



PRONGHORN

4th Quarter 2022
Volume 28 Number 4



ARIZONA ANTELOPE FOUNDATION, INC.

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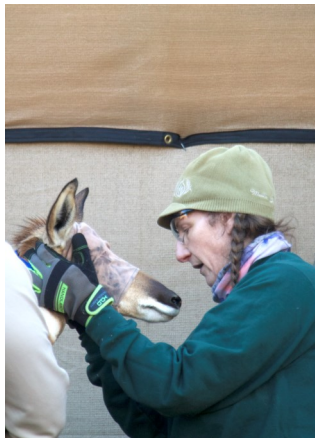
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IN THIS ISSUE

Page 3	President's Message
Page 4	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle
Pages 5-7	Vekol Valley Pen Construction, Photos
Pages 8-12	Cabeza Prieta NWR Sonoran Pronghorn Capture with Photos
Pages 13-14	Captive Raised Sonoran Pronghorn Capture and Relocation from a Retired Wildlife Biologist Perspective
Pages 15-16	10th and Final Annual Sonoita Plains July 16, 2022 Pronghorn and Fawn Saturation Survey Has Record Results!
Pages 17-20	Sonoran Pronghorn Survey
Page 21	Daniel's Buck
Page 22	Membership
Page 23	Letter from a Member: Kelly Fleming Thank You Supporters!

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

Pronghorn Whisperer - Devorah Young, Phoenix Zoo's representative for Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Team. Devorah is a seasoned lead mugger at yearly round-ups/translocations.

Photo credit Betty Dickens

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

Hoping everyone had a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and welcome to the year in review 2022. We lost a few of our great members and active participants: Dave Brown, Richard Ockenfels (both retired Game and Fish with great experience in the management of Pronghorn) and Dave Laird one of our original members and Past President. Brown and Ockenfels could always be depended upon for information or historical aspects for the state of Arizona, and Laird always made the board meetings projects and fund raisers along with contributing his Two-cents worth. All three will be missed.

For the year we accomplished three fence projects with one cancelled due to fire restrictions and another for mud; welcome to the diversity of Arizona. We also had another successful saturation survey in Southern Arizona with the results showing all of our work helping our Pronghorn numbers to hold steady. Our total volunteer numbers ran at 208 days equating to 2,734 hours for fund matching with various agencies. From tools to project food to supplies - **AAF put \$57,251.00 dollars on the ground for enhancing Pronghorn numbers and habitat.**

We have been able to participate in and observe three great releases this year. First we had a release of 22 Sonoran Pronghorn back into an historical area that has not seen animals for quite awhile. As a reminder these are an endangered species and thanks to Jill Bright, John Hervert (both Game and Fish Region IV) and Stephanie Doerries of Fish and Wildlife they are making a very good comeback. There were also two Pronghorn releases in units 18A; each unit received 33 and 48 respectively. These were animals that were scheduled for removal from an area in Utah and our Game and Fish department was able to arrange a capture and transport to Arizona. Another success was the purchase of three new 1,000 gallon water-hauling trailers for the Region 1 area. Two were purchased outright by AAF and one more was a cost share with fellow groups - Arizona Elk Society (AES) and Arizona Deer Association (ADS). These will double the capacity for water hauling during the dry times so frequent in the Southwest. This was another well spent \$30,000.00 dollars that will be used far into the future.

The AAF was recognized this year with a couple of Awards. Along with Arizona Game and Fish and National Fish and Wildlife we received a Special Recognition Award for our efforts with the Southwest Arizona Grassland Pronghorn Initiative. This was presented at the Western States and Province Pronghorn Workshop. The AAF also received an award for our contributions in protecting natural and cultural resources of the Cienega Watershed and Sonoita Plain.

One of our members, and the Vice President for the organization, Glen Dickens received a commendation of Achievement from Game and Fish commission for his over-the-top efforts in wildlife and conservation in the Southeastern Arizona region. For the year we also want to thank Bev, our Administrator, who is behind the scenes keeping us all straight.



We would like to thank all of our members, volunteers, and all who participate in our raffles. Without both your time and monetary support we can't accomplish what we do. We also would like to thank Game and Fish, Fish and Wildlife, and BLM; three agencies who work most closely with us in our endeavors.

While we will be losing two of our greats, Amber Munig, Big Game Supervisor, and John Hervert to retirements we still have people such as Jill, Stephanie, and Rana Murphy. Callie Cavalcant should do a good job filling in Amber's shoes.

We can't accomplish our mission without your help. If you're not a member think about joining, if you are a member why not recruit one more this year.

With thanks and gratitude,

The AAF Board of Directors



The Arizona Big Game Super Raffle is now called Conservation First USA.



Same great Arizona Special Big Game Tags and even more prizes!



Photo by Doyle Moss

NEW FOR 2023

Buyers must be present in the state of Arizona to purchase and *now every ticket is just \$10.* Get your tickets online at conservationfirstusa.org

Winners of Arizona Special Big Game Tags can hunt for **365 DAYS!** The hunting season for all tags is 8/15/2023 – 8/14/2024.

Round One Species
Tickets Available

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100% of funds raised from Arizona Special Big Game Tag raffles goes directly to AZ Game & Fish Department for wildlife conservation.

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Bighorn Sheep, Bear, Buffalo & Javelina



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Tickets Available January 1st – June 30th

Scan this QR Code with your smart phone.



Must be 21 years of age and present in the state of AZ to purchase tickets.

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VEKOL VALLEY PEN CONSTRUCTION

BY JAMIE WATKINS, AAF BOARD

On Saturday, October 15 2022, Arizona Antelope Foundation partnered with US Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and Bureau of Land Management to construct a temporary holding pen in preparation for the second release of endangered Sonoran pronghorn to Vekol Valley.

The meet-up location was our usual campsite at the entrance of the Sonoran Desert National Monument just south of Interstate 8. We were looking forward to a beautiful morning with a good chance of rain. Down-pours in areas around the valley were visible, but far enough away that we weren't too concerned about getting drenched. We did have a good turnout and were graced with some new volunteers as well.

Although we didn't have our usual campout the prior evening and continental breakfast to get us started ahead of the project workday, one of our long-time volunteers was kind enough to send a large box of donuts to share with the crew. Most of the volunteers showed up early, allowing plenty of time to greet one other and chitchat before the designated 8:30 am meet-up time.

When everyone was present, Stephanie Doerries, Wildlife Biologist with the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, provided an introduction of the "what and why" of the day's efforts. To summarize, 22 Sonoran pronghorn were previously released in January 2022 to begin a new herd in the Vekol Valley. Since then, losses occurred due to predation from mountain lions, but the new herd also gained four fawns. With the rains we've had through the summer providing forage and the herd doing well overall, the conditions are favorable for releasing additional pronghorn.



Another capture is being planned later this year (this occurred on December 13/14th, please read the two articles in this issue by Board member Gary Boyer and Secretary Dave Cagle) with all the pronghorn coming from the Cabeza Prieta pen. Construction of the pen in Vekol Valley provides a predator-free zone for the newly released pronghorn to calm and acclimate for a few weeks prior to being released into the wild.

The fence posts from the first release were left standing. When the fencing was brought down, it was neatly rolled in sections and secured to a fence post where the section had ended. This was done to make any subsequent pen construction more efficient. Securing the rolled-up fencing to a post was done as a prior lesson-learned to ensure inclement weather doesn't bury the fencing into a wash. The idea would be to roll out the bundled fencing, hoist it up, secure it to the existing fence posts, and call it a day.

With all this said, it was time to load up and caravan to the project site. After a dusty ride down a few more miles south of our meet-up location, we stopped and unloaded materials such as tie wires, a couple spools of wire for the electric fence, a box of insulators in case any of the existing fence posts were missing any, and the tools necessary for the day's work

The volunteers were organized into a few different groups—the first group being the ones that would free the bundled fencing from the posts, roll it out, and connect it to the next section of bundled fencing. All of this was done as carefully as we could, with assumptions that little critters would be present between the shade cloth within the rolls. While the fencing was being unrolled, we did see some little critters, such as crickets, spiders, scorpions, and geckos running along the shade cloth.



The fence was then lifted vertically and secured to the fence posts by the next, and largest, set of volunteers. Some held the fence upright and taut while others secured the fence to the post using the tie wire. The bottom of the fence was brought to ground level as one of the steps to keep the enclosure free of predators.



Installing the wire for the electric fence was handled by two or three volunteers who followed behind those lifting and securing the fence. The purpose of the electric wire is to deter predators from entering or digging into the pen. Insulators about 12” from the ground were present on each fence post from the prior release and were still in good condition. Extras were brought along in case any were damaged or missing. The wire was unrolled and secured to the insulators while another volunteer trimmed back vegetation that was in the path of the wire.

It took about an hour to complete each of the four sides of the pen. A gate wide enough to allow the trucks and trailers to enter was also constructed. Within the pen, not too far from the gate, is a trough for water that has been left active for the pronghorn that were previously released. As there are still pronghorn using the water, the trough was moved outside of the pen so we could close the gate and leave water available. A team will return later to bring another trough back into the pen for when the pronghorn from Cabeza Prieta are brought in. The gate was closed to prevent pronghorn from entering the pen and getting trapped by a predator.



Just as we began to head home, a few sprinkles began to hit the windshield of my truck and shortly thereafter, we could see the sandy road leading us back to the interstate was damp with some pooling of water in the desert landscape. I’ll be looking forward to the news of the upcoming capture and release.



Big thanks go out to those who carved time from their weekend to help make this possible.

- AAF Board: Ken Meadors, Jamie Watkins
- AAF Members and Volunteers: Jordan Bingham, Nicole Bingham, Dave Cruce, Mike Ebright, Adam Fuest, Anastasia Fuest, Brian Goble, Al Kreutz, Kevin Martin, Sam Martin, Ken Morris, Mark Ovitt, Alex Watkins, Thomas Watkins, Darrel Wood,
- USFWS: Stephanie Doerries
- AZGFD: Ryan Dow
- BLM: Damon Haan, Kendra Loubere

To learn more about the Sonoran Pronghorn recovery program, visit our website www.azantelope.org

- Video on the Homepage: *Cabeza Prieta NWR: Saving the Sonoran Pronghorn*
- Publication on the Magazine Page: *Pronghorn Special Edition 4th Quarter 21*

Photo Credit: Thomas Watkins and Jamie Watkins



CABEZA PRIETA NWR SONORAN PRONGHORN CAPTURE

DEC. 13-14, 2022

BY GARY BOYER, AAF BOARD MEMBER



Buck released in Vekol Valley pen. Near a Teddy Bear Cholla. Photo by Ken Cook

Recently the Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF) was invited by the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge (CPNWR) to participate in the capture, processing and translocation of the Sonoran Pronghorn. Sonoran pronghorn, (*Antilocapra americana sonoriensis*) are one of four extant subspecies of pronghorn, which are endemic to western North America.

The Sonoran Pronghorn was on the first list of endangered species in 1967 under the 1966 Endangered Species Preservation Act and is currently listed as endangered throughout its historic range under the 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA). During a record-breaking extreme drought during the summer of 2002 in Arizona, possibly the worst on record since the 1400s, the Arizona Sonoran Pronghorn population dropped to 21 known animals from a previous average yearly population of 140.

The captive breeding program at Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge (CPNWR) began in 2003 with the seven remaining animals. They were captured and placed in a 640-acre (one square mile) predator proof pen on the CPNWR.

The AAF (the only statewide organization devoted solely to pronghorn in our state) was invited because of our ongoing efforts in habitat restoration in the Vekol Valley. This area is south of I-8, 30 miles east of Gila Bend, is the eastern most range for the Sonoran pronghorn. At this time over 22 miles of old, outdated and unused pasture fence has been removed by AAF, Arizona Game and Fish Department and Arizona Wildlife Federation (AWF) on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. AAF assisted building a 20-acre holding pen for Sonoran antelope from CPNWR to be acclimated before being released into their new home. AAF was very honored to assist in this current capture and translocation on Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge (CPNWR).

I kept hearing and seeing a word that I had seen in print many times, boma. The following definition is provided by Tricia Oshant Hawkins-Volunteer Project Manager, Arizona Wildlife Federation. "A boma is a large, stockade-like enclosure, the sides of which are mostly opaque.

The word boma originates from Swahili from a time when pre-colonial African ethnic groups built bomas (mostly out of brush) to serve as corrals to contain their domestic animals and protect them from predation." The term boma is used by the people working with the peninsular pronghorn (PR) herd in Baja Mexico. CPNWR personnel adopted it from our Mexico counterparts. Cabeza Prieta is Spanish for Dark Head; this refers to a large granite mountain with a lava cap in a remote part of the refuge.

There are two bomas in CPNWR, one in the north pen and one in the south pen of the one square mile captive breeding pen. Each has three large circular chambers and are connected by gates that can be opened and closed rapidly. The first chamber is the largest. Pronghorn enter this chamber for the timothy hay inside. This begins weeks before the planned capture as the pronghorn will have adapted to the boma by then. Thank you, Tricia, for providing much of the information on the bomas.

Inside the bomas the walls are draped with tarps and padding on the lower half. This prevents the PR being disturbed and frightened by outside activity. A strict “keep quiet” rule is observed. These animals are very high strung and can be easily upset causing increased body temperatures, hair loss, and distress. Hair loss with overnight temps at or below freezing can be deadly. We must remember we are dealing with an endangered species and the loss or injury to even one can be disastrous. A huge amount of time and expense goes into each one to insure survival of the species in their historic range.

CPNWR constructed a one square mile enclosed, captive breeding pen in 2003. It is divided from east to west into a north and south pen. The pens are enclosed by a 4’ high, wire mesh fence commonly known as sheep fence. The sheep fence is attached to T-posts. To prevent predators from entering the pens, four plastic insulators are mounted on each post to carry four separate hot wires. Wire is strung 6” above ground level then up every 6”- 8” apart. The four bare, single strand hot wires create an electrical fence barrier. Common voltages on pasture fences can run between 2,500-8,000 volts for horses and cattle. Amperes are what make high voltages deadly therefore these fences carry only 120 milliamperes producing a safe but effective jolt. Horses and cattle learn quickly to back off. Imagine what a 35 lb. coyote or a 150 lb. mountain lion experiences when touching a hot wire. Not only is one set of hot wires attached to the fence, another 4-strand hot wire fence placed out another 4’ from the original fence line providing another layer of protection for the antelope. These electric fences are very effective for keeping hungry or curious predators out of the pens. The fences are powered by batteries charged by solar panels.

A well and storage tank supply water lines installed throughout the pens that supply drinkers for the Pronghorn. Feeding stations with timothy hay supplement whatever forage may be found inside the pens.

For several weeks before the capture the first and largest boma is open and the Pronghorn are fed premium hay inside and they are allowed to feed freely and pass in and out. Once the capture day arrives the outside doors are closed manually. Before dawn on December 13th the process began, some of the herd were moved into the second chamber and then 2-3 were captured by hand and moved into the third chamber. This was the beginning of processing for the herd. All these procedures were duplicated the following morning.



At this time the muggers and wallflowers are staged outside the exit door of the third boma. What the heck are muggers and wallflowers, you ask? Is this a high school dance for criminals and non-dancing folks? Muggers and wallflowers are volunteers with questionable IQ’s and perhaps a death wish. Muggers use nets to catch an antelope then blindfold and immobilize them and place it on a stretcher. Wallflowers enter the boma and spread out along the walls, arms outstretched and lining the walls to basically act as human shields to divert and prevent the Pronghorn from running into the walls or injuring themselves.

The muggers line up very tightly outside the boma gate holding the edge of the net. The net is about 50’ long x 4’ high made of a rope mesh. Parallel to them in line, are the wallflowers also packed tightly together. Politely speaking they are all bottom to bellybutton apart with one hand on the shoulder of the one in front of them. Once the door is opened, they rapidly shuffle into the boma, imagine a chain gang hustling inside. Wallflowers spread out along the wall and muggers? Well... they mug. The Pronghorn are placed on stretchers. The stretchers used are military style with four holes cut in them for the legs. Once lifted off the ground their legs become useless for escape, but they are still formidable for kicking.



The Pronghorn is transported outside to the covered medical area. The stretcher is placed on a metal frame over a shallow pit. The pit keeps their legs off the ground and acts as a catch basin for cooling water. There are three stations that reminded me of a triage setup, M*A*S*H style, you youngsters Google it. Each station is equipped with oxygen, a saline drip and buckets of cooling water. A canula is placed on the Pronghorn's nose, administering oxygen. A vet tech is monitoring body temperature, just like dear old mom used to do. Ideally the temperature should be 104 F. or lower. If body temperature rises above 104 degrees water is poured over



the body and massaged into the hair, remember the ambient temperature both days was 33 degrees F. each morning. The cooling bath works well. A fecal sample is taken, good work if you can get it. Each animal has its own work up sheet that indicates which antibiotics, vitamins and vaccines it will receive. Many receive 6-8 doses of medications. Each Pronghorn has its own medical history, ear tag and some are even named by CPNWR personnel. A few teary eyes were seen as favorite Pronghorn were leaving for their new homes. These beautiful creatures were born and raised in captivity and will soon be on their own in the wild. For some Pronghorn to be translocated they receive radio collars for tracking purposes, and these are placed on the neck at this time.

There were 49 people involved at the processing area plus 17 on the A team (Vets, vet techs, handlers, etc.).

The most amazing thing to me was the total time involved from the capture inside to loading into the transport trailers. I have a copy of the data sheet for one Pronghorn, a two-year-old buck. It was received at the station at 7:52am left station at 7:57am and in the trailer at 7:58am. It received three vaccinations and seven medications plus the blood draw and a radio collar. That is less than 10 minutes from capture to trailer. These folks could qualify for a pit crew at NASCAR. For Pronghorn released back into the pen less than 5 minutes elapsed. Several of the old-time muggers sported duct tape repairs on their pants. These were the result of being kicked. One fellow who shall remain nameless had, at another capture, his pants unceremoniously yanked down when a hoof caught in his pocket, hopefully he wasn't going commando that day. Some muggers duct taped their pockets to prevent similar embarrassment

Some data from the results of the 2-day capture follows. Tuesday 30 Pronghorn were processed and the first 6 were returned to Mexico in exchange for the 6 previously sent to CPNWR to help with the breeding program to provide genetic diversity. The Pronghorn are transported in enclosed, air-conditioned trailers. Four were loaded into the trailer and sent on a rapid trip 2-hour trip to the Vekol Valley holding pen 90 miles northeast. Perhaps the first time these Pronghorn exceeded 70mph. The rest were returned to the south pen, The second day 15 PR were processed, and a few moved into the north pen. The trailer was loaded up with 7 PR and sent to Vekol Valley making the total to Vekol Valley holding pen, 11 Pronghorn, 7 bucks and 4 does in two days.



I have mentioned that a well-fed crew is mandatory. Our Yuma based cook crew along with AZGFD folks exceeded my expectations. Hot breakfasts were prepared and ready to eat a little after 6am both mornings. Temps hovering around freezing and sunrise still an hour and a half away and these folks had scrambled eggs, sausage, bacon, hash browns and biscuits with sausage gravy ready to eat. Monday night was a pasta soup with plenty of meat and rolls to ward off the chilly, drizzly evening. Tuesday's dinner was John Hervert's "world renown" fish tacos with all the fixins. John caught the fish and fried it to perfection. A delicious time was had by all. All meals served between 35-70 hungry folks. Thank you, Yuma Rod and Gun and the AZGFD cook crew.



John Hervert and Jill Bright at the World Renown Fish Taco Event

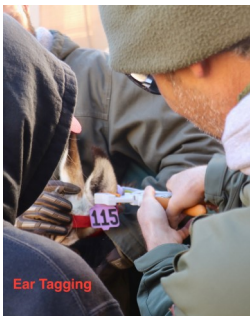


Following dinner Tuesday night Glen Dickens, AAF V.P. and Dave Cagle, AAF Secretary presented John Hervert and Jill Bright with plaques from AAF acknowledging and honoring their tireless efforts working to save and protect Sonoran pronghorn for 30 years. Together they developed safer methods to capture and provided for the recovery of this endangered species. Thank you both for your extraordinary work. Very excellent information on John and Jill and the recovery efforts involving the Sonoran pronghorn is available at www.azantelope.org in the archived editions of our magazine, *Pronghorn*. Look for 4th quarter, 2021 Vol.27 Number 4 titled *Sonoran Pronghorn Special Edition*.

I was very impressed with all the different agencies represented at the capture. The co-ordination was amazing. First of all are the many volunteers from all over Arizona that make these projects possible. Then comes the federal, state and local agencies. Headed up by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Stephanie Doerries who oversees the endangered species project(s). AZGFD biologists John Hervert, Jill Bright, Noel Ratliff and veterinarian, Anne E. Justice-Allen. The Mexico counterparts, Commission of Ecology State of Sonora (CEDES) and their veterinarians and vet techs. U.S. Park Service, U.S. Marines, National Park Service, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Organ Pipe National Monument, Dan and Fritz, it is the only park with a resident Sonoran PR herd numbering 40-50 head, U.S. Border Patrol and Phoenix Zoo veterinarian, Ole Alcumbrac, and a veterinarian from Mexico City.

AAF was represented by Glen, V.P. and Betty (photographer) Dickens, Dave Cagle, Secretary, Gary Boyer, board member and life member Marsha Halcrow, Earl Polvent and Ken and Kathy Cook, photographers.

My apologies to those I missed, I know you are out there and you are appreciated.



Photos courtesy of Betty Dickens

More photos page 12





John Hervert and crew - in the process!



AAF Gary Boyer - Water Hauler



AAF Secretary Dave Cagle Assist to Trailer



Russell Delivering Hay to Pen

FREEDOM!



Release Back into Pen

CAPTIVE RAISED SONORAN PRONGHORN CAPTURE AND RELOCATION – FROM A RETIRED WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST PERSPECTIVE

BY: DAVE CAGLE, SECRETARY, ARIZONA ANTELOPE FOUNDATION

A few select members of the Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF) were invited to participate in the annual captive Sonoran Pronghorn capture and release operation, which took place near Ajo this past December. This opportunity set a precedent, as the capture and release operation historically was limited to primarily state and federal agency participation. Last year a few AAF members were allowed to remain along the perimeter of the capture operation and photograph the action. This December, we not only photographed and filmed the event, which includes the associated pictures in this edition and an edited film which will be found on our website TBD, but also were assigned to enter the capture area with the main objective of keeping the animals safe from injury during the handling process.

During my 30 year career with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, I have had many opportunities to be part of a big game capture and transplant. Primary species transplanted included bighorn sheep and American Pronghorn. During those operations, free range animals were captured, marked with ear tags and movement collars, placed in trailers, and released at a pre-determined location to hopefully expand populations. During these operations, even though major efforts were taken to keep animals safe from injuries, it was expected that a few would succumb as a result of initial restraining efforts, transportation in a trailer, or capture stress related post-release mortality. I quickly learned when dealing with the handling of a federally endangered species, the rules of engagement become very refined to protect the health of each individual animal. Each animal is important to the ultimate recovery of this endangered species, and the overall tone of the operation emphasized this fact. The utmost care was clearly spelled out to insure the health of each animal. A 16-page operational plan was distributed to each participant at least a week prior to the event. Everyone was expected to read and become familiar with the entire operation, especially their specific assigned position.

A multitude of partners contributed to achieve the project's goals. A large camp was established on the edge of the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge located about 12 miles west of Ajo. Our camp was about two miles away from the captive pens. A large cook operation was manned by the Arizona Game and Fish Department and volunteers from the Yuma Rod and Gun Club. The hot breakfasts and dinners were most welcome as temperatures were about 10 degrees below normal. The wild Sonoran Pronghorn occur on several land status designations in extreme southwestern Arizona, including two national wildlife refuges, Bureau of Land Management, Organ Pipe National Park, the Yuma Proving Grounds and Barry M. Goldwater Military Range administered by the U.S. Marines and U.S. Air Force. The bulk of the participants were from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department. However, also present were persons from the U.S. Marines, U.S. Border Patrol, National Park Service, Mexican wildlife officials, a veterinarian from Mexico City, large animal specialists from the Phoenix Zoo, and a contract veterinarian and his technicians. It was unique to experience all these entities working like clockwork to achieve the project goals.

The pronghorn handling operations spanned two mornings. In the pre-dawn grey light of December 13th, everyone met to hear the final assignments. Again, it was emphasized to keep the animals calm as possible, as their safety was paramount. Proper animal handling was demonstrated for the people assigned as muggers who were to pick up the animals with a total of three holding the head, rib cage and flanks, respectively. Once at the capture site the captive pronghorn, which reside in two fenced pens, each approximately 300 acres in size, had previously been enticed with premium feed to enter a series of three, round 50-foot diameter pens. Each pen had shade cloth to prevent the pronghorn from seeing outside, and the pen closest to the processing area was padded along the perimeter.

Once all the animal handling equipment was set up with three separate handling stations, it was time to start the capture operation. A succession of approximately 12 separate capture events began.

A capture and release event entailed the following:

- 1) Two to three pronghorn were gently directed into the pen closest to the processing area.
- 2) The 20+ person handling team lined up outside the pen; roles included a net team to run down the middle of the pen with a 40+ foot long net once the door was slid open, a line of alternating muggers and wallflowers formed on both sides of the net team. Muggers duties were to quickly hand grab an animal and wallflowers duties were to keep animals away from the pen wall to protect them from injury. I was a wallflower.
- 3) On cue, the door was slid open and all three lines quickly entered the pen.
- 4) Animals either ran into the net or were picked up by the muggers. Once the pen door was opened, most animals were restrained within ten seconds.
- 5) Blindfolds were placed over the eyes to calm the animal.
- 6) Teams of veterinarians and their technicians entered the pen with each team attending to one animal.
- 7) All animals had blood taken, up to eight injections were given, temperatures were closely monitored during the entire handling process, and ear tags were placed on any animals without one.
- 8) Animals to be released back into the pen were gently taken outside the pen away from the processing area and released.
- 9) Animals destined for transport were placed on a stretcher and carried to a processing station where the veterinarian team monitored the health of the animal and a movement collar was placed on each animal. Fecal samples were also collected for later analysis.
- 10) Once those tasks were completed, the animal was carried by stretcher to a specially designed trailer. To reduce injury, bucks were placed in one side and does went into another section. These first 10 steps normally took less than eight minutes to complete. After the last of those animals were safely handled, the whole process started over to handle another 2 – 3 pronghorn.
- 11) Once the desired number of animals were in the trailer, it was driven either to the release pen in Mexico or the one in Vekol Valley. A veterinarian accompanied each trailer in case further medical attention was required at the release site.

The capture and release operation described above is just one of the required steps implemented to better insure the recovery of this endangered species. The captive facility is perhaps the most crucial piece of this species' management pie. These semi-captive, raised animals provide the source to supplement existing wild populations and start new populations in suitable habitat, such as in the Vekol Valley. Without these additional Sonoran pronghorn contributing to the overall population, the recovery of this species would be more tenuous.

Your AAF contributes to the recovery of this species on several fronts: First, our volunteers have removed many miles of livestock fencing on retired livestock grazing areas in the Vekol Valley. These fences have proven to be an absolute barrier to their movement. Second, we assist in the annual set-up and take-down of the Vekol Valley release pen, which holds the captive pen animals and offers a place to find food, water and become accustomed to their new surroundings prior to their release into the wild. Third, we have contributed funds raised from the AAF raffles to purchase materials to build waters critical to this and other desert wildlife species.

It was an added bonus for me to participate in this capture/release project and seeing firsthand the unity and dedication our wildlife partners shared improving the future of this iconic species.

10TH & FINAL ANNUAL SONOITA PLAINS JULY 16TH 2022 PRONGHORN & FAWN SATURATION SURVEY HAS RECORD RESULTS!

BY GLEN DICKENS AAF VP

On Saturday July 16, 2022 volunteers from the Arizona Antelope Foundation led by Arizona Game and Fish Department personnel District Wildlife Managers Brittany Oleson, Brian Aragon and Regional Game Specialist Rana Murphy conducted our 10th and final annual Sonoita Plains pronghorn fawn “Saturation” survey. This entails stationing as many separate observers as possible across all the occupied pronghorn habitat in a game management unit from the crack of dawn until 10AM and observing and classifying all of the pronghorn observed and their exact locations. This time of year is when pronghorn does are at their peak of fawning/nursery herd activity.

This survey included both game management units 34A and B, east and west of Highway 83 and north of Highway 82 and 35A/B north, south of Highway 82. We had bluebird weather that morning and had good road conditions throughout the survey zone. We counted a record 321 pronghorn; 64 bucks, 146 does and 111 fawns for a 76% fawning success rate a Sonoita Plains record! Last year we experienced just a 10% fawn success rate directly reflecting the lack of a 2020 monsoon, the dry winter of 2020-21 and our unprecedented statewide drought.

The 2021 survey while having a low fawn success did net 273 with 218 observed in 2020, 274 observed in 2019, 168 observed in 2018 (low count due to rainy weather and impassible roads), 243 in 2017 and 316 during the 2016 survey. What these numbers continue to reaffirm is that the Sonoita Plains population continues to hold its own at 250+ and function as a single metapopulation. When the grant efforts began in 2010, we observed just 81 animals fragmented into 3 distinct herd zones. This continuing positive data and pronghorn continue to be observed over the entirety of the 100K acres Sonoita Plains grassland habitat.



Camp was located at the historic Rose Tree Ranch corrals and stone bunkhouse near Elgin, thanks to Bill Brake and Al Wilcox ranch owners, for hosting us yet again. Dinner was pulled pork and served by yours truly and spouse and resident photographer Betty Dickens. We had three hunters that drew tags to hunt pronghorn in the area assisting us as well.

Thanks go to all the following AGFD partners and volunteers that contributed to the success of this survey;

- Representing the AAF Board: Darrell Tersey, Dave Cagle, John Millican and yours truly.
- Representing the AGFD: Raul Vega, Brad Fulk, Kirby Bristow, Rana Murphy, Brittany Oleson, Brian Aragon, Gerald Berthlette, Fritz Sawyer and Noah Silva
- Arizona Land & Water Trust: Cameron Becker
- University of Arizona: Brett Blum
- National Wild Turkey Foundation: Phil Gonzales and Wayne Kaiser
- Photographer: Betty Dickens
- Other volunteers included; Warren Adams, Jerry Clarno, Dave Cruce, Kolin Tersey, Byron Paquette friend and two youth, Melanie-Paul Ellis and 2 youth, Andrew, Kimberly and Clayton Young, Kristol Travsch, Clif Tarlip, Phil Gonzales and Nicholas Schobinger

So you ask why is this the “last” summer saturation survey using AAF provided “civilian conservationists”? The answer is two-fold. As of 2022 the AGFD have restored their traditional August aerial surveys statewide including all of the units we have been working on in the Tucson Region 5 herd zones. These surveys while not projecting total population numbers as closely as our saturation surveys, do provide the biologically required buck-doe-fawn numbers and ratios to make the annual hunt recommendations within the confines of the 5-year hunt guidelines.

Also at what will become an annual AAF/AGFD coordination meeting held on July 16th at the Tucson Region 5 headquarters we put our collective heads together and developed a joint 6-year workplan to replace the now completed 9-year National Fish and Wildlife grant workplan. We concurred that the summer survey would be discontinued, replaced with a rotating winter population count beginning the last weekend in January 2023 for the Bonita/Allen Flat herd zones and back to the Sonoita Plains in 2024. This approach will provide overall population data every other year for two of the Region’s largest three herd zones.

So we will continue to do a single annual survey moved to January and rotating those efforts, still utilizing our joint AGFD professional/civilian conservationists approach. The AAF looks forward to continuing these “on the ground” joint AGFD pronghorn monitoring efforts in future years.





SONORAN PRONGHORN UPDATE



FIGURES AND PHOTOS BY JILL BRIGHT, AZ GAME & FISH

SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2022

Captive Breeding Cabeza Pen

The pen has remained green throughout the fall with several rain events. This made trapping for the boma capture and release more difficult this year. The capture event took place December 13 and 14. South herd was processed the first day; 34 of the 42 pronghorn had been captured in the bomas. Six pronghorn (3M, 3F) were fitted with GPS radio collars and transported by trailer to the holding pen in Pinacate Reserve in Sonora Mexico. Two males and two females were transported by trailer to the holding pen in Vekol Valley. One buck was moved from the south to the north herd for breeding purposes. The north herd was processed the next day; 15 of the 30 pronghorn were in the bomas. Of these, 5 males and 3 females were moved



to the Vekol Valley holding pen. All the other pronghorn in the bomas were vaccinated, collared or ear tagged and returned to their respective pens.



This year we are experimenting with holding more yearling females in the captive pens a year longer to assess whether 1) we can increase fawn survival by keeping these younger females in the pens and 2) determine if pronghorn released at 2 years or older survive better and recruit fawns at a higher rate in the wild than yearling does. There were no known injuries or mortalities during the processing.

However, 9 days later one of the old does who had been captured in the boma and immediately released back into the pen due to her age, was found dead in south herd. She was 13 years old and her death was likely due to her age and the stress of the boma operation. A buck fawn has also been observed limping after the capture.





Prior to the captures, in October, an 11-year old doe was found dead in the north pen; cause was unknown but likely due in some part to her age.

Reports from monitoring the group in the Pinacate holding pen have all been good, and they are expected to be release to the wild in mid-January. Monitoring of the Vekol Valley herd indicated that a doe transported there has a bad injury to one of her rear legs. She will be recaptured, her injury assessed, and most likely taken back to the Cabeza captive breeding pen before that herd is released to the wild.

In an effort to retain good genetic diversity in the captive breeding pens, an attempt to capture a few wild bucks to move into the pen took place December 31 – January 2. Despite ground fog delaying the fixed-wing locator planes from taking off from Yuma until near noon on December 31, two bucks were successfully captured and helicoptered to the Cabeza pen. The first buck was put into the north pen, and the second into the south pen. Weather cancelled the effort on January 1, but the next day, we were able to get one more buck successfully into the north pen. These bucks seem to be doing well; 2 of the three have joined their respective herds, while the first buck put into the north pen still remains to himself although he appears healthy. We did not have any mortalities during the wild capture.



*One of the pronghorn in the Pinacate holding pen.
All photos by George Andrejko, AZGFD.*

NORTH HALF		SOUTH HALF	
Adult Females	11	Adult Females	13
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 202)	3	Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2022)	7
Adult Males	7	Adult Males	6
Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2022)	4	Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2022)	6
Fawns (<i>b</i> 2023)		Fawns (<i>b</i> 2023)	
TOTAL	25	TOTAL	32
Total Pen	57		

Kofa Pen

The Kofa pen has also remained fairly green with scattered rain during the fall. The Kofa boma capture/release operation took place December 6. Twenty-four of the 33 pronghorn were captured in the bomas. Eight (4M, 4F) were processed, fitted with GPS collars, and transported to the holding pen on the YPG East Arm for release. The rest of the pronghorn were vaccinated, marked if needed, and returned to the Kofa pen. There were no injuries or mortalities.

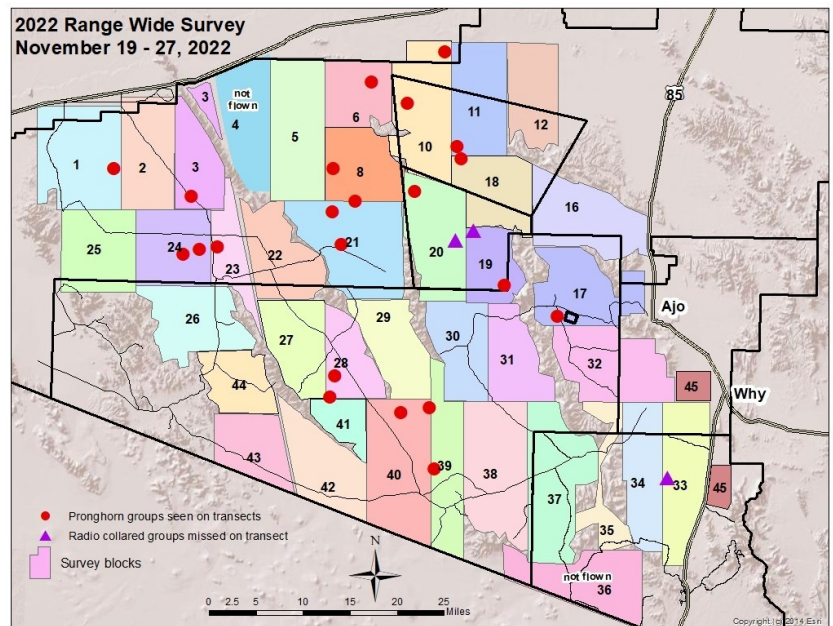
However, one buck was detected with a limp in the holding pen during subsequent monitoring. He was observed for a couple of weeks to determine if he would recover sufficiently enough to be released but he did not. He was darted, and moved back to the Kofa pen. The remaining 7 pronghorn were released to the wild on January 4, 2023. They moved north as a group and have remained about 10 miles north of the holding pen.

Adult Females	14
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2022)	3
Adult Males	4
Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2022)	5
Fawns (<i>b</i> 2023)	
TOTAL	26

In the last few years, we have had several pronghorn ending up with bad limps after being released into the holding pens, requiring them to be re-captured via darting and transported back to the captive pens. We are not sure if the injury occurs during the capture and handling in the bomas, or when they are in the trailer. We are working on ideas to modify the trailers to reduce the potential for injury. Another idea we are exploring is to drive the trailer around near the captive pen once there are pronghorn in it as we continue processing animals; we have noted the movement of the trailer seems to calm them down quickly. We will also reevaluate our handling methods to determine if they can be modified to reduce the potential for injury.

Wild Pronghorn Cabeza/ORPI/BMGR Herd: Range conditions throughout this sub-unit are varied with some areas showing signs of very little rain, although other areas look much better.

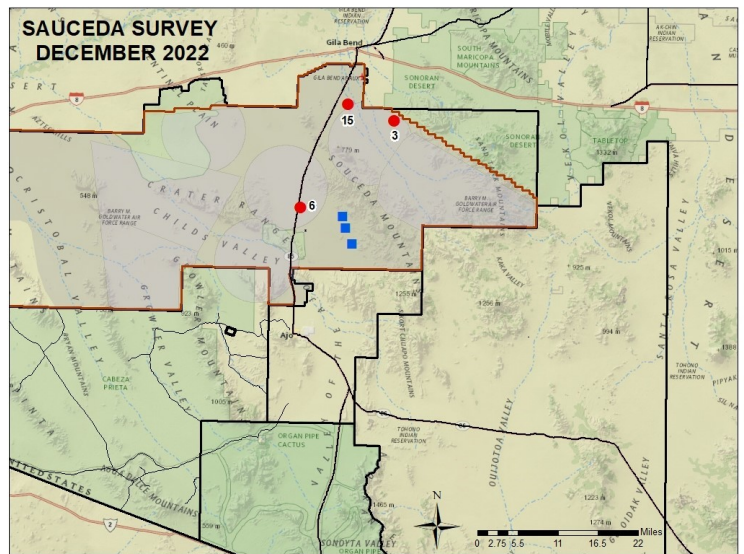
We conducted a range-wide survey in this subunit in late November. On the transects, 143 pronghorn were observed. From radio telemetry checks, 34 pronghorn were known missed on the transects. One large group of 26 was missed on the tactical ranges; it was on the edge of a block and we are not sure if it was in the block when the block was flown. A group of three was also missed on the tactical range, and a group of 5 in Organ Pipe Cactus NM. Therefore, we know the minimum number of pronghorn is 177. The estimate for the survey based on animals seen on the transects is 185. We believe the



best estimate for the actual number of pronghorn is 211 (185 + 26) as the estimator assumes that groups over 7 will not be missed, therefore it is not factoring in the large group that was missed but we know exists. Last year the results were 161 seen on transect, 5 known missed, minimum number 166, and estimate 232. The estimate, which is based on the likelihood of missing different sized groups, was lower this year even though more pronghorn were seen. This is due to the fact the pronghorn were in fewer, but larger groups this year, likely due to the excellent range conditions in the areas they were found allowing them to congregate in large groups. We were somewhat surprised the minimum number this year (177) was higher than last year (166). The herd experienced low fawn recruitment this year due to poor range conditions in the spring and early summer. We also anticipated a decline in the population due to projected annual adult mortality that ranges from 10-20% under the range conditions exhibited in early 2022.

Wild Pronghorn Kofa Subunit: This area has remained mostly green throughout the fall with several rain events. Four pronghorn have died in this sub-unit. In September, an 8-year old buck was found dead on Kofa of unknown causes. On October 18, a 3-year old buck was found dead on YPG East Arm of unknown causes, although he had not been moving much in the days leading up to his death and may have been sick or injured. On October 25, a 2-year old buck was found dead on YPG, likely from coyote predation. In December, a hiker on Kofa found a collar and ear tag and reported it to the Kofa crew. It was from an 8-year old doe who died of unknown causes. A range-wide survey of the Kofa/YPG/Palomas Plains herd is scheduled to take place in January 2023.

Wild Pronghorn Saucedo Subunit: This area has also remained green and in good condition. A range-wide survey took place this area December 18 and 19. Due to some aircraft mechanical issues, we did not complete one block on the eastern edge of the range. We observed 24 pronghorn in three groups (15, 6 and 3). This leads to an estimate of 29 pronghorn. All the working collars were observed. We were happy with the numbers given the large predation losses of collared animals in 2021 and little known recruitment for the last few years. Of note, we believe 18 of the pronghorn observed were unmarked wild born pronghorn, as we did not observe any collars or ear tags on them. One doe fawn from last year was observed.



Wild Pronghorn Vekol Valley Herd: This area has also remained in good condition during the fall. We have not flown any flights here recently, but GPS collar data shows the pronghorn remain in two groups, one in the vicinity of the holding pen and one further north closer to the Interstate. We have not documented any mortalities in this herd.

Water Projects: We are planning to build a water for the Palomas Plains herd on YPG East Arm in late January in an area where they have become accustomed to using a temporary water.

Forage Enhancements: Nothing new to report.

Other Projects: n/a

Written January 6, 2023

Daniel's Buck



Playing a high school football game

The night before my Antelope hunt

With a few hours of sleep

*Me and my Dad & two of his friends
(Vinnie & Tony)*

Headed out to a special and unique hunt

*Arriving to an area where we have
previously scouted*

Prepared and ready to go

*Started our walk across a road into the
field*

Tall wet grass, and spiders

19 minutes of walking and glassing

There he was at 500 yards

Put him in my cross hairs

And squeezed the trigger

The field fell silent

Gratitude!



Special thanks to Vinnie and Tony

For sacrificing their time and dedication

Which led to a successful hunt-

Daniel Joaquin Ainza Garcia

AKA-“BULLET”

September 2nd 2022

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Tania Peret, Goodyear, AZ
Petkovic Family, Tucson, AZ

Thank You!



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Thank You, Kelly!

5 Nov. 2022

Kelly Fleming

Patagonia AZ
85624

I am a member of AZ Antelope Foundation and would like to become a sustaining member (check enclosed). My ^{regular} membership is about due for renewal.

With immense pleasure, I have seen the Southeastern antelope population grow healthier & the number increase to an amazing degree lately.

I grew up among herds of Pronghorn, growing up on the family Wyoming cattle ranch

These remarkable survivors from the Pleistocene have a very special & important place in my heart.

After a year of bumping across some very rocky circumstances, I am tucked & again settled in the Sonoita/Elgin AZ area (25 years in Patagonia AZ) and very ready to pitch in on AAF volunteer work days.

I just wish to express my huge thanks to AAF for the past and on-going work on behalf of these great animals & their ecological niches.

All thanks to a remarkable band of people - people I hope to come to know

Kelly
Kelly Fleming
Sonoita, AZ

