

Mountain Goat (*Oreamnos americanus*)



Key to Identifying:

Thick and long white pelage, massive forequarters, and relatively short thin sharply pointed horns.

Biology

Adult males (billies) weigh on average 70 to 120 kg and adult females (nannies) 55 to 75 kg. They are between 1.2 and 1.5 meters length on average. Growth rings on the horn (30 cm for adults) indicate age (annuali). The goat's cloven hooves have rough-textured traction pads that projects slightly past the rim of the hooves and make them highly specialized for rocky, slippery terrain.

Mountain goats have the thickest and longest pelage of any North American ungulates (apart from the Musk Oxen). Its winter coat consists of coarse hollow guard hair up to 20 cm long and very fine, interwoven underfur that is 5 to 8 cm long. This enable goats to withstand the most severe wind chill. Males and females have different physiological characteristics.

Billies:

- Horns are thicker throughout length, have a uniform gradual curvature, larger bases and they are closer together.
- The body is stocky and has a pronounced hump and pantaloons. Beards start above mouth line and have a roman bulge to nose.

Nannies:

- Horns are thinner than the males' and the curve get sharper near the tip. Bases are small and the distance between them is wide.
- Nannies' bodies are smaller than billies' and they are mostly accompanied by kids in large groups.

Behavior

Mountain Goat can be found on steep slopes and rocky cliffs in alpine or subalpine areas. In British Columbia, Goats are present in most mountainous ranges except for those on Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlottes and other coastal islands. According to recent estimation, they are 50.000 in B.C., for a total between 75.000 and 100.000 in North America.

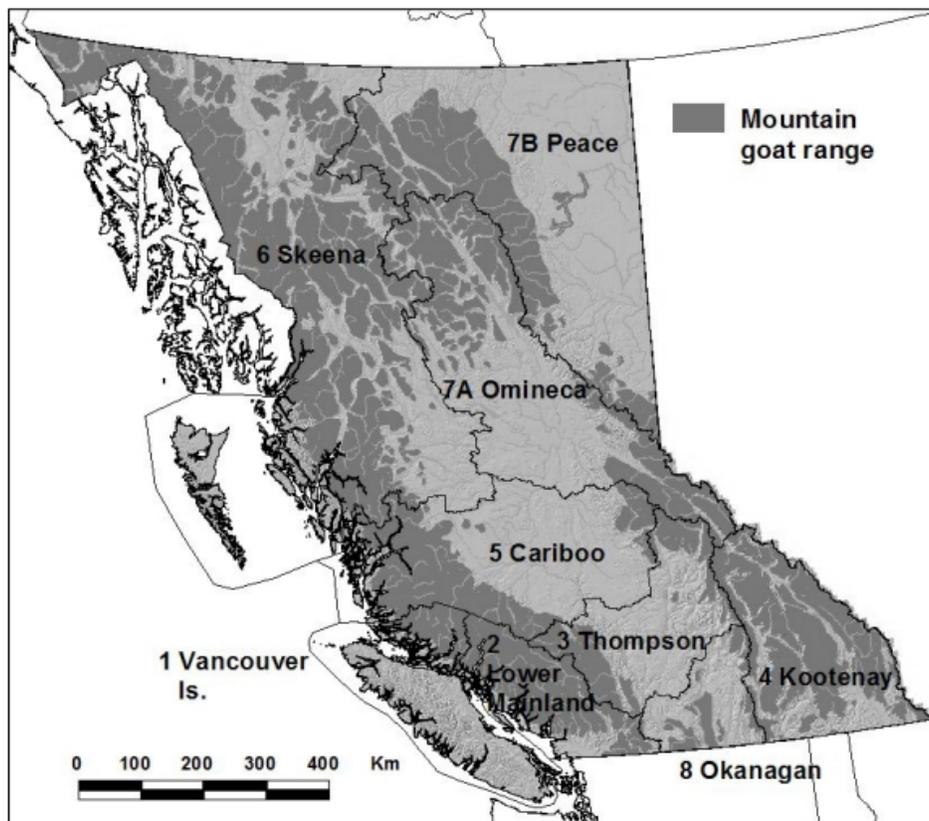


Figure: Distribution of mountain goats in British Columbia. Based on a map provided in Shackleton (1999), and updated from B.C. Ministry of Environment biologists in 2008–2009. B.C. Wildlife Management regions are illustrated by number and name.

Lone adults and those in groups of two or three with no accompanying kids or yearlings are usually billies. If the social group contains kids, the adults are almost certainly nannies, unless it's the mating season.

Most females breed for the first time when they are two years old. Males mate later because dominant billies do most successful breeding. Mating season occurs late November and early December. After six months of gestation, nannies give birth to a 3kg kid from late May till early June. 40 to 60% of kids die in their first winter, likely from starvation.

Predators, like cougar and wolves occasionally ambush, but because of their alertness, preference for steep terrain and ability to use their horns, goats are less susceptible to predation than most big game animals. The only constant threat is the Golden Eagle.

Food Diet & Seasonal Range

In spring, goats usually remain at low elevation in order to take advantage of the earliest flush of green vegetation. When summer starts, they follow the development of new growth upward, taking advantage of its most nutritious early stages. In summer and early fall, most goats graze at and above the timberline where they favour lush alpine swales and boulder meadows beside steep cliffs. Most winter ranges are steep sites that shed snow and have a warm south-to-west exposure. Goats survive in eating a wide variety of plants, including lichens, ferns, grasses, herbs, shrubs and deciduous or coniferous trees. Their diet varies considerably from place to place; in dry regions they eat mostly grasses and in wet areas woody browse. Mountain goats are also strongly attracted to mineral licks and can travel several kilometers to reach them, apparently to satisfy their craving for sodium and other minerals.

Management Arguments

The species is not considered at risk, because goats are widespread, numerous and stable in most

areas of the province. However, activities such as helicopter viewing and snowmobiling in winter range should be managed, as well as disturbing activities in general. Changing travel routes and careful scheduling of disturbing activities can resolve these problems.

Because of the goat's low reproductive rate, their visibility in cliffy terrain and the fact that they do not readily repopulate ranges after they have been removed, hunting should be closely monitored. The number of female harvested should be minimized and females with kids, which still have an horn less than 10cm should not be hunted. This is a proposal from the ministry of environment of BC. From 1950 to 1975, goats numbers declined in many areas primarily because of over-hunting but recent hunting restrictions and reintroductions have largely reversed that trend.