

DFG photos courtsey of Nancy Andrew

Above, netted deer are handled immediately upon capture.

known for certain is which water sources are used most frequently, and where future systems might best be positioned. This study will provide an opportunity to evaluate responses of deer to the placement of additional water sources. The resulting information is necessary to more effectively make use of limited funds.

In addition, this investigation will provide important demographic information about the deer population. At present, the number of deer inhabiting the study zone is not known; a more precise estimate of population size will be one result of this investigation. Biologists also expect to learn how deer best survive on the parched desert, what they eat and where they find food, when and where they give birth, and how many young survive to adult age, along with some answers to ways that deer and bighorn sheep share habitat where both occur simultaneously.



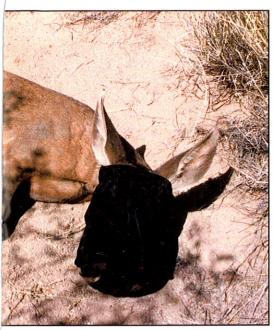
A black face mask is placed over the eyes of each captive deer in order to reduce visual stimuli



After radio collars were applied and prior to release, deer were placed into a pickup and transported to a location removed from the central processing area.

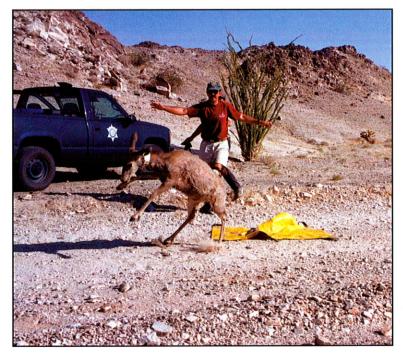
The study area, which is approximately 250 square miles in size, extends from Highway 78 on the north to Interstate Highway 8 near the border with Mexico on the south, and from County Road S34 on the west to the Colorado River on the east. South-state biologists and wardens, volunteers from Desert Wildlife Unlimited (a local conservation organization), and DFG

wildlife capture experts from its Wildlife Investigations Laboratory in Rancho Cordova, captured deer in various locations throughout the study area using a net-gun fired from the open doorway of a rapidly maneuvering helicopter. Once a deer was caught in the net, it was transported a short distance to a central processing area where biologists attached a radio-collar,



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to which the animals are exposed during handling.



Many animals buck wildly upon release but quickly settle down and trot off to suitable, nearby habitat.

acquired body measurements, blood, and other samples, and then released it to again roam the desert. Biologists will attach additional radio collars throughout the duration of the study as collared deer die. Eventually, more than 30 deer will be monitored on a daily basis.

The study is being carried out in deer zone D-12, also known as the Colorado

River Zone. This area is increasingly popular and typically produces trophy deer. During the 1998 deer season, 950 buck tags were issued for zone D-12, resulting in a hunter success rate of approximately three percent. Size of the typical buck taken in this zone is, however, among the largest in the state, and 81 percent of all animals taken during 1998 had at least three antler



This female mule deer has been placed in the bag and is being readied for transport to the central processing area.

points on a side. In contrast, the statewide zone average for three-point bucks was 43 percent.

Funds for this project have been provided by the DFG's Deer Herd Management Plan Implementation Program from the sale of deer tags, the Fish and Game Preservation Fund, and the Imperial County Fish and Game Commission. Cooperating with DFG personnel on this project will be biologists from the University of Arizona and Texas Tech University, who will be supported by the Welder Wildlife Foundation of Sinton, Texas.

Dr. Vernon C. Bleich is a Senior Wildlife Biologist with the Department's Inland Deserts and Eastern Sierra Region, stationed in Bishop, Inyo County. For the past nine years, he has directed the Round Valley Project, an intensive study of mule deer population dynamics and deer-predator relationships. Results of that investigation currently are being readied for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals.