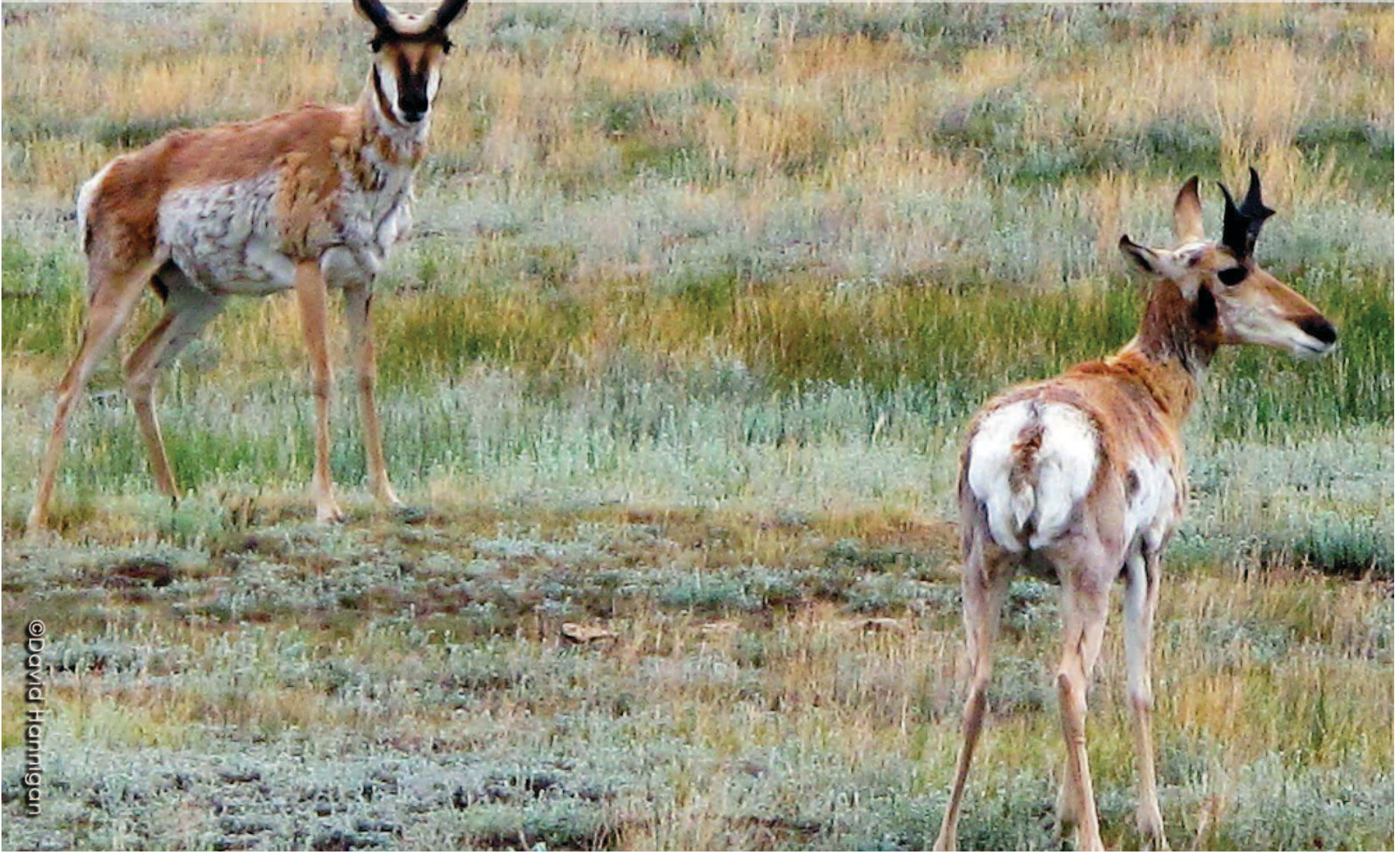


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The Colorado speed goat

The explorers, Lewis and Clark, were the first people to scientifically document the pronghorn antelope. When the European settlers first crossed the Great Plains, they began referring to them as antelope, probably because they are similar to the many species found in Africa and Europe.

The scientific name for pronghorn is *Antilocapra Americana* (for those of you who were wondering), and they are the only surviving members of the Antilocapridae family. They are sometimes called the pronghorn buck, pronghorn antelope or the American antelope. They got the name pronghorn because their horns point backwards, towards their rump, and then prong.

These guys have been nicknamed "speed goats" because of their incredible running speeds. Interestingly enough, they are not related to goats, but their DNA is a close match to that of a giraffe. Their average running speed is 40 mph, but can run at 60 mph for great distances, up to a mile-and-a-half. That makes them the fastest mammal in North America. The only mammal in the world faster is the cheetah.

With all this speed, you would think they would be good jumpers, but they are not. A pronghorn will belly crawl under a fence rather than try to jump it.

I have a special love for them. The ranch in Wyoming, where I spent many boyhood years, was loaded with them. One of my first dates with my wife, back in our teen years, was on the ranch for a pronghorn hunt. The large herds of pronghorns used to watch me do my ranch chores.

Pronghorn stand about 3.5 feet tall and are about 4.5 long. They have a body shape similar to a deer and their fur is a reddish-brown or tan color with white markings on the face, neck, stomach and rump. The males can top 150 pounds, while the females are closer to 100 pounds.

The fur is hollow, just like that of a deer. The hollow hair keeps them warm in the winter months. Pronghorn can tolerate temperatures from minus 50 to 130 degrees Fahrenheit. That is a whole lot more than this old man can stand.



(Top) A photo of two bucks. Notice the scars and cuts on the chest of the larger buck from fighting. This was taken during the rut season. (Above) A pronghorn buck showing off the dark face and cheek patches. (Photos courtesy of CPW)

Pronghorn are a migrating animal, moving between winter and summer grounds. A single animal can cover 170 miles during a migration. That would explain why I always seemed to see different bucks on the ranch, seldom seeing the same one for very long.

They can change the position of the hair on their skin. When the hairs are straight up, it allows air to circulate around the skin, keeping them from overheating during the hot times. In the cold, these hairs will lay flat, close to the body to prevent loss of body heat.

When a pronghorn is startled, they raise the hair on their rump. This creates a white patch that is visible for miles. Pronghorn are good swimmers; despite the fact their normal habitat has few places for them to swim.

Both males and females have horns. The females are usually just a bump but sometimes can be several inches long. The males have a much larger

horn that can reach 17 inches or longer.

The horn is composed of a fused hair sheath, which covers a bone core. Unlike true horns, males shed this sheath after breeding each fall, and then grow a new one.

Pronghorn breed in September, and the does give birth after seven or eight months. The newborn fawns, usually two of them, can outrun a man after just two days. They can probably outrun me on their first day.

Pronghorns have very large eyes and incredible vision. They are capable of spotting a predator from very far away. Just ask anyone who has tried to sneak up on one. Their vision is comparable to a human looking through eight power binoculars.

Those eyes provide 300 degrees of vision. A pronghorn can see movement from up to 4 miles away. They always seem like they are on "alert" which is probably why their lifespan

can reach past 10 years in the wild.

At one time, pronghorn ranged from the high plains north of Mexico City, all the way up to south-central Canada. Scientists estimate the population in North America once exceeded 35 million.

Pronghorn are a leftover from the Pleistocene Era some 19 million years ago. By the 1920s, there were fewer than 20,000 left. Like many other species, commercial hunters killed them for their food value.

In the early 1960s, Colorado's pronghorn population had dropped to fewer than 15,000. Today, thanks to the efforts of Colorado Parks and Wildlife and hunters, the population is nearing 80,000.

Pronghorn hunting in Colorado is very popular and many hunters wait years before accumulating enough points to draw a tag. All pronghorn hunting tags issued in Colorado are by the draw, as no over-the-counter tags are available.

The majority of pronghorns are in northwestern Colorado and on the eastern plains. There are small populations also found in North Park, Middle Park, South Park and the San Luis Valley. The biggest herds, and usually the biggest bucks, are located in the northwest in areas near Craig and Maybell.

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has done a great job managing our herds. In recent years, there have been a few tough winters in the Northwest part of our state, and that has taken a toll on the herd population.

This year, the herd seems to be in good health. Let's hope we get good moisture and the herd continues to grow. The pronghorn antelope is a part of Colorado history and I hope it stays here forever.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the *Montrose Daily Press* and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



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We know...

...it is coming! I'm talking about one of the best times of year in our area- FALL! More stews and chili, crockpot meals, football, the turning leaves, and hot chocolate. I love those cool mornings when you leap up, close the windows and jump back into bed for a few more minutes. In our house, you might have to crowd back into the bed, edging out a monster dog who has moved into your spot. Some of you may find this awful, sleeping with the dogs. As a child I was taught that pets are special. They ask for nothing and expect nothing, yet they have an enormous capacity for love. I will share my pillow with the sleeping dog...and hope the drool factor is minimal!

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