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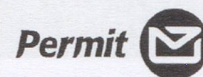
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FAUNA IN SWITZERLAND

Chamois - Gemse

The chamois, *Rupicapra rupicapra*, is a goat-antelope species native to mountains in Europe. The chamois has also been introduced to the South Island of New Zealand. The English name is from the French chamois.

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 and weighs between 20 kilograms and 30 kilograms. 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.

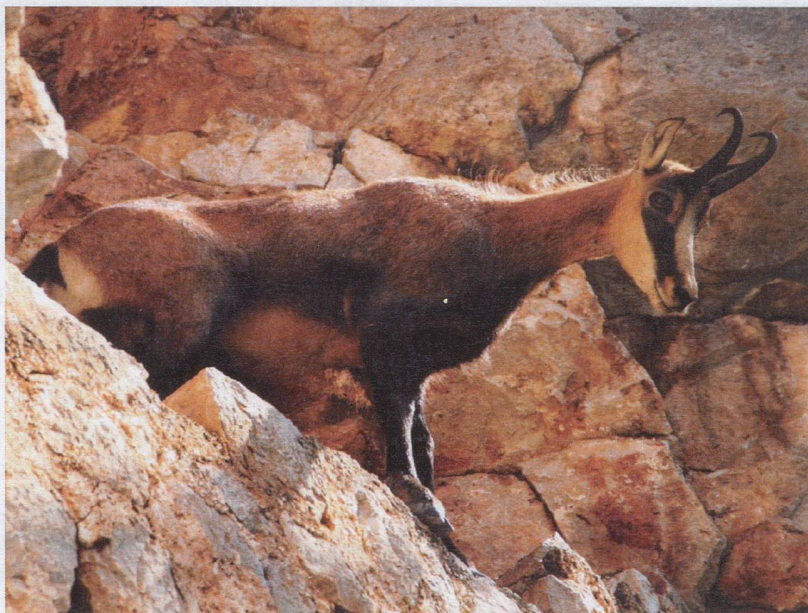
An impregnated female undergoes a gestation period of 20 weeks, after which a single kid is born. The kid is fully grown by 1 year of age.

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 animals' 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.

As their meat is considered tasty, chamois are popular game animals. Chamois are most active in the morning and evening when they feed. They tend to look for danger from below. This means that a hunter stalking chamois from above is less likely to be observed and more likely to be successful.



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