



August 2017

THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

Volume 6 issue 1

Message From The President

Great news - the refuge has received propagated Attwater's chicks from Fossil Rim, the Houston Zoo and the Abilene Zoo, and those birds have been released in acclimation pens on the refuge.

It is both interesting and a delight to see the refuge team checking birds for injuries, dusting them for mites, homing their transmitters and collecting and verifying their banding numbers, as well as placing water and food in each acclimation pen.

In what can be de-

scribed as an assembly-line operation, every team member has a job that is performed in a specific manner and order. Both refuge personnel and interns are involved in the release, and their performance is both professional and personally attentive.

Annual Meeting

Please remember that our Annual Meeting is at noon on September 23, 2017 at the Visitor's Center of the Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge. We will be sending ballots out shortly. Please return your ballot. If you

do not vote either electronically or by mail, you may vote at the meeting. We will be providing a light lunch and refreshments. Hope to see you there.

Your membership is essential to a viable organization, which is an important element in efforts to save the chicken. If you are a member, please renew your membership. If you are not a member, please visit our website and join. Remember members, "failure is not an option."

Gary Woods , President



Above: Dr. Mike Morrow loads another box in the trailer and its two more for the road . Photo by Tye Chandler

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Did you know?

- There are 5 acclimation pens on the refuge
- Each pen is 30 ft. X 50 ft..
- Ten to twelve birds at a time are placed in a pen.
- On average, the pen locations are changed every 2 years.

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.

APC UPDATE

APC Release Selection Process

Terry Rossignol, Refuge Manager

Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

Unfortunately, the first half of 2017 has not been good for the Attwater's prairie-chicken (APC). The official APC spring count dropped to an alarming 42 birds estimated in the wild at two locations. Last year's Tax Day floods could be one reason for the drastic decline. Nesting in the wild also proved difficult this year. Despite cooperation from the weather for the first time in several years, low numbers overall did not help. On the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (APCNWR), 1 of 3 hens (33%) successfully raised chicks this year. In Goliad County, no nesting was documented; however, a brood of 7 APC chicks (estimated to be about 4 weeks old) was observed. Production in captivity was a little less than average, but provides the spark of hope for the species this year.

This summer, 252 APCs are slated for release into the wild. You might wonder, "How do they determine the number of birds to release each year?" or "how do they determine which individual bird gets released?" The process is not easy, but ensures that the best candidates are placed where needed – either released or kept as a breeder.

This process starts shortly after the APC captive breeding season ends with personnel from the refuge and from each APC captive breeding facility meeting during the third week in June to make these important decisions. By this time, most APC chicks have hatched, giving the captive breeding crew an idea of production results for the year.

All captive APCs are identified with a stud-book number. Strict record keeping provides the ability to map each individual's lineage. With the help of specialized software programs, each bird's genetic importance (or mean kinship number) can be determined. The mean kinship number basically ranks the bird's relatedness to the rest of the captive flock.

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Above: Staff from Fossil Rim Wildlife Center and the Refuge participate in the evaluation of birds scheduled for release.

Photo by Tye Chandler

New Transport Trailer Begins Operation

The new APC transport trailer has now made four successful trips moving birds to release sites on the Refuge and in Goliad County. The birds were transported from Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, near Glen Rose, Texas, where they were raised. Birds from the Abilene Zoo were also transported after having been staged at Fossil Rim. More than 160 birds will be moved from Fossil Rim this season. Prior to loading, the birds are given a health check, have their band numbers verified and are fitted with a radio transponder. The birds were examined prepped and loaded with precision by a team of dedicated professionals made up of staff and interns from both the refuge and Fossil Rim. The same precision is used at the release site, as the birds are removed from the transport trailer and placed in their acclimation pens.

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*Above: A team effort of staff from Fossil Rim and the Refuge is needed to load birds for transport.
Photo by Tye Chandler*



*Above: A team of dedicated staff members from Fossil Rim and Attwater Refuge pose for a group photo before another load of birds head for their new home on the coastal prairie.
Photo by Tye Chandler*

Cont. from page 2, APC Update

Generally speaking, birds with a lower mean kinship number are more genetically important to the overall captive flock and tend to be kept as breeders to supplement the captive breeding flock. Those birds with a higher mean kinship number tend to be released into the wild, depending on where the dividing line is.

So how is this dividing line determined? This question is answered by first determining the number of chicks to hold back as breeders for next year. To figure this out, the mortality factor for each age class of birds (i.e., hatch-year birds, 1 year-old birds, 2 year-old birds, etc.) is determined using historical information. This allows for the “replenishment” of next year’s breeders with a broad-base of hatch-year birds forming a stable age pyramid for the captive population. For example, if 300 chicks were produced this year and it is determined that 50 hatch-year chicks (chicks hatched this year) need to be held back to form the broad base core of the age pyramid for next year’s season, then this allows 250 chicks produced this year to be released.

Although the example used above sounds simple, it doesn’t always work so easily. Each year a group of older birds also is released – these are the 2 or 3 year-olds whose mean kinship number have increased, making room for younger birds moving up the age pyramid. These older birds are included in the total number of birds being released. So, using the example above, if we have 15 older birds being released, we would release 235 chicks produced this year, for a total of 250 birds planned for release.

During the June meeting, each of the birds slated for release is given an initial “Go-No-Go” to make sure they are physically ready for release. They will be given a physical exam by a veterinarian and by refuge staff prior to being transferred to the release site. As a result, the actual number of birds released is less than the number slated for release at the June meeting.

This year’s release will take place during the summer months with plans to release about half of the birds at the APCNWR and the other half on private lands in Goliad County. The goal is to have all birds released by mid-September at the latest before the arrival of migrating hawks to the area in October.

This entire process is carried out to not only provide healthy birds for release to increase wild APC populations, but to also maintain the integrity of the APC captive breeding program. Thank goodness for those folks at each of the APC breeding facilities dedicated to the recovery of this imperiled species. Without them, the Attwater’s would probably not be in existence today.



Above: Fossil Rim veterinarian, Dr. Julie Swenson, gives a bird a dose of dewwormer before transport to a release site.
Photo by Tye Chandler



Above: Prior to transport, Dr. Mike Morrow fits a bird with a radio collar with the help of Fossil Rim Avian Curator Janet Johnson.
Photo by Tye Chandler

Transport trailer, Cont. from page 3



Above: An acclimation pen sets on the prairie awaiting its new residences.
Photo by Sumita Prasad



Above: An acclimation pen in Goliad County gets one more inspection before its new tenants arrive.
Photo by Terry Rossignol



Above: Birds are removed from the trailer upon arrival at the release site.
Photo by Sumita Prasad



Above: Birds are carried across the prairie to their new home. There are 2 birds per box.
Photo by Terry Rossignol



Above: Birds are staged in the pen prior to getting a final inspection.
Photo by Sumita Prasad



Above: Refuge staff check out each bird, one more time before they experience their new home.
Photo by Terry Rossignol

Local Students Gain Valuable Experience

Jennifer Romero, Wildlife Refuge Specialist

Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

During this summer, the staff at Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge had some extra hands-on help from four local high school students. The Refuge received funding from the Youth Conservation Corps, a national summer employment program that provides youth with work experiences on public land. Four high school students worked on the refuge from June 5 through July 28. Three students from Rice High School, Katie Macek, Jesus Ortiz, and Makia Richardson and one student from Sealy High School, Matthias Litzmann, worked various projects on the refuge during the eight-week program.

Led by wildlife refuge specialist, Jennifer Romero, they spent many weeks removing barbed wire fence on the refuge. Many of the fences were old and had been damaged in 2016 by the floods, and they were removed to help with grazing management, prescribed fires, and natural water movement on the Refuge. The YCC crew members worked in the summer heat to remove the four strands of barbed wire from every post, extract the posts from the ground, roll up the barbed wire, and carry all the materials back to the truck. By the end of the program, the crew had removed a total of 2.82 miles of fence.

Among other tasks, the crew members helped with vegetation management on two walking trails and around Auto Tour route signage. The students also worked with maintenance mechanic Jeremy Petruncio in renovating the refuge's Renz Barn, which is used to store large supplies. They aided the biology staff by fixing the five acclimation pens on the Refuge in preparation for the upcoming prairie chicken release season. They fixed the roof between the main office buildings, and they repaired and painted all the beams to prevent further damage from carpenter bees.

Every Friday Ms. Romero took the YCC crew to visit other public lands in the area. The students enjoyed taking a break from the hard work and heat of the prairie. They visited the Houston Zoo, Stephen F. Austin State Park, Sam Houston National Forest, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Matagorda Bay Nature Park, and Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. During these trips, the crew members learned about different environmental topics and met staff from a variety of organizations.

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Above : YCC crew members, Katie Maciek, Jesus Ortiz and Matthias Litzmann roll up barbed wire . Photo by Jennifer Romero FWS

Cont. from page 6

At the end of the eight week program, Crew members and their families, along with refuge staff celebrated with a luncheon at the Refuge. Jeremy Petruccio cooked for the group and others brought drinks and desserts. A slideshow was presented with pictures of the work accomplished by the students throughout the summer. Crew members Katie Macek, Matthias Litzmann, and Makia Richardson completed the entire program and were presented a certificate of appreciation signed by refuge manager Terry Rossignol, a YCC patch, and a YCC T-shirt. The guests were given a tour of the Refuge guided by Ms. Romero to see the projects worked on by the students.



Above: YCC crew members pose with Smoky the Bear while on a well earned Friday field trip to Sam Houston national Forest.

Photo by Jennifer Romero FWS

The YCC program is a valuable asset for the Refuge. It provides needed assistance for refuge staff during a very busy time of the year, while giving participants the opportunity to experience the outdoors, learn about refuge operation and receive valuable life and work experience.



The U.S. Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) is a summer youth employment program that engages young people, ages 15 to 18, in meaningful work experiences on national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and fish hatcheries. Youth are engaged in fun, exciting work projects designed to develop an ethic of environmental stewardship and civic responsibility.



Above: YCC members are given the opportunity to observe refuge biological staff work with Attwater's Prairie-chickens in an acclimation pen. Photo by Jennifer Romero FWS



Above left to right: Wildlife Refuge Specialist, Jennifer Romero and YCC crew members, Katie Macek, Matthias Litzmann, and Makia Richardson. FWS photo

FRIENDS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE



This is only a small snapshot of what Friends Groups have accomplished within the last year.
This represents just **30%** of all Friends nationwide.

WHAT HAVE FRIENDS GROUPS ACCOMPLISHED?



There are more than 230 Friends Groups that support wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries.

With looming threats to conservation in the U.S. - Friends are needed now more than ever.



15,008
MEMBERS



\$5 MILLION
IN CONSERVATION FUNDS RAISED



256
HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECTS



955
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



1,037
OUTREACH & SPECIAL EVENTS



82,685
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS



the difference Friends can make!

See America's History on National Wildlife Refuges



Lighthouses and forts, shipwreck treasures and long lost cultures: So much of America's past can be found on national wildlife refuges.

In Iowa, you can visit DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge visitor center and museum, where you can find fully-preserved bottles of pickles, brandied cherries and peaches and so many other artifacts from the *Steamboat Bertrand*. The boat was bound for Montana gold mining territory when it sank in the Missouri River in 1865. All the passengers survived as did some of their stories and belongings.

In Wisconsin, the lifesaving station built on Plum Island in 1896 may be the only one left on the Great Lakes. The Friends of Plum and Pilot Islands in 2007 helped to restore, preserve and manage the islands' historic and cultural resources. A year later, Plum and Pilot Islands were added to Green Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

In Montana, Peter Whaley and his wife, Hannah, moved to the Bitterroot Valley in 1877. By 1885, they had completed a two-story house of square-hewn logs. The house still stands at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge as a lasting example of craftsmanship of the late 19th century.

In Washington, explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark visited Cathlapotle in 1805-1806. They saw one of the largest Chinook villages along the Columbia River and plankhouses that served as people's homes. You can see a replica on Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge.

In Nevada in the late 19th and early 20th century, Jack Longstreet settled "arguments with a gun and championed those who could not protect themselves." In 1896, he built his cabin into the side of a mound, giving him private access to an underground spring and food storage area. The stone cabin was restored and opened to the public in 2005.

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife

Refuge is the largest remnant of a million-acre swamp that once covered southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. For 200 years, the swamp was home to "maroons," escaped slaves whose story is told in the refuge's Underground Railroad Education Pavilion.

At the height of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), 64 CCC camps employed 13,000 men in Arkansas, some of them at Dale Bumpers White River National Wildlife Refuge, which had just been established in 1935. The refuge housed the nation's only floating quarter boats as living quarters for CCC crews. Several CCC-era buildings still stand at the refuge.



Great Dismal Swamp NWR

"A little repentance just before a species goes over the brink is enough to make us feel virtuous. When a species is gone, we have a good cry and repeat the performance."

Aldo Leopold

Membership Application

Yes, Please enroll me as a Friend of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

New Membership -or- Renewal Date: _____

Name (s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Annual: \$15 Student or Senior (62 or older), \$20 Individual, \$30 Family

Make checks payable to: Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge and mail to:

Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

P. O. Box 212

Eagle Lake, Texas 77434

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

Interested in reading back issues?

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

You can help with vital Red Imported Fire Ant suppression on the refuge by supporting the

"Fire Ant Control/Brood Survival Fund"

Visit our website, www.attwater.org for more information

We would like to thank Tye Chandler with Fossil Rim Wildlife Center for sharing some of his photographs for this publication.