GENUS CAPRA.—LINN.

DENTAL FORMULA.

$$\text{Incisive } \frac{0}{8}; \text{ Canine } \frac{0-0}{0-0}; \text{ Molar } \frac{6-6}{6-6} = 32.$$

Horns common to both sexes, or rarely wanting in the female; in domesticated races occasionally absent in both: they are directed upwards and curved backwards, and are more or less angular. No muzzle, no lachrymal sinus, nor ungual pores; eyes, light coloured, pupil elongated; tail, short, flat, and naked at base; throat, bearded.

Mostly reside in the primitive and highest mountains of the ancient continent and America.

Habit, herbivorous; climbing rocks and precipices; producing two or three young at a time; gregarious.

There are six well determined species—one inhabiting the Alps, one in Abyssinia and Upper Egypt, one in the Caucasian mountains, one in the mountains of Persia, one in the Himalaya, and one in the Rocky Mountains of North America.

The generic name Capra is derived from the Latin *capra*, a goat.

CAPRA AMERICANA.—BLAINVILLE.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT.

PLATE CXXVIII.—MALE and FEMALE.

C. Magnitudine ovem arietem adæquans, corpore robusto, cornibus parvis acutis lente recurvis, pilis albis, cornibus ungulisque nigris.

CHARACTERS.

Size of the domestic sheep; form of body, robust; horns, small and pointed, slightly curved backwards. Colour of hair, totally white.

SYNONYMES.

ANTILOPE AMERICANA ET RUPICAPRA AMERICANA. Blainville, Bulletin Socy. Phil., Ann. 1816, p. 80.

OVIS MONTANA. Ord, Jour. Acad. N. Sci. Phil., vol. i., part i., p. 8. Ann. 1817.

Drawn from Nature by J.W. Audubon.

On Stone by Wm. L. Hitchcock

Rocky Mountain Goats

Lith. Printed & Col^d by J.T. Bowen Phil.

- MAZAMA SERICEA. Raffinesque Smaltz, Am. Monthly Mag. 1817, p. 44.
 ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHEEP. Jameson, Wernerian Trans., vol. iii. p. 306. Ann. 1821.
 CAPRA MONTANA. Harlan, Fauna Americana, p. 253.
 " " Godman, Nat. Hist., vol. ii. p. 326.
 ANTELOPE LANIGERA. Smith, Linnæan Trans., vol. xiii. p. 38, t. 4.
 CAPRA AMERICANA. Rich., F. B. A., p. 268, plate 22.

DESCRIPTION.

Form of the body and neck, robust, like that of the common Goat ; nose, nearly straight ; ears, pointed, lined with long hair ; the horns incline slightly backwards, tapering gradually and not suddenly, uncinated like those of the chamois, transversely wrinkled with slight rings for nearly half their length from the base, and sharp pointed ; towards the tip they are smooth and polished. Tail short, and though clothed with long hair, almost concealed by the hairs which cover the rump ; legs, thick and short ; secondary hoofs, flat, grooved on the soles, and resembling those of the common Goat.

The coat is composed of two kinds of hair, the outer and longer considerably straighter than the wool of the sheep, but softer than that of the common Goat ; this long hair is abundant on the shoulders, back, neck, and thighs ; on the chin there is a thick tuft forming a beard like that of the latter animal ; under the long hairs of the body there is a close coat of fine white silky wool, quite equal to that of the Cashmere Goat in fineness.

COLOUR.

Horns, and hoofs, black ; the whole body, white.

DIMENSIONS.

							Feet.	Inches.
Length of head and body,	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4
" tail,	-	-	-	-	-	-		1
" head,	-	-	-	-	-	-		11
" horns,	-	-	-	-	-	-		5
Diameter of horns at base,	-	-	-	-	-	-		1

HABITS.

Standing "at gaze," on a table-rock projecting high above the valley beyond, and with a lofty ridge of stony and precipitous mountains in the background, we have placed one of our figures of the Rocky Mountain

Goat; and lying down, a little removed from the edge of the cliff, we have represented another.

In the vast ranges of wild and desolate heights, alternating with deep valleys and tremendous gorges, well named the Rocky mountains, over and through which the adventurous trapper makes his way in pursuit of the rich fur of the beaver or the hide of the bison, there are scenes which the soul must be dull indeed not to admire. In these majestic solitudes all is on a scale to awaken the sublimest emotions and fill the heart with a consciousness of the infinite Being "whose temple is all space, whose altar earth, sea, skies."

Nothing indeed can compare with the sensations induced by a view from some lofty peak of these great mountains, for there the imagination may wander unfettered, may go back without a check through ages of time to the period when an Almighty power upheaved the gigantic masses which lie on all sides far beneath and around the beholder, and find no spot upon which to arrest the eye as a place where once dwelt man! No—we only know the Indian as a wanderer, and we cannot say here stood the strong fortress, the busy city, or even the humble cot. Nature has here been undisturbed and unsubdued, and our eyes may wander all over the scene to the most distant faint blue line on the horizon which encircles us, and forget alike the noisy clamour of toiling cities and the sweet and smiling quiet of the well cultivated fields, where man has made a "home" and dwelleth in peace. But in these regions we may find the savage grizzly bear, the huge bison, the elegant and fleet antelope, the large-horned sheep of the mountains, and the agile fearless climber of the steep—the Rocky Mountain Goat.

This snow-white and beautiful animal appears to have been first described, from skins shown to LEWIS and CLARK, as "the Sheep," in their general description of the beasts, birds, and plants found by the party in their expedition. They say, "The Sheep is found in many places, but mostly in the timbered parts of the Rocky Mountains. They live in greater numbers on the chain of mountains forming the commencement of the woody country on the coast, and passing the Columbia between the falls and the rapids. We have only seen the skins of these animals, which the natives dress with the wool, and the blankets which they manufacture from the wool. The animal from this evidence appears to be of the size of our common sheep, of a white colour. The wool is fine on many parts of the body, but in length not equal to that of our domestic sheep. On the back, and particularly on the top of the head, this is intermixed with a considerable portion of long straight hairs. From the Indian account these animals have erect pointed horns."

The Rocky Mountain Goat wanders over the most precipitous rocks, and springs with great activity from crag to crag, feeding on the plants, grasses, and mosses of the mountain sides, and seldom or never descends to the luxuriant valleys, as the Big-Horn does. This Goat indeed resembles the wild Goat of Europe, or the chamois, in its habits, and is very difficult to procure. Now and then the hunter may observe one browsing on the extreme verge of some perpendicular rock almost directly above him, far beyond gun-shot, and entirely out of harm's way. At another time, after fatiguing and hazardous efforts, the hungry marksman may reach a spot from whence his rifle will send a ball into the unsuspecting Goat; then slowly he rises from his hands and knees, on which he has been creeping, and the muzzle of his heavy gun is "rested" on a loose stone, behind which he has kept his movements from being observed, and now he pulls the fatal trigger with deadly aim. The loud sharp crack of the rifle has hardly rung back in his ear from the surrounding cliffs when he sees the Goat in its expiring struggles reach the verge of the dizzy height: a moment of suspense and it rolls over, and swiftly falls, striking perchance here and there a projecting point, and with the clatter of thousands of small stones set in motion by its rapid passage down the steep slopes which incline outward near the base of the cliff, disappears, enveloped in a cloud of dust in the deep ravine beneath; where a day's journey would hardly bring an active man to it, for far around must he go to accomplish a safe descent, and toilsome and dangerous must be his progress up the gorge within whose dark recesses his game is likely to become the food of the ever prowling wolf or the solitary raven. Indeed cases have been mentioned to us in which these Goats, when shot, fell on to a jutting ledge, and there lay fifty or a hundred feet below the hunter, in full view, but inaccessible from any point whatever.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, as portions of the mountains are not so precipitous, the Rocky Mountain Goat is shot and procured tolerably easily, it is said, by some of the Indian tribes, who make various articles of clothing out of its skin, and use its soft woolly hair for their rude fabrics.

According to Sir JOHN RICHARDSON, this animal has been known to the members of the Northwest and Hudson's Bay Companies from the first establishment of their trading posts on the banks of the Columbia River and in New Caledonia, and they have sent several specimens to Europe. The wool being examined by a competent judge, under the instructions of the Wernerian Society of Edinburgh, was reported to be of great fineness and fully an inch and a half long. "It is unlike the fleece of the common sheep, which contains a variety of different kinds of wool suitable to the fabrica-

tion of articles very dissimilar in their nature, and requires much care to distribute them in their proper order. The fleece under consideration is wholly fine. That on the fore part of the skin has all the apparent qualities of wool. On the back part it very much resembles cotton. The whole fleece is much mixed with hairs, and on those parts where the hairs are long and pendant, there is almost no wool."

"Mr. DRUMMOND saw no Goats on the eastern declivity of the mountains, near the sources of the Elk river, where the sheep are numerous, but he learned from the Indians that they frequent the steepest precipices, and are much more difficult to procure than the sheep. Their manners are said to greatly resemble those of the domestic Goat. The exact limits of the range of this animal have not been ascertained, but it probably extends from the fortieth to the sixty-fourth or sixty-fifth degree of latitude. It is common on the elevated part of the Rocky Mountain range that gives origin to four great tributaries to as many different seas, viz. the Mackenzie, the Columbia, the Nelson, and the Missouri rivers."—*F. B. A.*, p. 269.

The flesh of this species is hard and dry, and is not so much relished as that of the Big-Horn, the Elk, &c., by the hunters or travellers who have journeyed towards the Pacific across the wild ranges of mountains inhabited by these animals.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The Rocky Mountain Goat inhabits the most elevated portions of the mountains from which it derives its name, where it dwells between the fortieth and sixtieth or sixty-fourth degree of north latitude. It is also found on the head waters of the Mackenzie, Columbia, and Missouri rivers. Mr. MACKENZIE informs us that the country near the sources of the Muddy river (Maria's river of LEWIS and CLARK), Saskatchewan, and Athabasca, is inhabited by these animals, but they are said to be scarcer on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains than on the western.

GENERAL REMARKS.

It is believed by some naturalists that Fathers PICCOLO and DE SALVATIERRA discovered this animal on the higher mountains of California. VANCOUVER brought home a mutilated skin which he obtained on the northwest coast of America. LEWIS and CLARK (as we have already mentioned) obtained skins in 1804.

In 1816 M. DE BLAINVILLE published the first scientific account of it. Mr. ORD in 1817 described one of the skins brought home by LEWIS and

CLARK, and Major CHARLES HAMILTON SMITH described a specimen in 1821, in the Linnæan Transactions for that year.

The resemblance of the animal to some of the antelopes, the chamois, the Goat, and the sheep, caused it to be placed by these authors under several genera. DE BLAINVILLE first made it an *antelope*, then named it *Rupicapra*—a subgenus of antelope to which the chamois belongs. ORD arranged it in the genus *Ovis*. SMITH called it *Antelope lanigera*. Besides these, RAFFINESQUE named it *Mazama sericea*. Dr. HARLAN and RICHARDSON were each correct, as we think, in placing it in the genus *Capra* (Goat). As in the Goat, the facial line in this species is nearly straight, while in the sheep and antelopes it is more or less arched. The sheep and the antelope are beardless, and the Goat is characterized by its beard, a conspicuous ornament in the present animal, which is moreover, in the form of its nose, the strength and proportion of the limbs, and the peculiarities of the hoofs, allied closer to the Goats than to any other neighbouring genus.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Capra americana, Rocky Mountain Goat [Pl. CXXVIII, male and female]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 128–133. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322386>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/108515>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322386>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/322386>

Holding Institution

Duke University Libraries (archive.org)

Sponsored by

Duke University Libraries

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Not provided. Contact Holding Institution to verify copyright status.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.