

Smartweed – Reprinted from Friends of Hagerman NWR Weekly Blog, February 1, 2018

Smartweed is a plant that is native to the lower 48 states and Alaska in the U.S. as well as in much of Canada. When Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge was first established, smartweed seed was among the 10 - 15 tons of seeds of various plants sent by the Fish and Wildlife Service to both Hagerman and Tishomingo national wildlife refuges, to be planted at both refuges along the edges of newly built Lake Texoma (Denison Herald, February 18, 1945). Since February is the anniversary month for the establishment of the Refuge, we chose Smartweed as the featured plant this month.



According to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, smartweed is in the buckwheat family and is important to waterfowl and other birds, which use it for food and cover.

At least 50 species of birds have been observed feeding on the seeds, including ducks, geese, rails, bobwhites, mourning dove, and ring-necked pheasant. The seeds and other parts are eaten by mammals such as the white-footed mouse, muskrat, raccoon, and fox squirrel. (Wikipedia)



The Wildflower Center notes that about 75 species of smartweeds occur in North America. Pink blooming *Polygonum pensylvanicum*, and white blooming smartweed, *Polygonum lapathifolium*,

can be found on the Refuge. We know this because thanks to the birds, we also have volunteer plants of both species in the Butterfly Garden each summer.

Pennsylvania, or pink, smartweed, is mainly identified by spikes of numerous flowers and encircling leaf sheaths. The white blooming smartweed is also known as Curlytop knotweed, and Pale Smartweed. Pale Smartweed (*P. lapathifolium*), is closely related to Pink Smartweed and has white or pale rose, arching flower spikes and usually smooth stems. Both are found in gardens as well as in damp waste places and wetlands. The plant is annual, so watch for it to come back from seed this spring. The bloom-time is March-May.

Photo credits: Philip Jones, Kim Morris