

Capra sibirica



Common name: Siberian
Ibex, Asiatic ibex, Himalayan
ibex

Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: Bovidae

Genus: *Capra*

Species: *sibirica*

Profile:

The Siberian ibex derives its name from Latin (*capra* = she-goat, *siberica* = of Siberia) and is the largest member of the genus *Capra*. The individuals vary in size (80-150 cm) with the females being slightly longer and can weigh 35-130 kg, with females being much lighter than male members. Though the typical colouration of the Siberian ibex is light tan, with mature members becoming darker, there are significant variations in shades with different populations inhabiting different regions. Overall, the abdomen area is lighter in colour and a distinct dark coloured stripe runs from the neck to the tail of the animal. Both the sexes have horns but males can be distinguished by their larger and thicker horns (up to 130 cm). The horns are distinctly bow shaped and segmented by transverse ridges.

Lifespan: 12-17 years in the wild, up to 22 years in captivity

Distribution: The species is found throughout the mountain ranges of central and northern Asia. Their range includes northeastern Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, India (in the western Himalayan states of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh), China (northwest Gansu and Xingjiang), Mongolia (in the Altai, Khangai, Sayan mountains) and Russia (southern Siberia). A small population of the Siberian ibex was introduced in the Florida mountains, New Mexico. The species inhabits open alpine meadows, rocky landscapes and mountains with steep terrain in the altitudinal range of 500-6,700 m. and moves to lower elevations during winter. The Siberian ibex is at home in harsh landscapes like deserts (both hot and cold), rocky outcrops and steep cliffs.

Population: Greater than 250,000 individuals (IUCN) (Figures for wild populations only)

Behaviour: The Siberian ibex lives in groups that are variable in size (6-100 animals with an average of 30 animals per herd). The sex ratio of herds is variable with females, young offspring and young males present. Adult males are found in separate herds with 6-8 individuals. However, in large populations, the herd number increases substantially and adult members of both sexes stay together. It is a diurnal animal and alternates its feeding and foraging activities to the mornings and evenings. The animal is adept at negotiating steep slopes and rocky cliffs. When the landscape is under snow, ibex are known to remove the snow with their forelegs and forage for food. In the winter months, the animals move to lower elevations to seek food. They can migrate for 100 km between seasons across a wide altitudinal range. The primary predators of the Siberian ibex include snow leopards, brown bears, lynx, wolverines, wild dogs, foxes, wolves and eagles (for kids). Ibexes communicate during mating, to raise an alarm or for recognition. To signal danger from predators, young ibexes bleat while adults whistle. Their ability to maneuver steep slopes (facilitated by anatomical features like soft, elastic pads surrounded by hard tissue on the hooves) protects them from predators. Male ibexes have a breeding hierarchy, which is established through aggression techniques like fighting with their horns. Females leave the herd a week before delivery and give birth in solitude.

- **Diet:** Siberian ibexes are diurnal herbivores and feed in the mornings and evenings. Their diet mainly consists of alpine grasses and herbs and some fruits like currants. The ibex eats grasses, new buds and shoots of trees and shrubs, leaves, moss and lichens. Like other ruminants, they regurgitate their food and chew it throughout the

day. The average intake of food is 8-10 kg in females and up to 16 kg in males. The species can also survive for several days without water and get their water requirement from the food they eat and salt licks.

- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: November; Breeding interval: 1 year; Gestation period: 5-6 months, Litter size: usually 1, rarely 2-3 kids; Weaning: 5-8 months, Sexual maturity: 1.5-2 years (female), 3-5 years (male).

Current status:

- **Status:**
IUCN 2008: Least Concern
- **Threats:**
 1. Hunting for meat and the horns by local communities.
 2. Poaching for horns and skin.
 3. Competition for food, water and habitat from livestock.
 4. Habitat deterioration due to human interference and climate change (excessive or inadequate winters) are also posing a threat to wild populations.
 5. Hybridization of wild populations with domestic goats.
- **Conservation practices:**
 1. Nominal protection in Afghanistan by a nationwide ban on hunting.
 2. Listed as a Class I animal in the Wildlife Protection Law, China. Listed as a rare species under Mongolian Law on Fauna and Mongolian Hunting Law.
 3. Protection of its range in China, India, Mongolia and Russia through in-situ conservation like establishment of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries (e.g. great Gobi Reserve, Great Himalayan National Park).
 4. The Denver Zoo and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences has initiated a research project to understand the behaviour and ecology of the Siberian ibex and develop a conservation management program. Twenty-seven ibex have been captured and radio collared since 2003.