



The Threat

In Bulgaria there are over 200,000 hectares of habitats suitable for chamois, allowing for a population of at least 20,000 animals. However, their total numbers for this country amount to staggering low numbers between 1,700 and 2,300 specimens (according to 2005 data). Such low population density is due to the main threat to the chamois: poaching. Despite an absolute and unconditional ban on hunting in national parks, poaching is still a fact, reducing the size and distorting the structure of the population, disrupting herd life and driving the chamois away from suitable habitats.

Having set foot in the home of the chamois, humans should not bother or endanger it, and should abide by the rules of conduct in wild nature.

We should not let poachers get away with what they are doing! If you detect or hear about any irregularity concerning the well-being of the chamois, call without delay **0884 111 400** at the Directorate of Rila National Park, or **0889 912 392** at State Hunting Estate, Razlog.

The Lesson of the Forefathers

Today we can only learn from our ancestors. For centuries, mountain dwellers – shepherds, cowherds, goatherds, loggers and the like – have satisfied their needs for food, animal hides and other basics from the numerous herds of grazing livestock. The domesticated goat is not just a lovable creature out of a fairy tale; for many centuries it has been a staple in every Bulgarian household. Its gifts are part of our daily life and lore to this day: milk, cheese, skins, goatskin rugs, topcoats, even mummers' costumes.



Thus our forefathers never relied on the chamois as a source of food or household materials, and had no interest in hunting it. This provides even less justification for today's illegal slaughter of this charming animal, which beautifies the alpine zone of Rila Mountain. For with its charm, the Rila Chamois can attract tourists and nature lovers, thus bringing much more benefit than the price of several specimens killed for food or sold as hunting trophies.



The best way to enjoy the trail and explore the beautiful wildlife is to put your trust in a trained mountain guide. Ask your hosts or make an inquiry with the Directorate of Rila National Park.



The Wild Goat Path was created under the Protection of Balkan Wild Goat – Symbol of Rila National Park Project of the Directorate of Rila NP and Information and Nature Conservation Foundation. The project is implemented with the financial contribution of the Swiss Confederation through the National Trust EcoFund and is realised in a certified PAN Park- Rila. PAN Parks guarantees the protection of Europe's wilderness – www.panparks.org



Or simply swing by the Children's Center for Balkan Chamois that is in the process of being set up at the entry to the village of Gorno Draglishte, across the street from Deshka House.

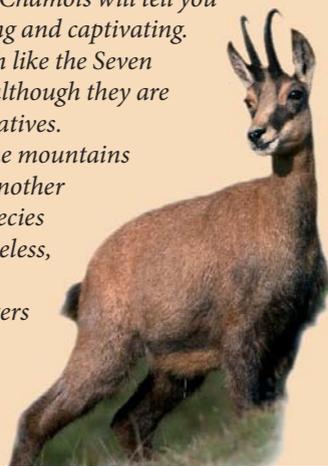


**Climb with us up the Trail
to the Home of
the Balkan Chamois!**



The Fairy Tale

Every child knows and loves the Wolf and the Seven Kids tale and can picture the happy family it tells about. Its lovable characters will stay with us for the rest of our lives. The trail of the Balkan Chamois will tell you another tale that is as exciting and captivating. Its characters look very much like the Seven Kids and the Mother Goat, although they are not their direct biological relatives. The chamois that inhabits the mountains of Bulgaria is a member of another family, a subspecies of the species of Balkan Chamois. Nevertheless, we make this compelling comparison with the characters of our favorite fairy tale because we want you to love the heroes of the trail in very much the same way!



Champions among Mammals

In addition to being a rare and protected species, the chamois is extremely charming and interesting to watch. It is one of the living symbols of Bulgarian mountain wildlife and, quite deservedly, the emblem of Rila National Park. With their powerful eyesight and ability to distinguish a moving creature from a mile away, chamois are veritable champions among mammals. Their hearing is also excellent and so is their sense of smell. Stalking a specimen is a real challenge. They are equally capable of climbing or walking across the steepest rock face, and jumping with ease across an abyss. No animal can rival them in agility and speed. Their places of habitation are virtually inaccessible to predators, and their natural enemies cannot reach them there.



Early Life

The female chamois is a loving, caring mother and never strays from her offspring during their first year. When lying down, the kid snuggles up to its mother, and when running it tries to follow her closely, keeping within touching distance. In case of sudden danger, it may even tuck itself between her forelegs. On occasion one can see a family such as: a mother, a newborn and a year-old sibling. Sometimes a goat would care for several kids, kindergarten-style, while their biological mothers graze away in peace. When they grow up, newborn kids would congregate and play with yearlings. They would chase one another, jump up and down, clash their horns together or attempt to mount each other. When they sense danger, they quickly race to their mothers. Yearlings still behave like babies; they are curious and just love to play. They stick close to their mother but may venture away from her for quite some distance. In the winter, they might slide down an icy slope on their hooves, as though on skis.

The Trail

You can take the chamois trail from the village of Banya, in Razlog municipality, from where it winds itself through the villages of Gorno and Dolno Draglishte. Its hiking section starts from the Byalata Prast locality uphill from the village of Dobarsko (1,070 meters above sea level) and reaches all the way up to Statevo Gyubre locality (2,025 m a.s.l.). Along the way, you will see 9 signposts and can use 5 lay-bys. Those who make it to the end of the trail will reach the home of the Balkan Chamois and, given a little luck and good weather, may spot it. Please take good care of the chamois, for it is part of Bulgaria's national treasure, our well-preserved natural scenery!

The trail is of low to middle difficulty. The duration of the hike is about 3.5 hours. The trail is suitable for children and teenagers, as well as for whole families – in short, for people of all ages in different physical shape, as well as for interest groups. The route allows you to choose a trek with a length and duration that really suits you; to make brief or longer stops along the way and still make it back in time for supper! Or you may choose to over-night in one of the mountain chalets up in the mountains and then extend your hike into the alpine zone.



For more information about the trail and the chamois please visit the tourism section of the Rila National Park website of www.rilanationalpark.org or click on the button with the projects of the Information and Nature Conservation Foundation at www.ecologybg.com

