

SONORAN PRONGHORN MONTHLY UPDATE

July 31, 2007

Captive Breeding:

North Half: We had a tragic accident in the north half of the pen. A yearling buck got caught between the woven wire fence and the shade cloth along the fence in the middle of the pen. This fence separates the north herd from the 5 juvenile bucks in the southeast quarter. We suspect he was trying to get into the pen with the other bucks. He was unable to go forward and couldn't turn around to get back out the way he got in, and the monitors didn't notice him before he died. In response, the monitors immediately fixed all the possible gaps between the fence and the shade cloth to prevent this from happening again. The rest of the pronghorn in the north half are doing well.

Southwest Quarter: The pronghorn in this section are all doing well.

Southeast Quarter: The 5 juvenile bucks in this section are doing well.

We have had at least 2 inches of rain on the pen and surrounding area in 3 separate storms starting on July 21st. In the first storm 0.5 inches fell, the next storm dropped another 0.5 inches, and the third storm dropped about 1 inch. Each time all the washes ran, and there was considerable debris to clean up around the pen. Several electric wires were bent or broken. The swinging gates worked as intended, but caught a lot of sand coming down the washes and needed digging out. Luckily, the main fence held and the pronghorn were all safe.

Because of the rain, the pen has greened up considerably and the pronghorn are now feeding on native forage much more than on alfalfa. The monitors have stopped irrigating and have been concentrating on keeping the pen secure, the wash crossings clean, cleaning out wet and refuse hay, tightening, repairing or replacing shade cloth around the pen and other chores.

Allen Zufelt left the project to take a job at Raymond Ranch Wildlife Area. We were trying to fill the position he left vacant on the pen crew, but none of the 3 people we selected would take the job, so we now have to re-advertise and will start the process all over. Consequently, we have only 2 of the 4 positions filled on the pronghorn project. The Cabeza Prieta hired a recent high school graduate, Matt Rosse, to work at the pen and on other projects for the summer until he starts college in the fall. He has been very helpful, especially with all the rain and major clean ups at the pen.

Water Projects: We hauled water to the Fawn Hills water that had gone dry on July 5. We checked the two waters on the Marine range on the ground after the rains on July 27-28. The Devil's Hills area had been rained on and the washes ran but the collecting point was clogged with debris. The water level is only about 20%. We went back the next day and put some screens up stream and built a settling basin in front of the dam to try to stop some of the debris from building up on the screen next time it rains. We also checked the Point of the Pintas water;

it had not rained there, but it is still about 75% full. There were recent pronghorn tracks around this water.

We checked all the pronghorn waters by air on July 29th, after monsoon storms had gone through the area. Unfortunately, it didn't rain enough around most of them to run any water into the tanks. Sierra Pinta #1 didn't collect water, but is still 2/3 full. Sierra Pinta #2 did not collect water and is still dry. Sierra Pinta #3 collected some water and is about 75% full. Fawn Hills did not collect any water, but is still 80% full from the hauled water. It did rain on Antelope Hills, which is full. Unfortunately, we suspect this one leaks so we need to get out and fix it before we lose all the water. Granite Mountains water did not collect any rainwater and is about 1/3 full. Antelope Parabolic did not collect rainwater and is about 50% full.

Forage Enhancements: Prior to the rains, we were irrigating all the forage enhancements. Granite Mountains is very green. We observed pronghorn tracks and pellets at several of the irrigated areas in the recently expanded part. We set a remotely triggered camera up there, but someone (illegal aliens, turkey vultures?) disconnected the camera from the trigger so we didn't get any photos. We reset it and hopefully should have some photos next time. We have also documented up to 13 pronghorn at the Charlie Bell forage enhancement, including all 4 of the released bucks from the pen, and two other radio collared animals from South Tac. Charlie Bell, Lower Well and Adobe Well all got good amounts of rain from the recent storms, so we have suspended irrigating there for now

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has secured funding from Homeland Security for a new forage plot to mitigate the effects of Border Patrol actions on pronghorn. We conducted a preliminary meeting and field trip with the Marine Corp and US Fish and Wildlife Service for a plot near the Devil's Hills water, on the Marine Range.

Other Projects: USFWS also secured funding from Homeland Security for starting the process to establish a second population. We had a meeting and field trip with KOFA, Cabeza Prieta and Ecological Services (Tucson) personnel in King Valley on the KOFA refuge to discuss alternatives.

We are also working on funding and logistics for our biennial survey of Sonoran pronghorn in Mexico for this December. We are also planning to assist the Mexican biologist with a GPS radio collaring effort in Pinacate Biosphere Reserve, dependant on securing funding and the appropriate permits.

Mike Coffeen retired from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, so they are now recruiting for a new biologist to fill the Recovery Team Leader duties.

Wild Pronghorn: We conducted a telemetry flight on July 29. At least 14 pronghorn, including 5 collared animals were either in the burn on South Tac or at the Charlie Bell forage enhancement plot. This group of pronghorn seems to be moving back and forth between the burn and the forage enhancement. At least 5 pronghorn, including 3 radio collars were in the San Cristobal Valley, north of the Antelope Hills. One group of pronghorn was near the Point of the Pintas water.

The Tactical Ranges and Daniel's Arroyo and the area around the Antelope Hills received heavy rain with washes running and standing water in puddles. This area is becoming very green. The rain was lighter or spotty over the rest of pronghorn range. The Agua Dulces, Granite Mountains, and parts of Sierra Pintas are greening up but there was no evidence of washes running or heavy rains. Some areas, such as the north end of the Sierra Pintas, did not appear to have received any appreciable rain. Rain was spotty in the Mohawk valley; some areas got heavy rain and are already green, while others still appear dry.



Four pronghorn bucks, including #46 released from the captive breeding pen in January, at Charlie Bell forage enhancement.