



Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project

September 29 – October 26, 2016

BRIEFING

The following is a summary of bighorn sheep reintroduction activities on the Coronado National Forest from September 29 through October 26, 2016.

SURVEY RESULTS

The Department conducted aerial surveys for bighorn sheep in the Catalinas on September 28 and 29. A total of 37 sheep were observed during the survey flights, including 11 rams, 22 ewes, 4 yearlings, and no lambs. The metric the Department uses for measuring lamb recruitment is the number of lambs per 100 ewes. Ground surveys were conducted concurrently with the flights, and within one survey block, a ground observer detected 3 lambs and 12 ewes, with a total of 20 bighorn sheep observed. Those observations equate to 25 lambs per 100 ewes, which is lower than the unusually high recruitment found in this population in 2015 (44 lambs per 100 ewes). However, this number is within the 20-30 lambs per 100 ewes ratio that is typical of desert bighorn populations statewide.

Observations of 19 of 34 collared sheep during the survey resulted in a 56% observation rate, which is similar to the 54% observation rate of collared sheep in 2015. Data collected during the survey flights will help the Department develop a model to predict population size that is appropriate for the Santa Catalina Mountains and other similar habitat types.

FOURTH TRANSLOCATION

The Department anticipated conducting 3 initial releases of 30 animals each into the Catalinas over 3 years in an effort to reestablish a self-sustaining population of bighorn sheep. A release was accomplished in each of the last 3 years. Based on data collected during surveys at the end of September, a mark-recapture model was used to estimate abundance of bighorn sheep in the Catalinas. Using this model, the population was estimated to be 66 animals. The Department and the project's advisory committee believe that this population of bighorn sheep will have the best chance to thrive with an additional augmentation. Therefore, a fourth translocation of up to 20 animals is planned for this November.

RESEARCH NOTES

During the month of October, Research Branch biologists observed 30 bighorn sheep in 7 groups. Sheep observed included 15 ewes, 10 rams, 1 yearling ewe, and 4 lambs. Biologists are still seeing mixed groups, although rams are no longer showing any rutting behavior.



*A group of two rams and a ewe
observed in October.*

Photo by Andrew Jones/AZGFD



*A ram observed in October with an
injured nose, likely from the rut.*

Photo by Andrew Jones/AZGFD

MORTALITIES

On October 22, the GPS collar for Ram #39538 sent a mortality alert indicating the animal had died on the night of October 21. Volunteers monitoring by VHF could not locate this ram on October 22. On October 23, the carcass of Ram #39538 was found, and the death was attributed to mountain lion predation. On October 24, the adult male lion responsible for this kill was removed.

In February and March of this year, this ram embarked on a month-long trek through the Rincon Mountains and south towards I-10, spending time at Colossal Cave Mountain Park, and venturing even farther south to the train tracks north of Marsh Station Road before returning to the Santa Catalina Mountains. Ram #39538 was captured in the Imperial Hills in 2015.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of October 26, 2016, 33 collared sheep are known to be alive.

LINKS

For project background and previously-reported information on project events, including photos and videos, as well as meeting notes and minutes please visit www.azgfd.gov and click on “Wildlife”, then “Catalina Bighorn Sheep” under the heading “Additional Wildlife Information”.

Additional project information can be obtained by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CatalinaBighorns, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society webpage at www.adbss.org, or by visiting the Catalina Bighorn Advisory Committee webpage at www.catalinabighornrestoration.org. This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

The next written briefing will be provided on November 25, 2016.

CONTACT

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