

Mountain Goats

in Alaska



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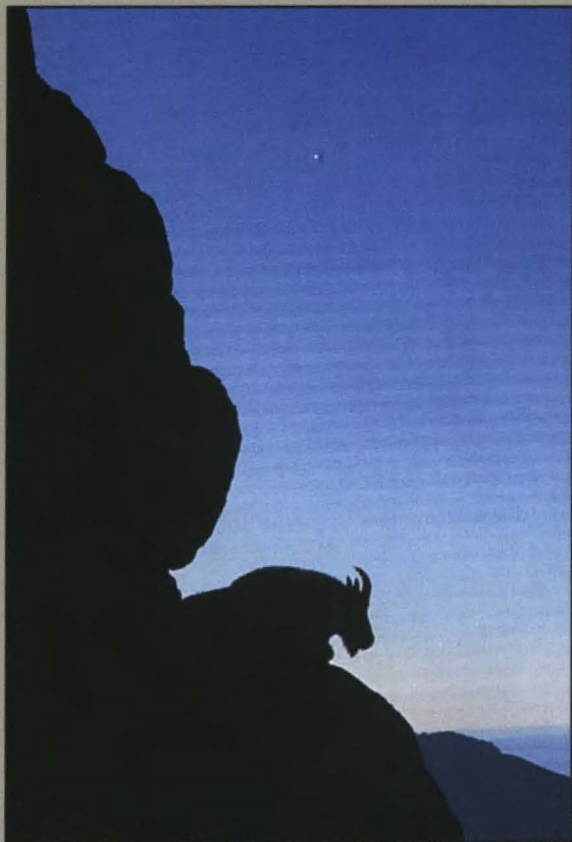
Description



 *Mountain Goat
Habitat*

Mountain goats are one of two species of all-white, hoofed, large mammals found in Alaska. They are often confused with young, female Dall sheep but are easily distinguished by their longer hair, deeper chest, black horns and generally blocky shape. They have a crest of long hair along their spine, on the rump, and over the shoulders and neck. Long hairs and heavy muscles on their legs give them the appearance of wearing pantaloons. Mountain goats have long hair that hangs down from their chin and lower jaw like a beard. Their pelage is much longer in winter than in summer. Both sexes have a crescent-shaped gland behind each horn that increases in size during rutting season. Adult males are considerably larger than females, up to 300 pounds or more. Females generally weigh about 160 pounds and have more slender horns than males.

Habitat



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Mountain goats inhabit the steep and broken mountain ranges of northwestern North America. They can be found from near sea level to over 10,000 feet. In Alaska, they occur from the southeastern Panhandle to Cook Inlet.

Kids are usually born in steep terrain and within a few hours must navigate rocky slopes, gently prodded by their mothers. These slopes provide protection from predators, especially for vulnerable newborns. By about six weeks of age, kids can be observed foraging at their mothers' sides.

Human Use



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Interest in goat hunting has increased in recent years. The average mountain goat provides about 70 pounds of meat. Historically Natives in Southeast harvested goats for food as well as for their hides, which they made into blankets.



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Life History

Mountain goats mate in November and December. Male goats (billies) may wander considerable distance in search of receptive females (nannies). Usually a single kid is born in late May or early June. They weigh about 7 pounds and stand about a foot high at the shoulders. Kids can keep up with adults when only hours old. Soon after giving birth, nannies join other females with newborn kids to form nursery bands. Kids usually remain with their mothers until the next breeding season. Most mountain goats live about 9 years, although they have been known to live 17 years.

Mountain goats spend the summer in high alpine meadows where they graze on grasses, forbs and low-growing shrubs. As winter advances, most descend to treeline or below or onto south-facing cliffs, where they browse on hemlock, ferns, bunch grasses and twigs. Some remain on wind-swept ridges where they feed on mosses and lichens.

Mountain goats are excellent climbers. Their hooves have a hard outer shell enclosing a soft inner pad which is well suited for climbing over rocks and ice.

During the mating season, the pelage (hair) of males and occasionally females becomes soiled when they paw "rutting pits." Male goats assume a sitting position similar to that of a dog and with their powerful front legs repeatedly throw soil and often snow at their bellies, flanks and hind legs.

Research

To monitor the health of Alaska's goat populations, state biologists annually survey goats in established count areas. Biologists have also studied mountain goat feeding habits, habitat use and movement patterns in Alaska. Results indicate that forested habitats adjacent to alpine ridges serve as critical winter range for goats during periods of heavy snow accumulations, and steep rugged slopes provide important escape terrain from predators.

The remote, steep and often treacherous terrain inhabited by Alaska's mountain goats makes access difficult and expensive for hunters and wildlife viewers. Harvest pressure is thus slight in most parts of the state. Populations tend to fluctuate most noticeably in response to winter weather conditions.

Conservation

Historically, goats inhabited only mainland habitats in southeastern and southcentral Alaska. However as a result of transplants during the past fifty years, populations now also reside on Kodiak, Baranof and Revillagigedo Islands.

Goat hunting in Alaska is strictly controlled using a permit system. Less than 5 percent of the state's goats are harvested each year. Biologists encourage hunters to target billies rather than nannies to ensure that populations remain healthy. Information that helps hunters distinguish between the sexes is available from Fish and Game.

Because goats generally winter in forested areas, one challenge wildlife managers face is the protection of wooded coastal areas adjacent to rugged alpine terrain.

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Mountain goats are renowned for their ability to climb and jump through rugged terrain. They have been observed gaining 1500 feet in elevation within 20 minutes.

Dollars for Wildlife

Each year, hunters pay a 10 to 11% federal excise tax on the purchase of firearms, ammunition and archery equipment. These funds are distributed to the states for wildlife conservation programs. Since this system was created in 1937, Alaska has received more than \$108 million in revenue from the tax on hunting equipment. This critical source of funding, called the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program, provides roughly half of the state's wildlife management budget, including about \$108,000 a year for goat research and management. In addition, all proceeds from the sale of hunting and trapping license support research and management programs. License and tag sales generate more than \$5 million annually.

This brochure was produced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation.



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