

Peninsular Pronghorn

(Sonoran Pronghorn)

Scientific Name: *Antilocapra americana peninsularis*

FAST FACT: When danger approaches, the patch of white hair on the pronghorn's rump sticks upright, alerting other pronghorns to flee.

Pronghorns are the only surviving members of the family *Antilocapridae*, a group of hoofed animals that appeared in the Pleistocene age (10,000 to 1.8 million years ago). They occupy a niche between deer and goats and are the only animals with *branched* horns (not antlers).

STATUS:

Peninsular pronghorns are critically endangered. Once numbered in the thousands, today approximately 150 survive in the wild. Cattle ranching and livestock fencing prevent their natural movement and reduce favorable habitats. Human development and drought are also threats.

HABITAT:

Peninsular pronghorns live in deserts and semi-deserts of Baja California.

DIET:

They eat shrubs, forbs, broad-leaf weeds, cacti, sagebrush, other leaves, and herbs. They drink when water is available, but can go for weeks without drinking, obtaining moisture from their food.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

These speedy animals stand up to 35 inches at the shoulder and weigh up to 125 pounds. They are golden-brown or tan, with white on the lower neck, jaws, stomach, and rump. Their white underbellies deflect heat from the ground. Males are larger, with darker faces and longer horns; forward-pointing prongs below backward-facing hooks. Their horns' outer sheaths are shed annually. Females' horns, if present, are spike-like and retained for 2-5 years before they shed. Pronghorns' pupils constrict to horizontal slits, maximizing peripheral vision, and their field of view spans an amazing 300°. Pronghorn can see for miles and have the largest eyes of any North American hoofed animal their size. The eyes are high on the sides of the head to watch for predators. Pronghorns live about 9-10 years in the wild but may live longer in captivity.

Ghosts of the Desert

Peninsular pronghorn, or *los berrendos*, are also known locally as *los fantasmas del desierto* or "ghosts of the desert" because their coloration allows them to blend in with the surrounding terrain, and because they can disappear at high speed. They are the world's fastest living hoofed mammals and the second-fastest land mammals, cruising at 40-60 mph for one hour or more. (Cheetahs run up to 70 mph, but only for short bursts). Pronghorns' cloven hooves are padded to absorb shock from 27-foot strides at top speed. Their oxygen consumption is three times greater than that of other similar-sized animals. The windpipe measures up to two inches in diameter (by comparison, a human's is three-quarters of an inch). Pronghorn also have an enlarged heart and lungs to aid oxygen consumption and run with mouth open and tongue hanging out to take in more air. Pronghorn moms have one or two 7- to 8-pound fawns that take steps just 30 minutes after birth. At four days old, fawns can outrun humans, and in one week, they can outrun dogs and horseback-riders over short distances.

