic gates to complete the project. The gardeners will then move Carolina jessamine onto the fence, and with good fortune it will be a delight of yellow blossoms next February. Our woodworkers have been busy making a terrarium stand for Desi our Desert Kingsnake in the Young Naturalist Room. It hopefully will be installed early in the New Year. The vegetable gardeners harvested the sweet potatoes after the cold weather set in. They have planted cabbage, mustard, Swiss chard, fennel and kohlrabi. They have also planted some crimson clover to add nitrogen naturally to the garden. The Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare Crew has several new recruits, and has numbered eight to ten volunteers each week. They have cleared most of the yaupon between two small sections of prairie, significantly expanding the remnant prairie. Hopefully native bluestem grass, which has flourished in other cleared areas, will soon take hold here as well. Then the forest in that area will look much as it did when the Klebs first began growing pines on the property. Also this month, the volunteers celebrated another successful year at their annual potluck Christmas dinner. Music provided by dulcimer groups set a festive mood, and the food was plentiful and enjoyed by all. We hope you will volunteer with them in 2018.

Eagle Scout projects
We have several projects lined up this winter, the first of which was completed in December. This project cleared an area where we lost a stand of pines in the 2011 drought and subsequent pine bark beetle outbreak. The scout’s crew cleared the yaupon and dead trees, and then planted 30 young pine trees to reforest the area. The project was a great success and we congratulate the young candidate for a job well done. We have two additional projects scheduled for January and February.
A Closer Look at Nature
Due to the holidays, there was no class in December. Future classes will be January 18: Owls, They’re a Hoot!, February 15: Build Your Own Bird House, March 29: All About Bats, April 19: Life in the Pond, and May 17: Aphids and Aphid Eaters (Ladybugs, Lacewings, and More!).

A Closer Look at History
The December class was about pictographs and petroglyphs. The students were shown many examples of these ancient forms of written communication. They translated some pictographs and even composed their own story using a simple pictograph “key” to which they added their own words and characters. Future classes will be February 1: President’s Day, March 1: Texas Independence Day, April 5: The Road to San Jacinto, and May 3: World’s Fairs and Expositions.

History Discussion Group
The discussion in December was about holiday foods. The group discussed the origins of sweet potatoes topped with marshmallows, eggnog, wassail, Christmas turkeys, hams, and geese. They delved into the history of fruitcake and sampled some as well. Who would have thought that every single participant would actually like fruitcake? They talked about candy canes and the great myths that surround this popular Christmas candy. They sampled those as well. But the final show-and-tell, or rather eat-and-smell, was a selection of Christmas cookies which required numerous samples to appreciate the finest of them all. Everyone left with some fun Christmas trivia to share during the holidays.

Our next history discussion on January 11 will be led by Jim Wilson, park historian. We will discuss the 1964/1965 New York World’s Fair, and the history of world’s fairs in general. Our February 8 discussion will be led by Barbara Pankratz,
historian and former teacher, who will talk about Comanche captives from her hometown area of Comfort, Texas. The March 8 discussion will be led by historian and former history teacher Jay Gavitt. The April 12 discussion led by Fred Collins, park director and author, will discuss Gail Borden. Borden was a key figure in Austin’s Colony, the first newspaper publisher in Texas and the creator of Eagle Brand Milk and the Borden Milk company. The May 10 discussion will be about Mexican Revolution hero Pancho Villa, based on the book The General and the Jaguar: Pershing's Hunt for Pancho Villa: A True Story of Revolution and Revenge by Eileen Welsome.

Houston Archeology Society Project
The Houston Archeological Society had a workday here on December 2. They completed the excavations begun in November where they hoped to find evidence of a building. They found no artifacts indicating a structure at the site. They were assisted by two college students. One from Rice University and the other from Southern New Hampshire University. Their next working weekend will be January 20-21.

German language classes
Formal German language classes continue with a German 1-A, German 1-B, and a German 2-A class. 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 December featured a good selection of winter residents. The Dark-eyed Juncos that were spotted in November have stayed throughout December. This is the first time that has happened. In past winters they tended to be here only one or two days and then departed. This is a great year for Brown Creeper, and one bird walk featured seven birds. Typical winters we only have one or two. Winter Wrens also seem more abundant than typical winters.

The December 15 Senior Birding Bus Trip visited Goliad State Park and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The attraction at Goliad was a rare wintering Painted Redstart. This species breeds in the high mountain canyons of the Davis and Chisos Mountains in west Texas, and is rarely seen elsewhere. For those unable to make a several mile mountain hike into these canyons in the spring or summer, the presence of this bird at Goliad State Park is a rare opportunity to observe the species. It is a bold and distinctly marked warbler which is mostly black but sports a white arc below its eye, a broad white wing patch and white outer tail feathers. Its breast and upper belly is bright red. It is quite active and flits about nervously feeding on insects.

At left, the Goliad Painted Redstart. Photo by Gary Olson. At right the same Goliad Painted Redstart. Photo by Gary Huffman.

In the hour that our group observed the Painted Redstart, it spent much of it’s time around the tree wells of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Sapsuckers drill small shallow holes into the bark layer of trees as shown in the following picture. The tree oozes sap to fill the hole and protect the cambium layer that feeds the tree. Sapsuckers continually drill at the holes to keep the sap flowing. That sugary tree sap also attracts insects. The sapsucker visits the holes regularly, eating the insects as well as some sap.
The Redstart was also visiting the sapsucker’s wells stealing insects and probably some sap as well. This clearly irritated the sapsucker that frequently ran the Redstart from the wells and put it to flight. The sapsucker’s extensive well works on this tree will probably feed both birds throughout the winter.

A good number of other birds were observed at Goliad. One of the highlights was an American Woodcock that flushed from cover, allowing a fleeting glimpse for a few lucky birders. Goliad lies in the center of the state from an east-west position and happens to be where two different species of titmice come together, the Tufted Titmouse of the eastern United States and the Black-crested Titmouse of the Southwest. In this very narrow zone the two species hybridize producing what is known as the Dixon’s Titmouse with intermediate characteristics. A few of those were observed in a flock near where the redstart was observed.

The group left Goliad State Park about noon and traveled to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. They were able to locate one family group of Whooping Cranes from the observation tower. Unfortunately it was overcast and misting while the group was there and it certainly was not conducive to photographs. Although the beautiful cranes were a distant observation from the tower, the views in the scope were still nice.
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 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 Bluewater Highway in Brazoria County. You may now sign up for the March 23 trip to east Texas to look for Bachman’s Sparrow and Red-cockaded Woodpecker. You may also now sign up for the April 6 trip to the Austin area to search for Golden-cheeked Warbler. 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 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 for more information.