

TAKE A
CLOSE-UP
LOOK AT
ONE OF THE
WORLD'S

**FASTEST
ANIMALS**
and
**WYOMING
ICON**

Tom Reichner at shutterstock.com

Abby Perry

The pronghorn is a Wyoming icon.

Its image appears on business signs, public art, and even agency emblems, and hearing Wyomingites brag there are more pronghorn in Wyoming than people is not uncommon. We love that over half of the worldwide pronghorn population is within the state.

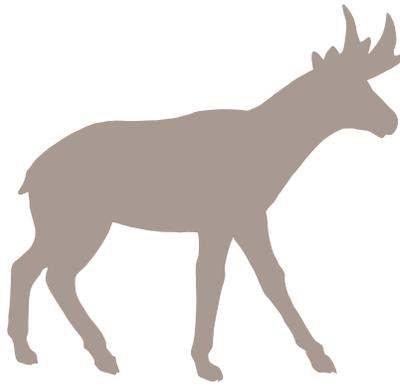
Pronghorn populations no longer exceed the population of Wyoming. Numbers have decreased significantly over the last couple of decades and are close to 400,000. There are now a third more people in the state than pronghorn antelope.

About the Pronghorn

People know they are fast and see well, but how fast and how well? Pronghorn can detect movement up to 4 miles away. The human equivalent to a pronghorn's amazing eyesight is looking through an 8-power pair of binoculars.

Exceptional eyesight and the ability to spot predators from miles away is their first line of defense. There are not a lot of places to hide on the wide-open prairie, and many pairs of eyes are better than one, which is one of the many benefits of strong herding instincts.

A pronghorn can run up to 60 miles per hour, which makes them the second-fastest land animal in the world (cheetah – 61 mph). Although second to the cheetah, the pronghorn can sustain its speed for much longer. While trying to evade predators, they run, and when pronghorn must resort to their last line of defense, they run together as a herd.



They use their long hair to communicate danger to other members of the herd. They raise the hair on their rump as a warning of danger, a characteristic that has, perhaps, contributed to their survival. Pronghorn are the last remaining species of their family, *Antilocpridae*, and are most closely related to giraffes.

Pronghorn horns have branches and have a bony core like a true horn, but they also have a branching horn sheath that is shed every year like an antler. Male pronghorn are adorned with full-sized horns, but a significant

form of fat for demanding times like the end of gestation and lactation. Other animals are considered income breeders. They use energy as they acquire it, and have much less energy stored; some do not store energy at all.

Pronghorn are in-between capital and income breeders, but likely fall more on the income breeder side of the spectrum. They have very few fat stores, which is interesting considering some of their reproductive characteristics.

Pronghorn invest more highly in reproduction than any other ungulate. The gestational period for pronghorn



Pictureguy at shutterstock.com

portion of the female population also has horns. However, female horns have more of the true horn characteristics, as they do not usually branch, and do not typically grow past their ears.

Energy Storage Survival

Pronghorn, although still considered ungulates, vary greatly from other ungulates in how they use and store energy. Most animals fall into two different categories of energy storage and breeding strategy. There are capital breeders, like most ungulates, who store energy in the

is longer than other ungulates of similar size, approximately 250 days. The pronghorn twinning rate is nearly 100 percent, and those twins account for almost 16 percent of the adult female pronghorn's body weight. That is like an average-size woman giving birth to 12-pound twins. Pronghorn fawns, on average, gain about a half pound per day. By the fall, telling the difference between fawns and adult pronghorn can be difficult, while it is much easier to distinguish fawns from adults in other ungulate species.

Contend with Drought, Fierce Winters

Having sufficient forage is crucial to survival. This makes pronghorn very susceptible to drought. To contend with drought, pronghorn sometimes change their diet to include more shrubs than forbs. If they cannot consume enough forage, their body condition deteriorates, which can result in death or a significant decrease in fawning rates.

Helping the Pronghorn

There are a few options to increase forage availability for pronghorn during drought. Pronghorn prefer to go under fences rather than over. Wildlife friendly fencing is a common management strategy that can allow pronghorn to move to higher-quality foraging areas in times of drought.

Other strategies include reducing stocking rates for domestic animals that compete directly with pronghorn, building an overpass on their migration route to help mitigate urban effects, and supplemental feeding. Most management strategies are costly, and do not guarantee survival.

Helping Hand from Man

Pronghorn often manage the seasonal forage availability problem in a different way – they move. Some pronghorn in Wyoming migrate approximately 170 miles from the Upper Green River Basin to Grand Teton National Park. The migration route is the longest in the lower 48 by any land animal. The route crosses four major rivers, private property, public land, and urban areas with lots of cars. The migration route also became the first federally designated



moosehenderson at shutterstock.com

migration corridor, which helps protect the pronghorn and other animals that also use this route to migrate. In the fall of 2012, pronghorn immediately took to the completed Wyoming Department of Transportation wildlife overpass on Highway 191 west of Pinedale and continue to use it. The overpass eliminated a deadly crossing from their ancient course.

Because pronghorn are a truly unique Wyoming icon, they continue to be the subject of many on-going research projects, hoping to aid in their success in the state of Wyoming.

Thanks to Adele Reinking, graduate research assistant in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management, for the inspiration to take a closer look at one of our speediest residents.

Tens of millions of pronghorn once roamed North America. Numbers dropped to about 13,000 worldwide. With only around 2,000 left in Wyoming by 1906, the pronghorn was going the way of the bison. An eleventh-hour commitment to hunting regulation and management reversed its fate. By 1984, the pronghorn population in Wyoming peaked at 600,000. Today, that number is around 400,000.

Speedy, swift, quick, nimble, tenacious, tough. Abby Perry can provide all the adjectives to describe pronghorn on Wyoming's vast landscape. The University of Wyoming Extension educator serves southeast Wyoming and can be reached at (307) 328-2642 or ajacks12@uwyo.edu.

