

Chapter 2

Species of the Trans-Himalaya and other Arid Tracts

SIBERIAN IBEX, *Capra sibirica*, Pallas 1776

Y.V. Bhatnagar

Vernacular Names: *Kin* (Spiti), *Skin* (Ladakh), *Tangrol* (Kullu, Lahul)

Taxonomy

Family: Bovidae
Sub family: Caprinae
Tribe: Caprini

Conservation Status

IUCN: Low risk
CAMP: Vulnerable
IWPA: Schedule I
CITES: Not listed
US ESA: Not listed



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Distribution & Habitat : Rocky alpine steppe and the rugged tracts of the Central Asian mountains - from the Hindu Kush in Afganistan till the Sutluj gorge in Himachal Pradesh, India; and northwards along the Altai Shan and Tien Shan, into Mongolia and Russia. Within India in western Ladakh (Zaskar and Ladakh ranges) and Nubra in Jammu & Kashmir, and Lahul-Spiti in Himachal Pradesh. Covers ca. 25,000km² within these two states.

Description: Stocky built goat. Largest in the genus. The general colour of the pelage is a light tan, with the undersides lighter; the coat colouration however, varies widely across this ibex's range. In the Himalayan population during winter, mature males are much darker (dark chocolate brown; especially males older than 5 years), with patches of white on the neck and back. Dark dorsal stripe from lower neck till the tail pronounced in males. The lighter ventral parts of females and young males are separated from the main body colour by a darker band which runs along the sides. Both sexes have a dark beard beneath the chin, although it is much less pronounced in females. Both sexes carry horns - in males they grow into massive arcs, which curl over the back and may even loop back on themselves, while in females they are small, almost parallel and slightly arched towards the rear. A male's horns have several large knobs on their frontal surface. Till the 7th-8th year two knobs are added each year; after which it is usually one every year.

Behaviour: The Siberian ibex live at high elevations, and often climb up to the vegetation line at 5,500m. In India, they usually occur between 2,500 and 5,500m. In many areas, they do not descend to lower elevations during winter. Uses primarily steep slopes, interspersed with 'escape terrain' in the form of rocky overhangs and cliffs, where they flee to escape predators such as snow leopard and the Tibetan wolf. In winter, partial to south facing slopes and areas where snow deposition is relatively lower such as windblown ridgelines, crests and avalanche paths. When snow cover is heavy, Siberian ibex find food by pawing at the snow with their forelegs in order to reach the vegetation concealed below. Most hierarchy is established before the onset of the rut based on body and horn size, but when contests do take place they may extend for over three hours of clashes, body and shoulder pushing and horn entwining. During the clashes, a male would typically go upslope, rear on its hind limbs and clash down at the lowered horns of the opponent, often trying to dislodge it.

Occur in small groups - mean around 11 animals per group; occasional congregations of 70-100 animals may occur in spring. Principally a diurnal animal, the Siberian ibex has alternating periods of resting and activity throughout the day. Usually forage in early forenoon and late afternoon, but have a distinctly unimodal foraging peak during the noontime in peak winters. Adult males primarily separate into 'all-male groups' during the summer.

Is an intermediate forager, feeding primarily on grasses, forbs, leaves and shoots of shrubs and also trees.



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Reproduction & Life Cycle

Gestation Period: 180 - 180 days
Rutting: Peaks for about 15 days in Nov to Jan (varies between years and regions)
Young per Birth: 1; twins not uncommon in well-protected areas
Weaning: Gradual, without a sharp cutoff-usually 6-7 months.
Sexual Maturity: At 1.5-2 years, although males do not reach their full potential before age 5-7
Life span: Up to 16 years in captivity. Males rarely survive beyond their 7-8 year

Size

Body Length: 130-165 cm
Shoulder Height: 67-110 cm
Weight: Male 85-130kg ; Female 40-60kg
Horn length: Male: 100-148cm, Female 15-30cm

