

# Sonoran Pronghorn

**DESCRIPTION:** Sonoran pronghorn are an endangered subspecies of the American pronghorn. They are brown and white, with white markings on the neck, a russet-colored mane and white rump patches. Bucks have a distinct black cheek patch and large “pronged” horns. Does lack the cheek patch and have short black horns. Sonoran pronghorn are smaller and lighter in color than American pronghorn.

**DISTRIBUTION:** In the United States, Sonoran pronghorn are found only in southwestern Arizona. A geographically distinct population is found in northern Sonora, Mexico.

**HABITAT:** Pronghorn choose habitats where they can acquire sufficient resources, and where vegetation and terrain allow them to detect predators with their keen eyesight and use speed to outrun danger. Sonoran pronghorn use creosote-bursage flats, the lower slopes of mixed cacti bajadas and desert washes. During the hot summer, they use areas with chain-fruit cholla, where they acquire water from the cactus fruits.

**BIOLOGY:** Sonoran pronghorn are selective, opportunistic feeders, choosing the most succulent parts of shrubs, forbs, desert trees and some cacti. Important food sources include bursage, ratany, paloverde, ocotillo, chain-fruit cholla and forbs. Breeding typically occurs from July through September, with the majority of fawns born between February and April. Pronghorn females typically give birth to twins after their first year.

**STATUS:** Sonoran pronghorn were listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Preservation Act in 1967. The Arizona Game and Fish Department lists the

Sonoran pronghorn as a “species of greatest conservation need.”

**HERITAGE FUNDING SPOTLIGHT:** The Heritage Fund has supported numerous recovery actions for Sonoran pronghorn. It provided funds to help build the captive breeding pen on Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. Other recovery projects supported by Heritage include aerial telemetry flights to monitor wild pronghorn; biennial range-wide surveys; building and maintaining water sources; hauling water by helicopter to critical waters in remote wilderness locations; and enhancing habitat. Because of these management actions, the Sonoran pronghorn population in the wild in Arizona has increased from a low of 21 animals in 2002 to more than 100 today, with an additional 90+ pronghorn in the captive breeding pens.

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**MANAGEMENT NEEDS:** Sonoran pronghorn face a number of threats, including predation, recurring drought in the harsh Sonoran desert and increasing habitat fragmentation and disturbance along the U.S.–Mexico border.

The greatest challenge is drought. Successful recruitment of fawns depends on the availability of nutritious forage and water, especially during the late stages of pregnancy, lactation and weaning. In the absence of sufficient rainfall, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and numerous federal partners have enhanced habitat to provide supplemental forage and water in suitable pronghorn habitat.

Securing the international border is needed to reduce habitat damage and fragmentation, as well as disturbance to Sonoran pronghorn. Illegal roads can damage and fragment habitat, and Sonoran pronghorn may abandon higher quality habitat if the frequency of human disturbance is too great.

Predation on Sonoran pronghorn adults and fawns by coyotes can be significant. Managing predators for the benefit of pronghorn could increase fawn recruitment and adult survivorship.

Other management needs include continued support for the captive breeding program. The captive breeding facility has recruited 170 fawns, and more than 70 pronghorn have been released into the wild. It also supplied the breeding stock for a second captive breeding pen in historic habitat on Kofa National Wildlife Refuge. These facilities will continue to provide animals for releases into historic habitat throughout southwestern Arizona. 🦌

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