

THE OTTAWA NATURALIST

VOL. XXIII.

OTTAWA, JUNE, 1909

No. 3

THE PRONG-HORN ANTELOPE.

(*Antilocapra americana*, Ord.)

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Like most railway travellers, crossing our vast wastes of prairie in the west, I have found one of the most interesting occupations to be that of observing the mammals, birds, etc., which from time immemorial have peopled the lonely plain between Brandon and the foot-hills of the Rockies. It has been my lot to make the journey nearly a score of times, but it never proves wearisome if one keeps a sharp lookout for living creatures on these grassy wilds. On my last recent trip I saw once more the usual gophers, prairie hares, hawks, ducks, geese, and sea-gulls in numbers, the beautiful prairie wolf or coyote with bushy tail, either wandering deviously like a lost sheep-dog or taking a survey from a rising knoll, while the appearance of a badge shambling along rewarded my sight. These I had seen before, yet in spite of my keen watch for antelopes, I had crossed the prairie time after time without seeing those wonderfully interesting animals. On one occasion, however, when travelling from Prince Albert to Regina, in the company of His Grace Monsignor Pascal, and I was in the act of expressing my disappointment at always failing to see any antelope, His Lordship suddenly turned to the right as we stood on the rear platform of the car, exclaiming, "Why, there is a band of them," and, lo, five or six of these lovely creatures proudly pranced along not more than 100 yards from the train. With heads aloft and stepping high on their nimble feet, they recalled the action of trained ponies in a circus. They were going northward as our train sped south, so that my near view was brief, but the beautiful animals were so near and apparently so fearless that I had ample time to notice their form, colour, and general appearance. Their active graceful actions delighted me. Few experiences in the wilds, and

I have had many, have given me greater pleasure, and I felt rewarded for my long disappointment in failing to see before that remarkable mammal the prong-horn antelope of Canada.

Several years have since elapsed and I continued to keep a keen outlook on the occasion of my many recent journeys, but I was not privileged to see the antelope again until a few weeks ago. In the first week of May, about 70 miles west of Swift Current, a western man in the Pullman car was calling my attention to a large herd of cattle scattered over some low hills, 400 or 500 yards from the railway track, when he excitedly exclaimed, "There's a small band of antelope beside them." A group of four or five prong-horn antelope were grazing about one hundred yards from the cattle. They fed nervously and every few seconds one or other of them would raise his head and look round, keeping watch. They were plainly to be seen, though less favourably than the group which I had observed a few years before. My friend had the keen acute vision of the western man, familiar with the moving objects of the plains, and he had made no mistake. Indeed, one can make no mistake about this graceful prairie animal as it haughtily tosses its head and looks round, the dark perpendicular horns resembling a high crown on its forehead and adding to its proud bearing. The slender neck held erect, the sharp nose, high forehead, small ears not unlike those of a pony, and the forked curved horns, impart to it a peculiar aspect, very characteristic, and not readily forgotten. There is a resemblance to the goat, the delicate trim feet and the erect horns being so goat-like, but the expression of the eyes and the light graceful bearing recall the deer tribe. Our prong-horn antelope is indeed neither a deer nor true antelope nor goat, but is intermediate in position, and combines their zoological features. Like the giraffe, which is also a unique Ruminant, the antelope of the Canadian prairie occupies a position by itself amongst mammals. The Ruminantia form the highest group of the even-toed Ungulates or hoofed animals. This group includes the Bovidæ or hollow-horned cattle, oxen, sheep, goats, and true antelopes; the Cervidæ or deer, the Ruminants with solid horns; the Camelidæ or Camels; and two peculiar families, the Giraffidæ or Giraffes, and the Antilocapridæ or Prong-horn Antelopes. These two last families are remarkable as containing each only one species, unless there be two species of Giraffes. The Prong-horn is therefore a unique species in a unique family, and cannot be ranked with any other living ruminant. In height our antelope is about three feet at the shoulder and about forty-eight inches from snout to tail, while its weight averages 70 pounds, being therefore much smaller than the Virginia deer (*Cariacus virginianus*),

which is usually four feet high and about five feet in length and averages 100 to 175 pounds in weight. The general ground-colour is almost white with a kind of saddle or saddletail patch on the back and the side of the body, of a light yellowish brown; the neck is brown with two bands or collars of white across the throat, there is a dark patch on each cheek, the nose is dark and the chin and sides of the mouth pale ochre. The tail is almost black, and a large patch of white surrounds the tail region. The white hairs forming this large rounded patch are said to be erectile, and in extreme fear or anger they rise and give a very peculiar appearance to the prong-horn. This complex arrangement of white, yellow, and dark brown would be grotesque were it not for the grace and delicacy of the form and action of the wearer of these colours.

The sharp goat-like muzzle, the high precipitous forehead, the bright piercing grey eyes near the summit of the brow and close below the root of the horns, the slender erect neck, perpendicular short ears and the deer-like body make a peculiar combination. The creature is a goat with its trim delicate legs, not an antelope; its hair is coarse, tubular and fragile just as is the hair of a deer. But it has no tear-canal near each eye with the double lachrymal apertures of the deer, and the posterior accessory hoof or "deer claw" is absent. There is a mane, not unlike that of the moose, consisting of firm, erect red hairs projecting four or five inches from the back of the neck. But the most striking feature is the pair of horns standing upright on the summit of the brow, 10 or 12 inches high and of a black or dark brown colour, thicker at the base and for a third of the total length, at which point the prong or sharp knob projects forward, while the sharp upper part curves backward like a hook. The short anterior fork on each horn imparts a peculiar jaunty aspect to the head, and justifies the name "prong-horn." But still more remarkable is the fact that this hollow horn is deciduous or shed annually. All the deer tribe have solid antlers, which are shed each season, but in the oxen, antelopes, goats, sheep, etc., the horns which are of the nature of a sheath covering a projecting bony core of the frontal bone, are not shed but permanent through life. Alone amongst cavicorn or hollow-horned ruminants, the prong-horn sheds these ornaments which are possessed by both sexes. The hollow horn becomes loose in mid-winter after the "battles of the fall," and in January or earlier they drop off. The frontal process or core, if examined after the old horn has dropped, is found to show fine white projecting hairs developed in a soft epidermal layer. At the tip these hairs are black and dense and they coalesce to form the new horn. A writer in *Forest and Stream* (New York) stated that:—

"Towards autumn the periosteum becomes thicker, and takes on the character of skin, and from this skin grows the fine hair, which, as stated, finally pushes the sheath of the old horn away from its supporting bone, and at the extremity of the skin becomes new hard horn. After the sheath has been shed, the hair continues to grow, and as it grows it becomes matted together below the tip, dark and hard, and gradually working down toward the head, changes from a covering of single hairs, which are white in color, to a mass of black agglutinated fibres, precisely like the sheath which the animal carried the year before. This process gradually extends further and further down the horn, until at the base it is sometimes difficult to be certain just where the sheath ends and the skin of the head begins.

"During September and during the first half of October, antelope use their horns to some extent in fighting, and often come together with considerable force and energy, and push head to head for a long time. It is not probable, however, that such battles are ever severe enough to loosen the horns, or that they have anything to do with the annual loss of the sheath, which has been described."

It is an interesting fact that the female prong-horn possesses these ornaments, but they are smaller, rarely more than 3 or 4 inches long, if hunters are to be trusted. Packard gives an interesting figure, after Hays, of a young prong-horn with a pair of sharp conical horns, not pronged, but covered with hair like the rest of the head. Its method of feeding is unlike that of the deer for it crops grass but never nibbles leaves or shrubs. It is nomadic and so far as I could learn has no special local haunts.

Formerly large bands numbering thousands roamed over the prairie, but it is now scarce, indeed in some of the western states it is quite exterminated, so that where fifteen years ago in a county, in Colorado, fifty thousand of these beautiful creatures were known to exist, to-day there are not fifty. They never frequent wooded or sheltered districts, but constantly roam over the open plains where they are exposed to the hunter's rapacity. East of the Rockies, in Canada, small bands may be found, but excepting in California where a few have occasionally been noticed, the prong-horn is absent from the coast country west of the mountains. Only in severe storms do they forsake the open country, and seek shelter on the slopes of coulees, and they have been known to migrate hundreds of miles in winter to find slopes where the snow was light and feed obtainable. They cannot subsist on the rich eastern grasses, or live confined in sheltered reserves, and in captivity very little grass must be given if the captives are to be kept in health.

Even on the prairie they are subject to mysterious maladies, due no doubt to improper food, and they have been noticed to be plentiful one year and very scarce the next from this cause. The year 1873 (or 1874) was said to be a scarce year for prong-horns. Owing to their rapid nimble gait they can cover long distances, especially when disturbed. "In fleetness", says Caton, "they exceed all other quadrupeds of our continent." When feeding out in the open, usually standing prominently on some rounded grassy area, they are visible from a long distance; but on the lower flats, and near coulees, they are less easily detected as their peculiar patched coloration effectually masks them. When watched one sees them feeding for a few moments and then moving on, one or two of the herd constantly raising the head and keeping a lookout. The wolves are their main enemies, apart from the insatiable cruelty of man, and in June when the young are born, the prong-horns are especially on the alert. Theodore Roosevelt tells of the spectacle described by a western rancher who saw a prong-horn attacked by two eagles. It was a brave contest, the animal rearing on his hind legs and striking like a goat with his horns and hoofs. Curiosity is so strong in these animals that it makes them an easy prey. When suddenly startled they make several leaps, high from the ground; then stop and stare wildly. They are easily shot then. Often a band will run a few hundred yards, wheel about and stare vacantly, and return almost to their starting point. This "circling" habit enables the unscrupulous hunter to slaughter a whole herd, indeed a hunter has been known to shoot a wagon load of them before the remnant of the herd fled away. When once started in full cry they veritably fly, apparently scarcely touching the ground; but they are soon exhausted and a horse has no difficulty in keeping up with them if the chase is prolonged. A bright cloth waved on a stick will cause a herd to approach a partly hidden hunter. The older larger animals are the most inquisitive, and the hunter can make sure of the finest prong-horns. Curious, nervous, swift in flight, they have the reputation of being plucky when cornered and make a gallant and dangerous fight. When leisurely trotting along at their leisure, as I saw them from the end of a Pullman car, nothing could be more easy, elegant, and confident. I have only once tasted prong-horn or antelope steak, and I found it juicy, fine-grained and of exceedingly good flavour.

Why is it that this lovely and scientifically interesting native animal is allowed to be exterminated? Its numbers on our prairie are few compared with the large bands of twenty years ago. Unlike the buffalo, as settlement proceeds, it need not become extinct if protection is afforded and our prairie

settlers educated to care for, and not destroy, this almost unique creature. The vast herds of buffalo had to go, the huge savage bovine defied the settler; but this swift and timid animal would keep out on the lonely waste far from danger, and would survive, were anything done to prevent merciless slaughter.

Antilocapra americana, Ord., is dissociated in every way from the typical antelopes of the old world and is neither a deer, a goat, a sheep, nor an ox. One American author says, "It is like an island in a vast sea, unrelated," though it would be more true to say that it is a connecting link related to many diverse branches of the Ruminantia. Its horns are hollow like the Bovidæ, but deciduous like the Cervidæ; yet it has the gall-bladder which no deer possesses. Scent glands which antelopes and deer exhibit, the prong-horn lacks, nor has it the tear sinus, nor the posterior hoof or "deer claw." Mr. Roosevelt characterizes it as "the extraordinary prong-buck, the only hollow-horned ruminant which sheds its horns annually"—and it is the sole species in the family Antilocapridæ, a family all by itself. It combines features of the deer, antelope, goat and sheep, and can be compared only to the giraffe in this respect as occupying an isolated zoological position amongst the Ungulates.

In confinement it makes a great pet, but rarely lives long and, until June, 1903, none had been known to have been born in captivity. It is difficult, if not impossible, to domesticate completely and, since it was first scientifically described in 1855, and its peculiar features studied in a captive specimen in the Zoological Gardens, London, its numbers have continued to decrease so that it bids fair to soon become one of the rarest of our interesting larger native mammals.

WINTER BIRDS AT POINT PELEE.

BY W. E. SAUNDERS, LONDON, ONT.

The most southerly piece of land in Canada is the south end of Point Pelee, the latitude being about 41' 55°, while London is almost exactly 43' and Ottawa about 45' 25°. It will readily be seen that there is sufficient variance between these places to make a radical difference in the winter bird population and it was, therefore, with much interest that Mr. J. S. Wallace and I undertook this year a couple of journeys to determine what the winter population of the Point actually was.

In the midst of a mild season it happened that the two closing days of January and the 1st of February produced the



Prince, Edward Ernest. 1909. "The Prong-horn Antelope (*Antilocapra americana*, Ord.)." *The Ottawa naturalist* 23(3), 41–46.

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