

PRONGHORN (*ANTILOCAPRA AMERICANA*) LOCKED IN FIGHT BECOMES PREY OF COYOTES (*CANIS LATRANS*)

JENNIFER G. CHIPAULT AND DUSTIN H. LONG*

Turner Endangered Species Fund, P.O. Box 131, Cimarron, NM 87714

* Correspondent: longdh@bacavalley.com

ABSTRACT—We report apparent predation by coyotes (*Canis latrans*) on one of two male pronghorns (*Antilocapra americana*) that were locked together. When the locked pronghorns first were spotted at 2030 h, both were alive, one standing and the other on the ground wounded by a horn of his opponent. At ca. 0230 h, four coyotes were seen within 150 m of the pronghorns. At 0630 h, the wounded pronghorn had been partially eaten, presumably by the coyotes, and the other pronghorn freed himself from the carcass and walked away.

RESUMEN—Reportamos la aparente depredación por coyotes (*Canis latrans*) en uno de dos antílopes machos (*Antilocapra americana*) que estaban atorados juntos. Cuando los antílopes que estaban atorados fueron vistos por primera vez a las 2030 h, ambos estaban vivos, uno parado y el otro en el suelo, herido por un cuerno de su oponente. Aproximadamente a las 0230 h, cuatro coyotes fueron vistos a unos 150 m de los antílopes. A las 0630 h, el antílope herido había sido comido parcialmente por los coyotes, y el otro antílope se liberó del cuerpo del animal muerto y se fue.

It is relatively common for conspecific male cervids to be injured, sometimes fatally, while fighting during breeding season (e.g., mule deer *Odocoileus hemionus*, Marchinton and Hirth, 1984; moose *Alces americanus*, Child, 1998; elk *Cervus canadensis*, Geist, 2002). However, records of pronghorns (*Antilocapra americana*) becoming fatally locked together while fighting are rare (Scholey, 1933; O'Gara, 2004c) and there is no documentation of predation on pronghorns while they are locked together. One of us (JGC) observed two male pronghorns locked together at the head for >10 h and found evidence that coyotes (*Canis latrans*) preyed on one of them during this time. The incident took place on Vermejo Park Ranch, Colfax County, New Mexico. The site was dominated by blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), tobosa (*Pleuraphis mutica*), alkali sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*), winterfat (*Eurotia lanata*), wolfberry (*Lycium pallidum*), fetid marigold (*Dyssodia papposa*), snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), milkvetch (*Astragalus*), and prickly pear (*Opuntia*). The weather was clear and calm and the temperature was 10–15°C.

At 2030 h on 2 October 2006, a standing male pronghorn that appeared to have his head caught in something on the ground was observed with the aid of a spotlight. When the animal was

approached, it was determined that the head of the standing pronghorn was attached to that of another pronghorn that lay on the ground on his right side. Because the standing pronghorn was pulling and twisting in an attempt to free himself, exactly how the pronghorns were locked together could not be determined. The pronghorn on the ground breathed shallowly and irregularly, kicked his legs occasionally, and blinked his eyes in an apparent response to the spotlight. The two pronghorns were locked nose to nose. The standing pronghorn dropped to the ground and rolled along the dorsal side of his opponent from its head toward its rump, and then stood again. During this roll, the pronghorn that lay on the ground flinched, but the position of his body was not altered. Based on this maneuver, it appeared that the left horn or prong of the standing pronghorn was embedded in the right side of the head or neck of his opponent. The two animals were observed for ca. 10 min. Each 2–4 h thereafter until daylight, the two pronghorns were monitored. They remained attached, with the standing pronghorn repeatedly struggling to free himself while dragging his opponent. At ca. 0230 h on 3 October 2006, four coyotes were seen within 150 m of the pronghorns. When the pronghorns were approached,

the coyotes retreated to the top of a nearby railroad grade, where they uncharacteristically lingered in light from the spotlight as if reluctant to leave.

When the pronghorns were approached at 0630 h, two coyotes ran away over the railroad grade and out of sight. The pronghorn on the ground had been partially consumed; all that remained was the head and four limbs held together by dorsal skin, backbone, pelvis, and ribcage. The head of the carcass was still attached to the head of the live, standing pronghorn, which pulled, twisted, and within ca. 1 min freed himself from the carcass. He seemed unstable but unharmed when he first lifted his head. He then stumbled away, gaining steadiness and moving faster with every step. There was a distance of ca. 75 m between where the pronghorns were first seen and where the live pronghorn freed himself.

The head of the dead pronghorn was collected the day after the observation and was examined and measured on 17 October. The pronghorn was probably >3 years old based on average length of his horns (34 cm; O'Gara, 2004a) and presence of eight large incisiform teeth (O'Gara, 2004b). Wear of his molars suggested he was <4.5 years old (O'Gara, 2004b). Our impression that he was in the prime of life was further supported by an unofficial measurement of the head that gave a score of 74.5 Boone and Crockett points (Boone and Crockett Club, <http://www.boone-crockett.org/bgRecords/ScoringYourTrophy.asp?area=bgRecords>). The surviving pronghorn was not measured; however, he appeared to be smaller than his opponent in size of body and horns.

We thank J. C. Truett for his review, D. E. Brown for sharing his knowledge of pronghorns, M. K. Phillips for support, C. A. Miller for translating the abstract, C. P. Jackson for help with identification of plants, and M. F. Chipault for editing and encouragement.

LITERATURE CITED

- CHILD, K. N. 1998. Incidental mortality. Pages 275–302 in *Ecology and management of the North American moose* (A. W. Franzmann and C. C. Schwartz, editors). Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- GEIST, V. 2002. Adaptive behavioral strategies. Pages 389–434 in *North American elk: ecology and management* (D. E. Toweill and J. W. Thomas, editors). Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- MARCHINTON, R. L., AND D. H. HIRTH. 1984. Behavior. Pages 129–168 in *White-tailed deer: ecology and management* (L. K. Halls, editor). Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
- O'GARA, B. W. 2004a. Physical characteristics. Pages 109–143 in *Pronghorn ecology and management* (B. W. O'Gara and J. D. Yoakum, editors). University Press of Colorado, Boulder.
- O'GARA, B. W. 2004b. Physiology and genetics. Pages 231–273 in *Pronghorn ecology and management* (B. W. O'Gara and J. D. Yoakum, editors). University Press of Colorado, Boulder.
- O'GARA, B. W. 2004c. Mortality factors. Pages 379–408 in *Pronghorn ecology and management* (B. W. O'Gara and J. D. Yoakum, editors). University Press of Colorado, Boulder.
- SCHOLEY, C. K. 1933. Battle of death (photograph). *Arizona Wild Life* 5(1):23.

*Submitted 12 December 2008. Accepted 20 June 2009.
Associate Editor was Troy A. Ladine.*