

SONORAN PRONGHORN MONTHLY UPDATE

December 31, 2009

Captive Breeding:

We have had several mortalities in the north half of the pen in the last 2 months. We had a two year old doe killed by a bobcat in mid November. We also found a doe fawn dead of unknown causes in mid November, but there was no indication that it was predation. Two adult does died December 18 and December 22. They had bled from the anus, and there were spots of blood in the vicinity of their bodies. We suspect a viral disease. We have sent specimens from the two adult does and the fawn to a diagnostic lab for disease testing. We also had one doe fawn and one buck fawn escape from the north half of the pen into the south half in early November.

We conducted boma captures and releases from the pen December 2-4. The bomas worked as anticipated and the removal of pronghorn from the bomas went smoothly (i.e. no injuries to the pronghorn). On the first day, we caught 20 pronghorn from the north half of the pen in the north boma. We radio collared, ear tagged and released 8 males and 2 females. These pronghorn received a combination of various drugs as recommended by the veterinarians on-site. We also radio collared or ear tagged 9 females caught in the bomas and released back into the pen for breeding stock or because they were too young for release. We also caught and released the breeding buck back into the pen. Six of the males were trailered about 5 miles south of the pen to a 5-acre temporary holding pen to recover from the drugs overnight and released to the wild the next day. Two males and the two females were released near the pen due to high body temperatures and/or the failure of the anesthesia to keep the pronghorn unconscious.

On the second day, we caught 20 pronghorn from the south half in the south boma. We radio collared, ear tagged and released 10 males and 2 females. We changed the sedative from Azaperone to Haloperidol due to the high level of stress exhibited among the pronghorn trailered to Lower Well on the first day. We also radio collared or ear tagged 6 females that were released back into the pen. The breeding buck was also caught in the boma and released back into the pen. Eight bucks were trailered to the 5-acre holding pen, held overnight and then released. We released two bucks next to the pen due to high body temperatures associated with handling in the bomas. Another buck with high body temperatures was released back into the south pen. The quick release of these bucks was believed to be the best method, under the circumstances, of dealing with the problem of high body temperature. The two females were flown by helicopter under anesthesia and released from a release pen on Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

On the third day, we darted one male from the north pen, and flew him by helicopter under anesthesia to the release pen on Organ Pipe NM.

All the animals released back into the pen are alive and doing well.

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	3F	1F		2F	2F, 2M	9F, 2M	
Released	1M	4M, 1F	3M	4M, 1F	5M, 2F	4M	
From south half						1M	22
To south half						1M, 1F	
SOUTH HALF							
In Pen	5F		2F	1F	3F, 3M	5F	
Released			2M	1F, 2M	1F, 5M	1F, 7M	
From wild						1M	22
From north half						1F, 1M	
							44

Released Pronghorn: The pronghorn released the first day from the north boma did not fare well. Three pronghorn died of capture myopathy between 1 and 9 days after the capture. Three bucks and one doe were found dead within 10 days from coyote predation near the pen. These deaths may be related to stress associated with handling during the capture. In other words, the pronghorn may have been impaired in some way, making them more vulnerable to predation. Although they looked normal, lacking overt signs of capture myopathy, i.e. droopy ears and head, walking abnormally etc., they may have been predisposed to predation due to other factors such as being solitary or possibly even mental impairment. This is only speculation; however, we cannot rule this possible explanation out. One doe was found dead 18 days after release. There was no predation; it may have been capture myopathy or possibly disease. We have sent tissue samples from her to a diagnostic lab for disease testing. Two bucks remain alive from the first day; one is by himself near Lower Well, the other is with a group of 10 bucks near the pen.

Changing the sedative used from Azaperone to Haloperidol after the first day appears to have had a positive result. Of the 12 animals released the second day, 10 are still alive. One buck was killed by a coyote near the pen. Another buck moved from the pen to STAC and then to NTAC where he was found dead December 28th. Cause of his death is unknown as he had likely been dead for a few days before being discovered. Eight of the bucks have joined up with 1 buck from the first day, and an adult buck that was released last year, and are moving around the pen in a group of 10. One of the two females flown to Organ Pipe joined up with the buck that was flown to Organ Pipe the next day, and both have joined a group of wild pronghorn in the Agua Dulce area. Prior to joining the wild group, these two captive reared pronghorn were found on top of Bates Mountain, 1400 feet above the desert floor. Was climbing the mountain a strategy to find other pronghorn? The other female also joined a group of wild pronghorn and is still on Organ Pipe.

We have also documented 4 of the 5 males released in previous years on automatic cameras on the Tactical Ranges (by their ear tags).

Water Projects: Nothing new to report.

Forage Enhancements: Nothing new to report.

Other Projects: We conducted the range wide survey in Mexico from December 7 – 11. We saw a total of 311 pronghorn in 64 different groups. In the Pinacate area, we saw 53 pronghorn and we saw 258 in the population of the east side of Highway 8. The estimate for the total population is 483. In the Pinacate the estimate is 101 and 381 east of the Highway. In the Pinacate area, we saw quite a few more pronghorn than the last survey 2 years ago (53 vs. 35) and the estimate is considerably higher (101 vs. 50). On the east side of highway 8, we saw fewer pronghorn than last survey (258 vs. 325) but because they were in much smaller groups, the estimate was a little higher (381 vs. 354). Most of the areas we flew were very dry, with only a few areas of green forage. We postponed a capture/collaring project due to the ongoing drought conditions we documented in Sonora.

Wild Pronghorn: On the most recent telemetry flight, we saw 28 pronghorn on north and south Tac, including 4 radio-collared animals. A group of 7 is using a green area on the western side of the Mohawk Valley, and a group of 7 were south of the Granite Mountains forage plot. Two of the newly released pronghorn were in a group of 8 in the Agua Dulce Mountains, and one newly released pronghorn was in a group of 11 in Organ Pipe NM. A group of 9 newly released pronghorn was with a buck released last year north of the pen. Most of the pronghorn range is extremely dry and the pronghorn are using the few greener areas.



Group of bucks released from the pen in the wild.