California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

PRONGHORN *Antilocapra americana*
Family: ANTILOCAPRIDAE Order: ARTIODACTYLA Class: MAMMALIA
M182

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The pronghorn is a fairly common resident of northeastern California, and locally common in Mono Co. Since 1982, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has translocated pronghorns captured in northeastern California to Kern, San Luis Obispo, and San Benito cos., where small populations have become established. The pronghorn is found only in sagebrush, low sage, bitterbrush, grassland, pinyon-juniper, riparian, and alkali desert scrub habitats. In northeastern California, there were nearly 6,000 in 1978 (Pyshora 1978, Salwasser and Shimamoto 1979). In 1992, numbers were at 8,000 (Fischer 2000).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forbs are the most important forage during summer. Browse is an important forage in all seasons, and is critical in winter (Ferrel and Leach 1950, Pyshora 1977). Several species of sagebrush are the most important browse, followed by bitterbrush and other shrubs (Pyshora 1977). Grass is used to a lesser extent than forbs and browse, but may be important spring forage (O'Gara 1978, Kitchen and O'Gara 1982). Use of alfalfa and other cultivated plants in California has been low, but may be increasing (Salwasser and Shimamoto 1979).

Cover: Pronghorns rely on speed, and ability to detect moving predators at long distances, to escape in open habitats. Also use shrubs and rolling topography for cover.

Reproduction: Low rolling terrain and open vegetation used for reproduction.

Water: Free water apparently necessary. The amount of water consumed varies inversely with the quantity and succulence of green vegetation consumed. Autenrieth (1978) reported daily consumption rates of 0.34 I (0.36 qt)/day in May, and 4.5 I (4.8 qt)/day in August.

Pattern: Pronghorns prefer low, rolling topography in open grassland and sagebrush communities. Optimal habitat is roughly 40-60% grass, 10-30% forbs, and 5-20% shrub cover (Sundstrom et al. 1973, Autenrieth 1978, Yoakum 1978). Low vegetation of up to 38 cm (15 in) is preferred.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Active yearlong. Mostly crepuscular, but may be active day or night. Peak feeding time is shortly after sunrise and shortly before sunset (Kitchen 1974, Kitchen and O'Gara 1982).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Pronghorns may migrate between summer and winter

ranges. May move up to 150 km (93 mi) between ranges in California.

Home Range: Winter herds contain all ages and sexes, and may number 2000. Groups of 600 have been sighted in California (Pyshora 1977). In spring, winter herds break up into smaller groups. Young males forn bachelor herds of 2-40, and females may be found in groups of 5-20. Home ranges are extremely variable, depending on habitat, year, and location. Yoakum (1978) reported daily movements of 0.1-0.8 km (0.06-0.5 mi) in spring and summer, and 3.2-9.7 km (1.9-5.8 mi) in fall and winter. During periods of extreme winter weather may restrict activity to very small areas.

Territory: On the summer range, dominant males hold widely spaced territories of about 0.2-5.2 km² (0.06-2.0 mi²) (Kitchen 1974, O'Gara 1978). Territories usually contain some water. Females are attracted to territories for mating.

Reproduction: Polygynous, mating from mid-September to early October. Bucks maintain harems of up to 15 does (Yoakum 1978). Gestation about 252 days. Twins generally born in spring, single births are less common. Young precocial, and weaned during rut. At this time, small herds of fawns may be observed. Females generally mate first time as yearlings. Males, though sexually mature, usually do not mate as yearlings because of inability to hold a territory.

Niche: Compete with domestic sheep, feral burros and wild horses. Excessive use by these species will reduce carrying capacity of range for pronghorns. Potential predators include bobcats and coyotes. Fences, and other barriers associated with human activities, not designed to allow them to pass, are detrimental to pronghorns.

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Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Depart. of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.