

Capra ibex Linnaeus, 1758

Ibex

Family: Bovidae

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(Photo U. Perreten, Fotolia)

The ibex is one of the most well-known inhabitants of the mountains; its physical structure allows it to move safely and easily both on the snow and steep rock faces, making it perfectly adapted to rocky environments and high altitude pastures.

It has a **robust body** and a coat that changes colour with the seasons: beige or light brown in the summer, in the autumn it is replaced with a thick, brown, nearly black coat. The summer coat is an iron grey colour on the back running down to a white belly. The females are lighter (creamy-beige or light brown) and darken slightly in the winter.

The ibex has **permanent horns** of up to a meter long in the males, and shorter, lighter horns in the females. These horns stop growing in November each year, producing a series of rings which can be counted to calculate the number of winters the animal has lived through, and therefore its age.

The ends of the legs have cloven hooves with two fingers in front and one behind, giving it a firm grip on the rocks.

Its diet is composed of fresh grass over the summer, supplemented with bushes, sprouts, lichens and conifer needles the rest of the year.

The ibex came close to extinction at the end of the 19th century, and was saved thanks to the creation of the Gran Paradiso National Park, where it has never ceased to be present.