



THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge



Volume 1 issue 2

18th Annual Festival Big Success

This year's Prairie Chicken Festival was a great success with the highest attendance seen in the past 6 years and an increase on 92% over last year. The 2 day attendance was 341 with the majority of those attending choosing to take the van tours to view Prairie Chickens on the

booming grounds. If your goal was to view one of North America's most endangered species, you were not disappointed. Despite winds that kept most birds undercover, the prairie chickens came out for every tour. Other attendees enjoyed self-guided refuge

tours as well as guided birding and wildflower tours. Visitors represented 11 states and 2 foreign countries. We appreciate all of those that came out to support the Refuge and dropped by the Friends booth to offer comments, join our organization, purchase merchandise or generously offer monetary donations. We look forward to seeing you next year and hope to have your continued support



Photo by: Noppadol Paothong



Photo at left. From left: Refuge Manager Terry Rossignol, Friends Vice President Gary Woods, Refuge Volunteer Jane Plunkett. Photo by John Magera.

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Did you know?

- There is only 1% of the original coastal prairie left and even less that has never been plowed
- There are 556 National Wildlife Refuges across the Country with at least one in every state.
- More than 300 herbaceous plant species have been documented from a single prairie remnant in Brazoria County, Texas

Cooperative Agreement Signed!

The Friends board is happy to announce that the Cooperative Agreement between The Friends Group and The USFWS Texas Coastal Program has been signed sealed and delivered. The \$42,000.00 grant will allow the Refuge to continue the

valuable work of controlling the invasive, imported red fire ant, discussed in our last newsletter. It will also allow staff to continue work on controlling other invasive species, including Chinese tallowtree, Macartney rose and deep-rooted sedge.

We want to thank the Refuge staff, led by Refuge Manager Terry Rossignol and USFWS, Texas Coastal Program staff members, Scott Williams and Elaine Schaffer for working with us so closely to see this process completed.

People Define our Successes

The success of our refuge system and the recovery of imperiled species is dependent on the hard work of dedicated people. That is truly the case at Attwater Refuge. In this issue of *Boomer* we are spotlighting one of those dedicated individuals, intern Andrew Ludvik. Recently Assistant Refuge Manager, John Magera sat down with Andrew to ask him about his experience at the Refuge and get his "Intern-view".

1. What brought you to Attwater ?

I'm originally from the north woods of Wisconsin, from a tiny little town called Weyerhaeuser. I got my bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. It's a very long story how I come to find myself here at Attwater, long story short I found myself stricken with malaria and was forced to back out of my post-graduation research plans. So I joined the SCA. This internship caught my eye and here I am.

2. What other jobs or internships have you had before coming here.

Last summer I worked for the Clean Boats Clean Waters program back home in Wisconsin. My primary duties were to inspect watercrafts from spreading aquatic invasive species, conduct surveys to tract the spread of the invasives, and to educate the public on the dangers they pose. I've also been fortunate enough to experience several ecology research opportunities which included traveling to Cambodia and the Galapagos Islands.

3. What have you been involved with at Attwater, and which job have you enjoyed the most?

My primary obligation is to assist in the removal of invasive species at the refuge. However the great part about my internship is that I feel like I got to experience a little bit of everything that goes on here, whether it be assisting in the prairie chicken recovery work to doing multiple kinds of species surveys around the area. I was quite pleased with the mixed assortment of experiences I've had. If I had to pick one job I liked the most, it has to be working up a good sweat and appetite chain sawing with Butch Young, a volunteer who has dedicated a lot of his hard work and time to the refuge.



SCA Intern Andrew Ludvik
Photo by John Magera

4. We do a lot of "dirty jobs" here on the refuge. Can you tell us your best "dirty job" story?

There's nothing clean about chain sawing in the Texas sun, however the dirtiest job I've done here by far is the work we do with the prairie chicken carcasses, getting them down to bare bones. The process is a little too long to discuss here, but trust me all you need to know is that it is quite dirty... and foul smelling.

5. How do you think working here will help you in your career?

I think doing this internship will help me in many ways. Like I stated earlier, I got to perform and assist in a wide variety of tasks here and have been certified in multiple skills from earning my RED card to tractor training. But what makes this opportunity truly unique is the invaluable experience I got working with one of North America's most endangered species and getting firsthand experience with the different steps of an endangered species recovery plan.

Success cont.

6. You're leaving soon after serving out a year internship. What will you miss the most and what's next for you?

You can't beat the prairie's sunsets and the night sky is great as well, but the staff here is truly amazing and it'll be hard to say goodbye for the final time. I'm going to continue to try and find work in the wildlife/ecology field and hopefully build up enough of a nest egg to eventually be able to afford grad school here in the near future.



Prairie Chicken Chick Photo by: Noppadol Paoyhong

7. One last question... what do you think the people should know about the refuge that they might not already know?

To me, people should really know just how much work is being done behind the scenes and how complex the issues really are in helping to save this species. As I'm sure is the same case with most other endangered species, the problems affecting the prairie chicken are complex and not clear as day. I've come to respect and admire the dedication an employee here must have to stick with it and not lose faith in the recovery of the Attwater's Prairie Chicken.

Editor's Note: Since 1957 The Student Conservation Association (SCA) has been America's conservation corps. Its members protect and restore national parks, marine sanctuaries, cultural landmarks and community green spaces in all 50 states. Their mission statement is to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of our environment and communities by engaging young people in hands-on service to the land. For more information about this fine organization, visit their web site

<http://www.thesca.org>.

Save the Last Dance Now Available !

Save the Last Dance – A Story of North American Grassland Grouse by Noppadol Paothong and Joel M. Vance is now available. This 204-page hardbound book captures the dazzling beauty of seven grouse species whose populations are diminishing across the prairies and plains of America – and one species that has already lost its battle for survival. The book includes the

story of our Attwater's Prairie Chicken and beautiful photographs taken on the refuge. Mr. Paothong graciously consented to the use of some of his photographs on the note cards the Friends Group had for sale at this year's festival. The book is available through Mr. Paothong's web site. <http://www.savethelastdancebook.com/>. The authors are donating a portion of the pro-

ceeds to a selection of conservation organizations. We encourage you to click on "donation organizations" when you place your order and select Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Wildlife Refuge. By so doing you receive a wonderful book and the Friends Group gains additional financial support to continue our work.

APC Summer Update

Dr. Mike Morrow, Wildlife Biologist

Late last summer, the Recovery Team recommended a temporary suspension of prairie-chicken releases in Goliad County and at the Texas City Prairie Preserve. This decision was driven by the reality that (1) as an *r*-selected species, prairie-chickens experience inherently high mortality; (2) while the average post-release survival of 16% observed over the last 15 years is less than the already inherently high mortality of wild birds, it is 2X higher than the best post-release survival we have seen in the literature for other galliform species; (3) based on this observed post-release survival, the average 200 birds released over the last few years would be expected to add only approximately 32 birds to the population/year. Therefore, the Recovery Team felt that given the current production from the captive facilities, there were simply not enough birds to have a reasonable chance of growing any of the populations in the foreseeable future if we continued to release birds at all 3 sites. Clearly, spreading the limited numbers of birds available across 3 sites has not resulted in significant population growth at any of the sites. Therefore, the Team recommended that given the current constraint of bird numbers available for release, all birds be focused on one site at a time to hopefully facilitate establishment of a viable population. The primary reason for selecting APCNWR for initial focus was based on the availability of personnel to monitor and conduct research that will hopefully ultimately benefit other sites as well.

This decision resulted from the Team's attempt to manage a scarce resource (i.e., number of birds for release) and does not represent a decision to walk away from the Refugio-Goliad or Texas City project areas permanently. Clearly, based on amount of habitat available, grasslands in Refugio and Goliad counties represent the best opportunity in the long-term for substantial increases in APC populations. Additionally, differences in reproductive success observed between sites this year and in years past emphasize the importance of having APC populations geographically dispersed to take advantage of locally favorable conditions, and conversely, to hedge against locally adverse conditions. Funding has been secured to initiate a new APC rearing facility at the Sutton Avian Research Center which will double the size of the current APC rearing flock. Although this facility is still a few years away from producing many birds, ultimately it should substantially increase the number of birds available for release.

This year, 228 birds from captive facilities were selected for release. All but 9 of these birds will be released at APCNWR. Nine chicks resulting from the previously discussed egg collection (see [2012 Nesting](#)) were transferred to Goliad County to supplement the 2 broods remaining there. This technique for releasing chicks will also be evaluated at APCNWR with a comparable number of birds. Plans are for all birds to be released by mid-September before the arrival of migrant raptors.



Photo by: John Magera

Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

Membership Application

A Friends group has been formed to support Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR. An interim Board of Directors is in place and we are now a non-profit corporation in the state of Texas. It will be a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We have received a NFWF Start-up Grant and will be entering a coop agreement with the FWS Texas Coastal Program to fund invasive species control on the refuge.

Our mission is to support the purpose and objectives of Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR and promote the recovery of the Attwater's Prairie Chicken and the Texas native coastal prairie ecosystem for this and future generations.

Our goals are:

- To provide educational and awareness programs
- To support the operating activities of the Refuge
- To advocate for issues that support the Refuge
- To maintain and grow our membership



Yes, I want to support Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge and its programs with my membership and my check is enclosed.

No, I do not want to join at this time but please contact me later.

Check Membership

- \$15 Student/Senior
- \$20 Individual
- \$30 Family

Please make check payable to:

**Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken
Refuge
P.O. Box 212
Eagle Lake, Texas 77434**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____