



REFUGE UPDATE

January 2022

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Calendar

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there still are no planned events. There will be a special notification sent to all if things change before the next Refuge Update is published.

Refuge Manager Notes

2021 was yet another challenging year; here we are with it behind us and great things ahead! Thank you for your continued support though a year of change and chaos! The staff continues to do good things - grade roads, manage the wetlands, issue permits, involve volunteers with refuge projects and maintain our facilities. Here is to a great 2022! Eventually we will have an announcement to make regarding Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge Manager!

Happy 2022, and thank you for your support!

Jeannine Kimble
Visitor Services Manager



Sevilleta (northern border). Photo Colin Barnett

Amigos Board News

Ann Adams, Board President

Amigos,

Now that we are looking at 2021 in the rearview mirror, most of us are hoping that 2022 will provide opportunity for all sorts of new beginnings, with vaccines and pills to conquer COVID; a milder variant than Delta; and hope for a final round of virus. Maybe this Spring will bring a reopening of Sevilleta's visitor center and the resumption of Amigos activities. While our parking lot/sidewalk events did bring the chance for Christmas shopping at the Nature Store's pop-up sales, and quite a bit of success, we can't wait to entertain everyone again inside the Store, in the visitor center, and out on the refuge trails. The latest rumors from the regional Fish & Wildlife Service folks indicate potential for an April reopening but we'll have to wait and see. In any event, Amigos are planning a celebration when the time comes with a social gathering and a speaker. Seems a great way to welcome Spring!

In the meantime, the trails remain open for hardy souls who want to do some winter hiking. It's quiet on the refuge during the winter as many of the smaller animals (prairie dogs, bats, etc.) are hibernating to preserve their energy stores given limited availability of food now. Elk, deer, and oryx are still busy grazing on dried grasses and whatever edible they can find. You just might see them if you are out on the trails. Most all the vegetation, which is now marked with new signs won't be easy to spot until warmth returns in Spring but their dried stalks and remaining seed heads are often still visible and do provide some forage for grazing animals. If you visit often you may be able to see the new growth appear as soon as March...just in time for the reawakening of the hungry hibernators!

This will be my last missive to you all as President of the Amigos. I have enjoyed the two terms I have served as your president and hope that I have left behind some interesting perspectives for your consideration and some motivating objectives for your pursuit. There are many things that Amigos can do in future to benefit Sevilleta as well as opportunities you can garner from time spent on the refuge. I hope that you all will continue to support the refuge and share with friends and family the beauty of the place by visiting often, volunteering, and donating as you can. I thank you for the support you have given me during my time on your Board.

It is normal in January for Amigos members to anticipate the Amigos' annual meeting. This year we will provide an abbreviated annual meeting covering only the 2021 Board Business report, accomplishments, and officer elections. As last year, the meeting will be virtual, occurring at the time of the regular Amigos Board meeting, January 19, 4:30 pm. The zoom number appears at the end of my note and at other locations throughout this newsletter.

All the best,

Ann

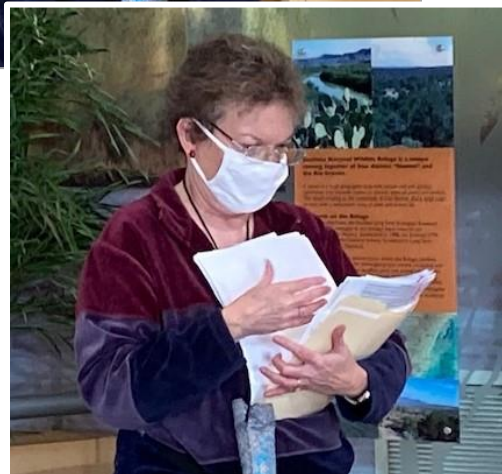
Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85344055359?pwd=NmdUZ0tUNDBzZi8vODhJMjBqRElrZz09>

November Volunteer

Submitted by Rex Myers

Penny Lommen

The books balance, money is well-spent, and reports are in to governmental agencies, all because of the efforts of Amigos' Treasurer, Penny. She and her husband Jim retired to Socorro in 2007 after her work as a librarian. School, public, medical and private – Penny has been a librarian in multiple career venues. In New Mexico she jumped into volunteer work first at Bosque del Apache and now as a board member of Amigos de la Sevilleta. In addition to duties as Treasurer, she helps with projects, and is a member of the team that operates the Nature Store. Asked about her favorite activity at Sevilleta, she does not hesitate – “Meeting and greeting folks at the Visitors Center – I love it.” Thanks, Penny.



Mammals in the Visitor's Center

Submitted by Penny Lommen

No, I'm not saying that the mammals at Sevilleta walk in through the front doors although we do have some very interesting "two-legged wildlife" in the Visitor's Center from time to time. I'm talking about the interpretive exhibits and displays that we have. A few years ago, the exhibits were changed and expanded to show more examples of the wildlife that can be found on the refuge.

Visitors are always amazed when I tell them that every form of wildlife that is on display can be seen on the refuge along with many others that we don't have an example of. The video loop of the drinker pictures is very popular with our visitors, both adults and kids! The photos of the oryx are among the favorites along with the bear sitting in one of the drinkers to cool off!

I make it a point to tell the story about the mountain lion that is on display. It is actually from New Mexico and was illegally shot by a hunter. The hunter took the body to a Cabella's in another state to get it stuffed. Much to the hunter's surprise, he was reported and fined for his actions. Fish & Wildlife decided to go ahead and have it stuffed and then return it to New Mexico to be used as a



Left: The returned taxidermied mountain lion (*Puma concolor*); Right: an adult male pronghorn sheep (*Antilocapra americana*) at the Visitor's Center.

display in its home state. Sevilleta was the lucky refuge that received this great gift.

Another display that is really popular with the kids is the one with the badger, prairie dog and pronghorn. What most of the adults don't realize is that below the display is a second version-a cut away of the inside of a prairie dog burrow! While most of us have seen prairie dogs above ground, how many have had a chance to see inside their home!

Hopefully the Visitor's Center will re-open in 2022. When it does, I invite everyone to come out

Gemsbok: Sevilleta's Unintended Connection to Southern Africa

Submitted by Sandy Barnett

Native to the arid and semi-arid savannah grass, shrub and woodland savannahs of the Kalahari, Karoo and adjacent regions of southern Africa, the gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*), can now also be found roaming parts of Texas up through south-central New Mexico, including Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge.



Gemsbok caught by a motion-activated camera at a drinker station at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. While they will drink water when available, gemsbok are well-adapted to life in the desert and can extract adequate moisture through their diet alone to meet most of their physiological needs.

The largest of the four species of oryx, the gemsbok stands about 3.9 ft at the shoulder, as tall as an average car. Males weigh 400–530 lbs, while females weigh 220–460 lbs. Both male and female gemsbok have impressive, ribbed horns that average just under a yard long, the male's horns being slightly shorter and thicker at the base than those on the female. The pale beige fur coat on a gemsbok has distinctive black-and-white markings on the lower flanks and legs as well as on the head that help to camouflage the animal in its desert habitat.

So how did these majestic animals end up in the Chihuahuan Desert? Meet Frank Hibben. While serving abroad in the navy during WWII, Hibben had the opportunity to hunt oryx in the Atlas Mountains of north Africa. Upon returning stateside, he resumed his career teaching archeology at the University of New Mexico, but also continued to pursue his love of big game-hunting. Hibben believed there was a "niche" in the Chihuahuan Desert that would support a large ungulate, such as the oryx, that could provide the thrill of exotic game-hunting to sportsman in his adopted state. In 1962 while serving as chairman of both the Albuquerque Zoological Board (1960–1970) and the New Mexico State Game and Fish Commission (1961–1971) Hibben helped finance, and participated in, trapping 18 gemsbok in South Africa to serve as breeding stock for animals to be released into the wild in New Mexico. The imported animals were held at the Albuquerque Zoo (today, the ABQ BioPark) following quarantine at an east coast port-of entry.

Between 1969 and 1977, New Mexico Fish & Game released into White Sands Missile Range 95 gemsboks captive-born to the imported group. It was expected that the introduced population

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would never grow beyond 500 to 600 (controlled by hunting under permit), and would not venture beyond the vast area of public land into which it was released. However, the animals thrived and proved to be more mobile than anticipated. The current wild population is estimated to be between 3,000 and 6,000 animals, with populations ranging from northern Socorro County, New Mexico, and extending southward into west Texas.



In their native African homeland, gemsbok are predominantly grazers, but occasionally supplement their diets with browse material, underground tubers, and wild melons (Gemsbok Cucumbers and Tsamma Melons) which have high water concentrations. In the American southwest, they feed on desert grasses, yucca, buffalo gourds, and mesquite bean pods. Photo: Max Murauer, courtesy of Unsplash.com

Gemsbok are social, occurring in unstable mixed or nursery herds of 3–30 individuals, or as solitary males. Both genders mature at 1.5–2 years of age, and are capable of year-round breeding, producing one to two young per calving. A calf is able to stand very quickly after birth and keep up with adults soon thereafter, adaptations that reduce their vulnerability to predation. Young are weaned at 3.5 months and become independent at 4.5 months. While these attributes are important in sustaining the wild population under the pressure of the gemsbok's natural predators in Africa (principally African lions but also cheetahs and jaguars), they have enabled the gemsbok population to steadily rise in New Mexico where such large predators do not exist. Except for calves, the oryx is too large to be easily preyed upon by cougars and by most other desert carnivores. The reintroduced Mexican Grey Wolf is too low in population numbers to be a

Gemsbok calves are able to stand and run shortly after birth, reducing their vulnerability to predation. They also have the protection of their mother who can use her formidable horns as weapons. Photo: Martin Perea, NM Dept of Game & Fish



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significant predator.

It is not known how many gemsbok are actually on Sevilleta land or what the impact of these large ungulates is on the native plants and wildlife. Visitors to the refuge will not likely see one, as gemsbok frequent the vast areas of the reserve that are generally not accessible to the public. Although the species is legally hunted in New Mexico, it currently is not hunted (nor culled) at Sevilleta.

Sources:

Perea, Martin. 2021. "Photographing oryx in New Mexico." NMDGF [New Mexico Wildlife](#)

Relton C, Selier J, Strauss WM. 2016. A conservation assessment of *Oryx gazella*. In Child MF, Roxburgh L, Do Linh San E, Raimondo D, Davies-Mostert HT, editors. *The Red List of Mammals of South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho*. South African National Biodiversity Institute and Endangered Wildlife Trust, South Africa.

Rowley, Robert Oct 22, 2001. "A graceful gazelle becomes a pest." [High Country News](#)

Wikipedia.com (articles on Oryx and Frank C. Hibben)

The next Amigos Board meeting is Wednesday, January 19, at 4:30 p.m. MT by Zoom
All Amigo members are welcome and are encouraged to attend.

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85344055359?pwd=NmdUZ0tUNDBzZi8vODhJMjBqRElrZz09>

Amigos 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>

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Visitor Services Manager

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Past editions of this Newsletter are available at the Amigos website

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

There are openings on the Amigos de la Sevilleta board of directors.