

# THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

Volume 4 issue 4

## Message From The President

**Friends:** Your organization has submitted grant applications to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Coastal Program for more than \$20,000, and to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for \$5,000.

A priority for the funding requested from USFWS is for a specially-designed trailer to be used for transporting young birds from breeding facilities to the refuge. The majority of the funding requested from NFWF is for items to increase public awareness.

Our thanks to our Past President, Ron Jones, and our Development Chair, Sumita Prasad, for their hard work

in researching, detailing and submitting these grant applications.

In addition, our thanks to Art Contest Committee Chair, Mark Sleeper, and his committee including Vice President, Jane Meldahl, and board member, Cynthia Lurix. Our thanks to board member, Paul Lurix, for his assistance with judging the artwork and the excellent essays. And last but not least, our thanks to board member, Carol Davis, for her generous donation to the Art Contest.

**Chicken update:** Flocks in excess of forty birds have been reported by refuge staff and observed by our

Treasurer, Eliot Tucker. During the Christmas Bird Count, expert-local birder, Mike Austin, reported observing forty-plus chickens, at the refuge.

Please plan on attending the Attwater Prairie Chicken Festival at the refuge on April 9 and 10. We will have a small group of Native-Americans demonstrating dances that originated from Prairie Chicken booming behavior. We also intend to provide free refreshments and snacks organized by our "Chef-in-Charge," board member, Jim Hluchan.

Hope to see you there.

**Gary Woods, President**



Above: Feral hogs destroy habitat and can decimate the young of ground dwelling species.

## "Booming-N-Blooming"

The 22nd annual Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Festival is scheduled for April 9- 10, 2016. Join us at the refuge for what could be a record year of prairie-chicken viewing. Participate in one of the walking tours or enjoy a guided van tour of the refuge. On Saturday at 12:30, native American dancers will demonstrate their traditional ,Prairie Chicken Dance and offer great picture opportunities. Each day of the festival, photographer and entomologist , Ian Wright will offer a special presentation on the biological control of red imported fire ants. *See Festival on P.3*

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### Did you know?

- In 2014, worldwide, there were 11,313 accepted species of grass.
- Grass covers 25% of all land on Earth.
- Grass dominated biomes are found from the Arctic to the Equator.

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

# Grazing Management

## Tools in the Prairie Management Toolbox - Part III

Terry Rossignol, Refuge Manager  
Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

In keeping with the habitat management theme of the last couple of newsletters, I'd like to discuss a very important habitat management tool – grazing. Although controversial in some western states, grazing is a very effective tool in managing the grasslands of the coastal prairie and for Attwater's prairie-chicken (APC) management. At first glance, one might think that grazing and prairie-chickens don't belong together; however, on the contrary, the two are very compatible at appropriate stocking rates.

Historically, bison roamed an estimated 6-7 million acres of coastal prairie habitat, co-existing with the Attwater's and keeping the prairie ecosystem healthy. Today, on a few remnant pieces of prairie, cattle do the job that bison did 200 years ago. Grazing, if conducted correctly (and that's the key!) can be beneficial by increasing the vigor and reproduction of the more desirable plants while at the same time creating habitat structure that benefits APCs.

At the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), personnel manage a grazing program to maintain good to excellent range conditions with >50% climax grass species, thus benefitting the Attwater's prairie-chicken and coastal prairie ecosystem. To maintain grasslands in good ecological condition, range managers use a rule of thumb of "take half, leave half" of desirable species.

If prairie lands are under-grazed, grasses and plants will become too dense and thick to be of value for the APC except as escape cover. If over-grazed, grasslands may be used for booming and feeding, but not

enough cover will be left for other life requirements. Constant monitoring is necessary to insure that the proper grazing pressure is being applied at all times. Of course, rainfall (too little or too much) also impacts grazing regimes, requiring stock rates to be adjusted accordingly.

The "structure" of the grasses is very important for prairie-chickens. These birds require native prairie habitat which contains clumps of grasses in order to escape from predators while also providing some open areas to allow for movement from one area to another, especially for young birds. Cattle trails provide excellent "roadways" for young chicks to use.



Above: Cattle doing their part on the Refuge. Photo by USFWS

Cont. on P.5

*Festival cont.* The work of this year's winners of the 4th annual Student Festival Art Contest will be announced and their winning work will be on display in the visitors center.

Complimentary refreshments will be provided to all festival attendees, thanks to the support of **HEB** and **Brookshire Brothers**.

It looks like this could be a great festival that you won't want to miss.



At Left:  
The Craig Hall Family Dancers will perform their culture's traditional Prairie Chicken Dance at the 2016 Attwater's Prairie Chicken Festival

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

## Membership Meeting Scheduled

A combined members and board meeting will be held on Saturday April 9, 2016 at 2 pm at the Attwater

Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge located between Sealy and Eagle Lake, Texas on FM 3013. The refuge's phone number is 979/234-3021 . My phone number is 281/224-8162. Please try and come early to see the prairie-chicken on its booming grounds-7 am and /or the Native American dancing at 12:30 pm. Your Friends group is providing free food and refreshments. Hope to see you there.

*Gary Woods, President*

*Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge*

### *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.

# Love Your Rabbit, Keep it Penned

By John Morton

Biologist, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska



Some time ago, the local newspaper carried a story about the Bunny Task Force, formed to deal with the 200 or so once-domesticated rabbits that are now living in the wilds around Juneau, Alaska. The bunnies have gone feral, meaning they escaped or were released from captivity and are now breeding in the wild.

Pets and other domesticated animals that go feral typically become problems. In the case of bunnies, they can literally eat up the landscape.

Perhaps the best example is the initial escape of captive rabbits in Australia in 1788, and then a well-meaning deliberate introduction in 1859, which set the stage for rabbits to compete with kangaroos as the primary herbivore Down Under. I read one account that 2 million rabbits were being killed annually with no appreciable dent in their population.

Here in the U.S., as many as 60 million feral cats may roam the Lower 48. One published study in 2013 estimated free-ranging domestic cats may kill up to 4 billion birds, 22 billion mammals, 822 million reptiles and 300 million amphibians EACH YEAR in the U.S.

Cats' destruction is only compounded by the fact that feral cats have high infection rates of feline leukemia virus, feline immunodeficiency virus, rabies and ectoparasites like ticks and fleas, many of which can be transmitted to wildlife (and sometimes people).



*Above: Feral rabbits around a waterhole on devastated habitat near Adelaide, Australia in 1961*

Norway rats escaped onto Rat Island, a 7,000-acre island in the Aleutian chain, in the aftermath of a Japanese shipwreck in the 1780s. Although rats from a ship aren't domesticated, they are considered "commensal" in that they have a living arrangement (like it or not) with humans. As rats became feral on the island, they eliminated burrowing seabirds like tufted puffins, and severely reduced populations of black oystercatchers, glaucous-winged gulls, pigeon guillemots, rock sandpipers, common eiders, red faced cormorants and gray-crowned rosy finches. A successful aerial application of rodenticide in 2008 has begun the restoration of the island's ecology even as the island's name was restored to Hawadax, the original Aleut name.

At the end of the day, love your rabbit but keep it penned.

*Dr. John Morton is the supervisory biologist at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.*

*Cont. from p.2*

Currently on the refuge, cattle are grazed in conjunction with a modified patch burn system. The premise of patch burning with regard to prairie management is that the interaction of burning and grazing creates a diverse habitat pattern, structure, and plant composition that meet the life requisites of prairie-chickens and other grassland species. Pastures have been divided into 4-16 patches, with 25 percent burned each year on a 4-year rotation. Continuous grazing within pastures results in preferential selection of areas that have been recently burned in comparison to areas that were burned 3-4 years ago.

Grazing on the refuge is a huge benefit for the Attwater's prairie-chicken. Without it, prairie grasses would become too thick or rank to be used by APCs. Whether used in combination with other habitat management tools, or by itself, grazing, when properly carried out, provides a way to maintain coastal prairie habitat for the benefit of many species.

## Board Members Attend National Workshop

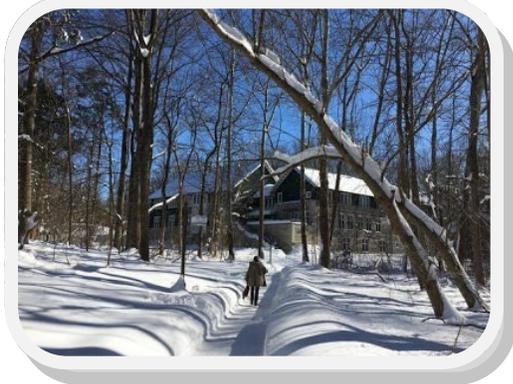
On January 22-24, Board President Gary Woods and Board Member Sumita Prasad attended the National Wildlife Refuge System's "Moving Friends Forward" workshop. The event, only hosted every 3-5 years was held at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

More than 225 board members from Friends groups across the country were in attendance. Sessions included board development, partnership agreements, environmental education programs, fund-raising and much more. It was a rewarding opportunity to network, learn new skills, uild camaraderie and energize to keep our organization moving forward.

But the story doesn't end there. The weekend of the workshop was also the weekend of the "Big Blizzard of 2016". Shepherdstown was ground zero for the storm with more than 40 inches recorded. Roads and airports were closed and Sumita and Gary were treated to 2 additional, unscheduled days at the training center. A skeleton crew remained at the facility 24/7, sleeping on cots and air mattresses, to attend to the needs of guests. It was one workshop that will remain in the memory of the attendees for a very long time.

*Top: Finding your car became a challenge, then you got to dig it out.*

*Center: Gary (2nd from left on back row) and Sumita (standing, right end of 2nd row) pose for a group picture with some of the other attendees.*



*“ We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. “*

**Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac**

**New Board Member** – We would like to welcome Robert Smith to the board of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge. Robert was elected at the last board meeting to complete the term of Brian McBride who had resigned his position do to an employment relocation. Robert will serve as Chair of the Audit Committee and will assist Treasure, Eliot Tucker. Welcome aboard Robert and Gig’em”.

## **2015 Attwater Christmas Bird Count a Success**

**Sumita Prasad, Friends Board Member and Count Coordinator**

During the 116<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count Season, the Texas Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count (Attwater CBC) took place on December 16, 2015. Despite the heavy rains in preceding days, CBC day was dry, with a high in the low 70s (°F) and a low in the upper 40s (°F). Fifty-two exuberant participants did a yeoman’s job of finding a good diversity of species on this count. The Attwater CBC is known for being one of the highest inland counts in the US. Situated in Colorado County, the Attwater CBC boasts both eastern and western birds, as well as birds from a variety of habitats, including prairie, riverbottom, forests, shrub-brush, various wetlands, agricultural/pasture, and riparian habitats. This year, our 52 volunteers counted 100,803 individual birds of **177 species!** This included 48 Attwater’s Greater Prairie-Chickens at the Refuge! At the Countdown Dinner, served, at sundown, participants tallied our final day’s list while celebrating our efforts. We thank the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge for providing and serving dinner, as well as the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge for all of their assistance and for lending us the space for dinner. The next Attwater CBC will be held on December 14, 2016.

*Cont. on P. 7*

# **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](http://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.**



**Birds observed at the Attwater  
CBC on December 16, 2015:**

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck  
Greater White-fronted Goose  
Snow Goose  
Ross's Goose  
Cackling Goose  
Wood Duck  
Gadwall  
American Wigeon  
Mallard  
Mottled Duck  
Blue-winged Teal  
Northern Shoveler  
Northern Pintail  
Green-winged Teal  
Canvasback  
Redhead  
Ring-necked Duck  
Lesser Scaup  
Bufflehead  
Hooded Merganser  
Ruddy Duck  
Attwater's Greater Prairie-Chicken  
Northern Bobwhite  
Pied-billed Grebe  
American White Pelican  
Neotropic Cormorant  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Anhinga  
American Bittern  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret

Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Little Blue Heron  
Tricolored Heron  
Cattle Egret  
Green Heron  
Black-crowned Night-Heron  
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron  
White Ibis  
White-faced Ibis  
Roseate Spoonbill  
Black Vulture  
Turkey Vulture  
White-tailed Kite  
Bald Eagle (adult)  
Northern Harrier  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
White-tailed Hawk  
Zone-tailed Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Ferruginous Hawk  
Crested Caracara  
American Kestrel  
Merlin  
Peregrine Falcon  
Sora  
Common Gallinule  
American Coot  
Sandhill Crane  
Black-bellied Plover  
Killdeer  
Black-necked Stilt  
American Avocet

Spotted Sandpiper  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Willet  
Lesser Yellowlegs  
Long-billed Curlew  
Western Sandpiper  
Least Sandpiper  
Dunlin  
Stilt Sandpiper  
Short-billed Dowitcher  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
Wilson's Snipe  
American Woodcock  
Ring-billed Gull  
Forster's Tern  
Rock Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
White-winged Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Inca Dove  
Common Ground-Dove  
Barn Owl  
Eastern Screech-Owl  
Great Horned Owl  
Barred Owl  
Short-eared Owl  
hummingbird sp.  
Belted Kingfisher  
Red-headed Woodpecker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker  
Pileated Woodpecker

*Cont. on P. 8*

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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](http://www.attwater.org) and you will find them archived on the publications page.

**Cont. from P.7**

Eastern Phoebe  
Vermilion Flycatcher  
Ash-throated Flycatcher  
Great Kiskadee  
Couch's Kingbird  
Loggerhead Shrike  
White-eyed Vireo  
Blue-headed Vireo  
Blue Jay  
American Crow  
Horned Lark  
Tree Swallow  
Bank Swallow  
Cave Swallow  
Carolina Chickadee  
Tufted Titmouse  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
Brown Creeper  
Carolina Wren  
Bewick's Wren  
House Wren  
Winter Wren  
Sedge Wren  
Marsh Wren  
Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
Eastern Bluebird  
Hermit Thrush  
American Robin  
Gray Catbird  
Northern Mockingbird  
Brown Thrasher  
European Starling  
American Pipit  
Sprague's Pipit  
Cedar Waxwing  
Orange-crowned Warbler  
Nashville Warbler  
Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler  
Pine Warbler  
Palm Warbler  
Black-and-white Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Wilson's Warbler  
Wilson's Warbler  
Eastern Towhee

Cassin's Sparrow  
Chipping Sparrow  
Clay-colored sparrow  
Clay-colored Field Sparrow  
Vesper Sparrow  
Lark Sparrow  
Lark Bunting  
Savannah Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Le Conte's Sparrow  
Fox Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
Harris's Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Lapland Larkspur  
Northern Cardinal  
Pyrrhuloxia  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Western Meadowlark  
Brewer's Blackbird  
Common Grackle  
Great-tailed Grackle  
Bronzed Cowbird  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
House Finch  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow



**Above: Friends board member Jim Hluchan and Assistant Refuge Manager, John Magera helped serve dinner to the CBC participant at the Refuge.**

**Below: Participating CBC team members begin the tally of birds seen at the 2015 event.**

