



# News Release

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**Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)**  
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## **Endangered Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Recovery Efforts Making Gains**

Wildlife biologists are making gains in the recovery of the Attwater's prairie-chicken, a critically endangered subspecies of the greater prairie-chicken. This once iconic bird, native to the coastal prairies of Texas and Louisiana, has been on the brink of extinction. Historically, up to one million birds occupied their native habitat. Invasive species, drought, and loss of habitat, have taken a toll on the population. Currently, only two populations exist in Texas – one at the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) near Eagle Lake and the other on private lands in Goliad County.

Biologists have now learned that survival of newly-hatched chicks in the wild has been one of the biggest obstacles to this species' recovery. Mounting evidence suggests that invasive red imported fire ants have decimated insect numbers, a main food source for chicks, to the point that young are not getting enough sustenance for survival. The ants were accidentally introduced to the southeastern United States on a ship from South America.

In 2009, Refuge staff in conjunction with Texas A&M University's AgriLife Extension Service and other partners began treating for red imported fire ants on a 760-acre area of the Refuge. Results were positive and treated areas saw a marked increase in insects. During the fall of 2013, about 3,700 acres of the Refuge were treated for these ants, further improving habitat. Controlling red imported fire ants is also beneficial to other species such as bobwhite quail and white-tailed deer.

“We have had great success in treating for red imported fire ants and are seeing wild bird numbers increase because of it”, stated Refuge Manager Terry Rossignol. “Of course there are other factors we can't control that affect chick survival such as drought or severe rain events, but we feel we are making real progress.”

Because the Attwater's prairie-chicken is so highly endangered, a captive breeding program has also been developed. This year about 450 chicks were produced in captivity at four breeding facilities which include Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Houston Zoo, Abilene Zoo, and Caldwell Zoo in Tyler. About 375 of these birds have been released at the Refuge.

“With the success of the captive breeding program and the increase in wild bird survival, we feel we are on the verge of a major breakthrough with this imperiled species”, concluded Rossignol.

More information about the endangered Attwater's prairie-chicken and recovery efforts is available on the Refuge's website at [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/attwater\\_prairie\\_chicken](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/attwater_prairie_chicken).

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