



THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

Volume 1, Issue 1

Message from the President:

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge's newsletter. It is appropriate that this first quarterly issue appear in the Spring and also appropriate that we call it the *Boomer*, as both denote new beginnings.

One represents the next generation of prairie chickens on the prairie and then other, renewed community support for the Refuge .

I invite each of you to join us. Become a member, a Refuge volunteer, or simply

a Refuge visitor. Help us in the vital work of preserving this critically endangered species and the diminishing prairie ecosystem. You can provide financial support or share your time and labor. Spread the word by telling a friend about the refuge, or better yet bring them for a visit.

Much is being done but there is much more to do. Join us and be a part of a new chapter in prairie chicken recovery. I hope to see you at the Refuge.

Ron Jones, President



Meet your Board!

President Ron Jones lives in Houston Texas. Ron is a retired wildlife biologist having worked in the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a private lands biologist. He has more than 20 years of experience conducting habitat restoration and enhancement projects.

Vice President Gary Woods lives in

Taylor Lake Village ,Texas. He has been involved with saving the Prairie Chicken for more than twenty years and has been involved with administering nonprofit and charitable organizations for thirty years.

Secretary Sumita Prasad also lives in Houston. Sumita is Southwest Regional Director for the Wildlife

Habitat Council and been involved in Refuge Christmas Bird Counts for a number of years.

Treasurer Jane Meldahl is a resident of Eagle lake, Texas. She is a successful business woman, avid birder and long-time supporter of the Refuge and the annual Prairie Chicken Festival.



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Did you know?

- There are over 200 National Wildlife Refuge Friends Groups across the nation!
- The Everglades Headwaters NWR in Florida became the 556th National Wildlife Refuge just this spring!
- Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR was established in 1972.
- Native Gulf Coast prairie is comprised of literally hundreds of species of grasses and flowering plants.

Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Recovery on the Cusp of Success

The survival rate of newly-hatched chicks has long been one of the biggest impediments to the recovery of the critically endangered Attwater's prairie-chicken (APC) but today biologists have hope. Mounting evidence suggests that controlling red imported fire ants could be a significant step in keeping the iconic bird on the landscape.

In 2009, personnel at the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (APC NWR) near Eagle Lake, Texas began treating for fire ants on a 760-acre area. Results from this treatment found that there were more insects in the treated area when compared to non-treated areas. This is consistent with other studies that have shown that areas infested by fire ants contain 75% fewer insects than uninfested areas.

Many bird species like prairie-chickens and quail depend on insects as a food source for young chicks. Terry Rossignol, Refuge Manager for the APC NWR and Attwater's prairie-chicken Recovery Team Leader said "Red imported fire ants decimate insect numbers on the prairie to the point that there are not enough for young prairie chicken chicks to feed on when they hatch in the spring."

The research and treatment conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners adds to the growing body of information documenting the negative impacts of the exotic invasive fire ant on native wildlife. More than 10 years ago, researchers at Texas Tech University documented substantial adverse impacts on the survival of young bobwhite quail and white-tailed deer due to fire ants. For both species, survival of young in areas where fire ants were suppressed was at least two times higher than in areas where fire ants were not reduced.

Because the life span of an APC in the wild is not very long, successful annual reproduction is especially important. "APCs have the potential for high reproduction to offset high mortality rates, but when you add red imported fire ants to the equation, their odds of maintaining a viable population decrease considerably," said Rossignol. "Our goal is to level the playing field and make sure the birds have a chance against unnatural factors like red imported fire ants."



In 2009, the refuge began treating for red imported fire ants. In 2010, the chick survival rate during the breeding season was comparable to historic brood survival of Attwater's. In 2011, the annual spring count indicated 82 birds on the refuge – the most APCs on the refuge since 1990. This brings the state-wide total of 110 birds in 2011, a 150% increase since 2007 when the numbers were only 44.

"We had a really good season in 2010 which shows that captive-bred APCs can successfully rear their own young in the wild," said Rossignol. "We can help increase the odds for these young chicks by making sure they have the insects they need to survive."

Plans are to expand ant treatments on the refuge and other areas where APCs are located. These treatments will not only help increase the endangered bird's survival, but also will benefit other native species like bobwhite quail and white-tailed deer.

In the 1930's, red imported fire ants were accidentally introduced at a port in Mobile, Alabama from a ship coming from South America. The economic impact associated with the introduction of the red imported fire ant has cost the Texas economy alone an estimated \$1.2 billion a year according to Texas A&M University's AgriLife Extension.



More than 125 years ago, up to a million APCs graced the Texas and Louisiana coastal prairies. Today, this grouse is found in only three Texas counties: APC NWR in Colorado County; Texas City Prairie Preserve in Galveston County; and, on private lands in Goliad County.

Partners in the APC recovery effort have faced significant challenges watching the species teeter on the precipice of extinction. Due to the commitment and strong partnership efforts of The Texas Nature Conservancy, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, several universities, Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd., Texas zoological institutions, private landowners, and corporate supporters like Central LifeSciences, the Attwater's prairie-chicken truly has a chance at recovery and remaining a part of the Texas landscape.

Eighteenth Annual Attwater's Prairie Chicken Festival Activities

at the

Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

Prairie Chicken Viewing Tours:

Experience the beautiful and comical courtship dance of the Attwater's prairie chicken in their natural habitat. These early morning tours have a very good chance of seeing Attwater's on their "booming" grounds, but there is no guarantee. Tours start at 7:00 am and continue until the birds leave the "booming" ground (usually 1-2 hours). No reservations needed, but don't forget your binoculars or spotting scope. Saturday and Sunday.

Refuge Van Tours:

Experience virgin coastal prairie habitat and it's wildlife with knowledgeable refuge guides as they explain the plight of the Attwater's prairie chicken and see first hand what is being done to keep this species from ecoming extinct.

Tours start at 10:30 am, 12 noon, and 1:30 pm, Saturday and Sunday. Length of tours: about 2 hours.

Bird Walking Tours:

A must for birding enthusiasts! Focus your binoculars to view prairie and riparian birds as they pass through the area on migration.

8:45 am - 10:30 am, Saturday and Sunday.

Woodlot Birding Tours:

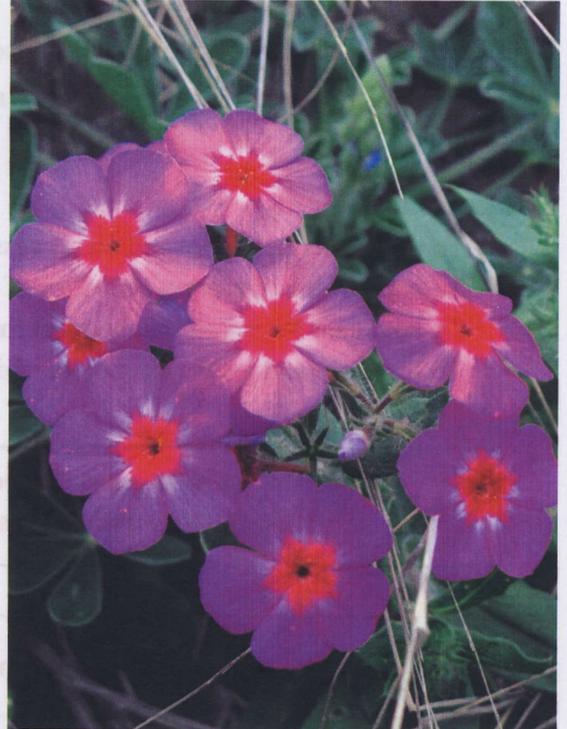
Rest your feet from the Bird Walking Tour and hop into a refuge van to explore the refuge's woodlot area.

10:45 am - 12:15 noon, Saturday and Sunday.

Native Plants Walking Tours:

Get "up close and personal" with the native vegetation (grasses, "blooming" flowering plants) of the coastal prairie and develop a greater appreciation for this imperiled ecosystem.

1:00 pm - 2:30 pm, Saturday and Sunday.



Enjoy the 5-mile auto tour route, 2 walking trails, and Visitor's Center with bird collection mounts and Attwater's videos at your leisure!

All tours depart from the Refuge Headquarters/Visitor Center

Grants and Agreements

The Friends group is happy to announce that we are the recipients of a Start-up Grant awarded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The grant will provide financial assistance that will allow us to increase visibility of the Refuge via website, literature, and other media; to garner local support and interest in the Refuge by recruiting and

engaging members in refuge activities, projects, etc.; and to develop a strategic plan, including outreach and educational components and measurable goals for the Friends group.

We are also working with the refuge and the USFWS Texas Coastal Program on a

Cooperative Agreement that will bring funding to the refuge to continue the vital red fire ant suppression program for an additional two years and will work toward significantly reducing exotic invasive Chinese Tallow trees that impact the ecosystem. Together, these awards will approach \$45,000.00.

Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

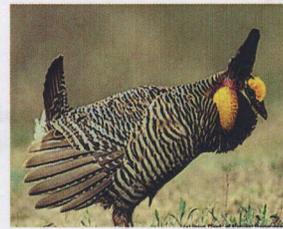
Membership Application

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 _____