

THE LIFE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY OF THE MOUNTAIN GOAT

IN IDAHO AND MONTANA

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Within recent years the management of the Rocky Mountain Goat (Oreamnos americanus missoulae, Allen) has become of increasing importance in Idaho, Montana and Washington, the only states in the United States supporting hunttable populations. Growing demands of sportsmen on the few areas open to hunting, coupled with a decrease in the numbers of animals on many ranges, make it essential that management policies be developed which will insure against future depletion of this big game species.

Since there is little life history and ecological information available on the goat, most of the questions bearing on its management have gone unanswered. It is the purpose of this investigation to provide life history and ecological information that can be used in the formulation of management plans.

This study was initiated during the summer of 1947 when the Restoration Division of the Montana Fish and Game Department sponsored a life history and food habits investigation in the Red Butte area on the West Fork of the Sun River, Montana. Research was continued in the same locality as well as in the Deep Creek-South Fork of the Teton River area and the Bitterroot Range of Montana during the spring and summer of 1948. In May, 1949, a year's field work was begun in the Salmon River area under the auspices of the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit.

The results of this investigation are a step toward the ultimate objective of obtaining a complete understanding of the life history of the mountain goat. A number of characteristic behavior patterns, some of which are of value to management, are described. Ecological comparisons of ranges permitted partial description of their important features, and intensive observations provided an opportunity to evaluate some of the factors affecting productivity of the species.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a dearth of technical information on the mountain goat, and the small amount of intensive research that has been conducted to date does not permit a complete life history description. Seton (1927), in his Lives of Game Animals, has done the most complete job of describing the animal's characteristics and life history. The basis for his contribution was numerous personal observations and a collection of reports of those that had frequented the goat's habitat.

Milo Anderson (1940) of the Department of Game in the State of Washington reported on a mountain goat study that was conducted during 1939-1940 on several of the important ranges in that state. His paper included information on productivity, declining factors, and food habits, as well as interesting life history notes. Cowan (1944) observed goats in Jasper National Park during 1943 and 1944, and reported a number of interesting facts on food habits, parasitization and disease. This study of the species was part of a reconnaissance of big game conditions in the park, and for that reason consisted of occasional observations made in the course of an extensive coverage.