

Texas  
QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT  
July, August, September, 1948  
Federal Aid Project 26-D

RESTORATION OF ANTELOPE

O. F. Etheredge

INTRODUCTION

The period began with weather conditions not favoring the growth of food and cover for wildlife species. Scattered showers in August resulted in plant growth that benefitted antelope over about 75% of their range. The latter part of the period was marked by local showers which did some good, but at least 65% of the range had again begun to burn. Some portions of the Trans-Pecos received very little or no moisture during the period. This was especially true of certain areas in Hudspeth and Culberson Counties, including the Moor, Helms, Kerr, Sibley, and Rounsaville Ranches.

Under prevalent drought conditions, grazing pressure by domestic livestock contributed greatly to the condition of antelope. On cattle ranches many of the antelope were in fair shape and a fair number of young survived even though the range received very little moisture. On the ranches stocked with sheep the antelope apparently produced fewer young and appeared to be not in as good a physical condition.

KILL QUOTA CENSUS

With the assistance of J. W. Gilbreath, Game Warden Pilot, Alpine, ranches on which a possible surplus of antelope might exist were censused (See attached map). This census was made by using a 140 Cessna plane flying from 75 to 200 feet above the ground, depending upon the ground cover, visibility, wind, etc. Most of the counting was done during the first three hours of day light in the morning and during the last three hours in the afternoon.

The flights were made from north to south and return, to take maximum advantage of the sun light. It was difficult to do very accurate census work when flying directly into the sun, especially during the early morning hours and late afternoon when the sun was low on the horizon. In the forenoon most of the surveys were started on the east side of an antelope range and moved west. In the afternoon the procedure was usually reversed. Since most of the antelope range was known by the census takers the flights were made to cover all of the known antelope range in a given area. This permitted fewer turns which would have resulted if the region was counted by ranches. The counts were separated by ranches as the flights progressed, to allow subsequent issue of kill permits on a ranch basis. The first flight, in a given range, was made from 200 to 300 yards from the outside boundary of the area to be counted. Subsequent flights were made, three or four per section, until the complete range was covered.

The plane was usually about 200 feet above the ground until antelope were sighted. Then if necessary, the plane dropped lower until the counters were satisfied as to sex and numbers of males, females, and young.

Former antelope hunt censuses were completed by the last of June and sometime as early as March. This was too early to obtain adequate season survival on fawns. The counts were made this year during July and the first ten days of August with re-checking done later in August. Most of the re-checking and late counts were made from an automobile in company with the landowner. Counting after July 1 has the advantage of giving a better fawn survival figure, and there is less movement of herds from ranch to ranch between the census and the hunt, the first fifteen days of October.

On the forty ranches in Brewster, Jeff Davis, Presidio, Culberson, and Hudspeth Counties, a total of 3,924 antelope were found. This involved 1,353 males, 1,842 females, and 729 young. The buck-doe-young ratio was about 3.45:4.69:1.86. The buck-doe ratio based on the total number of males and females was about 4.24:5.76, which indicated no serious amount of over-shooting during the previous four hunting seasons. But the doe-fawn ratio, showing 4.69 does producing 1.86 fawns, was below the normal fawn survival. The low fawn survival was thought to be related primarily to drouthy conditions and over-stocking of domestic livestock on the antelope range.

Based on the census data and landowner desires, an issue of 718 antelope hunting permits on 31 ranches was recommended. The 11 ranches on which no permits were recommended either did not possess enough males to justify a hunt or range conditions were not suitable (See attached map). The 718 permits issued was 53.07% of the total number of males on all ranches or 56% of males on the ranches hunted.

#### STATUS OF TRANSPLANTS

A check of the antelope in the Big Bend National Park, released during the trapping season of 1947, revealed that most of them are located near the release sites while others have drifted to adjoining areas. Five does with four young have taken refuge on the Hudspeth Ranch northeast and adjacent to the Park. One male is on the Lluenthal Ranch west of the release area, five are ranging in the vicinity of St. Elena Canyon, and nine are near the two tanks on the road to Hot Springs. Others are seen by the park personnel from time to time, scattered over a wide area in the Park.

The antelope released on the Cornell Ranch, Jeff Davis County, Selman pasture, seem to have explored the entire one hundred sections and are running in small herds. The exact number of young surviving is not known.

The antelope released on the Jackson and Robinson Ranches in Reeves County have been driven north and west from the release sites by new irrigated farms. However, they drifted into good antelope range. The number of fawns surviving is not known.

The McElroy Ranch release, Brewster County, reports no known births. Three of the released stock were found dead. All others seem to be in good condition.

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SUMMARY

1. Weather conditions, generally, did not favor growth of food and cover for wildlife species aided only by scattered showers. The drouth and grazing pressure by livestock limited the food supply and had its effect upon young survival.
2. The antelope on forty ranches in Brewster, Jeff Davis, Presidio, Culberson, and Hudspeth Counties were censused by plane to obtain records for setting kill quotas for the October open season.
3. The census flights at altitudes between 75 and 200 feet were made so as to gain maximum advantage of the sun light. Flights crisscrossed general range areas, but records were kept to permit assigning kill quotas by ranches.
4. A total of 3,924 antelope were observed; 1,333 adult bucks, 1,842 adult does, and 729 young. The buck-doe-young ratio was 3.45:4.69:1.86.
5. A 1948 season's kill of 718 antelope was recommended on 31 ranches to be hunted. This quota represented 56% of the bucks found on these ranches.
6. Checks were made on four 1947 antelope transplanted areas in Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Reeves Counties. Recent agricultural developments had dispersed widely the Reeves County herd. Conditions on the other areas appeared satisfactory.

