

Rare pronghorn behavior photographed at Organ Pipe

Resource Managers at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (Arizona) recently documented the use of open-water pools by the endangered Sonoran pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana sonoriense*). As part of an NRPP (Natural Resources Preservation Program) project, resource managers placed infrared-triggered Trailmaster camera systems at selected water sources and travel corridors in the park to determine use of these features by pronghorn.

Use of freestanding water by the Sonoran pronghorn is the subject of

continuing scientific and management debate. Before this project, the only confirmed use of freestanding water by the subspecies was from a photograph of a pronghorn drinking at a muddy bomb crater on the Barry M. Goldwater Bombing Range, northwest of the monument. Last summer, Organ Pipe Wildlife Biologist Tim Tibbitts and Biological Technician Lara Dickson secured several photographs of Sonoran pronghorn drinking from natural bedrock pools (tinajas) in the Bates Mountains.

Still unknown is how frequently, or under what conditions, Sonoran pronghorn will use freestanding water. Research by Lisa Fox (University of Arizona, Tucson) suggests the forage plants constituting the diet of the pronghorn may meet its water requirements. A previous Trailmaster camera study on neighboring Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge by Tricia Cutler (University of Arizona, Tucson) failed to document the animal using an artificial water catchment that had been constructed specifically for its use.

The events photographed in Organ Pipe came during a prolonged drought, when animals might have been particularly in need of water. The tinajas used by the pronghorn had received water from the first, meager rains of the summer thunderstorm season. After more extensive rains,



the pronghorn apparently did not revisit this water source, or any others where cameras were stationed. Photographs of a mountain lion visiting the Bates Mountains tinajas the day before the pronghorn suggest that this rare water resource also provides a dependable ambush site for predators. Sonoran pronghorn, and other wildlife, indulge their thirst at some risk