



# Refuge Update

January 2025

Published quarterly by the Amigos de la Sevilleta

*Board meetings are held the third Tuesday of most months. The next board meeting, which is also the Annual Meeting for our membership, will be held on Saturday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2:00-3:30 PM at the Visitor Center. You are welcome to attend in person or remotely via Zoom (a link will be sent out several days prior to the meeting).*

## Refuge Update

Jeff Sanchez, Refuge Manager

Hello Everyone. This month, I am going to be brief and touch upon the Visitor Services program at Sevilleta NWR. As most of you may know, the US Fish and Wildlife Service is experiencing changes due to funding issues. All refuges across the nation have been strategizing to prioritize work and manage work-loads with current staff. There are a number of visitor centers at refuges in the Southwest that will be closed as a result of these recent budgetary issues. What this means for Sevilleta NWR is that it is highly unlikely that we are going to be able fill our vacant Visitor Services position anytime soon. This position has been vacant for over a year now. During that time, Rex Myers, Susan Richards, and the Amigos de la Sevilleta members had been doing a lot of work to keep the Visitor Center open. We managed to keep the RV Volunteer program going for most of the time, thus, keep the Visitor Center open with RV volunteer support. As we learned together, managing the RV volunteer program with Amigos members and refuge staff that are not able to fully focus on visitor services needs is not realistic or manageable. Therefore, a huge thank you goes out

to the Amigos de la Sevilleta and specifically Susan Richards for pretty much running the Visitor Center and training RV volunteers during that timeframe allowing the Refuge to keep the Visitor Center open most of the time.

At this time, we do not know when/if we will be able to hire a Visitor Services person. Our current refuge staff focus is of major priority needs, such as the fourteen Right-of-Way issues that have arisen recently, the Bolson Tortoise, wetland management and the research/LTER programs. We hope to work with our cooperators such as the Amigos de la Sevilleta, University of New Mexico, and the LTER to provide some support in the future for visitor services needs. Refuge staff intends on looking for creative ways to engage the public and provide opportunities at Sevilleta NWR. If you have questions, please join the Amigos de la Sevilleta annual meeting in a few weeks in which I will be present to answer any additional questions. Thanks everyone for all that you do!



# **Rex Meyers and Susan Richards You Will Be Missed!**

Chuck Kooshian, Amigos Vice-President

It's with sadness that I must report that after many years of service as USFWS volunteers and Amigos de la Sevilleta board members, Rex Meyers and Susan Richards are stepping away from working at the refuge.

Susan and Rex moved their home to New Mexico in 2017 and soon thereafter began volunteering at Sevilleta NWR. They established a routine of heading out to the field every Wednesday morning to fix barbed wire fences, maintain trails, clean up drinkers, and much, much more. In 2022 I joined their weekly work detail and the three of us spent many enjoyable days traveling the length and breadth of the refuge, supporting refuge staff by doing whatever tasks were needed at the time.

The two were also members of the Amigos and served on the Board of Directors. Susan managed the Nature Store, while Rex became Secretary and later President of the Amigos. Whether it was helping to plan Sevilleta's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, manning tables at nature events around the state, or doing educational



demonstrations for kids, Rex and Susan were always at the forefront, enthusiastically sharing their time and energy.

When the refuge lost its full-time Visitor Services staffer (Jeannine Hunter) in August of 2023, Susan and Rex shifted into high gear. They led the FWS volunteers and the other Amigos in running the Visitor Center three days a week, and took on many of Jeannine's environmental education events, hikes and other public activities that the

refuge had come to be known for. At the end of the day they could often be found pitching in to clean the Visitor Center and keep the restrooms well-stocked with necessary supplies.

Through it all they reported for work every Wednesday as FWS volunteers. Rex and Susan were especially generous in sharing their knowledge of special places on the refuge, their experience with past projects and their insights at

potential trouble spots. For my own part, I know Wednesdays will not be the same without Rex and Susan, and I'm sure the Amigos will join me in wishing them all the best and thanking them for their tireless efforts in support of Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge.

Many thanks,  
Chuck Kooshian

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## Important Message from the Amigos Vice-President

Chuck Kooshian

Happy New Year to all Amigos!

I warmly invite you to attend our annual meeting on Saturday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at 2 PM in the Sevilleta Visitor Center. The new year will usher in some major changes for the refuge and for the Amigos de la Sevilleta, so we are going to use this meeting as an opportunity to re-imagine the role of the friends group at Sevilleta. We will ask what you, as members, think are the most important and enjoyable aspects of being an Amigo, and how our group can best advance the welfare of Sevilleta NWR.

Why this year? Well, here's the situation:

Refuge management has confirmed that, for the foreseeable future, the Visitor Services specialist vacancy will **remain unfilled**. Jeannine Hunter was the last person to fill this position, and since her departure in August 2023 there has been no staff

member to recruit seasonal (residential) volunteers or to lead public programs. The Amigos made a valiant effort to operate the Visitor Center with a diminishing number of seasonal volunteers during the past year, but the demand proved unsustainable. As a result, the Visitor Center will close when the last seasonal volunteer leaves at the end of April 2025.

On the Amigos side, while our membership continues to grow, several Board members, including our President, have decided to resign. With the Visitor Center closing, the Amigos Nature Store will no longer have a space to operate and will need to shut down as well. We need to re-build our board and re-think our functions.

Under these circumstances, the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Amigos is a very important one as we look to our membership to help chart a way forward. Refuge tours and other outdoor events

will still be possible, and are always helpful for keeping the refuge in the public eye. What other channels might we explore? We value your input and will devote most of the meeting to brainstorming and discussion.

If you want to contribute your time to the Board, we would welcome you. You don't have to travel for Board meetings, you can live anywhere and attend by Zoom.

An on-line survey and more information about the Annual Meeting will be sent out soon. Please do respond to the survey, especially if you are unable to attend the meeting. I hope many of you will come on January 18<sup>th</sup> and bring your enthusiasm and ideas to support New Mexico's largest national wildlife refuge.



SNWR Visitor Center



# The Prehistoric Pronghorn

Jennifer Keyser, Amigos Member

The pronghorn antelope (*Antilocapra americana*) is one of Sevilleta's many hoofed residents. They are mostly found in the flat, open grassland areas of the Refuge. Though not a "true" antelope, the pronghorn is often called one because it visually resembles antelope of the Old World. They are the sole survivor of over a dozen members of the *Antilocapridae* family that once inhabited North America. That family left a fossil record dating to the Miocene Epoch, about twenty million years ago.

During the Pliocene Epoch, approximately 2-5 million years ago, the pronghorn's ancestors shared their environment with American cheetahs

and saber-toothed cats. When humans arrived in North America about 13,000 years ago there were still five living pronghorn species. Some of those people hunted pronghorn species as a main food source. They also figured prominently in certain cultures' mythology, symbology, and oral history.

By the end of the Pleistocene Epoch, about 11,000 years ago the planet began the last Ice Age, and a series of mass extinctions caused several predators to disappear. The pronghorn may have developed its exceptional running ability to evade such now-extinct animals. They are by far the fastest land mammal in the Western Hemisphere, topping out at 60 miles per hour (mph). Today, this



Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge (Photo: USFWS)

speed may seem unnecessary as their fastest current predators, the cougar and jaguar, are about 10 mph slower over even short distances.

Bones of the modern species found in California's La Brea Tar Pits dating to some 10,000 years ago are one indicator of how long "today's" pronghorn has been around. Their current range extends from southern Saskatchewan and Alberta south



Watrous, NM (Photo: J. Keyser)

into more than a dozen U.S. states including New Mexico. They can also be found in some northern regions of Mexico. They are easily recognizable in the wild. I find their most distinctive feature to be their white rumps. (I have seen pronghorn in numerous locations throughout New Mexico; for example, see the photo above taken near the Fort Union National Monument.)

While the pronghorn's "family history" is a long one, their survival has been a question at times. At the turn of the 20th century they seemed headed for extinction. The entire West's population was thought to be about 20,000 with only about 1,700 in New Mexico. Overhunting

and impassable fences contributed to their decline. Due to conservation efforts, populations have recovered, and New Mexico's portion is currently estimated at 62,000.

A few more facts about pronghorn follow:

- Wild pronghorn exist only in North America.
- Males average three feet tall, sixty inches in length, and weigh 120 pounds. Females are about 10% smaller.
- They have large, protruding eyes and excellent vision, enabling them to spot predators up to four miles away.
- They have pointed and padded double hooves which cushion the shock of running at high speeds.
- They need little water to survive, and can live off the metabolic water within plants they eat.
- Their closest living relatives are the giraffe and okapi of Africa.

#### Sources:

- Email exchange with Samuel Vassallo, Wildlife Refuge Biologist, Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, December 16, 2024.
- [Pronghorn Brochure, National Park Service, Bryce Canyon National Park](#)
- ["Pronghorn." National Wildlife Federation Website](#)
- ["Pronghorn Find New Homes in New Mexico," Elizabeth Miller. \*New Mexico Magazine\*](#)
- ["Prehistoric Pronghorn: Ancient Antelope" Exhibit. Arizona Museum of Natural History](#)
- [Pronghorn article. Wikipedia](#)
- ["The Top 7 Fastest Cats in The World" by Rebecca Bales. AZ Animals Website.](#)



# A Quick Guide to Gender I.D. in Pronghorn Antelope

Sandy Barnett, Amigos Newsletter Editor



Adult male Pronghorn (Photo: A. D. Wilson)  
Inset (Photo: MONGO)



Adult Female Pronghorn (Photo: Y. S. Krishnappa)  
Inset (Photo: USASIMILAR IMAGES)

- 4-5 ft long nose to tail, stands 2.5-3.5 ft high at the shoulder
- Weighs 90 –140 lbs
- Dark lower cheek patch
- Horns 5-17 inches long; inward curved with a distinctive prong
- Same height and nearly the same length as a male
- Weighs 75–105 lbs
- No cheek patch
- Horns 1-6 inches long, sometimes barely visible; straight, very rarely pronged

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## Contacts

Amigos web site: <https://www.amigosdelasevilleta.org>

Amigos on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/amigossevilleta>

Refuge Web Site: <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/sevilleta>

## Editor's Note

Items for consideration in the Refuge Update are encouraged.

Please email your submission in Word format to [sandybarnett95@gmail.com](mailto:sandybarnett95@gmail.com)

Past editions of this Newsletter are available at the Amigos website:

<https://www.amigosdelasevilleta.org/contacts>