February witnessed the retreat of winter and the birth of spring. The hard freeze of January has set back many tropical and less hardy plants, but it also set back the insect population. The hardy fruit orchard seems to find the cold winter much to its liking, and the colors it displays are wondrous. Although the woods are still somber, the grasses and wildflowers are demonstrating spring’s rebirth and vivid color. Commissioner Radack invites you to come and visit the woods in their spring glory.

Volunteer activities
The Tuesday Volunteers have again been highly productive and have the place looking neat and clean. They bermed and mulched many trees that had been transplanted with one of the Precinct’s tree spade trucks earlier this winter. They have also improved some drainage near the Kleb House. The master gardeners have continued to cut back frozen plants and clean flower beds in anticipation of the spring growing season. Our vegetable gardeners are anxiously waiting for the weather to dry out the garden enough for the spring season to begin. Our woodworkers prepared 80 bird house kits for “A Closer Look at Nature” in February. They also helped the kids during the class build their bird houses. The Yaupon’s Worst Nightmare crew has worked on the wetland trail this month and are beginning to clear a vine-tangled area where we lost a grove of trees during the 2011 drought. This area will be reforested with pine trees in the coming years. All of these fine people would love to have you join them this coming month.

Eagle Scout projects
An Eagle Scout candidate volunteered to replace one of our original boardwalks which had rotted with time. His crew of high school age volunteers were fun loving but industrious and conscientious. They took the term “work party” to heart. While at times it sounded like a party, it was hard work. They did a good job removing and replacing the boardwalk at the junction of the wetland and live oak trails.

At left, the Eagle Scout first has to remove the old boardwalk. At right, his crew of volunteers deck the new structure. Photos by Megan Ahlgren.

A Closer Look at Nature
The class in February was about bird houses for backyard birds. The kids learned some basics about which birds use cavities as opposed to building open cup nests. The cavity nesters readily accept bird boxes. The class was highlighted by the kids building their own bird box to put up in their back yard in hopes of providing a nest site for chickadees and titmice. Future classes will be March 29th: All About Bats, April 19th: Life in the Pond, and May 17th: Aphids and Aphid Eaters (Ladybugs, Lacewings, and More!).
A Closer Look at History
The class in February celebrated Presidents’ Day. The kids attended a “birthday party” for a few of their favorite presidents. They opened gifts for each president and tried to figure out their significance. A sword was significant to President Grant since he had been a General. A bag of peanuts was a fun gift for our president who was a former peanut farmer. Do you know who that was? Why do you think President Truman’s gift was a tie? After the presents, there was of course a birthday cake. All in all it was an enjoyable and educational Presidents’ Birthday Party. Future programs will be March 1st: Texas Independence Day, April 5th: The Road to San Jacinto, and May 3rd: World’s Fairs and Expositions.

History Discussion Group
The discussion in February was led by Barbara Pankratz, historian and former teacher, who talked about Comanche captives from her hometown area of Comfort, Texas. In 1870 Herman Lehmann was eleven years old when he was captured by Apache during a raid on the Lehmann settlement. He lived among the Apache and later the Comanche. He was adopted by Quanah Parker. He was returned home in 1879 at the age of 20 by the U.S. Army. While he remained with his natural-born family and was restored to the white civilization, he maintained his ties and friendship with the Comanche and remained a member of the tribe until his death. In 1927, his experiences were published in his memoirs: Nine Years Among the Indians, 1870-1879. The story of the captivity and life of a Texan among the Indians. The group also discussed other captives and contemporary accounts of their experiences. Our next history discussion on March 8th will be about women’s suffrage in the West and will be led by historian and former history teacher Jay Gavitt. The April 12th discussion will be led by Fred Collins, park director and author, and 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 10th 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
Due to excessive rain during February the society was unable to hold their scheduled workday. They have not yet scheduled a March workday as they have to have drier ground. Please check their web site for future work days at Kleb Woods Nature Preserve.

German language classes
Formal German language classes continue with a German 1-A, German 1-B, and 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 February were often soggy, but well attended in spite of the weather. We also held their annual winter Big Day on February 7th. We had a good day and recorded 60 species, but this was well short of our winter record of 70 species. Several of the regular bird walks cracked the 50 species mark. The most unusual species for the month was an Osprey, which hung around the area and was spotted on several occasions. Ospreys are occasionally seen during migration but these were the first ever Kleb Woods records for February or any winter month.

The February Senior Birding Bus Trip went on a quest for a rare Purple Sandpiper that had been reported near Port Lavaca in Calhoun County. The group arrived at the appointed sight about 10 a.m. and within ten minutes had the rare bird in view. The sandpiper foraged alongside Killdeer, Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone shorebirds. Other interesting birds at the spot were three Osprey, a Clapper Rail and both Semipalmated and Piping Plovers. The Purple Sandpiper kept at a distance and did not prove to be very photogenic. However, it was a “lifer” for almost everyone on the bus, and so all thought the whole affair wonderful.

The group went to lunch at a local restaurant and then continued birding. They visited Magnolia Beach, where they found huge rafts of Lesser Scaup with more than a few of the less common Greater Scaup. They also had Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye, and found the black and white males of these species to be quite beautiful and striking. Other birds at the site were Laughing and Ring-billed Gulls as well as Forster’s Terns.

The group then went to the Texas Ornithological Society’s Magic Ridge. This bird refuge is near the Islandola Cemetery and the group enjoyed a bit of history while they birded.
At left, a Forster’s Tern. At right, male and female Buffleheads. Photos by Smily Flores.

At left, Magnolia Beach. At right, a Brown Pelican. Photos by George Valdez.

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 March 23rd trip to east Texas to look for Bachman’s Sparrow and Red-cockaded Woodpecker (5 AM to 5 PM). You may now sign up for the, the April 6th trip to the Austin area to search for Golden-cheeked Warbler (5 AM to 5 PM) and the April 27th and May 11th trips which will both go to the coast to look for spring migrants. 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 February and March 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.