



PRONGHORN

1st Quarter 2024
Volume 30 Number 1



ARIZONA ANTELOPE FOUNDATION, INC.

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AAF Mission Statement:

The Arizona Antelope Foundation is an organization dedicated to the welfare of pronghorn antelope. The Foundation's Mission is to actively seek to increase pronghorn populations in Arizona through habitat improvements, habitat acquisition, the translocation of animals to historic range, and public comment on activities affecting pronghorn and their habitat.



ON OUR COVER

Meet Vivian Current, a senior from Northern Arizona University, whose article begins on Page 4, illuminating the experience of an AGFD internship on the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge.

Photo courtesy of Vivian Current

Pronghorn is a quarterly magazine for the members of AAF. Letters, comments, news items, articles, pictures and stories are all welcome and will be considered for publication. Address all such items to:

Lenée Landis, Pronghorn Editor, PO Box 1191, Mesa AZ 85211 or by email at info@azantelope.org.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to our first quarter Pronghorn magazine of 2024. It has already been a busy year. Our first work project for 2024 has just completed. This project was part of the landscape work in 18A and we had over 30 volunteers in the field. Thank you to those of you who joined us.

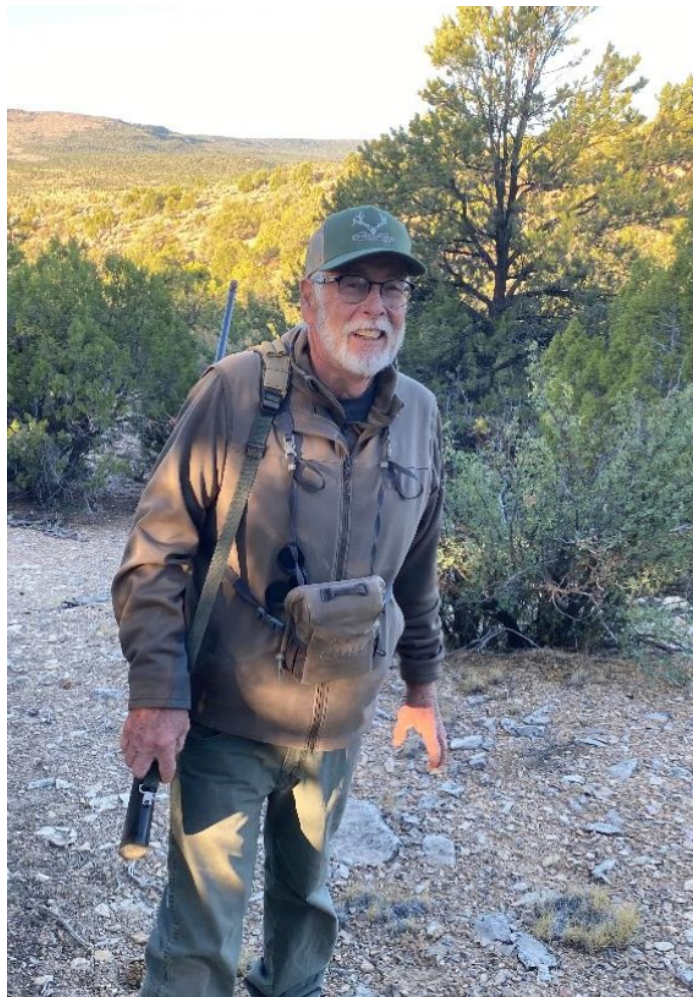
Our next project will be at Big Lake on May 18th. We have four more scheduled projects after Big Lake including a make-up date for the cancelled project from January. Six on the ground projects for 2024 so plan on joining us. Visit our website for more details about the 2024 projects. These projects include a day of hard work and an evening of camaraderie. Always a good time. Consider joining us on one of them.

Now for all you lucky antelope hunters who drew tags for this year. An important date to remember is June 15th, which is our hunters' clinic. The clinic is the place to get information on the unit in which you are hunting. Additionally, there are presentations about optics, scoring, and tactics for both rifle and archery. The information is very useful, and we always receive good feedback from the clinic attendees. This year's clinic will be held at the Game and Fish Headquarters on the Carefree Highway. To register, visit the Arizona Antelope Foundation website.

Our membership is growing. We now have 326 members, which is great news. Our membership is so important to our conservation efforts. Even more so in the future as I will explain later. If you are not a current member, please consider joining us. If you are a member, please consider putting dollars towards the AAF and its mission. You can also assist by recruiting a friend or family member to join.

Many of you are aware of the proposed changes to the highly successful Big Game Super Tags by the current Commissioners of the Arizona Game and Fish. With changes set to go into effect in 2025, some of the dollars that have been available this year and, in the past, may not be there in the future. And I say "may not be" as the plans have not been finalized. Hopefully, the changes will be to the positive and there will be more funds available for the wildlife in Arizona. With that said, it is even more important that individuals become more active in the conservation effort.

We at the Antelope Foundation will continue to work on the mission of our Foundation. But we cannot do it without your involvement both with your membership and taking part in our fund-



raising raffles. All the conservation groups need you.

Finally, I wish all the lucky tag holders "Great Hunting." When you score that great buck, please send a photo and we will make every effort to make you a "Rock Star" in the Pronghorn. We especially would like to hear from our youth hunters and first-time hunters!

Be safe,

Terry Schupp
President, AAF

"LIBERTAS AD VAGOR"....

FREEDOM TO ROAM

2024 Project Calendar

May - Big Lake, June - San Rafael Valley
August - Interstate-17, September - 18A

MY ARIZONA GAME & FISH DEPARTMENT INTERNSHIP ON THE BUENOS AIRES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BY VIVIAN CURRENT - SENIOR, NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

On May 15th 2023 I started my new job as the Tucson Regional Office Intern for the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). Less than a week earlier I had finished my junior year at Northern Arizona University majoring in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology with a certificate in Wildlife Management. My degree path includes courses such as: Mammalogy, Wildlife Management and Ornithology. My coursework has proven to be instrumental in preparing me for field work, species identification, understanding animal physiology and behavior, wildlife management tactics, and much more.

Working for AGFD was a longtime dream of mine and little did I know the internship I was starting would become one of the most impactful and rewarding experiences of my life. My internship was split mostly between assisting with dove banding efforts within the Tucson area and monitoring the pronghorn population on Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge in Southern Arizona 7.5 miles north of Sasabe. The population had recently undergone a supplemental transplant of 30 new pronghorn from the San Bernardino Valley northeast of Douglas in January of 2023. (See 1st Quarter 2023 Pronghorn pages 7-13 for that entire story)

The transplant resulted in the release of 30 total pronghorn, 24 does, and 6 bucks. Out of the 30 released, 10 were equipped with GPS-enabled tracking collars, which were placed on 8 does and 2 bucks. All 30 pronghorn released had blue ear tags with different numbers to indicate the individual. Though there were already pronghorn present on the Refuge from previous releases and subsequent births, this transplant added a significant number to the population. The pronghorn were released near the Refuge headquarters and the “Antelope Loop” which is a drivable sightseeing trail for Refuge visitors. The habitat in this area is flat grassland and rolling hills with occasional mesquite and brush patches. The area where they were released also encompassed areas south of the entrance road to the Refuge headquarters and in Antelope Loop’ that were recently treated with prescribed fire. The other important feature of this area includes the multiple fixed water sources present on the surrounding landscape. Now that I’ve set the stage for you, let’s take a deeper dive into life on the Refuge throughout the summer of 2023.



A day in my life when visiting the Refuge during my internship typically starts around 6–7am when I make my way from the AZGFD Tucson regional office towards Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. When I arrive, the first task on my agenda is to pull over and check the most recent GPS pings from the collared pronghorn. There is a delay of several hours between updates so the last location uploaded is usually a good indicator of where they slept. I head to the general areas of their most recent locations and begin utilizing ground telemetry to get a location bearing for each animal. The goal is to locate the animal, record any observations I have, keep track of locations and which pronghorn are present. Throughout the day, I would try to locate all collared pronghorn on the landscape and record numbers from as many ear tags as possible.

I was equipped with a telemetry kit, binoculars, a spotting scope and an AGFD camera. All of these were essential tools for my day-to-day on the Refuge. Using telemetry to track pronghorn was a challenging but rewarding experience. Oftentimes I would be walking far from my vehicle through the grassy desert terrain of southern Arizona to locate a specific animal. Though sometimes the pronghorn were tricky or taxing to locate it was all well worth it when I was able to record new data on individuals and the population as a whole.

Having a camera with me allowed me to take every opportunity to photograph the pronghorn on the Refuge. I was able to capture many wonderful moments and used photography to cement different observations I had made. One example of this occurred when I was able to capture a pair of sparring bucks and a doe that chased off a coyote from their small social group all within the same five minutes. The bucks were interlocked in contest when one of the does they were traveling with began acting defensively in response to a coyote pressing in on their space. She engaged in a standoff and spent a few minutes chasing the coyote away, never taking the chance to look away from the small predator. While watching the events unfold, I was able to capture them and share the event with my supervisors and the department. Being able to share my observations of this population with others and bring their moments to life once again was incredibly rewarding.



Another common daily goal of mine was locating, observing and monitoring fawns on the Refuge. I still remember the rush I felt when I spotted my first fawn of the summer in the mid-morning hours of June 2nd. I first saw the fawn running through the hills of grass near Refuge headquarters. The fawn was within a group of medium size including resident and recently introduced members of the population. I first saw the fawn playing with one of the bucks, chasing after him in short bursts. After watching the group for around 20 minutes it was observed that the fawn belonged to a collared doe, which made it much easier to keep track of and monitor throughout the summer. Over the course of my time on Buenos Aires there were 5 separate fawns identified, belonging to recently transplanted and unmarked resident members of the population. I made it a major goal of mine to find new chances to identify a fawn, which could sometimes feel like a needle in a haystack due to the large size of the Refuge, 117,464 acres to be exact.





Perhaps two of my biggest take-aways after the time I spent familiarizing myself with the population and their behaviors, was their use of the landscape and the composition of their social groups. After going through my data and reflecting on my time on the Refuge it could be noted that the part of the population found most frequently near “Antelope Loop” and Refuge headquarters gravitated heavily toward burn areas for grazing. They seem to particularly prefer burned areas bordering an unburned area of grassland as they will alternate between the two areas depending on the time of day.

The social groups in this area consisted of a mix of transplanted and Refuge-born pronghorn. Ranging in size from small to large, members of this population would often switch groups being seen with one group on a certain day and a completely different one on another. For almost all of the group sightings I made, both tagged and untagged pronghorn were present together.





By the end of my internship in mid-August I knew I had been changed by the work I was able to contribute to this summer. Having the opportunity to work with such an incredible species as an intern just starting out in the professional world is something for which I am incredibly thankful. This experience has solidified my dream to work in wildlife management and resulted in me having an even deeper appreciation for the work the Arizona Game and Fish Department and organizations like Arizona Antelope Foundation do. I am due to graduate from Northern Arizona University in May of 2024 with my bachelor's and I hope that I continue to have opportunities to help this species succeed within Arizona throughout my life.

Article photos courtesy of Vivian Current



5TH ANNUAL CAMO AT THE CAPITOL CULTIVATED A STRONG CONSERVATION VOICE



On January 17th, AWF's 5th Annual Camo at the Capitol was held at the Arizona State Capitol. Eight conservation organizations were in attendance and a variety of decision-makers spoke to the group throughout the day. Attending organizations brought delicious game meals, including smoked salmon dip, elk chili, summer sausage, and more!

Attending sportsmen and women learned about current issues and how they can advocate for legislation that supports wildlife and our public lands. Thank you to everyone who joined us and we're already excited for next year's Camo at the Capitol!



A special thanks to our participating organizations: Arizona Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Scottsdale Ducks Unlimited, Get Outdoors Arizona, Friends of the Verde River, Arizona Council Of Trout Unlimited, Arizona Trail Association, Arizona Antelope Foundation, and Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club.

Thanks also to Representative David Cook, Senator Sine Kerr, Representative Austin Smith, Representative Lupe Diaz, Representative Selina Bliss, Representative Tim Dunn, Representative Analise Ortiz, and Representative Martinez for sharing your insights with us on the Capitol lawn!



CONSERVATION & ADAPTATION RESOURCES- GRASSLAND RESILIENCE LAS CIENEGAS WORKSHOP- FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2024

JOHN MILLICAN, AAF FIELD PROJECT MANAGER

From October 2023 to January 2024, the Conservation and Adaptation Resources Toolbox (CART), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service, and Altar Valley Conservation Alliance conducted a Grassland Resilience Workshop Series on brush management and soil health. The series was held at three



locations in Southeastern Arizona – Santa Rita Experimental Range, Altar Valley, and Las Cienegas National Conservation Area. A total of 89 participants signed up bringing together landowners, land managers and researchers to learn about and discuss standard brush management practices focusing on vegetation, soil health and habitat quality. Through these workshops, participants developed a better understanding of various management practices, outcomes, lessons learned, and monitoring techniques. The series highlighted the need to collaborate on best management practices across various watersheds.

The Las Cienegas workshop focused on soil health and mesquite management at three separate locations with presenters from AZGFD, BLM, and AAF discussing topics from Prairie Dogs, priority grassland bird species, mesquite management techniques, maintenance, land ownership obstacles, connectivity, and future vegetation management opportunities.

The tour highlighted the complexities of a diverse landscape, particularly one that is being shared with high numbers of recreational visitors. Working in this arena requires collaboration amongst many interest groups if ecological health is to be obtained. The overall message that I came away with was that managers must identify

ecological site standards, manage for these, and develop projects that work toward achieving a diverse habitat mosaic supported by these standards.

The Bureau of Land Management gave a presentation on their efforts in improving soil and grassland health through various mesquite prescriptions and future planning. Here are the numbers completed and planned for 2024:

	Acres Completed 2007-2023	Acres Planned 2024
Rx Fire	10585	0
Chemical	1615	0
Mechanical	8655	1664
Cultural Survey	15675	0

In addition, BLM has completed 995 acres of invasive/noxious weed surveys and are planning to complete 11,000 acres over the next 3 years.

To assist with developing a large-scale plan over diverse landscapes and ownerships, BLM completed a vegetation management and erosion control environmental assessment that covers 216,732 acres throughout the Sonoita Valley which includes BLM, State, Private and Pima County Lands. They are working with partners to identify resources and projects across land ownership lines to expand large scale grassland and wildlife restoration work, which AAF will participate in.

Along with viewing past mechanical treatments of mesquite, a stop was made at the Hummel Pasture, owned by the Vera Earl Ranch where AAF provided funding through an AZSFWC (Arizona Sportsman for Wildlife Conservation) grant in 2019 for the purchase of herbicide. This is one of three contiguous pastures totaling 1,571 acres that were initially grubbed in 2012 and 2014 but required herbicide maintenance to manage mesquite resprouts. On the way to this stop the entire group was rewarded by viewing a winter herd of Pronghorn numbering more than 90 animals.

This led to a discussion on the need for maintenance post mesquite grubbing and how future prescriptions should be designed to provide connected corridors by developing habitat parameters around a diverse range of grassland obligate wildlife target species, including Pronghorn, Mule deer, quail, and grassland birds.

AAF has worked closely with southeastern Arizona partners to develop prescriptions that provide various levels of mesquite removal and maintenance along varying vegetative changes to provide a mosaic beneficial to a wide range of wildlife species. These efforts and discussions will be a part of future bio planning efforts across the Sonoita Plains. More information specific to soil health and mesquite management can be found on the CART resources toolbox through this link: [Conservation and Adaptation Resources Toolbox | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/cart/resources-toolbox)



Photo credits: CART and Ariel Leger

THEODORE ROOSEVELT CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP & & THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT - LAS CIENEGAS CONSERVATION AREA PARTNERS FILMING

**DARRELL TERSEY, BOARD MEMBER &
GLEN DICKENS, VICE PRESIDENT**

In February 2024, The Arizona Antelope Foundation received two requests to interview Board members for short videos on the restoration work the AAF has been involved with on the Sonoita Plains zone with multiple partners and how those partnerships have benefited the Sky Island Restoration Landscape. One interview was to be conducted for a video for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) and the second for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Both videos were to be filmed in the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (Empire Ranch). After checking our respective calendars it was decided Darrell Tersey would do the TRCP filming and Glen Dickens the BLM video.

On the Friday date of the scheduled TRCP 8AM filming, it rained across SE Arizona and as Darrell sat looking for Pronghorn on the Empire Ranch, he received an email that the day's filming was cancelled due to rain. After exchanging emails, the TRCP filming was rescheduled for the following Tuesday afternoon at the Empire Ranch headquarters with the BLM filming scheduled for the following Wednesday. The questions that the TRCP/BLM asked about the conservation work the AAF had done in the zone and how it has benefited the pronghorn and pronghorn hunters follow;

Interview questions:

- Describe the goals and missions of the Arizona Antelope Foundation.
- What role does your organization play in your community?
- How is it involved with Las Cienegas NCA conservation work?
- Describe the Antelope Foundations partnership with BLM on vegetation treatments.
- Why are partnerships like this important?
- Has the success of the restoration efforts benefited the antelope herd in this region?
- Summarize the changes you have seen before and after treatment.
- Has the success of the restoration and species work led to a sustainable harvest of Antelope in the region?
- How does the Antelope foundation partnership with BLM benefit antelope hunters in the region.
- How important is this region for antelope and their migration routes?
- Describe the benefits the restoration work in this region creates for antelope migration





Having the questions provided beforehand allowed Darrell to reach out to our AAF Southeast Arizona, Field Manager John Millican and he provided expert answers for many of the questions. Many of the questions were responded to by the Arizona Game and Fish Department District Wildlife Manager Brit Oleson who was also present for filming.

While interviewed, Darrell and I highlighted the work the AAF accomplished in the Sonoita Plains herd zone through the National Wildlife Foundation grant funds from 2010-19 augmenting projects accomplished by the BLM and respective partners: we modified 64 miles of fence on 100,000 acres with AAF volunteers/students, increased the number of water points, and the BLM restored thousands of acres of grassland by grubbing invasive mesquite. The Sonoita plains pronghorn herd numbered just 84 in 2010 and now numbers over 350.

**The Sonoita plains
pronghorn herd
numbered just 84 in 2010
and now numbers over
350.**

The video interviews should be published within a month or two and will be made available to the AAF for posting on our website.





SONORAN PRONGHORN

UPDATE



RUSSELL GARDNER, AZ GAME & FISH
JANUARY–APRIL 2024

Captive Breeding Cabeza Pen

The Childs Valley received a generous amount of rainfall from January to April. The Cabeza pen received a total of 4.6 inches, Charlie Bell got 5.4 and Knucklehead 4.5 inches.

During a heavy rainstorm in January the Cabeza pen sustained significant damage along the perimeter and midline fences, which required several days to repair. This allowed pronghorn to move between pens while the outer fencing was being repaired, with the majority of the South herd moving into the North pen in the first two days after the storm. We decided to leave an opening along the midline fence, rather than repair it immediately, to see if pronghorn would return on their own. By the end of February, the majority of the South herd returned to the South pen and brought with them one adult doe, two adult bucks, and six yearling bucks from the North herd. Two yearling does from the South herd remained with the North herd. The opening was closed at the end of February, prior to fawning season, to prevent possible separation of does and fawns. The first fawns were observed on March 23 in the North pen, and March 25 in the South pen. One more doe in South pen appears to have given birth on 4/30/24, but no other does still appear pregnant in either pen. The new herd composition is provided below.

NORTH HALF		SOUTH HALF	
Adult Females	9	Adult Females	12
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2023)	3	Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2023)	7
Adult Males	3	Adult Males	5
Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2023)	3	Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2023)	14
Fawns (<i>b</i> 2024, as of 4/30/2024)	11	Fawns (<i>b</i> 2024, as of 4/30/2024)	3
TOTAL	29	TOTAL	41
Total Pen	70		

A coyote was detected by pen biologists in the North pen on March 20. Removal attempts were initiated immediately; multiple attempts were made and a variety of different techniques were employed while working to ensure the safety of the pronghorn. The coyote moved to South pen on March 28. Pen staff continuously attempted, using multiple tactics, to remove it and were finally successful on April 17. The coyote was documented to have killed one doe fawn, however, only three fawns appear to remain in the south pen. The total number of fawns killed by the coyote remains unknown.

We learned valuable lessons from this experience on how to more quickly and effectively remove a predator, and are working diligently to continue to secure the pen so coyotes cannot get in. Pen biologists are continuing efforts to install additional shade cloth and chicken wire along the perimeter fencing to help prevent predator incursions, and have installed additional game cameras to aid in predator detection.

Kofa Pen

The King Valley received generous rainfall since January, with 2.5 inches at the pen, and similar amounts at our other sites in King Valley. The pen suffered minor damage during the winter and spring rains, which was quickly repaired by pen staff and USFWS volunteers. The winter and spring rains allowed for abundant plant growth, providing excellent forage in the King Valley. The vegetation has started to dry out as of mid-April, but the range is still in very good condition. The pronghorn waters in the area remain at, or very near, full capacity. There has been minimal activity at the waters, though a small number of pronghorn have been seen sporadically near the Kofa pen.

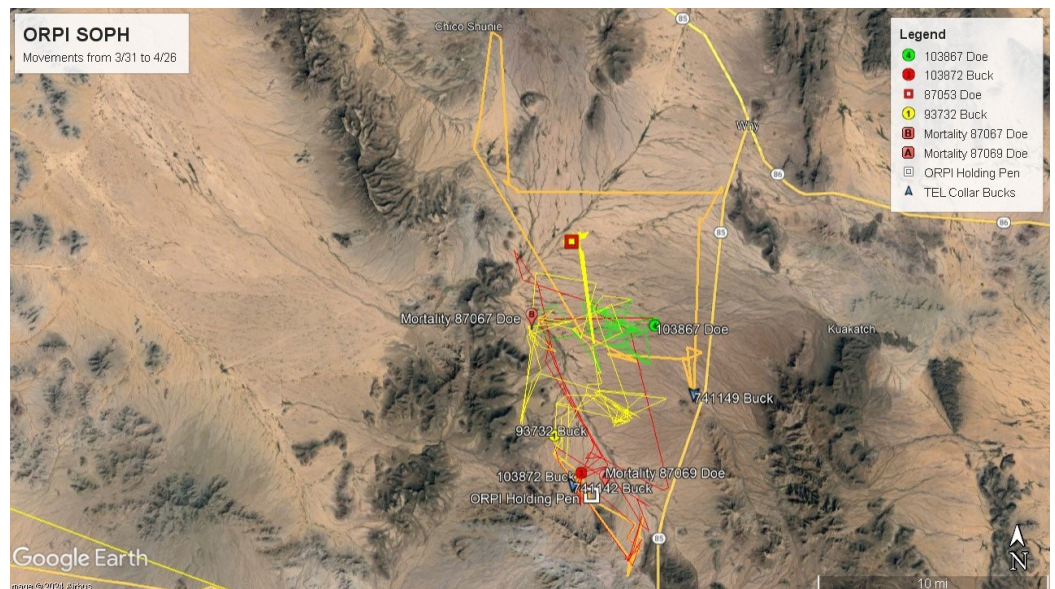
Takedown of the capture boma was delayed twice by rainfall, but was completed in late February with help from YPG and USFWS personnel. The first fawns were observed in the Kofa pen on March 11, with nine fawns reported as of April 29. There is one more pregnant doe in the Kofa pen.

Kofa Herd Composition

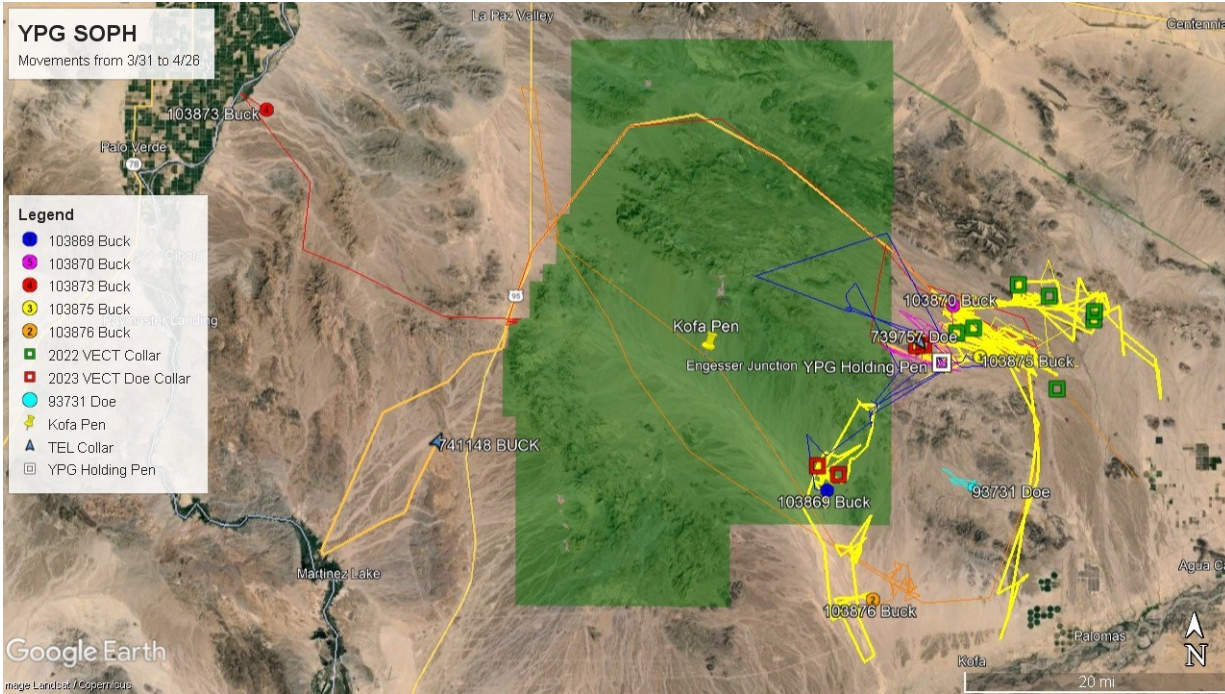
Adult Females	11
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2023)	4
Adult Males	4
Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2023)	10
Fawns (<i>b</i> 2024, as of 4/30/24)	9 (6M,3F)
TOTAL	36

Wild Pronghorn Cabeza/ORPI/BMGR Herd: A telemetry flight was conducted over ORPI on March 24. During the flight 15 pronghorn were observed, including three fawns. There have been two mortalities of the newly released pronghorn in OPRI in April; both three-year-old does.

One died on April 9 of unknown causes. The other was killed by a mountain lion on April 19, and the remains of two unborn fawns were found near her. A map of recent pronghorn movements in ORPI:



Wild Pronghorn Kofa Subunit: The Kofa Subunit received excellent rainfall from January to April, creating excellent forage conditions. A telemetry flight was conducted over the Kofa subunit on March 29, seven fawns were observed on the flight. One buck whose collar has not been transmitting GPS coordinates, was located on the flight in King Valley. Two newly released bucks moved into King Valley, and have recently crossed Highway 95 and gone all the way to the Colorado River. Hopefully they make a safe return.

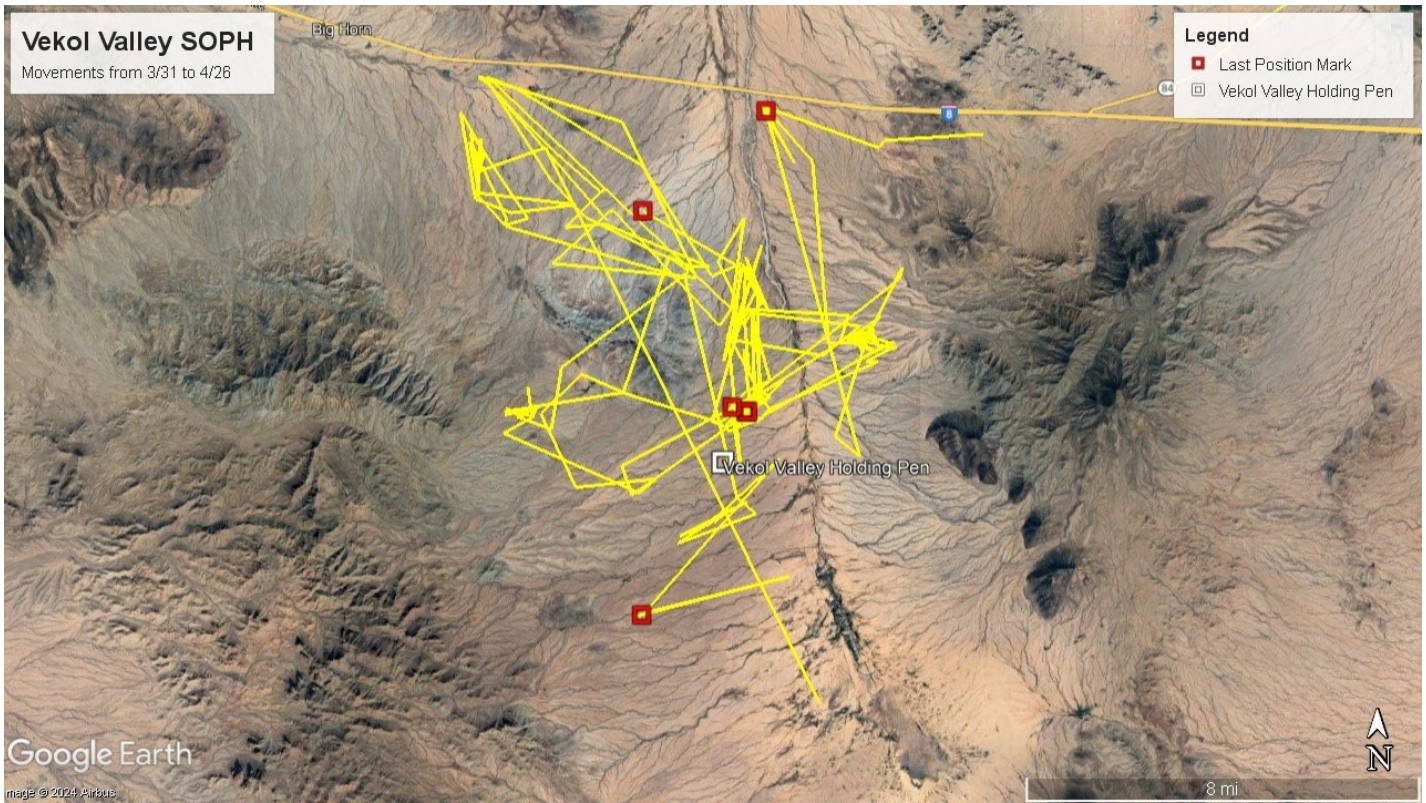


Wild Pronghorn Saucedo Subunit: The rain gauge at the Area B holding pen recorded a total of 3.9 inches of rain from January to April, and forage has been excellent in this area. A telemetry flight was conducted on April 14.

Eleven pronghorn were seen, including one fawn. Several of the recently released pronghorn remain near the holding pen. Three of the bucks are north of the Saucedo mountains, where they were observed with wild pronghorn. AGFD staff completed a brush thinning project at Ku:wud drinker in an effort to reduce mountain lion predation this summer



Wild Pronghorn Vekol Valley Herd: A telemetry flight was conducted for the Vekol herd on April 14. Eleven pronghorn were seen during the flight, including one fawn. Only six of the GPS collars in Vekol Valley are currently transmitting coordinates.



Water Projects: AGFD and USFWS personnel hauled 11,500 gallons to Uken tank, nearly filling it in anticipation of the upcoming summer. Although there were several rains in this area over the winter, none were hard enough to run the washes and put much water in the storage tanks.

Photo credits: Alfredo Soto USFWS, Payton Rains AGFD



Forage Enhancements: A load of alfalfa was taken to Devils Hills and Point of the Pintas in anticipation of the forage drying out. Pronghorn activity at both sites has been light during the winter and spring. The waters at both sites are nearly full.

Pinacate Pronghorn: The collared buck and doe in Pinacate remain in the vicinity of the holding pen, though the doe took a journey roughly 16 miles NE along Mexican Highway 8 at the beginning of April.

Written April 26, 2024

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WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

- | | | | |
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| Tyler Barker, Cave Creek | Dan Drake, Phoenix | Jim LaRue, Glendale | Jackson Schupp, Gilbert |
| Daniel Caywood, Vail | Harry Globstad, Box Elder, SD | Rob David Mahaffey, Rapid City, SD | Dean Swanson, Flagstaff |
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