



PRONGHORN

Phylum Chordata, Class Mammalia, Order Artiodactyla, Family Antilocapridae
Antilocapra americana

"Pronghorn are true American natives, **found nowhere else in the world**. They have roamed the plains and deserts of North America for at least the last million years in substantially the same form" (NPS). While pronghorn are sometimes referred to as "pronghorn antelope", and their genus name *Antilocapra* means "antelope goat", pronghorn are **not "true" antelope** like the antelope species of Africa and Asia. Pronghorn are the sole living member of the family Antilocapridae, "an ancient family dating back 20 million years" (EDF).



There are 5 living subspecies of pronghorn:

- *Antilocapra americana americana* - the American pronghorn, found throughout the Great Plains
- *Antilocapra americana oregona* - the Oregon pronghorn, found in a small area near the border of Oregon, Idaho, California, and Nevada.
- *Antilocapra americana sonoriensis* - the Sonoran pronghorn, found in southern Arizona and the Sonora province of northern Mexico
- *Antilocapra americana mexicana* - the Mexican pronghorn - found in the Mexican provinces of Chihuahua and Coahuila
- *Antilocapra americana peninsularis* - the Peninsular pronghorn, also called the Baja California pronghorn, found in Baja California, Mexico

Height: Average 34 inches at the shoulder **Length:** 48 to 57 inches long.
Weight: Males = 90 - 130 lbs. Females = 75 - 110 lbs. **Lifespan:** 6 - 10 years in the wild

Habitat: Grasslands, brushlands, deserts

Range: Scattered populations in several of the states in the western United States - Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, southeastern Oregon, Nevada, northeastern tip of California, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, N. Dakota, S. Dakota, western Nebraska, and western Kansas; Canada - southern portions of Alberta and Saskatchewan; Mexico - Baja California and western Sonora.

Status: Before the arrival of Europeans, 35 - 40 million pronghorn roamed the plains and desert areas of North America. By the early 1920s, fewer than 20,000 animals were left. Pronghorn populations had been nearly wiped out due to the actions of ranchers who shot pronghorn because they thought the pronghorn competed with cattle for grass. The construction of fences also hampered the natural migration and foraging patterns of the pronghorn. "A 1962 aerial survey found only 56 antelope left in [Kansas], all in Wallace county. Since then, wildlife biologists have transplanted animals from other states" (Eastes).

While no longer found in their original numbers, the pronghorn population in North America has recovered to roughly 750,000 animals today. Legal, regulated hunting of stable populations is allowed.

Two subspecies of pronghorn are endangered. The Peninsular pronghorn (*A.a. peninsularis*) of Mexico is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature). The Sonoran pronghorn (*A. a. sonoriensis*) of the United States and Mexico is listed as Endangered by the IUCN. Both subspecies are listed as Endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Both subspecies are also listed as CITES Appendix I (CITES, 3/99). CITES, The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, is a United Nations treaty with more than 100 member states that provides a means for regulating international trade in wild animals and plants.



Threats to survival of the Sonoran pronghorn and the Peninsular pronghorn: poaching; habitat loss due to livestock overgrazing and restriction of movement due to fences. Natural predators of pronghorn fawns include coyotes, bobcats, and golden eagles, but these predators aren't usually able to kill healthy adult pronghorn.

Diet in the wild: Pronghorn eat primarily forbs and browse plants. Cacti also make up a significant portion of the diet. **Pronghorn actually consume very little grass.** Pronghorn can be valuable to range managers, as the animals can safely consume poisonous and injurious plants.

Special features:

- Male pronghorn are called bucks; females, does; and young pronghorn, fawns.
- Male pronghorn grow horns 12-18 inches long. The horn consists of two parts: a bony core and a black outer sheath made of keratin. Unlike most animals, for which horns are permanent structures, pronghorn shed their horn sheaths each year following the breeding season. The horn sheaths grow back by the next year's breeding season. Females sometimes grow horns 3-4 inches in length.
- Male pronghorn have black patches on their cheeks
- Pronghorn are well adapted to both the heat of summer and the extreme winter temperatures that occur throughout portions of their range. Their coat consists of an outer layer of hollow, air-filled hairs that provide insulation from the cold. In the summer, the animal molts to a thinner coat. Pronghorn are also able to erect their body hair to allow for the release of body heat.
- Pronghorn have a short "mane" about 2 - 4 inches long.
- Pronghorn are able to raise their long, white rump hairs to signal approaching danger. This creates a "flash" of white visible from a long distance.
- Pronghorn are the fastest land mammals in the Western hemisphere. They are capable of bursts of speed in excess of 60 mph. Their only competitor for the title of the world's fastest land mammal is the cheetah, which some claim is capable of speeds up to 70 mph. However, some scientists dispute the top speed of the cheetah and thus, the pronghorn may be the fastest. Pronghorn are considered by many to be the world's fastest land animal over long distances as they can easily sustain speeds of 35-40 miles per hour over long distances.
- Pronghorn are built for speed. They have a high-capacity trachea (windpipe) and lungs. They run with their mouth open, not due to exhaustion, but to take in extra oxygen. When moving at high speeds, pronghorn cover the ground in 14 to 25 foot bounds.
- They have large eyes in relation to their body size. Their eyes protrude from the side of the head giving them a wide angle of vision. They have acute eyesight and can detect movement 4 miles away. Their vision has been compared to that of a human looking through high-power binoculars.
- They also have acute senses of hearing and smell.
- Oddly enough, according to several sources, wild pronghorn do not have a tendency to leap fences like deer. Pronghorn crawl under them instead. (RHZ pronghorn are able to jump the fence in their yard.)
- Male pronghorn have 9 scent glands: 2 over the rump, 4 between the toes, 2 beneath the ears, and 1 above the tail. Females have just 6, and lack those below the ears and above the tail. Scent from the glands is used to mark territories and during mating rituals. The rump glands produce alarm odors that supplement the warning "flash" produced by the white rump hairs. Some references claim that the alarm odors can even be detected by humans (Geist 284, Fowler 996).



Social organization & Behavior:

- Pronghorn group size and structure varies with the changing seasons.
 - Late fall to winter:** Loose aggregations of mixed sexes and ages form at the end of the breeding season. Groups of 100 or more animals may gather during winter.
 - Spring to summer:** “During the spring and summer the herd breaks up into smaller groups segregated by sex.” Does and fawns gather in groups, usually with 12 or fewer members. Young males form small bachelor groups. Males 3 years and older compete for and defend territories. (University of Michigan) Older, more dominant males scent-mark and defend territories during the breeding season, and try to collect harems of females.
- Communication-vocalizations and visual signals in addition to the one ones previously described (U. of Mich.):
 - “Calves bleat when separated from their mother.
 - Mother grunt when seeking their calves.
 - Males “roar “during fights.
 - Males and females blow through their nostrils when angered.“

Breeding & Care of Young:

- Sexual maturity occurs at 15-17 months of age. While does often mate at this age, bucks generally do not mate until they are older and have established dominance, usually at 3 years of age.
- The breeding season, or **rut**, in the wild occurs over a 2-3 week period during September or October. Breeding may begin in August in southern portions of the pronghorn’s range.
- Prong horn have an interesting reproductive strategy. Females ovulate 4-7 eggs at mating time. Usually 4 fertilized eggs then implant in the uterus. However, not all the embryos will survive to term, as some embryos are killed when punctured by projections that grow from the embryos destined to survive. Thus, a female pronghorn typically gives **birth to two offspring at a time**. First-time mothers may give birth to just one fawn. **Gestation=250 days** In the wild births usually occur in May or June.
- Fawns typically weigh 5-9 pounds at birth and lack the spots typical of deer and elk fawns. Pronghorn fawn coats are more gray in color than the hair color of adults.
- At two days of age a pronghorn fawn can outrun a human. At four days it can beat an average horse.
- Fawns after begin feeding on vegetation at 3 weeks of age, but aren’t weaned until 4-5 months.

