



Wildlife Notes

Persian Ibex (*Capra aegagrus*)

An Exotic Species

In 1970, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) imported 15 Persian ibex from Iran and released them in the Florida Mountains near Deming, New Mexico. Soon after, an additional 27 were released, and a sustainable population was established.

By 1974, the first Persian ibex hunt in the Florida Mountains was offered to the public, and one to two hunts have been conducted every year since.

The Bureau of Land Management has established an optimum, supportable number of 400 animals for this localized population. To achieve and maintain this target, NMDGF annually conducts aerial surveys, determines populations and offers public and management hunts accordingly.

A Secretive Species

Spotting a Persian ibex can be a challenge. Stealth, camouflage and patience are required. Ibex have keen eyesight which enables them to notice movement more than half a mile away. Their specially adapted hooves have a soft inner pocket surrounded by hard outer ring,

allowing them to cling to rocky surfaces and traverse sheer cliffs. These attributes, combined with the ability to jump several times their own height, make hunting or spotting the Persian ibex extremely difficult.

Description

Sometimes called bezoar goat or Iranian ibex, the short-legged Persian ibex stands approximately 30 inches at the shoulder, and the hind quarters are noticeably higher than the front.

Adult males weigh up to 150 pounds, and females usually weigh up to 90 pounds. Both sexes grow horns — the female's nine-inch prongs are modest, compared to the male's 30-inch horns which curl in an arch over the back.

Blending with terrain during summer, ibex are colored light brown. As winter approaches and the rut (breeding) begins, males undergo a dramatic transformation. The color of the body turns deep chocolate brown and the belly light cream. Markings on the legs also darken, and a black-brown cross forms over the shoulders and back. The billy's face darkens, and the beard and tail turn jet black.



Mating Season

During the rut, males exude an odorous musk to entice females. Dominant and aggressive males quickly gather harems of 10–15 fertile females. Fierce fights often break out with males rearing on hind legs and plunging forward to butt horns. The resounding crack of horns can be heard for miles. Bouts can be repeated several times, until the defeated male retreats and leaves the area.

Breeding season builds in intensity from late November until early January. By mid-winter males are often thin from the great expense of energy the rut requires. The dominant males maintain their harems through the winter until early spring, when new grasses and forage form. As the rut ends, harems disband and merge peaceably into larger herds.

Newborn Kids

Usually by May, pregnant females leave the herd to find a solitary cliff or rocky outcrop to bear young — most often twins, but sometimes triplets. A few days after birth, kids are able to travel, and females and their young gather into small herds called 'nursery bands.'

As summer temperatures soar to 100 degrees and above, a common occurrence in the Florida Mountains, nursery bands gravitate near watering holes.

Feeding

Persian ibex, like their cousin the domestic goat, feed on almost anything edible. Mountain mahogany, oak, and Wright's silk tassel are common food sources in winter — and grasses, forbs (flowering plants) and leaves from deciduous trees are common in spring and summer. On occasion ibex also may eat prickly pear and cholla cactus.



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish www.wildlife.state.nm.us
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