



## Newsletter #39

March 10, 2025

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Greetings

### New Video

The population count for the mountain goat herd on McKendrick Mountain this winter is complete. There are six goats in the herd as of February 24. We observed seven goats in October and again in January, but by February, the juvenile born last year to nanny #2 disappeared. See the new video on our YouTube channel at

[A Fragile Population McKendrick Mt. Report 12](#)

### Smithers Research Grants

Our three research grants are still available. So if anyone has an idea that solves long-standing problems or gaps in knowledge, contact us at [mtgoats@bcnorth.ca](mailto:mtgoats@bcnorth.ca)



*Figure 1 Last sight of juvenile in January*

Current mountain goat research often involves capture and drugging of goats in order to install collars to track individual goats. The famed research project at Caw Ridge, Alberta\* had problems with abandonment of kids, poor survival of kids with collars and poor reproduction by young females that had been drugged – all the result of handling to install collars. Is there a message here?

Another problem area is aerial population surveys with helicopters. A survey flight can be 50 to 100 meters distance from the goats. Close flight teaches goats that helicopters can be very scary and threatening. A panic response can result in more stress response to all helicopter flights, even at 400 meters distance. The question should always be: what are we teaching the goats? Mountain goats are quick learners. May be better to teach the goats to give us the information

we need to protect them rather than inducing a form of post-traumatic stress disorder that permanently corrupts the natural behaviour that is being studied.

### **Kevin White photos**

Kevin sent photos of mountain goats near Haines, Alaska. A winter storm in 2020 left 96 inches of new snow over 10 days, ~ 10 inches of rain and 45 knot winds. To think that mountain goats have been surviving conditions like that for over 40,000 years! The first photo below shows goats taking shelter amongst the fractured blocks of snow at the upper end of a glide avalanche.



This was the only avalanche in the area. The slide extended all the way to the ground. The goats were attracted to the forbs and grasses on the ground that are revealed by the avalanche. The avalanche provided essential feed and mortal danger at the same time.

In the second photo, goats are sheltering under one of the blocks of snow from the same avalanche. That block had just slid once and there is no reason to doubt it will slide again.



In the next photo, the goats have dug shelters from high winds. It seems that mountain goats are not skilled at detecting avalanche hazards. One of Kevin's research projects revealed that 40% of mountain goat deaths in that area were due to avalanches.



In central British Columbia, we are lucky. We don't have the massive coastal snowfalls. Our alpine slopes don't avalanche much until late in spring when there is already lots of bare ground

and forage for the mountain goats. But at the same time, avalanches can happen at any time with the right weather conditions. With global warming, there may be more days with rain, warm winds and wet snow that trigger deadly avalanches.

### **Heli Skiing**

We received video of a heli-skiing helicopter close to mountain goats near Squamish BC. Difficult to see, but there is a group of mountain goats on the rocky knob at the top of the photo. Thanks Mike for advocating for the mountain goats. As we have stated before, Section 27(3) of the BC Wildlife Act prohibits harassment of wildlife by motorized vehicles including fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. Harassment includes pestering and annoying.



### **Creatures of habit**

More and more, we observe that mountain goats continue to repeat the same behaviour every year unless they are disturbed. They stay in the same winter home. They forage on exactly the same ridges and meadows. They sleep in the same beds. They obey a strict calendar of movements from month to month. You only have to learn their habits once and you know their behaviour will repeat unless you interfere.

Until the next time

\*Reference: Festa-Bianchet, M., & Côté, S. D. (2008). Mountain goats: Ecology, behavior, and conservation of an alpine ungulate. Washington, DC: Island Press. Simply the best study of mountain goats – still available in digital format from Island Press.

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