

SONORAN PRONGHORN MONTHLY UPDATE

January 20, 2009

Captive Breeding:

Our Boma capture pens were not ready and tested in time for our release of pronghorn from the captive breeding pen this year, so we used the technique used in the past, which was darting them from blinds placed around the pen. In December, we released three juvenile bucks from the pen. They were taken to the release pen near the Charlie Bell forage enhancement, and released after their recovery from the drugs. All were collared with GPS collars. Unfortunately 2 of them were killed by coyotes within 4 days. The third one was heard for several weeks to the south of the captive breeding pen, near Temporal Pass. We have not be able to hear him for over a week now, and hope he has moved across the pass and into the Growler Valley where he is more likely to encounter wild pronghorn herds. We will do a telemetry flight this week to determine where he is.

We released 5 more pronghorn from the pen in January. We released 1 juvenile buck and one fawn buck which was accidently darted. Both have GPS collars. We also released 3 females to reduce the breeding population in the pen. They were collared with VHF collars. We wanted to transport these animals out of Child's Valley using a helicopter in an attempt to reduce the coyote predation seen on the earlier release. However, we could not get a helicopter, and decided it was better to go ahead before the ambient temperatures got too hot to allow darting. We moved the recovery pen closer to the edge of Charlie Bell Pass and attempted to move them over the pass and into Growler Valley. This would have made it easier for them to find the wild herds of pronghorn that use the South Tac area and likely reduce coyote predation; however, they all circled around our lines and went back into Child's Valley. One of the females was killed by coyotes the next night. The two bucks are still alive and being heard in Child's Valley; we have not been able to hear either one of the females. We will locate them on our upcoming telemetry flight also.

We also captured a buck from the wild and put him in the south part of the pen. We moved the breeding buck from that pen into the north section of the pen. We moved these bucks around to increase genetic diversity in the breeding pens.

We plan to do another release in mid February to release the last 2 juvenile bucks that need to come out. We also plan to release one of the original adult bucks that we started the captive pen with from Mexico, who has bred with all the adult females. If he were left in the pen, he would be breeding with his own offspring. When we do this release, we plan to use a helicopter to transport them to areas where they have a better likelihood of quickly encountering wild pronghorn.

Status of Pronghorn in Pen

(M = Male, F = Female)

	Wild pronghorn put into the pen	2005 recruitment	2006 recruitment	2007 recruitment	2008 recruitment	2009 recruitment	Total in Pen
NORTH HALF							
In Pen	5F, 1M	2F		3F	5F, 7M		
Released		4M	3M	4M, 1F	1F		
From south half						1M	24
SOUTH HALF							
In Pen	5F		2F	2F, 2M	4F, 7M		
Released			2M	1F	1M		
From wild						1M	23
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2008 Released Males: One of these males is still alive on STAC; the other one is still alive in Mexico.

2007 Released Males: We were able to identify (by colored ear tags) 3 of these 4 bucks during the range-wide survey in December. They were on the Air-to-Air Range on the BMGR.

Water Projects: We have checked all the pronghorn waters, and they are all full or nearly full except Antelope Hills. We suspect this one may have a leak in the trough.

Forage Enhancements: We went out to the planned Devil's Hills forage plots on the Marine Range with the contracted well driller and the Marine archaeologist. We are just awaiting the word from the Marine archaeologist that we can move forward and the well driller is ready to go. We hope to have the well drilled by end of February, and have the plot running by this spring/summer.

Other Projects: We are still moving forward with the preliminary steps for establishing a second population. The public scoping comment period ended December 12. The USFWS received 36 comment letters, the majority of them favorable. The Interdisciplinary Team working on the NEPA will be meeting in February to go over anticipated impacts and effects of the proposed and alternative actions with the NEPA consultant.

We also went to the captive breeding pen in Baja to learn how they do their releases using the boma capture traps. However, their pronghorn are managed very differently than ours and are much tamer; hence it was not directly comparable. However, we did learn a lot that will be helpful with our project.

We hired two more people to work at the pen, so we are now fully staffed for the first time. Dean Pokrajac is a graduate of NAU and worked on birds in Flagstaff, volunteered at Raymond

Ranch while in school, and does part time wildlife education work at the Phoenix Zoo. Kelly Asbill graduated from the University of Alabama, did an internship at Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge and did some pronghorn related vegetation work in South Dakota. Both are learning the duties of the pen, participated in the recent releases from the pen, and will make good additions to the team out in Ajo.

Wild Pronghorn:

Range Wide Survey: We completed the US range wide survey from December 6-14. We had low dark clouds and wind on several days which makes it very difficult to see pronghorn. We know we missed quite a few pronghorn from our radio collared animals. We also re-surveyed several blocks where we typically see pronghorn when we had better weather. Because of our low sighting rate during the survey and redoing blocks, the survey estimator we use will not be accurate. Due to this, we are using 68 pronghorn as our estimate this year, which is the minimum number we think are out there, based on animals seen on the survey, animals missed on the survey and several recent telemetry flights.

We captured and radio collared 3 females in the wild in December after the range-wide survey.