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MONDAY April 24, 1996

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THE BATTALION

Page 3

A fowl way of life

A&M program aims to save Attwater prairie chickens

raise the number in captivity,

while supplementing the existing

population, with the hope that

later, habitat conditions will im-

prove," Silvy said. Along with similar programs at

the Houston and San Antonio

Zoos and the Fossil Rim Wildlife

Center, researchers at A&M are

striving to save the birds through

The small number of chickens has created breeding prob-

the wild was we had isolat-

ed populations that were highly inbred," he said. "In

females from another."

the facilities, we bring in males from one county to mate with

Researchers hope the

more genetically diverse

birds will have increased

vigor and a greater chance

of survival in the wild. Clifton Griffin, a wildlife

and fisheries doctoral student,

said photomanipulation is used to

increase offspring numbers. Pho-

tomanipulation involves altering

insects in early life — up to 17

"One problem we found in

captive breeding.

lems, Silvy said.

By John LeBas THE BATTALION

t one time, as many as one mil-A lion Attwater prairie chickens roamed the country between Louisiana and Mexico.

Native Americans integrated the chicken into their culture, imitating the bird's head and tail feather displays and mating dances in dress and ritual.

Now, mostly due to habitat re-duction, 40 chickens or less exist in the wild.

However, a Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences program at Texas A&M is working to halt the extinc-

dangered species. Dr. Nova Silvy, professor in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences said the Attwater prairie chicken is actually one

tion of this en-

of four prairie grouse sub species. The heath hen, a subspecies that used to live in in the Eastern states, is already extinct, and the Attwater prairie chicken is predicted to die out in the wild by 1998.

Tripping Daisy returns to **Bryan-College Station**



"They require large expanses of prairie habitat," Silvy said, "and that's gone. The major reason is that this habitat is the easiest to go to crop land."

Since the United States expanded from the East, the heath hen was the first to go extinct, Silvy said. Urban sprawl in Texas, like in Houston, has helped contribute to the Attwater prairie chicken population crash.

Degraded prairie lands, on which the chickens are more susceptible to predation, and fewer habitat-renewing fires have also taken a toll on the population

The captive propaga-tion program at A&M aims to stabilize and

crease the falling number of wild prairie chickens.

grams per day. Finding an ade-"The ultiquate number of insects to feed the chicks has been a bit of a hurdle, mate goal is to Griffin said.

One of the factors we feel like is

leading to the demise of the Attwater prairie chicken is a lack of insect availability," he said.

When chickens move into adulthood and begin eating vegetation, a new problem arises. The chickens are raised on commercial feed in captivity but must learn to eat vegetation upon release

"There are not any little red feed and water bowls on the prairie," Griffin said. "This year, we're

going to try to train them to go back to native vegetation before they're re-leased," Silvy said.

Training the birds f o r

But Silvy said researchers are encouraged by last year's chicken release — 15 percent have survived, without any such training.

Typical survival rates in the wild from egg to adult chicken are about three percent.

This year, researchers hope to release as many as 100 captive-bred and trained birds in the wild. These birds will be fitted with radio transmitting collars for tracking purposes.

While the fate of the chickens remains to be determined, Griffin is confident about their survival.

"Within a few years, we've worked out many of the details of raising the chickens," he said. "Now, we can increase the scale.

"We need to keep getting land, because there is no sense in having a huge number of birds if you have nowhere to put them.'

Griffin said the state of the prairie chicken also points to the poor condition of the entire tall grass prairie ecosystem.

Without significant increas-

es in population, the Attwater species will be

lost, he said, and might indicate the destruction of this entire ecosystem.

This is a critical year," he said. "Hopefully, it's not too little,

Queens Theatre one of several buildings to be renovated as part of downtown Bryan revitalization

By Kristina Buffin THE BATTALION

Over the next few years, downtown Bryan will become a place more A&M students and

vival in the wild remains a large as-

to induce more frequent egg lay-ing, and thus more chicks, he said. But Attwater chicks eat a lot of pect of the prairie chicken's future

Food shortages may also affect wild chickens, he said.

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rough Friday during th ring the summer session exas A&M University.

CDonald Building, Te

Tripping Daisy (above) is returning to College Station to play its first show at A&M since last summer. The band is playing tonight at The Tap.

music · poetry · food

and it's all free...

because we love you.

house

NO CAR ride the happy bu

he oldest building in downtown Bryan dates back to the 1890s. However, one hundred years later, most of the historic buildings are either deserted or in hor-

RESEARCH PARK

FRIDAY. APRIL 26

4.00 PM

follow the

orange signs

down

University Dr. and into **Research** Park

rible condition.

Bryan-College Station residents frequent for entertainment, shopping and work.

The revitalization of downtown Bryan will include the refurbishing of the Queens Theatre, the LaSalle Hotel and the Carnegie Library.

The owners of the 3rd Floor Cantina and the Dixie Theatre, Willie Bennett and John Williams, purchased the Queens Theatre when they realized they were losing bigger bands because the venues were not large enough.

"The music scene is growing," Ben-nett said. "More bars around town have live music and there is an increasing overall awareness of the music scene in Bryan-College Station. We believe in downtown Bryan.



Gwendolyn Struve, THE BATTA

See Bryan, Page 4 The Queens Theatre, which has been closed for 30 years, is being renovated.

1997 AGGIELAND Applications Available Now!!!

Due by 5 p.m. Friday, April 26

Positions Available:

Writer/Reporter Designers Photographers Pick up applications in 012 Reed McDonald