

SONORAN PRONGHORN MONTHLY UPDATE

January 14, 2013

Captive Breeding:

We did our annual capture of pronghorn in the boma traps December 18-20. The capture/release operation was a success due to assistance from numerous personnel from many agencies including Arizona Game and Fish, US Fish and Wildlife Service – Cabeza Prieta and Kofa Refuges, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Luke Air Force Base, Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, the Ajo, Yuma, and Wellton Border Patrol Sectors, BLM Yuma, and Phoenix Zoo. In addition to our Game and Fish veterinarian (Dr. Anne Justice-Allen), and contracted veterinarian (Dr. Ole Alcumbrac), we also hosted Dr. Ivonne Cassaigne from the National University of Mexico. Papillion Helicopters provided helicopters and pilots. Barry M. Goldwater Range, Marine Corps Air Station Yuma and Yuma Proving Ground permitted access to their restricted airspace. The Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club provided excellent meals for those camping at the event. Many thanks to everyone who participated!

Prior to the release operation, we trapped 32 of the 46 pronghorn in the south herd, and 29 of the 33 pronghorn in the north herd. During the trapping event, the pen monitors determined there was one additional buck fawn that had somehow eluded detection in the pen for the last 6 months.

We processed 21 pronghorn from the south boma on the first day. We had a late start as one helicopter was delayed in Tusayan by weather, and the other helicopter that was on-site wouldn't start in the morning. All pronghorn were vaccinated against Bluetongue/EHD and other diseases and had blood drawn for disease and genetic testing. Pronghorn that were needed in the south herd for breeding and this year's fawns were marked and released back into the pen.

We moved 2 yearling females to the Kofa breeding pen for breeding stock. We moved 3 yearling males to the holding pen at the Kofa pen to be released into the wild at a later date. We also moved 1 yearling male and 1 yearling female to the 5-acre holding pen on BMGR-West for release at a later date. All the pronghorn were given GPS collars, VHF collars, or ear tags for monitoring depending on their age and destination. We had one female fawn injured during the capture and handling in the boma. When released back into the pen, it appeared that she had no control of her rear legs. The veterinarians assessed her, determined there was a problem with her back, and gave her fluids, other drugs, and moved her to a quiet and undisturbed area to see if she could recover.

We processed the remaining 11 pronghorn in the south herd on the second day. We moved 3 more yearling bucks, 1 yearling female and two 2-year old females to the holding pen at Kofa. We also moved 1 yearling female to the holding pen on BMGR-West. The remaining 4 pronghorn in the boma were fawns, and were marked and released back into the breeding pen. The veterinarians also re-assessed the injured fawn from the day before, and determined her back was fractured or broken and she would not be able to recover, so the decision was made to euthanize her.

We also processed 18 pronghorn in the north boma on December 19. We moved an adult female and adult male to the holding pen on BMGR-West. We also moved 2 yearling females and 2 yearling males to the 5-acre holding pen on Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. The rest of the pronghorn were returned to the pen for breeding stock, or were fawns returned to the pen.

We finished processing the 11 pronghorn in the north boma on December 20. One yearling buck was moved to the BMGR-West holding pen, and the other 10 pronghorn were returned to the pen. We had no additional mortalities or injuries on the last 2 days.

All the pronghorn handled and released back into the captive breeding pen have joined with their herds and appear to be fine. We now have 31 pronghorn in the south half of the pen, and 26 in the north half.

Status of Pronghorn in Cabeza Pen

January 2012

NORTH HALF		SOUTH HALF	
Adult Females	8	Adult Females	10
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2011)	2	Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2011)	1
Breeding Buck (<i>b</i> 2010, Purple 3)	1	Breeding Buck (<i>b</i> 2010, Yellow 3)	1
Back-up Buck (<i>b</i> 2011, Yel/Blk 3)	1	Back-up Buck (<i>b</i> 2011, Green 4)	1
Fawns (born 2012, 5F, 9M)	14	Fawns (born 2012, 9F, 9M)	18
TOTAL	26	TOTAL	31
Total Pen	57		

Kofa Pen

The 2 females added to the pen on Kofa have also joined the rest of the herd and appear to be fine.

Status of Pronghorn in Kofa Pen

	January 2013
Adult Females	8
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2011)	3
Breeding Buck	1
Back-up Buck	1
Fawns (born 2012, 4F, 5M)	9
TOTAL	22

We monitored the pronghorn in the 3 holding pens daily. All the pronghorn grouped up with each other in the pens, and fed on native forage as well as alfalfa. One adult buck was found dead in the BMGR-West pen five days after being moved there. He had no visible injuries or other problems during the handling or transport, and had been acting normally in the previous days. His death is still under investigation, but is likely due to capture myopathy.

The remaining 5 pronghorn in the BMGR-West and 4 pronghorn in Organ Pipe holding pens were held for 2 weeks to ensure any lingering effects of the drugs are completely gone, to allow them time to become oriented to their new surroundings, and time to band together. The Organ Pipe herd was released into the wild on January 4th, and the BMGR-West herd was released January 5th. The 9 pronghorn in the Kofa release pen were released January 11th. Data from GPS collars and radio tracking collars indicate that the 4 Organ Pipe pronghorn moved into the Valley of the Ajo, and have been near Highway 85. The pronghorn from the BMGR-West release appear to be within 4 miles to the south and southeast of the release pen. We do not have any data on the location of the Kofa animals yet, but their radio signals cannot be heard from the Kofa pen.

Summary of Pronghorn for Release into the Wild

	Kofa NWR	BMGR-West	Organ Pipe Cactus NM	TOTAL
Adult Females	2	1		3
Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2011)	6	2	2	10
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2011)	1	2	2	5
Total	9	5	4	18

Water Projects: We repaired a water on Kofa where the trough popped out of the ground during a rainstorm. We built a permanent water in place of the temporary one on STAC during 9 – 13 January with help from the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club and personnel from Luke Air Force Base.

Forage Enhancements: All our forage enhancements have received ample rain recently, so we are not irrigating any of them.

Other Projects: We completed the range-wide survey December 8-15. We saw 108 pronghorn on transect and know we missed 23 (in radio collar groups or incidental sightings going to and from the survey blocks). Minimum number of pronghorn is 131, and our population estimate, based on group-size adjusted sighting rates is 159. This is much higher than 2 years ago, when the estimate was 68 and the minimum number was 85. The increase in numbers can likely be attributed to successful releases from the captive breeding pen, pronghorn use of our habitat enhancements such as forage plots and waters, and generally more favorable climatic conditions in the last 2 years.

Wild Pronghorn: We have not done any telemetry flights since the survey. During the survey, in addition to our radio collared groups, we saw a group of 4 pronghorn on the west side of Organ Pipe Cactus NM. We also observed fourteen pronghorn near the Devil's Hills water, a group of 7 near the Mohawk Valley dunes and a single buck in the Mohawk Valley. We saw groups of 6, 3 and a single buck in the Tule Desert area. Several uncollared groups we also seen on the Tactical Ranges.



Sonoran pronghorn leaving the holding pen on BMGR-West. Photo by John Kulberg, Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club.