

Corsican Mouflon

The Corsican Mouflon - and the EU Life Nature scheme



- He weighs 40-60kg and she weighs 30-40kg;
- he is 75-80cm high at the withers and she is 70-75cm;
- he is about 130-140cm long and she is about 120-130cm;
- both are about the smallest of the Eurasian mouflon varieties;
 - he lives about 12 years and she about 14 years;
- his triangular horns grow to their near circular full size (up to 85cm) at 7-8 years;
 - she has little 'bumps' rather than horns as such.
 - Here are Mr and Mrs:



The Corsican Mouflon

The Corsican mouflon is a wild mountain sheep. His name is *ovis gmelini musimon var. corsicana*. This is to distinguish him from his Sardinian and Cypriot cousins. The Corsican mouflon has never been hybridised and so is important to retain as a separate species. The mouflon prefers open country, hard underfoot and covered with grassy or bushy vegetation.

He is a Mediterranean hoofed animal who seeks steep slopes and rocks to protect himself from man and stray dogs. His is known for having diverse tastes in herbaceous food, mainly grasses, but also leaves, buds, young shoots, berries, nuts, chestnuts, roots, mushrooms and lichen. His main water intake is through the fresh vegetation he eats and he drinks rarely.

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Mouflons react to climatic and seasonal changes by seeking shelter from snow in winter, or drought and fire in the summer.

Mouflons are sociable – at least the females and their young; a mother will often keep her previous year's offspring with her as well as the current year's. After the rut, the females live apart from the males until the next rut. They spend a large part of the day feeding, although in summer they will also eat at night. While mouflons eat a wide variety of plants they do not pose any problem to forest production.

Distribution

The population of the estimated at about separated groups. One massif (Haut Asco, Falosorma, Bonifatu, the south (400), (Malo-Tova, Incudine, Oespedale). Both slowly (measured in 15% a year). To 20-25% a year is



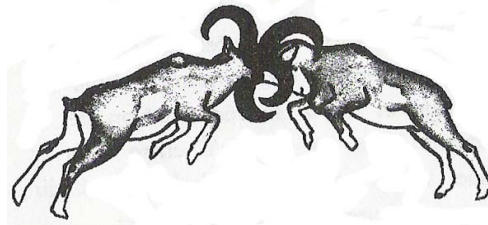
Corsican mouflon is 1000 head, in two main in the north (600) in the Cinto Haut Golo, Aitone, Lonca, Tartagine-Melaja) and one in centred on the Bavella region Aiguilles de Bavella, groups are increasing very the south as being about 10- preserve stocks an increase of necessary.

In 1827, more than 2200 animals were counted and at the lowest ebb before all hunting of the mouflon was banned (in 1956), there were only 500 left.

There are said to be up to 100 000 animals loosely described as Corsican mouflons round the world, but the *corsicana* variety (un-hybridised) exists only in Corsica. Therefore it is important to conserve this unique population. Since 1989 the import of mouflons from outside the island has been forbidden. In Sardinia, thanks to an effective conservation programme, there are now about 2500 head on that island.

Breeding

They reach sexual maturity at two to three years. The rut lasts a couple of months, reaching a peak from mid-November in Bavella and from the first fortnight of December on Cinto. The male is polygamous.




Gestation is about five months and the female only produces one lamb a season. Reproduction is successful in about 50% of cases in Corsica and this is insufficient to ensure the survival of the species here. They give birth in protected nooks and crannies such as dead tree stumps, bush country or rock 'nests'. The lambs follow their mothers within a few hours of birth. They suckle for about three months and already start eating little plants from two weeks' old.

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Annual breeding cycle

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
									Rutting	Rutting	Rutting
Gestation	Gestation	Gestation								Gestation	Gestation
		Lambing	Lambing	Lambing							
		Suckling	Suckling	Suckling	Suckling	Suckling					

The mouflon as an emblem of Corsica's interior

 Here is a graphic mouflon used by the Corsican singing group I Muvrini (the little mouflons). The horns of the mouflon often appear on products, hotel and business names.

Examples of the latter include a hotel, the *Mouflon d'Or* at Zonza, the island's biggest travel business – Ollandini, or a interior decoration shop in Corte called *Le Mouflon a Cinq Pattes* – the five-legged mouflon!



Another image of a mouflon that I treasure is on the back of a sweater of mine, knitted in pure Corsican wool by Lana Corsa, the only people making use of Corsican sheep's wool in Corsica – do visit them in Ponte Leccia if you go that way.

It is odd that most people who live here have never seen a mouflon and know little about the animal and yet hold it dear to their hearts. Hunters, whom you might expect would respect nature, frequently are careless with noise (they shout at their dogs and clap and shriek to beat the wild boar from their daytime sleeping places) and cause panic among the mouflons.

The head of the mouflon appears in art carved on the mid-12th century church your eyes open, you will find many



from very ancient times. Here is one at Aregno in the Balagne. If you keep more.

A muvra, its derivatives and names, such as the little lake *a Muvrella* at the beginning of the GR20 long-distance mountain path – there's also the *Boca di a Muvrella* - between Bonifatu and Haut Ascu (in mouflon country). Another example is *Punta Muvrarcchia* on a more southerly stage of the GR20.

diminutives crop up in many place

Summary of the EU Life Nature programme for the Corsican mouflon

As an introduction (if you speak French) take a look at the [TF1 news item](#) on TV announcing the Life Programme. Otherwise, read on.

The objective of the project (1.6 million euros, 50% financed by the EU) is to conserve the only non-hybrid flock of *ovis gmelini musimon var.corsicana*. The means will be to increase numbers, extend the area of coverage and the creation of new nuclei through releasing animals bred in captivity. These specially bred animals will be monitored by GPS. The project is managed by the [Parcu di Corsica](#) (*Parc Naturel Régional de Corse*) under the scientific direction of [Dr César Mattei](#). Dr Mattei speaks English, having worked both in the UK and the US (University of Maryland).

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The capture of breeding stock will be undertaken by a joint Park team with colleagues from the [ONCES](#) (*Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage*). Many other national, regional and voluntary bodies are being co-ordinated. Liaison is undertaken with sister Life-Nature projects concerned with the Bearded Vulture (mouflon carrion forms part of this bird's diet) and that concerned with the Lariccio Pine (a habitat of the mouflon).

The project will include a programme of public information and communication:

- public information and awareness campaigns in the localities concerned;
- increasing public knowledge about the Corsican mouflon, particularly among schoolchildren, using among other media a specially prepared case of teaching materials;
- sharing information about this emblematic animal with visitors to the Park, tourists and walkers, about the sensitivity of the species.

The main threats for the mouflon population are

1. poaching (males for their horns and lambs for eating);
2. genetic impoverishment resulting from the two herds (separated for more than a century);
3. fires, since though less forest animals than the chamoix, mouflons run in the same forests and dense maquis, both of which are high fire risk areas;
4. hunt beating for wild boar (15 August to mid-January) that have mouflon fleeing to difficult rocky terrain less accessible to dogs;
5. outdoor sports that cause a progressively intense disturbance to mouflons including 4x4s and quads;
6. catarrhal fever that spreads from domestic sheep when there is an outbreak.

The co-financers of the project include the *Office de l'Environnement de la Corse* (CTC - Region of Corsica), *Direction Régionale de l'Environnement* (decentralised service of central government), *Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage* (part of the Ministry of Ecology & Sustainable Development), *Office National des Forêts* (4.4 million hectares of public forest), [INRA Corse](#) (the national agricultural research institute) & the IRGM (large mammals research institute).

The role & mission of the Parcu di Corsica

The Park covers about a third of the island (350 thousand hectares/26, 700 population) and is overseen by the Region, the two Départements and 145 communes of *Haute Corse* and *Corse du Sud*.

Established in 1972 it was given missions to

- ◆ protect nature and specific sites;
- ◆ renew the rural economy, concentrating on livestock farming and supported by tourism activities;
- ◆ improve the links between the mountains and the coast.

The new charter for 1998-2008 aims to develop these missions by

- ◆ preserving a natural, cultural and landscape heritage of high quality;
- ◆ revitalising the rural areas;

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- ◆ welcoming, informing and making the public aware.

La Maison du Mouflon

If you want to make a trip to one of the Corsican mouflon's habitats, then head on up the Asco valley, most easily accessed via Ponte Leccia. There not only will you be able to appreciate the kinds of surroundings in which the animal lives, but you can also visit the Eco-Museum, the [Maison du Mouflon](#) and learn more directly about this very special creature. It is situated in the forest of Carrozzica.



photo: ONCFS

To save a wasted trip, you can make contact before a drive up there (though that is rewarding in itself) – by calling the Maison du Mouflon, Maire d'Asco, Village, 20276 Asco (Monsieur Monti tel: 04 95 47 82 07).

Mouflon products

In the past considerable use was made of mouflon products. There is no evidence that I know of it in Corsica, but Cordovan leather made from mouflon hide was developed in Spain in the 8th century, when the Moors arrived. It was tanned with alum. Hunters prized the horns and the lamb made for good eating. Nowadays you can find Corsican knives with moulon horn handles, but this is recovered from dead animals or shed horns.



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