



WILDLIFE NOTES

Pronghorn

Antilocapra americana

Accelerating to 40 miles per hour on a dead run, their white rumps flashing over grasslands, pronghorn are fixtures in the New Mexico landscape, particularly in the eastern third.

New Mexico pronghorns are usually called antelope, though they are not closely related to the many species of the African antelope. Their ancestors date back 10 to 20 million years ago in North America. The pronghorn evolved between one and two million years ago and apparently never migrated over the land bridge that once stretched across the Bering Sea from Asia to America.

The first Europeans on this continent found pronghorn abundant, in numbers rivaling that of the bison. Pronghorn ranged from the open, rolling country of southwestern Canada through the Rocky Mountain plateaus to central Mexico. There may have been 40 to 50 million antelope in the plains of western North America.

As prairies were converted to ranches and farms, and pronghorn were intensely hunted for food, populations declined. By the early 1900s there were only about 20,000 antelope in the West.

New Mexico trends were much the same. The state had an estimated 1,700 pronghorn in 1912 and a low ebb in 1915. As game laws were strengthened and some ranchers protected pronghorn, numbers

increased slightly to about 3,000 in 1926. Starting in the 1930s, the Department of Game and Fish began trapping and transplanting pronghorns to new ranges. That practice continues today, and there are now roughly 30,000 pronghorns in the state.

Large basins and rolling, grassy plains with scattered brushy draws are ideal pronghorn antelope terrain. Livestock waterings may aid pronghorn, especially during drought. Pronghorn eat mostly forbs and weeds, with grass a minor part of the diet. Animals may range widely for food when snows are heavy for ranges are dry. Net-wire fences may interfere with pronghorn movements, but barbed wire

fences - especially if a little room is left at the bottom - can be compatible with their need to roam.

Speed and exceptional eyesight are the best protection a pronghorn has from enemies. These animals are smaller than you may think, and light bone structure helps make them swift. An adult stands three feet tall at the shoulder. Mature bucks weigh from 100 to 125 pounds, with does about 10 percent smaller.

The buck has forked horns up to about 16 to 17 inches long. Horns may be present on does also, but they seldom are longer than the ears. (Pronghorns shed their horns, which have a bony core, each year.) There are scent glands on the rump patch, at the base of the horns, on the hind



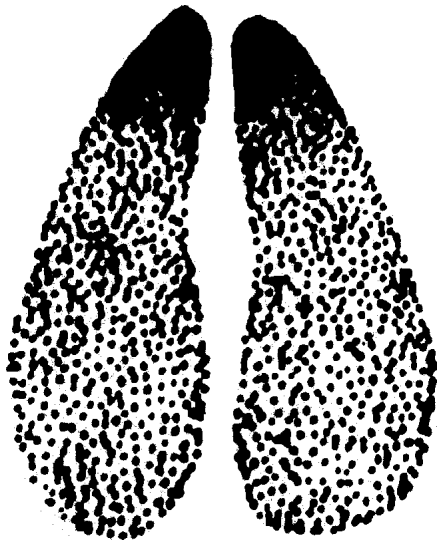
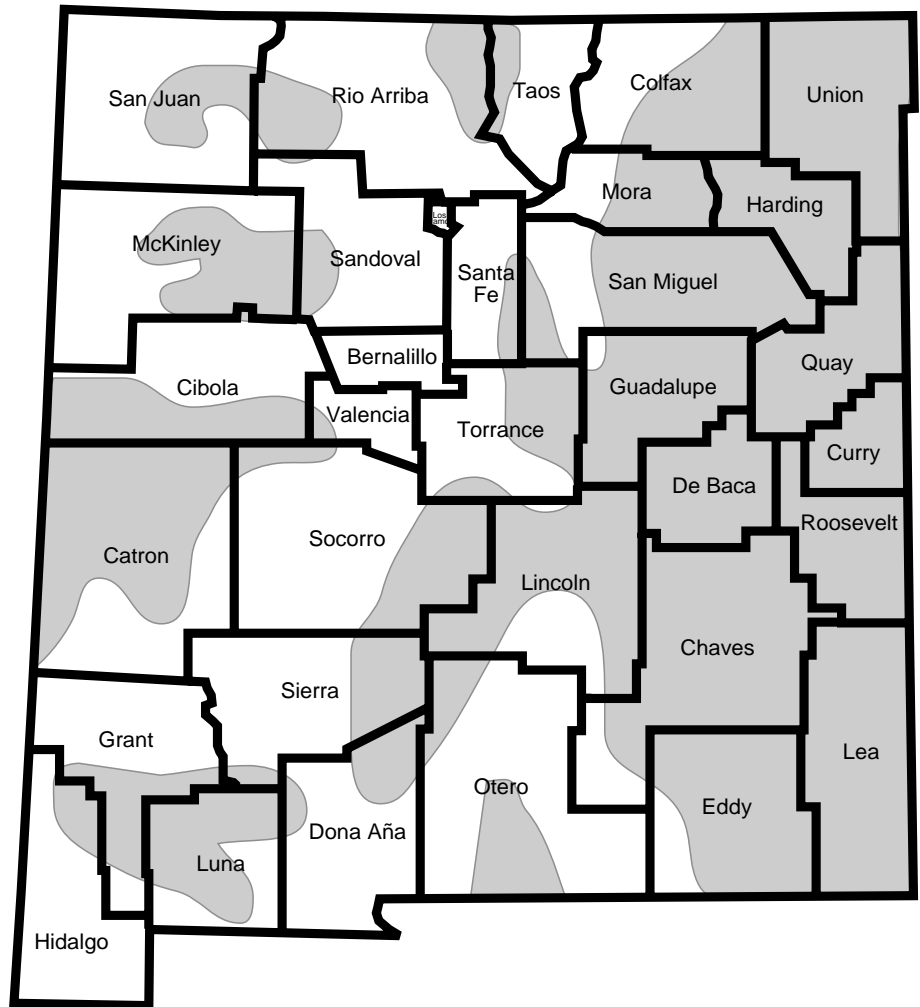
legs, between the hooves, and on the lower jaw.

Pronghorns live to 12 years of age, but their reproductive potential is high. Females normally breed at 14 to 16 months of age. The rut occurs in late September, and usually twins are born in late May or early June. The kids weigh about six pounds, develop rapidly, and can outrun a man after three days.

Coyotes and golden eagles may prey on young pronghorn, and prolonged drought or heavy winters may cause herd die-offs. Pronghorn are comparatively free of serious diseases and parasites

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Shaded areas depict pronghorn ranges.



Actual size of a pronghorn track

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