



Newsletter #40

May 16, 2025

Greetings

Two new videos

We recently received two home-made videos from newsletter readers. The first video reveals a small herd of mountain goats in panic mode. The video is an excellent example of leadership by the lead nanny. We also see the tendency of a nanny to abandon her kid when her life is threatened.

[Mountain Goats Panic](#)

The second video is a stark reminder of how easy it is for non-motorized recreation to stress an entire herd.

[Mountain Goats and Mountain Bikes](#)

We were very careful in both videos to scrub all mention of location or people. If you have video of mountain goats in distress or in unusual circumstances, consider sending a link or copy to mtgoats@bcnorth.ca The quality of the video is of secondary importance.

Mass dispersal?

The mountain goat herd on McKendrick Mountain declined from 22 to 6 goats. But McKendrick Mountain is close to the Babine Mountain range that has a population of about 160 goats. People often say “Maybe the McKendrick goats moved”. So what is the likelihood that a large group of mountain goats abandon their home mountain and move to a neighbouring mountain?

There is a lack of scientific research concerning dispersals. But what is clear from our research and other projects is that mountain goat dispersals follow a pattern:

1. Dispersals work both ways. For example, mountain goats can move from McKendrick to Babine Park or from the Babine park to McKendrick. An imbalance in the short term can be balanced in the long term.

2. Dispersals may be temporary and are often reversed. A mountain goat may move to a neighbouring mountain for a day, a week or a year and then move back.
3. Most dispersals are limited to juvenile mountain goats in the months of July and August when travel is easy and feed is easily available in the forest.
4. Dispersals are very high-risk. Mountain goats may not be expert at swimming and can drown crossing rivers and lakes.
5. Mountain goats are easy targets for predators in a forest. Mountain goats have very limited endurance to escape a wolf or bear. For this reason, some dispersals are cut short and can be viewed as a fatal natural hazard similar to avalanches or rockfalls.

Visit the neighbours

We have monitored a local mountain goat herd with six members for more than two years. We monitor the herd at least six times a year. On May 10, we were surprised to see 15 mountain goats instead. The herd was neatly divided. One group of six and another group of nine. Here is what we think happened. April 15 is the traditional date for mountain goats in this area to leave their winter home and start moving out to their summer pasture. In this case, it appears that a group of nine goats from one herd kept moving right across the mountain range into the home range of their neighbours.

The alpine areas for all three herds on this mountain range are connected. It's a wonder that it doesn't happen more often. The three herds can literally see each other in summer. But they usually don't visit each other until August when we sometimes see Super-herds made up of multiple herds that come together briefly and then return to their home range in a day or two.

This movement of nine goats across home range boundaries in May is unusual. It may be an indication of the need to socialize soon after the isolation of winter. The fact that it doesn't happen often demonstrates the strong urge for herds to stay home. We'll watch to see how long the visit lasts and report back.

Skeleton

Years ago, Bill Jex, lead biologist for mountain goats and mountain sheep in BC until recently, decided to put a mountain goat skeleton together. First he had to take the carcass apart to clean the bones. That produced boxes of bones. There are no how-to guides to put a mountain goat skeleton together so Bill had to look at instructions for similar species to fit the puzzle together. The skeleton is too big for in the house so the skeleton resides on Bill's porch.



Figure 1 Mountain goat skeleton



Figure 2 Boxes of bones

The mountain goat skeleton stands near the skeleton of a full-grown moose. Bill has big ideas and a big porch!

What are you doing?

Take a friend to lunch. Have a picnic. What are you doing to celebrate Mountain Goat Week from June 1 to 7? It's time to take a minute to remember our friends in high places and all the new mountain goat kids that are bouncing around, thrilled with anything the mountain has to offer. After a hike in the alpine, you and I go home to a warm bed but the mountain goats stay. Our mountains would not be the same without them.

Morning surprise

A friend decided to camp overnight on a local alpine ridge. He only had a sleeping bag and a tarp to keep dry. When he woke up in the morning, he looked out from under an edge of the tarp to discover a herd of mountain goats bedded down all around him. He froze, afraid of startling his new friends. He stayed under the tarp, peeking out from time to time, until the herd got up and wandered away. That's one camp he will not forget.

Until the next time

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Figure 3 Mountain goat skeleton