



# THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 7 Issue 2

## New Attwater's Prairie Chicken Documentary Debuts

The Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge is proud to announce the release of our new documentary film, **Little Grouse on the Prairie.** This short film tells the story of the Attwater's Prairie Chicken and the almost heroic efforts to save a species.

The film was made possible through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and masterfully shepherded to completion by Friends board Vice president, Sumita Prasad. In production for over a year, the film highlights the tremendous collaborations involved in

recovering a species. The film will be used as a public awareness and educational tool. It will be available for viewing by visitors to the refuge and at other venues. It is currently available on our website homepage at:

<http://www.attwater.org>

There are many individuals and organizations that provided their assistance and or/ footage to make this documentary a success.

We would like to recognize at least some. Thanks to refuge staff and interns, John Magera, Mike Morrow, Brandon Melton,

Garet Litwiller and Mandy Bellamy for their guidance and hard work. Thanks to Curtis Jones for providing the drone footage. Thanks to Jeff and Barbara Mills at IO Communications for their expertise and valuable input during production and post production. Thanks for the contribution of the staffs at the Houston Zoo, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Caldwell Zoo, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Also Sandy Parker and the Texas Master Naturalists, and Jay Kelso and the Nature Conservancy of Texas.

Well done everyone.



Raising these chicks needs your support

### Inside this issue:

<i>New Documentary Debuts</i>	1
<i>APC Update</i>	2
<i>You Can Make a Difference</i>	5
<i>First Saturday Refuge Tours</i>	6
<i>Christmas Bird Count</i>	6

### Did you know?

- There are 562 NWRs
- The proposed 2019 budget for the NWR system is 473.1 million dollars. Av/ refuge is 842 thousand dollars.
- The estimated cost, provided by the military, to deploy more than 5000 troops to our southern border, to strengthen barriers is \$220,000,000
- That equals the total, annual budget of 261 NWRs or approx. 46% of the annual budget.

### 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)

## APC UPDATE

# To Set the Record Straight....

Michael E. Morrow, Wildlife Biologist, APCNWR

As I write this article, 2018 is rapidly drawing to an end. Like many of you I'm sure, I find myself pondering over the blur of this year, and wonder where the time has gone. The summer was particularly hectic. We released a near record (second only to 494 in 2015) number of 452 birds this year at the refuge (266) and on private ranchlands in Goliad County (186). Of these, 242 came from Fossil Rim, 186 from the Houston Zoo, and 24 from the Caldwell Zoo. Thankfully after Harvey's nastiness last year, these facilities were "hitting on all cylinders" with respect to producing APCs for release. Flocks of 10+ prairie-chickens are regularly being seen flying across the prairie at both release sites – a sight I will never grow tired of seeing. Groups of males are also starting to spar with their brethren in preparation for next spring's booming season.

In addition to dealing with all things prairie-chicken this year, refuge staff have been inundated with queries by journalists following Harvey's aftermath. Some of them are genuinely concerned in documenting impacts and how we will move forward with APC recovery, while others just want to write the Attwater's obituary. As expected, some of the accounts are better than others. Many of the resulting articles are mostly factual; others are filled with inaccuracies. However, a statement made by one of these journalists really struck a nerve. The statement was not unique – we have heard or seen similar statements before. So if you would indulge a little editorializing on my part, I would like to offer an alternative perspective on Attwater's prairie-chicken recovery.

**Statement:** "The federal government has been working to restore this species since the 1970s, but has little to show for the efforts."

**Fact(s):** While it is true that population levels in the wild have not responded as well to intense management as we would like, it is far from truth that we have "...little to show for the efforts." In the first place, "the federal government" is an incredibly imprecise attribution. According to a quick Google search, the "federal government" employs some two million people. I can assure you they are all not working on APC recovery. While we would welcome help from all two million of those individuals, in fact, most of the federal action has been taken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service whose employees represent approximately 0.4% of the federal workforce. Of course, only a small fraction of FWS employees have actually worked on APC recovery issues. Secondly, the "federal government" is not the sole entity pouring their blood, sweat, and tears into recovery of this species. The Attwater's recovery program is incredibly fortunate to have multiple government (local, state and federal) and non-governmental groups and individuals (including landowners) that are actively engaged in removing this iconic species of coastal Texas from the brink of extinction. Many of these organizations have contributed a lot of their own funds toward this effort.

*APC Update Cont. on Page 3.*

Endangered species generally do not “achieve” that status overnight, and the Attwater’s is no exception. So I am perplexed by those who think we should be able to snap our fingers and make it all better. A basic assumption of that line of reasoning is that we *know* what factors are limiting populations and can do something about them. The reality is that may or may not be the case. The Attwater’s is a perfect example of being wrong about what was most limiting to the population. Originally, we thought lack of habitat and “maladaptation” of released captive-reared birds were the problems. However, it turns out that red imported fire ants were indirectly resulting in near zero chick survival in the wild, probably for at least the last 30 years. While fire ants had been considered, the general consensus was that they were less of a problem than other factors. It does not take sophisticated statistical models to realize that if a species cannot reproduce itself, populations cannot grow. In the case of the Attwater’s in the face of reproductive failure, we can expect the resulting population to *decline* on average by at least 50% annually, because that is the average annual mortality rate of wild prairie-chickens.

So to address the original statement directly (sorry for the circuitous route in getting here), it is untrue that the Attwater’s recovery program “...has little to show for the efforts.” Here are just a *few* of our (that includes you!) accomplishments:

- We have assembled a diverse group of organizations and individuals dedicated to preserving a species once so numerous that according to Val Lehmann “...in early days prairie chickens were relied upon to furnish meat for the cattle camps. The task of killing 40 or 50 prairie chickens was menial, the cook of the outfit usually attending to it.” (Attwater’s Prairie Chicken – It’s Life History and Management, 1941, page 6,  
<http://www.fwspubs.org/toc/nafa/57>
- We have established a viable and stable captive breeding program that has produced 250–500 birds for release annually for the last five years. It should be noted that in order to get to this point, a lot of work went into developing best management practices for husbandry, diets, health, genetics, etc. Not only does this program provide stock for reestablishing populations in the wild, but also provides an extremely valuable safety net as a hedge against catastrophes like Harvey.
- We have developed techniques for releasing birds that have resulted in post-release survival several times that reported for similar efforts in the literature. Can we do better? We hope so, but post-release survival through the years has not been the factor most limiting population growth.



# #GIVINGTUESDAY

#GivingTuesday is a global day of giving that harnesses the collective power of individuals, communities and organizations to encourage philanthropy and to celebrate generosity worldwide. Following Thanksgiving and the widely recognized shopping events Black Friday and Cyber Monday, this year's #GivingTuesday will take place on November 27<sup>th</sup> and will kick off the giving season by inspiring people to collaborate and give back.

Founded in 2012 by the 92nd Street Y – a community and cultural center in New York City – #GivingTuesday inspired millions of people to give back and support the causes they believe in. Over \$300 million was raised online to benefit a tremendously broad range of organizations, and much more was given in volunteer hours, donations of food and clothing, and acts of kindness

**Please consider participating in Giving Tuesday by supporting the Friends organization at:**

<http://www.attwater.org/beafriend/>

## 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

Join on-line at: <http://www.attwater.org/beafriend/>

- We have identified through research, that movements and habitat use of released captive birds are comparable to wild birds. Released birds readily boom (male display), nest and hatch young. And, when adequate resources (i.e., invertebrate food) are present, survival of broods produced by hens released the previous summer is comparable to those of wild hens.
- We have identified through research, that indirect impacts of red imported fire ants on availability of invertebrates as food for young chicks is a **major** limiting factor for APC population growth.

**Bottom-line.** Yes, it has taken much longer than any of us wanted or hoped to set the Attwater's on the path to recovery. That path has turned out to be rockier than any of us imagined. But we **are on the path** now. I am optimistic that good things are around the corner for Attwater's prairie-chickens. I hope you are too.

### You Can Make a Difference

As you can see from the Update article, much has been accomplished, but more needs to be done. Now, more than ever, your support is needed. With reduced federal budgets, federal support for non governmental entities can not be relied upon. Please consider supporting the efforts to save the Attwater's prairie-chicken.

- **Become a member and/or renew your membership.** Renewals are currently due for anyone that joined prior to January 1, 2018. <http://www.attwater.org/beafriend/>
- **Consider a donation,** Giving Tuesday is just around the corner. <http://www.attwater.org/beafriend/>
- **AmazonSmile** donates to the Friends when you do your shopping at: [smile.amazon.com/ch/45-0720176](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/45-0720176)



**Adopt-A-Prairie Chicken Program** was formally administered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department but will soon come under the Friends banner and be administered by the Friends organization. Please watch for the formal announcement. All funds will go to support the captive breeding partners.



***Every Attwater's Prairie Chicken  
hatched is a native Texan***

# First Saturday Refuge Tours

## *Are you interested in having a guided tour of Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge?*

The first Saturday of each month, a van tour takes visitors on a free two hour trip through the prairie. Join refuge volunteers and staff to learn about native coastal tall-grass prairie, the history of the refuge, the biology of the Attwater's prairie-chicken, and what's being done to save it from extinction.

One tour per first Saturday is conducted, beginning at 8 am. Space is limited and reservations are required. Call the refuge at **979/234-3021** to check about availability and to reserve your spot on this interesting tour.



*Above: visitors learn about the refuge from refuge staffer, Jennifer Romeo while on a First Saturday Van Tour*

# Christmas Bird Count Announcement

The Attwater CBC will be held on Wednesday, December 19, 2018 and is an amazing opportunity to bird the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR as well as public roads and private property in the Eagle Lake, Texas area. For residents living/working within the CBC circle, we welcome feeder watchers! This CBC is open to all birders and is one of the highest inland CBCs for diversity in the country, yielding total species counts ranging from the upper 160s to upper 170s. On the skirts of the Texas Hill Country, (though situated inland) this CBC offers coastal prairie habitat, and also includes bottomland hardwood, scrub, and pine forest habitats; it's a little east-meets-west and temperate-meets-tropical, providing a tremendous mix of birds. Participants will later convene for a catered "countdown" dinner, sponsored by Revitalize Eagle Lake, Eagle Lake Chamber of Commerce, Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge, and Alleyton Resource Company, LLC in downtown Eagle Lake Commercial Historic District. If you are interested in participating, contact:

Sumita Prasad at [sumita@utexas.edu](mailto:sumita@utexas.edu)

# Did you know you can make a difference ?

AmazonSmile donates to Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge when you do your shopping at : [smile.amazon.com/ch/45-0720176](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/45-0720176)



**This holiday, make a difference while you shop**

Shop for holiday gifts and supplies at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and Amazon donates

You shop. Amazon donates.  
amazon smile



*“Do right and risk the consequences”*

*Sam Houston*



## ***THE BOOMER***

is the official publication of the  
***Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge***

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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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**Happy Holidays From Your Friends**

