



THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge



Volume 1 issue 3

Message From The President

Recently, the Houston Chronicle published *Birds Take Wing on a Prayer*, 9/06/2012, a front-page story on the effort to save the Attwater Prairie Chicken. The story was picked up and published by other Texas newspapers. While it is always good to see the public informed of this on-going effort, I felt there was more to the story than was brought out in the article. The article failed to mention the hard work, dedication and generosity of the volunteers, organizations, companies and public and private agencies whose collaboration has been essential to the survival of the species.

A "short" list of key partners demonstrates this bird's extraordinary appeal to both the public and private sectors: Mobil Oil donated both the Texas City Refuge site and

funding for the first Attwater's Prairie Chicken Festival. Texas A&M provided expertise and research into captive breeding. Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, the Houston, San Antonio, Caldwell, and Abilene Zoos and Sea World have participated in captive-breeding programs. The Nature Conservancy of Texas agreed to accept and manage the Texas City site. The town of Eagle Lake sponsored the first Attwater's Prairie Chicken Festival. And volunteers from the towns of Eagle Lake and Sealy, the Houston Audubon Society and the local Chapter of the Telephone Pioneers have worked to identify nesting sites and restore habitat. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have worked with private landowners to restore habitat for the Prairie Chicken

At present, these efforts and countless others have managed to save this uniquely Texas species from extinction; however, much needs to be done to ensure its future survival. Texans from all walks of life can be a part of this vital effort.

You can help by becoming our newest "Friend," donating to the cause, or becoming a sponsor. If you are already a "Friend", and there are now 72 of you out there, make sure you renew your membership, invite a friend to join, or give a gift membership. Whether you are an individual or a home-grown corporation concerned about a bird found "nowhere else but Texas," you too can be part of the effort, to keep this species a part of the Texas landscape.

Ron Jones, President



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Did you know?

- There are six facilities in Texas that participate in the APC captive breeding program.
- The membership in our Friends Group is now 72 members strong.
- Grassland dependent wildlife species are on decline world-wide .



Photo at left. Snow geese on the refuge. Coastal prairie can be very wet during parts of the year.

The Refuge System's Unsung Heroes

National Wildlife Refuges across the Country are better able to provide enhanced visitor services, improve wildlife habitat conditions and protect America's natural resources because of the unselfish work of dedicated volunteers. In FY 2009 nearly 42,000 volunteers donated more than 1.6 million hours to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The FWS valued their labor at more than \$32 million or the equivalent of 775 full-time employees. Attwater was one of the beneficiaries of this generosity in the form of volunteer Butch Young. Butch volunteers an averages 6-8 hours per week at the refuge and since June of last year has contributed 330 hours of his time to the Refuge's mission. Here are some Butch's comments about how he came to be a volunteer and his thoughts on volunteering at the refuge.

1. Tell us a little about yourself - where you're from, what you used to do for a living, and some of your interests.

I Retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1997 after having served 23 years as a Weapon Systems Officer in F111s and as a manager of operational weapons tests. My wife and I moved to Brenham where I worked for Leggett and Platt as a branch quality manager.

2. When did your interest in the outdoors and nature begin?

I became interested in nature in college while at the University of Texas where I obtained a degree in biology. After retirement, my wife and I became certified as Texas Master Naturalists.

3. How did you find out about Attwater and the National Wildlife Refuge System?

I toured the refuge and noted on the web that volunteers were needed.

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

I have participated in ant studies, vegetation studies, mammal studies, fed the newly arrived prairie chickens in their acclimation pens, disced fire breaks and food plots, sprayed invasive plants such as MacCartney Rose, chain sawed invasive trees, cleared fence lines, inventoried and maintained the survey point markers. Mowing the two walking trails in the spring is one of my favorite tasks, the flowers are beautiful and change every couple of weeks.

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

Clearing fence lines of yaupon with pruning shears then stump spraying is not much fun. Too much bending over for my back.



6. What advice could you offer someone interested in volunteering at a National Wildlife Refuge? Be flexible.

To use any equipment you must be trained, and as with any bureaucracy this takes time. Attwater sent me to a four day chainsaw class, a day long ATV/UTV class and a large equipment class. Good way to get rid of bad habits.

Unsung heroes continues on p.3

At left: Butch and his wife Peggy applying Nixalite to fence posts to keep predators from perching.

Unsung heroes from p.2

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

While dedicated to the Attwater Prairie Chicken the efforts benefit a lot of other wildlife. Every time I drive in I look at the adjacent properties and compare what I see to the refuge. It is a joy to have to give the right-of-way to quail, deer, rabbits and turtles.



Eastern Yellow-Bellied Racer

Photo by Curtis Jones USFWS

**If you are interested in volunteering
at the refuge contact Assistant Refuge Manager, John Magera at: 979/234-3021 ex.223**

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

Prairie Grass and Wild flower Seeds Don't Make a Prairie

But they are an important component if your goal is prairie restoration. Lack of suitable seed and large enough quantities has always played a part in determining the success or failure of a grassland restoration. A new initiative has begun that plans to help remedy the situation. Modeled after a successful program in south Texas, The Prairie Seed Council is working with volunteers to collect suitable seed that will become part of an effort to grow enough seed that it can be turned over to commercial seed grower, with a final goal

of producing enough volume to meet the public demand. Seed will be collected from suitable sites all along the upper Texas coast, including Attwater Refuge. The collected seed will be grown out at the USDA's Plant Materials Center in Kingsville, Texas. If you think you might be interested in becoming a part of this effort, visit their web site at www.prairieseedco.org to find out more. If you want to get involved with the Refuge effort and at site in surrounding counties, contact John Magera at the Refuge. (see article

above). John does ask that you commit to 40 hours of volunteer time because of the training required.



Eastern Gamagrass bloom

APC Fall Update

Dr. Mike Morrow, Wildlife Biologist

2012 Brood Survival

Nine of the 10 broods at APCNWR were released from predator-deterrent fences at or near hatch, and 1 brood was confined with the hen in a head-start pen for 11 days posthatch. Of the 9 broods released at hatch, 4 (44%) still had chicks at 2 weeks posthatch. Of the 11 chicks confined in the head-start pen at hatch, 11 (100%) were released with the hen at 11 days posthatch. Four of 5 (3 released at hatch, 1 head-start) broods were known to still have chicks at 6+ weeks posthatch (at least 11 total chicks, average 2.8 chicks/brood).

Four of 5 broods (80%) at Goliad were known to have survived to 2 weeks posthatch, and 2 still had chicks at 6+ weeks posthatch (3 chicks total, average 1.5 chicks/brood). Combining APCNWR and Goliad County, 8 of 14 (57%) broods not confined in head-start pens still had chicks at 2 weeks posthatch, and 5 of 14 (36%) still had chicks at 6 weeks. Studies have shown that the first 2 weeks posthatch is the most critical time for survival for most galliform species. The 2-week survival observed this year for APC broods was not statistically different ($P > 0.25$) than the 69% survival observed for 83 wild greater prairie-chickens in a stable Minnesota population (Pratt 2010). A study (Morrow 1986) conducted on wild APC at APCNWR from 1983-85 observed 38% survival of 8 broods to 8 weeks post-hatch, very close to the 36% to 6+ weeks observed this year.

RIFA Study

In an effort to evaluate the role of red imported fire ants (RIFA) (*Solenopsis invicta*) on insects available to APC broods and therefore, ultimately on brood survival, 5 areas totaling 2,852 acres at APCNWR (540 acres), TCPP (504 acres), Goliad County (2 areas totaling 1,169 acres), and Refugio County (639 acres) were treated in fall 2010-11 with 1.5 pounds/acre of Extinguish Plus (donated by Central Life Sciences) to reduce numbers of red imported fire ants. In addition, 760 acres were treated by APCNWR as a continuation of a pilot project initiated in 2009. Ant and insect assessments were conducted bi-weekly at these sites during the brooding seasons of 2011-12, along with paired control (untreated) sites at each location. Texas A&M University Department of Entomology (TAMU) under contract with the Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus conducted sampling at all sites except APCNWR, where refuge staff conducted the sampling. Three bi-weekly assessments of ant activity and insect abundance were conducted from early-May–mid-June. Samples are still being processed in the laboratory at APCNWR and TAMU. A final report on this project is expected in early 2013.



Boy Scout Volunteers Assemble the First Release Pen at the Texas City Preserve

Visit Your National Wildlife Refuges: October 14-20, 2012

Treat yourself with a visit to a national wildlife refuge during National Wildlife Refuge Week, from October 14-20. Celebrate America's wildlife heritage, and see what refuges are doing to conserve it.

Among the most popular activities for 45 million refuge visitors last year were wildlife viewing, bird watching, photography, hiking and auto-tour-route driving. National wildlife refuges also offer world-class recreation, from fishing, hunting and wildlife observation along 2,500 miles of land and water trails to photography and environmental education.

Check the [special events calendar](#) for Refuge Week events in your community. Follow news about the Refuge System online at: <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/> Join the conversation about wildlife refuges at

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/USFWSRefuges>.

Don't Miss the Attwater's Christmas Bird Count

The Attwater's CBC, in Eagle Lake, Texas will be held on Wednesday, December 19, 2012. Join us for a wonderful opportunity to bird the Refuge. This event is open to all birders and is one of the highest inland CBCs, for diversity, in the Country. Last year it recorded 163 species and in 2010 184 species. If you are interested in participating, please contact Sumita Prasad at: sumits@alumni.utexas.net



At left: Visitors enjoy the Booming and Blooming Festival by taking the opportunity to view the Attwater's Prairie Chicken. The festival is held at the refuge the second weekend in April. Contact the Refuge for more information

Birding in the Refuge System

From bald eagles and blue-winged teals to sandhill cranes and puffins, hundreds of birds show their colors and their intriguing habits on national wildlife refuges. Now, the Refuge System Web site has new pages to encourage more visitors to bring their love of birds to wildlife refuges.

At www.fws.gov/refuges/birding, visitors can find special events and birding festivals, activities for families and stories about the groundbreaking work refuges do to protect birds and their habitat. A section on backyard birding identifies food preferences for wild birds in eastern and western North America. There are links to citizen science projects and to Bird Tracker results, which show current bird sightings at refuges. A "for the pros" section provides a checklist for refuges and Friends groups that want to improve the birding experience for visitors.

Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

Membership and Renewal Application.

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.

I would like to renew my membership for another year. 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 (s) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Email _____ Phone _____