



BRITISH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN GOAT SOCIETY

SMITHERS BC CANADA

MTGOATS@BCNORTH.CA

Newsletter #7

January 22, 2019

Welcome members to another newsletter – more results from last summers hikes and projects. Do you have any subjects we can tackle?

Superherds

On a small mountain in our area, a single herd of nine mountain goats would be typical. But on a large mountain range with an area of 350 sq km, there can be more than 200 mountain goats. For most of the year, the goats would be in numerous small herds each numbering 6 to 12 individuals. In late summer, an unusual thing happens. Many small herds combine to form a superherd. It only happens in August when there is abundant feed across the alpine. Most of the winter snow fields have melted and the herds can wander anywhere with ease. We have seen superherds numbering from 24 to 32 goats. The largest superherd we have heard about numbered 125 mountain goats. Superherds only occur on large mountain ranges where it's possible for small herds to meet without crossing forested valleys between mountains.



A superherd of 24 mountain goats

A superherd stays together for a day or a week but soon breaks up into smaller herds that return to their home territory. Research has shown that members of each small herd choose whether to follow their previous leader or go with a new leader when the herds disperse. Members of a small herd may be related or may not. The only constant is the elder nanny that leads each small herd.



A superherd of 32 mountain goats

Our observations lead us to believe that superherds are very social events. It is an opportunity for mountain goats to greet long-lost relatives and meet all the new kids born two months earlier. Small herds can often see other herds in the distance but August is the only time the herds bother to travel and meet in one central location. A superherd would attract predators if it persisted but a superherd also has the advantage of many eyes to spot approaching predators. Even more important, plant growth is thinly dispersed across the alpine and a superherd would soon exhaust the local supply of browse. After the superherd disperses and winter approaches, each small herd may break into even smaller groups. The available feed determines how many mountain goats stay on each winter ridge. A superherd reflects the abundance of browse in August as well as a strong desire for social interaction by mountain goats.

New video

We have posted a new video all about a mountain goat mineral lick. The lick in the video is very large, unique and needs to be protected. Our society will be advocating for special status later this winter. We spent a lot of time last summer observing the goats and editing hundreds of camera trap images along the trail from a home mountain to the lick. We kept accurate records over the entire summer of the movement of every goat along the 5 km of trail the goats used to access the mineral lick. So we have strong evidence of the importance of the lick as well as the vulnerability of the goats to predation and illegal hunting. See the new video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odYaUyJNzm0&t=39s> or in the Gallery at www.mtgoats.ca

Advocating

Our directors try to keep tabs on all local events and actions that may affect mountain goats. In one case, a local company set up a eco-tourism business. They flew clients to huts in the alpine and one of the big attractions was a herd of mountain goats close by. The business owner didn't seem to appreciate that the helicopters he used were displacing the goats. If we had not advocated for the goats, the herd was sure to move out of the area to lower quality habitat. The owner wanted to expand his fly-in operation to another mountain slope close by. Again we advocated for the goats and possibly saved another mountain goat herd. We support eco-tourism and wildlife viewing but it has to be done right to avoid harming the wildlife. In this case, the operator will move his huts away from the goat habitat and have his clients walk to see the goats. That will keep the helicopter shuttle away from the goats.

In another case, the hunting season for mountain goats in our local region extends from August 1 to the end of February the following year. Most other regions in BC end their season by November 15 of the same year. We learned that the reason for such a long season was that hunters along the coast like to harvest goats off the cliffs along salt water but the goats only come down that low in February. Twice we proposed to Victoria that the season for mountain goats in our region end on November 15. Twice the reply was that so few goats are shot in the spring that it is not worth the effort to change the season. That reasoning effectively gives support to our proposal. If hardly any goats are shot in the spring, there is no good reason to retain the long season. Our concern is that guides and their clients are hunting mountain goats in February in our interior area when the goats are most vulnerable to disturbance. Our goal is that no mountain goats in BC should suffer displacement or disturbance by people in late winter. UPDATE: we were asked to re-submit the proposal for consideration for the next round of regulatory changes.

A third case involved a local mountain bike club that wanted to construct a mountain bike trail right through prime mountain goat habitat. Again the party did not appreciate that mountain goats will not tolerate constant vehicle traffic and will move out of the area to lower quality habitat and possible local extinction. We advocated for the goats. Once the club understood the possible effect on the goats, the project was postponed until a better route was found.

These three cases are local and may not be of interest to members out of our area but they illustrate the need for our society to advocate for mountain goats.

Links

We have added a number of interesting scientific papers to the Links page on the www.bcmountaingoatsociety.ca web site. Included is the report by our new member, Kate Nowak, on mountain goat molt. We'll add papers to the list as we find them.

Our directors

We should introduce our society directors:

Mel Coulson, retired civil engineer, Quick BC
Josette Weir, retired pediatrician, Hazelton BC
Jim George, retired lumber grade inspector, Smithers BC
Jim Easterday, retired businessman, Smithers BC
Leesa Easterday, retired school administrator, Smithers BC



BCMGS members, left to right, Ron McNaughton, Jim George and Jim Easterday

Best wishes until the next time.

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