

Alpine Ibex

Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Artiodactyla
Family:	Bovidae
Genus:	Capra
Species:	C. ibex
Binomial name	Capra ibex Linnaeus, 1758

The Alpine Ibex (*Capra ibex*) is a species of wild goat that lives in the mountains of the European Alps. The Spanish Ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*) and the Middle Eastern Nubian Ibex (*Capra nubiana*) are very close relatives of the Alpine Ibex.

Names

Its names in various European languages are French bouquetin, Italian stambecco, Slovenian kozorog, German Steinbock, and Dutch steenbok. Confusingly the Dutch word has entered the English language (via Afrikaans) not for this animal, but as the name for an unrelated species of African antelope, the steenbok (*Raphicerus campestris*).

Habitat

Being an excellent climber, its habitat is the rocky region along the snowline above alpine forests of the European Alps. They tend to occupy steep, rough terrain at elevations of 6,500–15,000 feet (2,000–4,600 m).

Appearance

Male specimens commonly grow to a height of about 1 metre (3 ft 3 in) and reach a weight of about 100 kilograms (220 lb). Females are usually only half the size of males. Apart from size, males can also be distinguished by their prominent beard. Older males will tend to grow beards under their chin. [clarification needed] Both male and female ibexes have large, backwards-curving horns although those of the male are substantially larger and can grow to an impressive length of up to 1 metre (3 ft 3 in). These horns are used to defend themselves from predators such as wolves, lynxes, bears and foxes. Small kids may also be susceptible to attacks from large predatory birds such as eagles. The Ibex has a brownish grey colouring in the summer which changes during the winter months to a richer, darker brown. It is related to the Nubian and Siberian ibexes.

Foraging behaviour

Ibexes are strictly herbivorous and survive on a diet of grass, moss, flowers, leaves and twigs. If leaves and shoots are out of reach, Ibexes often stand on their rear legs to reach this food. They eat during late afternoon and evening hours, descending at this time from the high steep cliffs and into the lower alpine meadows below. The rest of the day is spent in the higher altitude of the cliffs and hills. This pattern of remaining at higher altitudes during the bright daylight hours helps protect them from predators who do not inhabit such high terrain. In the winter, Ibexes also tend to live at lower altitudes since food is more scarce. The need to drink every few days in the summer causes the Ibexes to seek permanent residence within proximity to a dependable water source during this season. If predators are after them, Ibexes will hide in the rocks of the steep cliffs.

Breeding habits

Male ibexes often group together in bachelor herds during summer; in late autumn, during rut, males typically go their own ways and seek out a female herd of their own. During breeding season, fight rituals occur between males in order to determine who is entitled to breed with the available females. Despite the large, heavy horns of the males playing a part in this ritual, it is rare that they are physically harmed in the process. After conception, and gestation period of 6 months, a single kid (twins rarely occur) is born around May.

History

The ibex has for a long time been regarded as a mystical animal; almost all of its body parts and its excrement were sought after as cures for various illnesses and as ingredients for magical potions. As a result of very extensive hunting, the ibex was almost extinct as early as the beginning of the 19th century.

