Fact Sheet: Domestic Goat

*Capra hircus*

**Description:**
- Size: Varies greatly based on breed.
  - Length: 3.75-5.5 ft (115-170cm)
  - Height: 0.85-3.5 ft (26-107cm)
- Weight: 20-250 lbs, average 100 lbs (9-113kg, average 45kg)
- Sexual dimorphism: Can vary some depending on breed, but generally males are larger, have a “bearded” face, produce a strong odor from the reproductive glands, and have larger horns than female goats, if they have them at all.
- Physical Description: A goat is a medium sized hoofed livestock animal. They generally have large ears, eyes with square pupils, and cloven hooves. Other aspects of their appearance can vary greatly based on the breed. The hair is generally straight and rough, but can vary some among breeds.
- Coloration: Coat color varies by breed, but can be black, white, red, and brown. Color patterns include solid, spotted, striped, blended shades, and facial stripes.

**In the Wild**

**Habitat and Range:**
- Geographic range- Worldwide, domesticated.
- Preferred Habitat- Domestic goats are one of the most adaptable domesticated grazing animals and can survive in a wide variety of habitats. They need grass to graze on, but can survive on much more sparsely vegetated areas than other livestock, such as cattle.

**Diet:**
- Herbivore: Domestic goats eat primarily grasses and shrubs. Eats a wide variety of plants, and are tolerant to some plants which can be toxic or inedible to other livestock. Goats are known for “eating” almost anything. Goats rarely actually consume inedible material such as tin cans, but have been known to chew on them.

**Adaptations:**
- Goat’s eyes have wide, rectangular pupils. This allows them to see almost 320 degrees around them at all times, which helps in the detection of predators.
- Goats are highly adaptable, and can eat a large variety of plants, enabling them to be raised in harsh environments where some other grazing animals cannot survive.
- Most male goats and some female goats have horns which can be used for defense.

**Lifespan:**
- On average, domestic goats live to be about 15 years old, but have been reported to live up to 22 years old.

**Ecosystem relationships:**
• Predators: Aside from humans using them as a source of meat, predators of goats can include a variety of canids such as coyotes and wolves, mountain lions, large birds of prey such as eagles, and other large apex predators that live in areas where goats are raised.

• Interspecies competitors: As a domesticated species, goat’s competition for grazing space is controlled by humans. Feral goats compete with other grazers such as deer for grazing land.

• Role/ Niche: As a domesticated animal, goats are used to provide humans with meat, milk and leather. They are also used to help control the growth of grasses and weeds.

Reproduction:
• Breeding season: Late summer to early winter
• Behavior: As a domesticated species, goats reproductive behavior is controlled by humans, but are generally considered to be polygynous. If humans do not intervene in breeding behavior, the more dominant males tend to breed with the most females. Males butt heads with each other to determine hierarchy status.
• Gestation: 5 months
• Offspring: 1 to 3, 1 being the most common
• Maturation: Kids (baby goats) are weaned by 5 months old, mostly independent by 10 months, and reproductively mature at about a year old.

Activity:
• Diurnal

Other “fun facts”:
• Domestic goats are social animals, and tend to prefer to be around other goats. Herd sizes of feral goats tend to range from 5 to 20 goats, but can be as large as 100 individuals.

Conservation Status and Threats:
• Listed on the IUCN Red List as least concern
• Conservation efforts: Goats are one of the most prolific domesticated animals in the world. There is no current threat to their survival as a species. Conversely, feral populations of goats have caused some problems as an invasive species in some regions, occasionally overgrazing and outcompeting local wildlife for food.
• Goats are sometimes used in place of mowing equipment in some areas that are not suitable terrain for mowing, such as steep or rocky roadsides, or remote and rural areas. This can help reduce emissions of carbon into the environment that power equipment produces.

At the Zoo
We have 3 breeds of domestic goats at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore:
• Anglo Nubian- Breed developed in Great Britian as a dairy goat. They have large hanging ears, and a narrow straight nose. Known for their high butterfat content in their milk. We have 2 anglo-nubian goats at The Maryland Zoo. They were both born in June of
2004.

- **Nigerian Dwarf-** Miniature dairy goat of West African origin. They give a large amount of milk for their size. Generally has a gentle temperament, which coupled with their size, makes them popular pets. We currently have 5 Nigerian Dwarf males at The Maryland Zoo, all born in 2010.

- **Pygmy-** small pet/dairy goat of West African origin. Generally considered a good pet goat due to its smaller size and calm temperament. The Maryland Zoo houses 2 male and 3 female pygmy goats. They were all born between 2009-2013.

**What We Can Do**

- When possible, try to support your local farmers by shopping at farmers markets and buying local produce and meat.
  - Buying locally benefits local economies and therefore the community — buying directly from family farmers helps them stay in business
  - Locally grown food is fresher than anything in the supermarket
  - Locally grown food also encourages humane treatment of farm animals
  - Purchasing locally grown food helps the environment by reducing the carbon footprint of your groceries. Locally grown food doesn't have to travel as far, and less fossil fuel is used to transport it.

- Local Harvest (http://www.localharvest.org/) is a website devoted to helping people find products from family farms, local sources of sustainably grown food, and encourages them to establish direct contact with small farms in their local area

- Make environmentally responsible lifestyle decisions to help conserve habitat — conserve energy and resources, reduce litter and pollution.

- Support the conservation efforts of local organizations like The Maryland Zoo as well as organizations working in the field to protect wildlife and conserve habitat.

**References:**

- [http://eol.org/pages/328660/details](http://eol.org/pages/328660/details)
- [http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/summary/136383/1](http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/summary/136383/1)
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