



# THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 6 Issue 2

## Message From The President

Congratulations and welcome to new board member, Mr. Joe Sherfy from Austin, Texas, who was elected, at our September membership meeting. Joe is a CPA and has accepted the chair of the Audit Committee. Joe is a valuable addition to our organization.

We presented two awards at our 2017 Annual Meeting – the “Most Valuable Member,” to Mary Lou Jones, and the “Most Valuable

Director,” to Ron Jones, Past President. There’s not enough space here to list all the endeavors each of these awardees has performed for the Friends group, but suffice to say, their efforts have been essential to establishing the organization and for many of our accomplishments to date. We appreciate their service to the Friends and to the chicken.

Please remember the Friends group for your

end-of-year donations. A recurring membership is an excellent gift that keeps on giving and increases the value of our organization to potential donors by enlarging our demonstrated community support. You may fill out and mail the attached membership form or join at our website at [attwater.org](http://attwater.org), using PayPal.

A happy holiday season to each of you.

Gary Woods , President



*Terry has left the building.  
Maybe the end, but a new beginning.*

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### Did you know?

- The proposed 2018 budget for the FWS amounts a funding reduction of 14.2%
- 84 bills have been introduced in congress that would chip away at the effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act.
- One bill would remove protection for any species that is only found in a single state.

### 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

[www.attwater.org](http://www.attwater.org)

# A Familiar Face Calls It A Career

*An Article Written by Friends and Colleagues*

Refuge manager and Attwater's prairie-chicken recovery team leader Terry Rossignol has decided to "hang it up" after more than three decades of public service. Terry has spent his entire 33+ year career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System.

Terry began his career in 1983 as a coop student while attending Texas A&M University. He and his wife, Geneva both graduated from the university in 1985 and Terry accepted a full time position with the Refuge System. Terry's early career took him to Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR, Cibola NWR, Buffalo Lake NWR, Salt Plains NWR, Bitter Lake NWR, and Brazoria NWR before settling into the position of Assistant Refuge Manager at Attwater in 1993. Three years later he accepted the position refuge manager and recovery team leader.

For the last 25 years, he has focused his talents on the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge and recovery of the namesake of the refuge. Those that have been around Terry much, know him as a quiet, humble person. As long as things are functioning smoothly, Terry is perfectly content to stay in the background to put all of the pieces in place and be the "glue" that keeps things moving forward. Terry has worked tirelessly to ensure that funding and administrative requirements were taken care of so that recovery actions for the Attwater's could be implemented. Even when dealing with the frustration of increasing administrative burdens, he has continued to maintain a focused perspective—"it's all about the bird".

*"In my opinion, he is one of the kindest, most humble people I have known. His focus has helped all of us, refuge staff and the many partners in Attwater's prairie-chicken recovery alike, keep a "we can do this" spirit, even in the face of frustration and setbacks."*

*Mike Morrow, Refuge*

*"The endangered Attwater's Prairie Chicken could not have asked for a better champion than Terry Rossignol. Terry has dedicated his career to recovering the Attwater's Prairie Chicken. He has expertly managed all facets of the recovery, including science, management of habitats, captive propagation and educating Texans on the challenges Attwater's face. I will personally miss Terry's positive spirit. "*

*Kelly McDowell, Refuge Supervisor, Texas Coast*

While humble, Terry can take pride in such accomplishments as increasing the size of the refuge, increasing the number of captive breeding partners, moving powerlines underground to reduce dangers to the bird, reducing invasive species issue, restoring additional acres to prairie, and improving visitor facilities and refuge access.

**Cont. page 3**

*Cont. from P. 2 Familiar Face*

In 2009, Terry was recognized by the Fish and Wildlife Service as a Recovery Champion for his part in establishing a new Houston Zoo captive breeding facility at the Johnson Space Center.

Terry has been a frequent contributor to this newsletter. We could have done nothing less than allow him one more opportunity to share his thoughts with our readers. His farewell piece follows our well wishes.

After retirement, Terry and Geneva will continue to make their home in the area and enjoy their family and the freedom to explore each new day, in the ways only retirement can allow. Terry's retirement will leave a big hole, and he will be missed. But we wish him and Geneva, the best that life has to offer in retirement. He certainly earned it.

*"I have always been impressed with Terry's dedication to the survival of the Attwater's. He has been a great support to me as the SSP Coordinator for the recovery of the APCs and I will miss his always optimistic outlook."*

*Hannah Bailey, Curator of Birds, Houston Zoo*

***Happy trails ya'll***

*I have known Terry since he first started at Attwater. It was a privilege, over the years, to be able to work with him for the betterment of 'Our Bird'. After retirement I was able to continue to work with him through the Friends organization. I never worked with a nicer or more dedicated individual. I expect to continue to work with him, for I am sure his interest in the recovery of this species will not end when he drives out the gate that last time as refuge manager.*

*Ron Jones, USFWS retired, Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge*

**A luncheon will be held in Terry's honor on December 18th at the refuge.**

**For more information and to RSVP, Please contact the refuge.**

**If you would like to send along well wishes, or have a story or gift to pass along, please contact:**

**Deputy Refuge Manager John Magera**

**john\_magera@fws.gov or 979-234-3021, ext. 223**



# Time Flies When You're Having Fun

## Terry Rossignol, Refuge Manager Emeritus

I remember the first time I saw Attwater's prairie-chickens on their booming grounds. It was during the spring of 1987. I was a Refuge Manager Trainee at Brazoria NWR. My newlywed bride and I came to APCNWR to view the birds in the evening as they strutted their stuff. As we watched from the blinds in the middle of the booming ground, I was mesmerized by the APC's courtship dance. On the ride home that evening, I remember telling my wife that this was a bucket-list refuge where I would like to work at in the future. My dream came true in February 1993, serving as Assistant Refuge Manager. A few years later, the opportunity to serve as Refuge Manager/APC Recovery Team Leader came open. I had no idea that I would spend the next 24 years here...but the challenges of recovering this imperiled grouse kept me going. O, how time flies when you're having fun!

Much of my time at APCNWR, unfortunately, seems to have become a blur. Just the other day, someone was asking about when the last time such-n-such was completed...I piped up, "Oh, a few years ago" only to find out after checking the records that it was actually 17 years ago! O, how time flies when you're having fun!

Despite the fact that everything seems to be "running together," one thing does stand out: the tenacity and dedication of everyone involved with the recovery of the Attwater's prairie-chicken is remarkable and unparalleled. The energy and "can-do" attitude of this group of partners, co-workers, and Friends is what has kept me going and focused for the last 24 years. I have personally seen many in this group literally pour their sweat and tears (and some blood) into this recovery program. Without this dedicated group, the Attwater's would probably be no more. It is an honor and pleasure to have been associated with such an awesome group of folks....a group I will always support, cherish, and remember.

Many have asked what my plans are for retirement. I plan to spoil grandkids, finally complete our house remodeling project (Year 20 started last April), spoil grandkids, travel the US and the world, and spoil grandkids (not necessarily in that order). Although I have experienced an awesome and blessed career with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and at APCNWR, I would be lying if I didn't admit that I am looking forward to everyday being Saturday. My biggest fear of retirement, however, is wondering what I will wear each day. For the last 34 years, I've always had a brown uniform ready to wear. **Cont. page 5**

*At right: A relaxed Terry Rossignol on the porch of the Refuge visitor's center. His home away from home for the past 25 years.*

*Photo by John Magera*



*Cont. from page 4*

It has been a fun ride...sometimes frustrating...sometimes very challenging....but never boring. My hope and prayer is that the sights and sounds of the Texas coastal prairie....of the Attwater's prairie-chicken will never be erased nor silenced, but preserved (like I first witnessed 30+ years ago). Thirty years from now, I would love to see the expressions and reactions of my great-grandkids as they experience the beauty of the coastal prairie and the Attwater's. I leave my post knowing that the fight will continue because of YOU...because of your passion, because of your perseverance, because of your dedication. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.



**Above: Terry, on right, dressed in his "signature" brown helps unload arriving birds at the refuge.**

*Photo by Sumita Prasad*



**Above: Terry, In center, poses with the Craig Hall Family Dancers. The longer you work with a species, the more you tend to resemble them. Photo by Sumita Prasad**



**Above: One of the thousands of refuge sunrises that have greeted Terry when he arrived to work each morning.**

*Photo by John Magera*



**Above: A "younger" Terry, on right, takes notes as an Attwater's is examined prior to release in an acquisition pen.**

*FWS photo*

# APC UPDATE

## Hurricane Harvey and Attwater's Prairie-Chickens

Terry Rossignol, Refuge Manager

Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

Hurricane Harvey slammed the Texas coast on August 25, 2017 as a Category 4 storm and meandered around for several days dumping 16-51+ inches of rain throughout the Attwater's prairie-chicken's (APC) historic range. Despite land managers and biologists doing everything possible to prepare for this storm, Hurricane Harvey became the worst case scenario for APC recovery, severely affecting both wild populations. More than 80% of the birds on the refuge being tracked by radio telemetry prior to the storm were lost. The outcome in Goliad County was worse. Despite experiencing high mortality, several APCs without radio collars were seen at both the refuge and in Goliad County following the storm.

The storm hit three-quarters of the way through the release of about 250 captive-bred birds this summer. In fact, 18 birds placed in acclimation pens at APCNWR awaiting release were transferred back to the Houston Zoo just a couple of days before the fast moving hurricane made landfall. These 18 birds along with an additional 50 or so were released into the wild from late September to early October to complete this year's release. Usually, captive-bred birds are released before mid-September prior to the arrival of migrating hawks to the area. Obviously, the hurricane delayed the release of these last 68 or so birds.

Infrastructure-wise, APCNWR fared pretty well...considering. Gravel from a few roads was washed off and a few fences were pushed over by flood waters. The refuge remained closed until after the Labor Day weekend in order to allow roads to dry out. In Goliad County, two APC acclimation pens were destroyed by high winds. Two other pens were partially damaged; however, thanks to a crew from Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, those pens were repaired just in time to receive birds for release.

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*Above: New roadways on the refuge sustained damage from heavy rainfall and flooding associated with hurricane Harvey. Photo by USFWS*

*Cont. from page 6, APC Update*

Despite the setback that Hurricane Harvey handed the wild APC populations, we are very grateful for the captive breeding flock. It is important to continue keeping the integrity of the APC captive flock intact – hence the need to continue the redundant strategy of providing for several facilities to raise birds to prevent loss of the entire captive flock to disease and/or environmental events. APC recovery needs to stay on course to continue and increase production of captive-bred birds in order to replenish the existing wild populations affected by Hurricane Harvey. This, however, will take time and commitment. Yes, the wild APC populations took a serious blow from Hurricane Harvey, but don't count this imperiled bird out just yet.

## The Christmas Bird Count is Just Around the Corner

The Attwater Christmas Bird Count will be held on Wed. Dec. 20, 2017. 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](mailto:sumita@utexas.edu)



# My YCC Summer Experience

**Matthias J.F. Litzmann**

I participated in the Youth Conservation Corp. (YCC) program at Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge during the summers of 2015 and 2017. During these two summers, I had to contend with the intense Texas heat, damaging and flooding rain, thick fog, strong winds, venomous insects/spiders/snakes, and sometimes, my coworkers! The YCC program taught me a lot about life, work, money, and myself. The first day of work in the summer of 2017, John Magera, Refuge Assistant Manager, told my group that this job was going to teach us “how to work.” This was a complete understatement of the experience I encountered, especially the previous summer of 2015. Since 2017 was my second summer, I already knew how hard the work was going to be and what was needed to be done. Yet, once again, I learned more about my capabilities, how to work and interact with an entirely new crew and a new YCC Supervisor, Jennifer Romero.

During my summers at Attwater, I constructed and removed Attwater Prairie Chicken pens, rolled up and constructed fences of barbed-wire, pulled up fence posts, cleaned and organized working facilities, painted buildings, maintained areas for the public as well as the birds, and did whatever was necessary for maintenance at the Refuge. I left my house at 7am, worked on a schedule, ate lunch almost always at 12pm, and continued the workday until 4pm. The hours never varied, but no one could predict what our work schedule would be day to day.

This job taught me the significance of the phrase, “a hard-earned dollar.” I quickly learned how fast and easy it was to blow money, as well as how difficult and long it was to make that same money. I started to judge my spending in terms of my hours of work. I began to view what I thought I wanted to purchase by comparing its worth against working 8 hours, sweating through my clothes, getting molested by mosquitoes, and getting burned by the sun. I was only 15 years old during my first summer. Although I was the youngest, at the end-of-year-luncheon in July, according to my boss, I very likely was the hardest and most dedicated YCC worker to spend a summer at Attwater. It made me very proud, yet confused, as to how I had managed to make such a favorable impression while sweltering under the Texas sun.

Working at a National Wildlife Refuge, I had the chance to meet undergraduate and graduate students from across the United States who were interns. These college students, and my high school crew members, are an added bonus to working in the heat.

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

*Cont. from page 8*

Comradery was felt and we shared fun moments that remained a secret only to the prairie and its inhabitants. I had the pleasure of working under some of the best bosses ever. They taught me how to lead, treat co-workers, and supervise others, so that the workers would be willing to complete the tasks, no matter the conditions. My bosses were so expert at their positions that I will use them to measure future supervisors; Attwater supervisors will be a hard act to follow.

Inadvertently, the YCC job taught me why I should work harder in school, which actually improved my work ethic, thus reflecting the same on my grades. I had arrived at the conclusion that I definitely wanted a higher education, so that I can decide what type of job I would have in my future, and not have it decided for me because I had no options. Working as a YCC worker helped steer me on my future college path.

As grueling as the tasks could be at Attwater, some days it seemed just down-right horrible, but I never gave up, even though some of the other YCC members quit. After I left to return to school following my first summer, I realized I missed being on the prairie. I missed the employees of Attwater, my crew members, the Prairie Chickens, and I missed the work--I really did. That's why I returned two years later when the YCC program opened up after a closed summer. When I was working out on the prairie I used to say I would much rather be writing an essay than taking down another barbed-wire fence. I hate essays, but at least I would be in an air-conditioned room, sitting down, and not getting cut up or burned up.

However, working at Attwater as a YCC worker was a memorable experience that cannot be equaled in typical summer jobs. The people, the friendships of other high school students from various towns, many of whom I have kept in touch with over the last few years, made the work easier, and the memory brighter. The prairie, unique with its charms, cast a spell on me, making the difficult tasks only a part of a much larger, wonderful memory that outweighs any trade.



*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.*

***“Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generation, bids us to restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wildlife and the larger movement for the conservation of all of our natural resources, are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose and method . “***

***Theodore Roosevelt***

# Wild Facts About That Thanksgiving Bird



Maybe you are already dreaming about Thanksgiving: turkey, stuffing, all the pies.

And maybe you thought you knew everything about turkeys. Think again. Wild turkeys are not hard to find – if you look in the right place. National Wildlife Refuges are great places to view wild turkeys. Refuge trails are generally open sunrise to sunset, many even on Thanksgiving day when refuge visitor centers are closed. Free trail maps are often available outside a visitor center or at a refuge entrance kiosk.



*Wild turkeys strut and display at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum, PA.*

*Photo: Copyright Bill Buchanan. Used with permission.*

Here are some more facts that could add to the lively talk around your holiday table.

- Thought the only turkey sound was gobble, gobble? In fact, turkeys make all kinds of sounds; fly-down or fly-up cackle, kee kee run, excited yelp and more.
- Turkey droppings tell a bird's sex and age. Male droppings are j-shaped, female droppings are spiral-shaped. The larger the diameter the older the bird.
- An adult turkey has 5,000 to 6,000 feathers—count them....on its body.
- Turkeys may look off-kilter, tilting their heads and staring at the sky---yet they are fast. In a poultry race, they can clock more than 12 miles an hour, beating chickens by 3 miles an hour.
- Tom turkeys aren't the only ones that swagger and fan their tail feathers to woo mates and ward off rivals. Some hens strut too.
- Young turkeys—poults—scarf down insects like candy. They develop more of a taste for plants after they are four weeks old.
- Move over American bald eagle. Ben Franklin called the wild turkey a “bird of courage” and thought it would make a better national symbol.

*Wild Facts About That Thanksgiving Bird (2017, November 18) Retrieved from [https://www.fws.gov/refuges/about/FunOnWildlifeRefuges/Wild\\_Facts\\_about\\_Turkeys.html](https://www.fws.gov/refuges/about/FunOnWildlifeRefuges/Wild_Facts_about_Turkeys.html)*

# 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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