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## FAUNA IN SWITZERLAND

# The Alpine Ibex

The Alpine Ibex — by its German name: Steinbock, by its Latin name: capricorn—is the species of ibex that lives in the European Alps.

Being an excellent climber, its habitat is the rocky region along the snowline above alpine forests of the European Alps.



Alpine Ibex — Steinbock

Male specimens commonly grow to a height of about 1 meter and reach a weight of about 100kg. Females are usually only half the weight of males. Apart from size, males can also be distinguished by their prominent beard. 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 1m. 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.

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 alpine meadows below. 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. If predators are after them, ibexes will hide in the rocks of the steep cliffs.

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 seriously harmed in the process. After conception, and gestation period of 6 months, a single kid (twins rarely occur) is born around May.

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 19th century. Thanks to the efforts of a small group of foresters, the last remaining animals were protected in 1816. Today, after extensive and ongoing reintroduction programs, the population in the wild is estimated to be around 30,000.

*from Wikipedia*