

ADOPT-A-

Fall 2008

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

Prairie Chicken

NEWSLETTER

Captive Breeding Updates

Six Texas zoos are actively involved in raising chicks for the Attwater's Prairie Chicken recovery program. In the 2008 breeding year, enough chicks were produced to release 286 into the wild. This has been the most ever released since the captive breeding program started in 1992.

For the 2009 season, one facility will not breed prairie chickens, but will provide assistance in research, housing overflow birds and helping in other ways. This will be a significant contribution since research has helped improve production, and crowding has affected production in negative ways.

One area of potential research is artificial insemination. This technique has the potential to allow incompatible pairs with significant genetic importance to the population to pass on their genes.

Although there will be fewer than last year, 53 pairs were identified for the coming nesting season. This should still allow for a productive season and another good release year.



Release Information

Birds were once again released at three sites in 2008: Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, Texas City Prairie Preserve, and on private lands in Goliad County. From the 2007 release, 20 percent of the birds were still being tracked in October. So far, more than 40 percent of the birds released in 2008 are still alive.



Hurricane Ike Impacts

September is the height of hurricane season in the Gulf of Mexico, and 2008 saw three hurricanes — Dolly, Gustav and Ike — impact the Texas coast. Of these, only Ike presented concern for the fragile Attwater's Prairie Chicken population.

As Ike approached the coast there were birds being held for release in pens in Goliad County, and it looked like these birds were going to be in the bull's-eye of the storm. The birds were captured and shipped to the San Antonio Zoo for safekeeping. The storm then made a hard right turn, putting the Houston Zoo and the Texas City Prairie Preserve in its track. The Houston Zoo had birds both in the main zoo property and at its Johnson Space Center facility. None of these facilities had time in the 36 hours leading up to the storm to move birds.

The Houston Zoo staff was put on the emergency access list to get in after the storm. Sunday morning, staff visited the Johnson Space Center property, and all birds and facilities were intact. At the main zoo property, one bird was lost to an apparent impact injury, and newly built holding facilities were destroyed by a downed tree.

Release sites, like Texas City Prairie Preserve, are harder to assess, since birds are not easily handled or located. Prior to the storm, an average 23 birds were being monitored. After the storm, the average has been 19 birds.

Overall, the impact of the storm was minimal to the birds but significant to facilities. It is hoped that the Houston Zoo will be able to reconstruct the holding pens prior to the 2009 nesting season.

Unique Fundraising Ideas

This job is for the birds! No, literally: at Wildlife Experiences in Rapid City, South Dakota, two birds—Lola, a pheasant and Zorro, a European Rook—“pass the hat” after the educational program they are involved in—literally, collecting money and returning it to a fund. The money raised is sent to the Adopt-a-Prairie Chicken program and has been a valuable source of support for several years. This unique way to assist endangered birds is a big hit with the visitors, too. For more information on this program, visit: <http://www.wildlife-experiences.org/summershow.html>

If birds passing the hat isn't for you, how about making crafts to sell as a fundraiser. Contributors are knitting hats and selling them with the proceeds being donated to the adopt program.

The students at Shady Oaks Christian School challenged local businesses to match donations they received, doubling their effort and resulting in a very significant donation to the Adopt program.

Your Support is Valued

Raising birds for release is a costly activity. Releases, tracking and research are also significant costs. The population is showing some positive signs that can only be continued with significant funds.

You can help. Donations to the Adopt-a-Prairie Chicken program go directly to the propagation and research facilities. Donations should be sent to:

Adopt-a-Prairie Chicken Program
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, TX 78744

All donations are greatly appreciated. Please make checks out to: Adopt-a-Prairie Chicken Program



Show Your Support for Wildlife!



Help protect native non-game species like the Attwater's Prairie Chicken with the purchase of the Horned Lizard license plate. The cost is just \$30, with \$22 going directly to benefit the conservation of wildlife diversity in Texas.

Order online today and get your plate in just two weeks!
www.conservation-plate.org/nature

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