Steve Radack, Commissioner  
Harris County Precinct 3  
Kleb Woods Nature Preserve  
June 2019

Commissioner Steve Radack and his staff wish you a happy Father’s Day. We hope you will enjoy some of the longest days of the year in our Precinct 3 Parks. Kleb Woods and many other parks are open each day until dusk.

Volunteer Activities  
Tuesday Volunteers are an active and dedicated lot. They continue their weekly contributions to the maintenance and improvement of the preserve and historic farm, even in the face of rising temperatures and humidity. They have assisted the gardeners by building trellises and spreading mulch. They also constructed a fence-like barrier to protect a recently cleared area and allow pines to regenerate the forest. The Woodworkers completed the siding and batten repair to the 1901 barn. Hopefully, it will be good for a few more years. The Vegetable Gardeners have a beautiful garden, which should have some crops ready to harvest by the time this newsletter appears. The tomatoes and pole beans really look quaint on their cedar limb trellises. The Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardeners have been busy tending flowerbeds and planting seedling trees. Thanks to them, we now have many more redbuds that will grace the area near the nature center for many springs to come. These productive people invite you to join their ranks, just show up Tuesday morning about 9:00 a.m. and join the fun.

At left, the Tuesday Volunteers pose next to the Bald Cypress tree in April 2019.  
At right, they posed next to the same tree in November 2017. Photos by Fred Collins.

The photos above illustrate some of the work the volunteers do. In 2017, they installed a French Drain off the Nature Center rain gutter downspout. It is next to a small Bald Cypress tree we planted back in 2006, which was well established but was not flourishing. Unfortunately, the old photo does not show the tree height, but the tree is obviously much healthier since the French Drain was installed. Often the value of what the volunteers do is not evident for years to come. Kleb Woods is a much better place, now and well into the future, because of what these volunteers do each week.

A Closer Look at History  
The final class of the spring was about the Spanish Missions of Texas. The students were presented an overview of when, where and why the Spanish Missions were established in the State. They were also shown those that can still be visited, either as active churches or historical sites. One of the missions that is a day trip from Harris County is the Mission Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zuñiga, built in 1749 on its present day site in Goliad State Park. Following the class, the kids tried their hand, or rather feet, at making adobe bricks. Many southwest missions were made of adobe brick. The kids mixed...
clay, sand, and straw together for the adobe material, and then packed a few brick forms. They were all anxious to see how they will turn out once they dry.

Above, the kids worked the sand and straw into the clay to prepare the adobe mix. Photos by Megan Ahlgren.

Two pictures left, the kids fill the brick forms. Two pictures right, the kids pack the adobe tight to make solid bricks. Photos by Megan Ahlgren.

Above, the final bricks are dressed and smoothed. Photo by Megan Ahlgren.
A Closer Look at Nature
The May class was all about spiders. The kids saw examples of this incredibly diverse group of arthropods, ranging from as small as the head of a pin up to a foot long, and from camouflaged to boldly patterned and brightly colored. While learning about their anatomy, hunting strategies, and usefulness for pest control, the kids and their parents grew to appreciate spiders and their importance in our world. Then the kids went outside and were excited to find and take pictures of the many different kinds of spiders found at Kleb Woods.

The “A Closer Look at Nature” and “History Classes” will return in the fall. This summer your kids will enjoy “Discovery Days” at Kleb Woods. See the calendar for topics and dates.

School Visitation Groups
On May 15, the Emery/Weiner School visited Kleb Woods for a field trip in cooperation with the Houston Archeological Society. The 73 students, accompanied by 8 teachers and parents, were able to participate in an archeology dig, try their hand at paleo forging with our volunteer blacksmiths, have a tour of the historical farm and 1896 Kleb House, participate in a nature walk and visit the Nature Center. It was a full, hands-on day for the students. They left with a variety of new experiences.

History Discussion Group
Historian and former Harris County Archives Manager Paul Scott led the May discussion. He reviewed the book A History of the World in Six Glasses by Tom Standage. The discussion covered the discovery, spread, and impact that six different drinks have had on world history. The first “glass” was beer, the result of the natural fermentation that occurred when stored grain was soaked and covered with rainwater in a vessel. This crude but natural beer disinfected the water with alcohol, and fermentation released vitamins in the grain. Hence, those who drank it were healthier as were their children. Beer making spread across all grain-growing cultures. The idea of fermentation soon spread to grapes and the second glass, wine, was born. This, too, benefited those who drank it instead of water, and wine and grape culture spread. As wine making evolved, a still was eventually employed to strengthen wine to brandy, and the historic third glass emerged spirits. Spirits had a great economic impact because such liquids did not spoil and served many purposes. It became something of an international currency, and caused the spread of sugar and rum production to many European colonies. This, in turn, spread slavery across the globe to sugar producing regions. The fourth glass was coffee. Like the alcoholic beverages, it, too, was healthier than water. In coffee’s case, this was because of boiling the water. Its spread to Europe was pivotal during the age of enlightenment when civilizations began to have information industries and apply math and science across commerce. The caffeine stimulated the brain and encouraged alertness and conversation. Coffee houses in England and Europe, especially France, had a dramatic and far-reaching impact on society, civilization and industrialization. The fifth glass was tea. Like coffee, its preparation and chemicals in the tea killed bacteria in the water. Because of its stimulating caffeine and its improved water quality, it improved the health and fecundity of the English who had adopted the drink across all economic levels. These healthier, caffeine-stimulated workers manned the industrial revolution factories and made the English economy a juggernaut in the later 18th century. The sixth glass was cola, the drink that combines safe water, caffeine, sugar, and global marketing to establish the globalization of the world economy. This was a result of Coca Cola’s commitment during WWII to give every serviceman a coke for five cents, regardless where he was or what it cost the company. The Company became tied to American Foreign Policy as they took the 64 global bottling plants they established during the War to consumers across the globe.

Albert Holba who will review World War II in the Pacific will lead the June 13 discussion. His focus will be the major naval actions and the personalities that dictated the events. The July 11 discussion will be about the removal of the Buffalo from the Great Plains in the 1869-1879 period. It will draw from several books including The Buffalo War: The History of the Red River Indian Uprising of 1874 by James L. Haley, published in 1976, and The Border and the Buffalo: An Untold Story of the Southwest Plains by John R. Cook, published in 1906.

German language classes
Formal German classes have concluded. Watch for a new German Series in the fall, “A Closer Look at German Heritage.”

Plant Walks
The “May Plant Walk” was as interesting as the April one even though many plants have finished blooming. The wetland plants were in full bloom, and they more than made up for the passing of spring flowers. It is also interesting to see the fall plants beginning to emerge and start their annual growth. The botanist leaders found two new species for the park while on
the walk and one the previous day as they prepared for it. We will have plant walks once each month through the summer. Please check the calendar for future dates or call the nature center.

Birding activities

The “Weekly Bird Walks” in May were spectacular. May 1 was our planned annual spring “Big Day.” Again, we made an all-out effort to see how many species we could find in one day at Kleb Woods. The previous record was 90 species in 2015. We were not expecting to break that since there were no special weather conditions that would stop migrants. However, as the different groups spread across the entire park, they each found a few good birds. One group ran across a mixed flock of Warblers. At noon, we tallied up and were surprised to find we had seen 80 species and were still missing some birds we knew were in the park. After a short lunch break, the intrepid birders resumed their quest. Slowly but surely they worked their way toward the 90th species, which was found at about 4:30 p.m. Then one last bird was found for the day. A Sedge Wren, for number 91! A new record! The day’s list was impressive with 16 species of Warblers. Later the same week, the first Saturday bird walk got some help from a stormy frontal passage the night before that stopped migrants. In a two-hour walk, they found 15 species of Warblers. It has been a long time since we have had such a great year for Warblers at Kleb Woods Nature Preserve.

Our May afternoon birding program was Hawk Identification by Dr. Cin-Ty Lee of Rice University. Cin-Ty is one of the finest field observers there is, and his presentations are always popular. Even though I have been observing birds for 50+ years
and teach field identification as well, I never fail to learn something from his presentations. He is also an excellent artist and his artful eye invariably sees a detail that most mortals miss.

There were two Senior Birding Bus Trips in April. The first went to Boykin Springs in the Angelina National Forest of East Texas. Boykin Springs flows through a healthy Longleaf Pine Forest. This type of forest dominated Texas prior to the 1850s, but the slow growing Longleaf Pines were cut and replaced with Loblolly Pine and non-native faster growing species. The unique Longleaf Pine ecosystem depended on regular fire to suppress brush and hardwood competition. Hence, these pine stands, when maintained by fire as in the Angelina National Forest, have grasses below the Pines. The habitat is perfect for the Bachman’s Sparrow. The Sparrow is rare except in these and other Longleaf Pine Forests. The birders went in search of this rare Sparrow and the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker that also likes Longleaf Pines.

![Above, the group sets out in search of Bachman’s Sparrow through the open Longleaf Pine Forest. Photo by Jerry Chen.](image)

Although our staff leaders were able to hear the Bachman's Sparrows as soon as we arrived, the birds are quite illusive. They perch up and sing from several places in their territory in spring. However, they seem to throw their voice in whatever direction they turn their head, so figuring out where the bird is singing from is a great challenge. When they are not singing, they forage on the ground and can run and hide like mice. We first cornered one on the ground, but he outran our flank. A few lucky birders saw him on the ground at 6-20 feet for a wonderful experience. Unfortunately, most of the participants never caught up to that bird. Persistence paid off and eventually one of the ventriloquist Sparrows was found on its song perch and we were able to put the scope of him. I think everyone on the trip finally got a good look at the enigmatic Sparrow.

![At left, the Bachman’s Sparrow scurries like a mouse. Photo by Jerry Chen. At right, the Bachman’s Sparrow on its song perch. Photo by Albert Holba.](image)
Then it was on to try to find the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. A family group was found foraging right next to the road, and we were able to drive the bus up and let the participants off to enjoy the antics of the family. Three birds in a binocular view at once is a rare treat. Just about, everyone got good looks at this endangered species.

At left, a Red-cockaded Woodpecker in a Longleaf Pine. Photo by Albert Holba.
At right, two Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, notice the color bands on one. Photo by Jerry Chen.

After a highly successful quest for these two Piney Woods specialists, we tried our luck with a third. This time we were looking for the Prairie Warbler. The name is misleading, as it actually likes young pines surrounded by grass. These conditions are typically found in pine plantations during the first 5 years or so from planting. The birds sing from the tops of pines, and nest between the Christmas tree like pines in the grass. We were quickly rewarded once we found suitable habitat, much to the delight of the photographers.

At left, a Prairie Warbler among the young pines. At right, the Prairie Warbler proclaims its territory. Photos by Albert Holba.

Following the Prairie Warbler encounter, the group went to Lake Livingston State Park where they ate a picnic lunch and birded around the lake. They added many species to their aggregate trip list. Many also enjoyed a Broad-winged Hawk migration that saw more than fifteen pass overhead, as well as two Bald Eagles that were in the area.

The second April field trip went to Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, the Houston Audubon High Island Sanctuaries, and to Rollover Pass on the Bolivar Peninsular. The group started at the small Oak Mott toward Frozen Point at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. There was a nice assortment of migrants there, including Flycatchers, Vireos, Thrushes, Orioles, Warblers, and Buntings.
The group next drove around Shoveler Pond at the Refuge. This is always a highlight of the trip. The group soon found Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, and Common and Purple Gallinule. A Common Gallinule tending six downy babies was a big hit with the group. There were many young alligators, with the population rebounding from the annihilation of Hurricane Harvey. There were many shorebirds on the pond, which is unusual but current conditions favor them. The best shorebird of the day was Hudsonian Godwit, of which two were spotted. This species is more common in May, so we were lucky to find these. The group was also able to pick out an unusual Glossy Ibis among the more common White-faced Ibis.

The next stop was Boy Scout Woods, one of Houston Audubon’s High Island Sanctuaries. In addition to birding, many of the Seniors ate their picnic lunch in the bleachers overlooking the drip. Unfortunately, other than Gray Catbirds and an occasional Swainson’s Thrush, it was slow at the drip. The woods provided better action with a good assortment of Warblers and an occasional other noteworthy bird. A popular sight was a perched Chuck-will’s-widow. This Nightjar is as large as a
A small hawk with a long tail and broad, long wings. It usually sits hidden on the forest floor, so one perched on a small limb was a treat. They are nocturnal, so this one was trying to catch some sleep even though a dozen to twenty birders were gawking at it almost continually in the early afternoon.

Above, a nocturnal Chuck-will's-widow catches a nap in spite of many admiring observers. Photo by Fred Collins.

The group's next stop was Rollover Pass down the Bolivar Peninsular. There they found an array of Gulls, Terns, Pelicans, Egrets and other shorebirds. They added many species to their trip list. Their final stop was Smith Oaks at the High Island Houston Audubon Sanctuaries. They spent their last hour of birding time enjoying more Warblers, Vireos, Thrushes, Catbirds, Orioles, and Tanagers.

At left, a Wilson's Plover. At right, a Blackburnian Warbler. Photos by Sarah Kuzio

**Signing Up for Senior Birding Bus Trips (Must be at least 50 years old to go on these trips)**

You may now sign up for the **June 7** trip to look for exotic species in the greater Houston area, the **July 12** trip to search for Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Swallow-tailed Kite, and the **August 27** trip to a coastal location TBD. To sign up for these trips, email klebwoods@pct3.hctx.net 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 May and June 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.