



THE BOOMER



Quarterly Newsletter of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

Volume 5 issue 2

Message From The President

Dear Friends

We held an excellent Annual Meeting and a following planning meeting on September 10, 2016. Those of you who were unable to attend were missed.

We elected a slate of outstanding board members, which included both incumbent and new members.

Carol Davis, Cynthia Lurix and Paul Lurix were re-elected to At Large positions.

Robert Smith, who had been appointed to take the place of Brien McBride, our previous Audit Committee Chair, was elected Treasurer.

Eliot Tucker resigned as Treasurer and has been appointed Secretary to take the place of Mark Sleeper, who resigned due to health concerns.

In addition, we elected two new At-Large board members, Diana Kies of Bellville and Sandy Venneman of Sealy.

Diana has an extensive background in volunteering, including for the Coastal Prairie Preserve in Texas City, which has held Attwater's Prairie Chickens. Diana has agreed to handle membership and online sales, as well as to assist with the Art Contest Committee.

Sandy is a teacher and an accomplished artist, photographer and equestrian. Sandy has agreed to chair the Art Contest Committee and the Flora and Fauna Committee.

Robert, Diana and Sandy are valuable additions to the board. Carol, Cynthia and Paul have been committed

and dedicated board members, and we value their continued support and assistance.

We have appreciated the cheerful assistance and support of Mark Sleeper, who has done an outstanding job as Secretary and as the chair of the Art Contest Committee. Mark will be sorely missed. We wish him the best with his health concerns and in his future endeavors.

Our organization needs a corporate sponsor that is willing to provide program support for a minimum of five years. If you are aware of a possible corporate sponsor, please contact me at 281-224-8162 or via email at garykwoods@sbcglobal.net.

Thanks

Gary Woods, President



Above: Sprague's Pipit, a winter visitor at the refuge. USFWS Photo

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Our Mission:

The mission of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge 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.

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

Did you know?

- Sprague's Pipit is 1 of only 12 birds endemic to the Great Plains grasslands.
- Its world-wide population is estimated to be less than 870,000 individuals, less than 79% of its historical population.



Employee Spotlight

Jennifer Romero

Refuge Manager Trainee

We want to welcome Jennifer Romero to the Refuge family. Jennifer joined the Attwater staff in June after completing an internship at the San Bernardino NWR in Arizona, and graduating from Texas Tech University in Lubbock. She is originally from Las Cruces, NM.

1. Jennifer, tell us a little about your position and “official” duties at the Refuge.

As the refuge manager trainee for Attwater, I work with John and Terry to learn what it takes to keep the refuge operating efficiently. My position is an entry-level position with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and I’m gaining skills that will help me become an assistant manager or refuge manager in the future. My duties include everything from helping the biologists with the prairie chickens, performing administrative and maintenance tasks, and eventually I’ll be operating heavy equipment and supervising a Youth Conservation Corps team in the summer.

2. You participated in a unique internship opportunity prior to arriving at Attwater. Share with our readers some of the highlights, and what you gained from that experience.

Before coming to Attwater, I worked at the San Bernardino NWR in Arizona as an intern in the Directorate Resource Assistant Fellows Program. As part of the program, I had a specific project to complete during my 11-week internship. Most of my time was spent monitoring projects on land owned by local ranchers that were funded through the Cooperative Recovery Initiative. I visited each site with landowners, ranch managers or employees of other conservation agencies and I documented the status of each project. I also collected GPS data on the Bar Boot Ranch and developed maps in ArcGIS for the landowners and the refuge to use in the future. Aside from my main project, I also learned how to catch birds in mist nets and band them, conducted fish surveys, and helped install an educational pond. My internship helped me see what varied work the Fish and Wildlife Service does, and it is the reason why I wanted to have a career with the Service.

3. So far, what are your favorite parts of the job?

I like that no two days are the same at Attwater. I come to work every day with a general idea of some tasks I have to get done, but there are always a few new things that come up. Some days I spend most of my time in the office and some days I’m out helping build a fence or acclimation pen. Even though some days I come home exhausted, I’m also satisfied knowing I accomplished something meaningful on the refuge. I’m also enjoying all the different training I’ve been getting because it will help me develop new skills that will be beneficial throughout my career. Every part of my job helps the refuge continue to function, and I love knowing that what I do helps our staff keep an endangered species alive.

Cont. on P. 3



Above: Jennifer Romero

4. What inspired you decide to pursue a career in wildlife management?

I've always loved animals and being outdoors, and as I got older I started to learn about conservation and how important it was going to be for future generations. The environment has such an important value to humans beyond just the physical resources we get from it, and I wanted to work in a field where I could help conserve ecosystems. Working in wildlife I've always loved animals and being outdoors, and as I got older I started to learn about conservation and how important it was going to be for future generations. The environment has such an important value to humans beyond just the physical resources we get from it, and I wanted to work in a field where I could help conserve ecosystems. Working in wildlife management has allowed me to work directly with wildlife and manage overall habitats, and I can't believe I'm lucky enough to get paid to do it all.

5. What about this job has surprised you most so far?

Now that I'm at Attwater as a permanent employee, I'm getting to see what goes on behind the scenes at a wildlife refuge and I've been surprised with how much varied work our staff has to do daily. As a visitor and even an intern, you're told a lot about the biology work the refuge staff does because that's the information most people want to hear. As a staff member, I now see all the administration and facilities maintenance that goes on to keep the refuge operating so we can do the biology work.

6. Lastly, what are you looking forward to the most in your career?

I'm looking forward to having a long career with the Fish and Wildlife Service and continuing to get more experiences in other areas of the country. I know there will continue to be national-level discussions about conservation and how to sustainably use our natural resources, and I'm excited to be a part of the group of professionals who will be developing solutions and managing our public lands for future generations.

Thank you Jennifer and welcome aboard.

Second Year of Every Kid in a Park Pass Gives Access to Public Lands and Waters

The federal government has launched the second year of the Every Kid in a Park program to give fourth graders and their families free access to federal lands and waters nationwide for a full year.

Fourth graders can log onto the Every Kid website at www.everykidinapark.gov and complete a fun educational activity in order to obtain and print their free pass, which allows access to national parks, forests, national wildlife refuges and marine sanctuaries. The pass is valid from September 1, 2016, through August 31, 2017, and grants free entry for fourth graders and up to three accompanying adults (or an entire non-commercial vehicle for drive-in parks) at more than 2,000 sites across the country.

"The Every Kid in a Park program is unlocking natural curiosity in children by encouraging them to explore our nation's most spectacular places," said U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell.

By introducing fourth graders to public lands, the Every Kid in a Park program is part of a multi-pronged approach to inspire the next generation to discover all that the nation's public lands and waters have to offer.

Visitors to the Every Kid in a Park website will find several new features this year. Educators and community leaders can access educational activities, field trip options, information and tools in English and Spanish, and have the ability to print passes for their classrooms. Parents can find additional links to plan trips.

For more information, please visit www.everykidinapark.gov

APC UPDATE

ATTWATER'S PRAIRIE-CHICKEN RELEASE - 2016

Mike Morrow, Wildlife Biologist
Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, Eagle Lake, Texas

The first honest-to-goodness cool front has come and gone on the prairie, and weather forecasters are teasing us with more cool weather supposedly on the way in another week or so. The prairie is adorned with its fall splendor accented by splashes of golden Indiangrass, the brilliant yellows of swamp sunflower and awnless beggartick, and the delicate pinks of gulf muhly. Stands of little bluestem, preparing to send their fluffy white progeny on their way in the next few weeks, sway like waves in the still warm breeze. All these mean that summer is finally drawing to a close, and we can look forward to a few months of respite from the oppressive heat and humidity which characterizes coastal Texas summers. We can also look forward to old friends that we haven't seen for several months – geese, ducks, sandhill cranes, savannah and vesper sparrows, Sprague's pipits, short-eared owls....

These things also mean that another summer of releasing APCs from the Abilene Zoo, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, the Houston Zoo, and the Caldwell Zoo has come to an end. Every summer beginning in late June or early July, we move birds from the captive-rearing facilities to release sites on the prairie. There, they spend two weeks in acclimation pens to recover from the stress of the transport process, and to start becoming accustomed to their new homes. Once this two-week period is over, doors to the acclimation pens are opened, and the new cohort of APCs experience their first taste of freedom. We continue to provide food and water "on the outside" for a minimum of 30 days after release to help ease the transition.

This year, 264 captive-reared APCs were released at the refuge and 36 on a private ranch in Goliad County in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy of Texas. Fossil Rim provided 63% of these birds, 28% came from Houston, 6% from Abilene, and 3% from the Caldwell Zoo in Tyler, Texas. All were released by September 1, except for 16 males that were surplus to the 2017 breeding flock which we were not planning on releasing until 2017 breeding plans were made in mid-September. These 16 were transferred from Fossil Rim on the 29th of September, and released on the 13th of

October. The total number released this year was down considerably compared to last year, ranking #3 behind 2014 (#2) and 2015 (#1).



Gulf muhly on a recent burn at the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR (APCNWR staff photo).

Cont. on Page 5

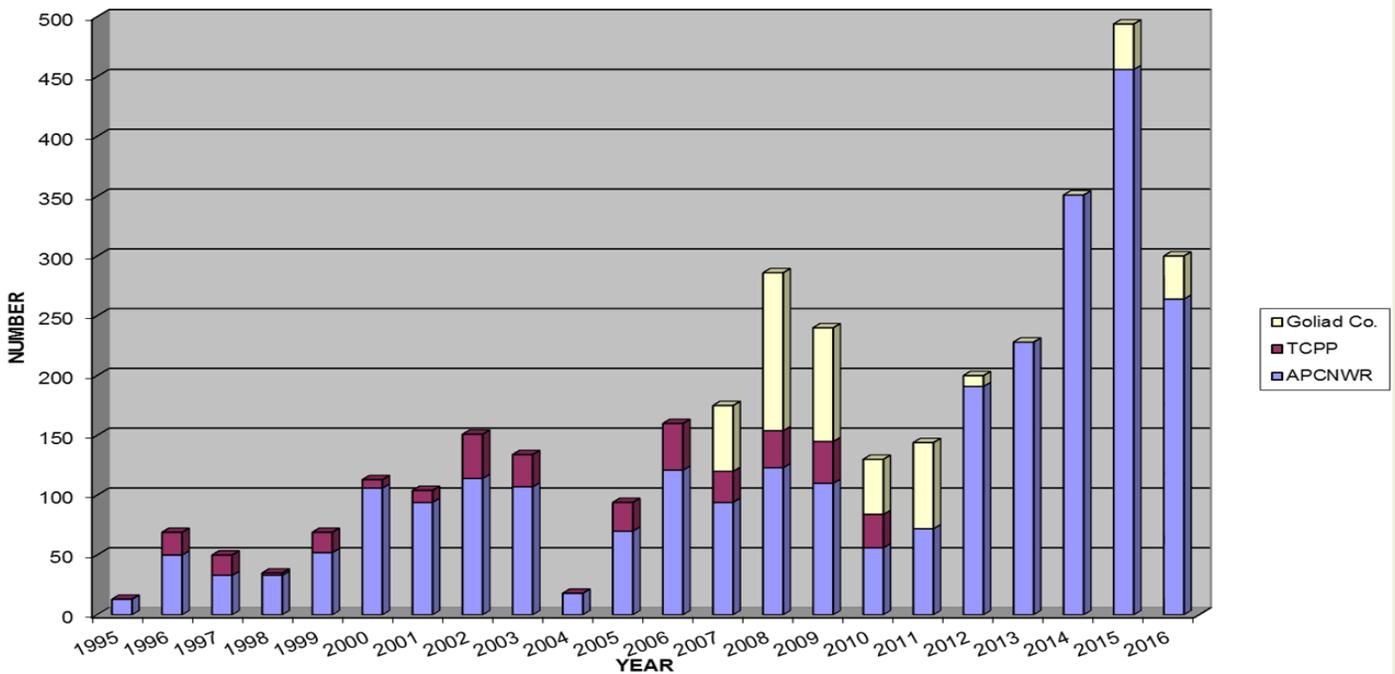
You can help with vital RIFA suppression by supporting our "Fire Ant Control/Brood Survival Fund"

APC Update Cont. from p.4

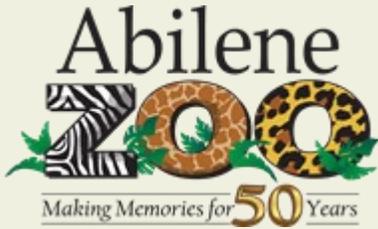
Most of us know that Mother Nature is a harsh task master, and as a result, life will not be easy for released birds. Whereas before release they were mostly sheltered from potential predators, after release these birds immediately move to near the bottom of the food chain where they are potential meals for a host of predators including great-horned owls, white- and red-tailed hawks, coyotes, bobcats, and raccoons – to name a few. In the Fall 2014 edition of *The Boomer*, I described ways that we try to give released birds a “leg up” on survival such as time spent in acclimation pens and timing of releases before migrating raptors arrive. On average, about 19% of APCs released in a given year survive the first year after release. Some years are better, some are worse. Unfortunately, it appears that this year is going to be in the “worse” column. When all the dust settles, we will look at the data and try to discern factors that may have contributed to this year’s poor survival. Was it something about the weather? Did we release too many in a relatively short amount of time? Was condition of birds different from previous years? Were birds younger or older? What about habitat conditions? Given all the rain earlier in the season, habitat looks good to us, but maybe not to the birds. That is what science is all about. While we want things to work out perfectly all the time, sometimes we have to learn from less than perfect experiences. Unfortunately, this year will go down as one of those experiences.



Above: Stand of Indiangrass on the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR - September 2016 (APCNWR staff photo).



Above: Numbers (N = 3,558) of Attwater's prairie-chickens released from captive-rearing institutions 1995-2016.



Thank You, Thank You **Abilene Zoo**

The Abilene Zoo has announced that the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge will receive a donation of \$2,500.00 as a result of their **Quarters 4 Conservation** campaign. Twenty-five cents from every zoo admission was contributed to the conservation fund with zoo visitors provided a special coin for voting purposes. The zoo is one of the Attwater's prairie-chicken recovery partners providing captive reared birds for release back onto the refuge. The Turtle Survival Fund and the endangered Texas Ocelot were also recipients of funds raised by their efforts. We want to thank the zoo's staff, administrators and supporters for including the Attwater's prairie-chicken their efforts. If you are in the area, visit one of the nicest zoos in Texas and pass on your appreciation as well.

The Abilene Zoo is a place of learning and adventure where families make memories, share the joy of discovery and become inspired to preserve wildlife



Left: Swamp sunflower on the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR - September 2016 (Photo Credit: Rebecca Chester).



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with I want the Boomer in the subject line and we will add you to the mailing list.

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Visit www.attwater.org and you will find them archived on the publications page.

Landmark Migratory Bird Treaty Celebrates It's Centennial

The skies of North America today provide the backdrop for celebrating a century of conservation of one group of Earth's most treasured animals: migratory birds. On this date in 1916, the first Migratory Bird Treaty was signed between the United States and Canada. Today, the two nations mark the monumental success of this agreement.

"It's hard to imagine the North American continent without egrets, ducks, hawks or songbirds, but at the turn of the 20th century, that's the way things were looking," said Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has responsibility for conserving and managing migratory birds and their habitats. "This treaty marked a turning point in the fate of our shared bird life, and it continues to this day to unite efforts in the United States and Canada to protect birds across our international boundaries."

"Our two countries' conservation efforts have yielded real results, especially for waterfowl populations. I am proud of the work we have done, but as the recent release of *The State of North America's Birds* report has shown, we have a challenging road ahead," said Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada. "I know we are up to the task, and I look forward to building on our successes, together, to recover other migratory bird species."

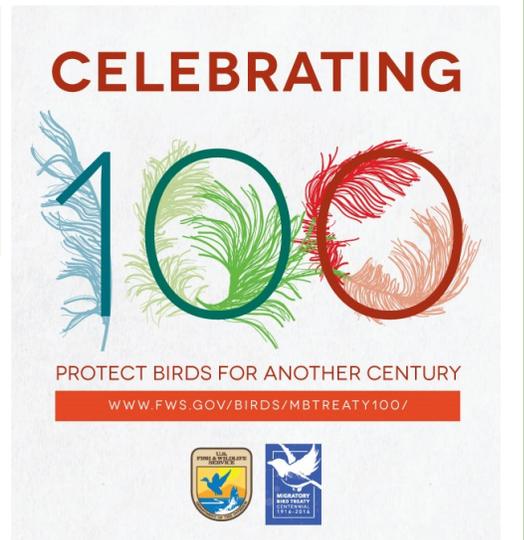
A century ago, birds were in trouble. Overuse of natural resources was the norm: habitat destruction and unregulated harvest for restauranters and feathers for the millinery trade devastated migratory bird populations. In 1914, the passenger pigeon, once the most abundant land bird in North America with an estimated population of 3-5 billion individuals, went extinct when the last bird – Martha – died at the Cincinnati Zoo.

Amidst this crisis, partners in the United States and Canada recognized the overwhelming need for collaboration to protect species that traversed or spanned their borders. They created an agreement to cooperatively manage and protect birds that migrate internationally. On August 16, 1916, the United States and Great Britain (on behalf of Canada) signed the first Migratory Bird Treaty (known in Canada as a Convention) to protect these shared natural resources. The treaty was the first international agreement forged to protect wild birds and among the first to protect any wildlife species.

The Migratory Bird Treaty is the foundation for significant achievements in bird conservation that followed, with both nations enacting statutes to implement its provisions. In 1917, the Canadian Parliament passed the Migratory Bird Convention Act. In 1918, the U.S. Congress followed suit, passing the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In subsequent years, the United States signed similar treaties with Mexico (1936), Japan (1972), and Russia (1976).

"Celebrating the Centennial of the first migratory bird treaty allows us to reflect on the outstanding work that has been done with our international partners and to set the stage for what comes next in bird conservation," said Ashe. "Make no mistake, despite our successes to date, many challenges lie ahead. Expanding human populations and climate change threaten to undo much of the remarkable ground we have gained. But it's comforting to know we will be standing alongside our partners in Canada, Mexico, Japan and Russia in that fight for the future of our birds."

Cont. on page 8



Bird treaty cont. from page 7

“During the North American Leaders' Summit this past June in Ottawa, Prime Minister Trudeau, President Obama and President Peña Nieto decided to act for the wellbeing of migratory birds and habitat conservation,” said McKenna. “They called for a plan to protect the birds of North America over the next century. Our three countries will cooperate in monitoring, research, conservation, and education activities. We must all show this level of commitment and dedication to the environment and to science if we hope to have healthy bird populations for another 100 years.”

The diversity, abundance and accessibility of migratory birds provide excellent opportunities to connect people with the natural world around them – even in their own backyards. Birds bring us great pleasure and provide significant ecological and economic benefits to communities and the environment: they control insect and rodent pest populations, limiting the need for toxic pesticides and saving farmers billions of dollars; they pollinate crops and native habitats from forests to grasslands to wetlands; bird watching and feeding generate billions of dollars for our national economy; and birds act as indicators of environmental health that is crucial to our own wellbeing.

You can celebrate the Migratory Bird Treaty Centennial by making a difference for birds too. This month, both the United States and Canada are highlighting the many ways that citizens can participate in conservation of our shared bird life. Visit <https://www.fws.gov/birds/MBTreaty100/index.php>

6 REASONS TO CARE ABOUT BIRDS



BIRDS EAT INSECTS AND CONTROL PESTS



BIRD WATCHING CONTRIBUTES \$82 BILLION A YEAR TO THE U.S. ECONOMY



BIRDS CLEAN UP CARCASSES



BIRDS SPREAD SEEDS, SAVING \$11 BILLION A YEAR IN SEED PLANTING IN THE U.S.



BIRDS = HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT



BIRDS POLLINATE PLANTS

GET OUTSIDE — FIND YOUR FAVORITE BIRD

WWW.FWS.GOV/BIRDS/MBTREATY100/



Membership

Interested in becoming a member or want to renew your annual membership? It is now easy to do ,on-line at

www.attwater.org

We are happy to remind everyone that we are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Any donations you may make are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law and tax code.

Donors should consult with their tax advisor.

Please consider Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge in your charitable giving.



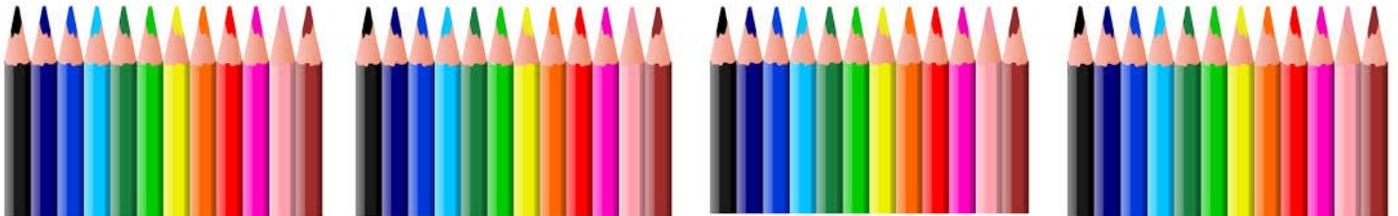
“ Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
Martin Luther King Jr.



STUDENT FESTIVAL ART CONTEST



The 5th annual ***Student Festival Art Contest*** is underway. The contest is being offered to students in K-12th grade and is open to students enrolled Brazos ISD, Bellville ISD, Rice CISD, Columbus ISD and Sealy ISD. Once again the contest has 3 divisions aligned with grade levels. A coloring contest for grades k-5th. A poster contest for grades 6-8th and the logo contest for grades 9-12th. The winning art work of the logo contest will be used on the festival tee shirts available at the 2017 Booming-N-Blooming festival April 8-9, 2017. The goal of the contest is to engage the power of art to help youth feel more connected with nature. First place in each category will receive a \$50.00 cash prize and a plaque. Second place will receive a \$25.00 cash prize and a ribbon. Third place will receive a \$10.00 cash prize and a ribbon. A grand prize winner will be chosen from the logo contest entrants and will receive a \$250.00 scholarship , a plaque and a festival tee shirt emblazoned with their winning artwork. Wining artwork will be on display in the refuge visitors center beginning the week-end of the festival. The subject of the artwork must be the Attwater’s prairie-chicken, it’s prairie habitat, or other coastal prairie species. Friends representatives will be working directly with school districts to get the word out and contest information will be posted on our web site, www.attwater.org. This years contest committee is being chaired by Friends board member Sandy Venneman. Once again ***Blisswood Bed and Breakfast*** has graciously agreed to be contest sponsor.



The Christmas Bird Count is Just Around the Corner

The Attwater Christmas Bird Count will be held on Wed. Dec. 21, 2016. The event is open to all birders and is one of the highest inland bird counts, for diversity, in the country. A hot dinner will be provided, at the Refuge, for all participants following the event. If you are interested in participating, contact Sumita Prasad at :

sumita@utexas.edu



Not All Milkweeds Are Created Equal

Rebecca Chester, Wildlife Biologist

Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR

This month I want to relay information already fairly widely distributed by The Xerces Society, EntomologyToday.org, and at least a handful of other online outlets that can be found easily by searching for “milkweed monarchs migration”. A study from The University of Georgia found that the widely available and popular (but non-native) tropical milkweed *Asclepias curassavica* may have some negative and certainly unintended effects on Monarch health. Apparently, this tropical milkweed, used by Monarchs when in Mexico (where it is native) can remain active and persist in the southern US through our mild winters. This is a potential problem for the Monarchs for two different reasons. 1. Because the plant never dies back, it allows the build-up of a protozoan *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (or OE) that infects Monarchs and causes an array of serious problems that can impact not only the individual butterfly, but also the population as a whole. 2. There is concern that by having year-round milkweed available to them, Monarchs may short-stop their return to Mexico before winter and hang out where the tropical milkweed is available, potentially disrupting the completion of their complex migration cycle and enticing Monarchs to stay too long where a cold snap could kill them. However, most sources seem to agree that if you have the tropical milkweed, cutting it back in the fall or winter so the Monarchs won't be tricked into sticking around and the protozoan won't build up will help reduce the problem.

Another problem I've seen locally is that folks are sold milkweed at local plant sales and are incorrectly informed as to which species they have. Tropical milkweed seems to be confused often with *Asclepias tuberosa*, a native to the US and Canada, commonly called butterfly milkweed. As a result, many folks think they have planted a native plant in their garden and are doing great things to help the Monarchs when that may not be the case for the reasons mentioned above. One way to tell if you have the tropical milkweed is that it doesn't die back in the winter. Some other characteristics that may help differentiate them include *A. tuberosa* tends to be shorter, with leaves arranged irregularly around the stem and more uniformly orange flowers while *A. curassavica* tends to be taller, with opposite leaves and flowers containing multiple hues from crimson to yellow.



Above: *Asclepias tuberosa*.



Above: *Asclepias curassavica*

Admittedly, there hasn't been time to track down every bit of information before this publication of The Boomer, but I wanted to relay this to Boomer readers who may have butterfly gardens so that they might be able to read for themselves, make their own decisions and take action to prevent any unintended consequences. Through more research, information should become available that better clarifies the effects of tropical milkweed in the US.

Editor's note: Ophryocystis elektroscirrha (OE) is an obligate, protozoan parasite that infects monarch and queen butterflies. OE isn't an animal or a plant, but a protozoan. Protozoans are single celled organisms,. OE is considered an obligate parasite because it must live within a host to grow and multiply. Between infections OE survives as spores that are resistant to extreme environmental conditions. OE was first discovered infecting monarch and queen butterflies in Florida in the late 1960s. There are no known other hosts. It has since been found in all other monarch populations world-wide. Because of this world-wide range, all indications are that this parasite has coevolved with monarchs.

Retrieved from: <http://www.monarchparasites.org/>