

Chamois

Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Artiodactyla
Family:	Bovidae
Genus:	Rupicapra
Species:	R. rupicapra
Binomial name	Rupicapra rupicapra (Linnaeus, 1758)

The chamois, *Rupicapra rupicapra*, is a goat-antelope species native to mountains in Europe, including the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, the European Alps, the Gran Sasso region of the central Italian Apennines, the Tatra Mountains, the Balkans, parts of Turkey, and the Caucasus. The chamois has also been introduced to the South Island of New Zealand. Chamois are strictly protected animals under the European Habitats Directive.

There are two species of chamois in the genus *Rupicapra*: *R. rupicapra* (the type species) is replaced in the Pyrenees by the Pyrenean chamois, *R. pyrenaica*. The chamois are in the goat-antelope subfamily (Caprinae) of the family Bovidae, along with sheep and goats.

The usual pronunciation in English is /'ʃæmwɑ/ ("shamwa"), but when referring to its leather (and in New Zealand often for the animal itself) it is pronounced /'ʃæmi/ ("shammy"), and sometimes spelt "chamy". As with many quarry species, the plural is the same as the singular.

Names

The English name is from the French chamois. This is derived from Latin *camox*, borrowed from Gaulish, itself perhaps a borrowing from Iberian or Aquitanian akin to modern Basque *ahuntz* "goat".

The Dutch name for the chamois is *gems*, and the male is called a *gemsbok*. In Afrikaans, the name *gemsbok* came to refer to a species of Sub-Saharan antelope of the genus *Oryx* and this meaning has been adopted in English.

Subspecies

- *Rupicapra rupicapra* (chamois):
- *R. r. tatica* (Tatra chamois): Slovakia (High Tatras, Western Tatras, Belianske Tatras, and Low Tatras) and Poland (High Tatras, Western Tatras)

Ente di Gestione delle Aree Protette della Valle Sesia

- *R. r. balcanica* (Balkan chamois): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, northern Greece (The Pindus Mountains), Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Slovenia
- *R. r. carpatica* (Carpathian chamois): Romania
- *R. r. cartusiana* (Chartreuse chamois): France
- *R. r. rupicapra* (Alpine chamois): Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Slovakia (Veľká Fatra, Slovak Paradise)
- *R. r. asiatica* (Anatolian chamois or Turkish chamois): Turkey
- *R. r. caucasica* (Caucasian chamois): Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian Federation
- *R. r. ornata* (also *Rupicapra pyrenaica ornata*) (Abruzzo chamois): Italy

Biology and behaviour

Chamois live at moderately high altitudes and are adapted to living in steep, rugged, rocky terrain. A fully grown chamois reaches a height of about 75 centimetres (30 in) and weighs about 50 kilograms (110 lb). Both males and females have short, straightish horns which are hooked backwards near the tip. In summer, the fur has a rich brown colour which turns to a light grey in winter. Distinct characteristics are a white face with pronounced black stripes below the eyes, a white rump and a black stripe along the back. Chamois can reach an age of 20 years.

Female chamois and their young live in herds; adult males tend to live solitarily for most of the year. During the rut (late November/early December in Europe, May in New Zealand), males engage in fierce battles for the attention of unmated females. An impregnated female undergoes a gestation period of 20 weeks, after which a single kid is born. The kid is fully grown by three years of age.

Distribution and habitat

New Zealand

Alpine chamois arrived in New Zealand in 1907 as a gift from the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph I. The first surviving releases were made in the Aoraki/Mount Cook region and these animals gradually spread over much of the South Island.

In New Zealand, hunting of chamois is unrestricted and even encouraged by the Department of Conservation to limit the animal's impact on New Zealand's native alpine flora.

New Zealand chamois tend to weigh about 20% less than European individuals of the same age, suggesting that food supplies may be limited
unting and wildlife management

As their meat is considered tasty, chamois are popular game animals. Chamois have two traits that are exploited by hunters. The first is that they are most active in the morning and evening when they feed. The second trait is that chamois tend to look for danger from below. This means that a hunter stalking

Ente di Gestione delle Aree Protette della Valle Sesia

chamois from above is less likely to be observed and more likely to be successful.

The tuft of hair from the back of the neck, the gamsbart (chamois "beard"), is traditionally worn as a decoration on hats throughout the alpine countries. Chamois leather is very smooth and absorbent and is favored in cleaning and polishing because it produces no streaking.

