Mountain Goats

Scientific Name Oreamnos americanus

Home Perched on steep cliffs high in the snowy mountains of North America

Description Thick, snow-white, fluffy long coat of hair, black horns 15 – 25 cm long

Diet Grasses, lichens and other forage sustain them in the winter. In the summer they eat grasses and wildflowers. Mineral salts are also needed.

Behaviour

Climbing climbs/jumps easily in rugged terrain

Bedding may excavate shallow depressions for bedding

Food browse, graze

Groups congregate at salt licks; large groups may form in winter in protected areas; in summer groups disperse into small bands

Movement may cover several 100 meters daily; down slope movement occurs in autumn

Personality males & females seem to indifferent toward each other except when breeding; animals sometimes clash over food; do not butt heads

Reproduction/life span

Life span male 14 yrs. record in wild; female 18 yrs

Mating Nov-early Jan

Gestation 147–178 days

Birth late May – early June; single births most common; twins not uncommon; triplets very rare; young able to follow mother in 1 week

Maturity both sexes approximately 30 months

Lifestyle

Mountain Goats are often called the kings of the hill and this seems to be very true, as this species is perfectly adapted to living on very steep slopes. Mountain Goats have a thick white to yellowish coat that protects them from cold and allows them to live in regions where about nine months of the year are winter. In winter, their coat becomes even thicker and they feel quite comfortable on the slopes.

Steep, rocky cliffs found in alpine and sub-alpine areas are the main habitat of this species. The range is great; it includes Alaska to northern Colorado and regions from the Pacific coast to the Rocky Mountains. This species lives in high elevations and observes the world from the bird's eye-view. These areas are usually covered with snow, yet this does not prevent the Mountain Goat from wandering freely in most cold climes. Its thick whitish coat is not only a good insulator, but also a hiding mechanism that allows it to appear unnoticeable to predators.

Each spring, Mountain Goats shed their coat and many cliffs become sown with the hair. Adult bullies start to change their coat earlier than compared to pregnant females. By July, most Mountain Goats completely shed their coat and grow a new one in preparation for winter. The outer hairs are coarse and are about 8 inches in length. The undercoat is dense and is about 2 inches in length.

Unlike other animals that have to bound when travelling in deep snow, the Mountain Goat tends to plough through it. Since balance is very important for these hill-living animals, nature supplied them with rubber-like pads on their hooves. These pads provide for efficient traction that is absolutely indispensable for animals such as Mountain Goats that constantly live about the cliffs.

Fun Facts

A threat is deep snow, which will bury their food. In the winter, they will climb to ground too steep or windswept to hold snow.

No other large North American animal can match the mountain goat in climbing ability; they have an extremely good sense of balance.

On the bottom of their toes are rough traction pads that are skid-resistant.

A female is called a nanny, a male is a billy, and young are known as kids.