

PREDATION / PROTECTION

> Man, its worst enemy

Hunted and poached from 1550, ibex had almost disappeared by around 1820, with a worldwide population of only 100 or so animals in the Gran Paradiso and Vanoise parks. They owe their survival to King Victor-Emmanuel II who created a private refuge near Valsavaranche to save the last of the species. Helped by the creation of wildlife parks and a succession of reintroduction campaigns, the survivors bred successfully in the Alps and recolonised part of their original terrain. The current world population numbers close to 50 000 individuals.



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Now protected in France, the species, particularly the young, still have some natural predators. These include foxes and wolves which ibex escape from thanks to their agility which allows them access to the steep areas that they alone can reach. However, this does not mean that they are safe from all risks. For this animal that lives on the mountain peaks, the greatest danger comes from the sky, in the form of the royal eagle.

THE EXPERT'S ANSWERS

- 1/ **TRUE**. The proof is in the drawings of ibex in Cosquer cave in the caves in Marseille.
- 2/ **FALSE**. They can grow several rings in a year. It's better to look at their length.
- 3/ **TRUE**. But on flat ground. On the rocks, it's another story.
- 4/ **TRUE**. It is a warning signal. For information, they can also bleat.
- 5/ **FALSE**. Ibex never live with a mate. And **TRUE**. Genetically speaking, they could mate with goats.

Drawings: © Caroline Legend except ibex in habitat paragraph: © Joel Valentin. Photo: © PNV - L. Imberdis



MINISTÈRE
DE LA TRANSITION
ÉCOLOGIQUE



On the trail of ...

THE ALPINE IBEX



Family: Caprinae
Height: 130-150 cm for the male
 105-125 cm for the female
Life expectancy: up to 20 years
Gestation: 170 days
Litter: 1, occasionally 2

Special features

- ✓ An Excellent climber
- ✓ A top model in Lascaux
- ✓ Not a big drinker, but enjoys a drop of dew
- ✓ Males and females look quite different

IN THE BEGINNING

> They come (and have returned) from afar

You won't find the tracks of the first ibex on the ground, but on the walls of Paleolithic caves in drawings that are 14,000 years old. But they were actually around long before that: About 100 000 years ago. However, not satisfied with drawing their portrait, Man drew weapons on them until the species was nearly extinct...

In France, this trend started to reverse in 1963 with the



creation of the Vanoise National Park. From around 60 animals at the time, the population in our massif now stands at around 3 000, the largest ibex population in France. As a real symbol for the Park and for wildlife protection, it was put on the medal worn by the Park's first rangers, made by Samivel.



HABITAT

> Standing proudly on high

With its **anti-slip hoofs**, the ibex has found its ideal habitat in steep terrain, rocky mountain walls and high-altitude meadows; with a noted preference for south-facing slopes sheltered from the wind and where the snow melts rapidly. They have no home but find shelter for the night in caves or in rock crevices. They live at altitudes of between **2 700 and 3 300 metres** in the summer but come down to the valley in the springtime to graze on the fresh grass. Which is not too surprising since, before taking to the mountains to get away from the hunters' guns, ibex lived in quite different regions, as long as there were rocks and cliff faces.



DAILY LIFE

> Living separate lives is in our genes

If my ancestors could speak, they would tell you that in times long past, herds could number more than 100 animals. But all of the same sex because, even if we like living in groups, we are also all for sexual segregation! ». The males only frequent the females during the breeding season, for reproduction purposes. Then we go our separate ways. The main reason for this is that we enjoy different diets, as well as the famous maternal instinct, of course, which encourages the females to seek steeper locations where they can keep their young safe

> Spring, our favorite season

Neves and frozen ground are certainly not the best terrain for us. You can keep the snowy couloirs and slopes. However, **we can't get enough of fresh new grass in the springtime**. The lower pastures, our favourite playground, can sometimes be the scene for some splendid jousting, with the best tournaments taking place in winter. At that time, jousting is not playing, it is all about asserting yourself as a breeder.



> From grass to shrubs, we like it all

Except for the times when food is scarce and we get by with coarse, fibrous, woody food, our preference is for **fescue**, various grasses, lichens, juniper branches and certain thistles. We are not the ancestors of goats for nothing. Our ration: **20 kg per day** and to wash it all down, **the dew on the leaves is enough**.

TRUE OR FALSE ? Answers on the back page

- 1/ Some ibex lived on the coast.
- 2/ The number of rings on the front of the male's horns show its age in years.
- 3/ Ibex can gallop at speeds of 70 km/hr.
- 4/ Like marmots, ibex whistle.
- 5/ Ibex have been known to mate with goats.