

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)
- 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.
- 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.

In the Wild

Habitat and Range:

- Range: Worldwide, domesticated.
- 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:

- Herbivorous: 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.

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 include coyotes and wolves, mountain lions, large birds of prey such as eagles, and other

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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: The reproductive behavior of domestic goats is controlled by humans, but they 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. Herd sizes of feral goats tend to range from 5 to 20 goats, but can be as large as 100 individuals.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

At the Zoo

Here at The Zoo, 2 breeds of domestic goats are exhibited in the Farmyard:

- 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,

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makes them popular pets.

- Pygmy: Small pet/dairy goat of West African origin. Though goats aren't good pets for everyone, pygmy goats are generally considered a good pet goat due to its smaller size and calm temperament.

What We Can Do

- When possible, try to support your local farmers by shopping at farmers markets and buying local produce and meat.
 - 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.
 - 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
- Reduce consumption of animal meat products to minimize habitat loss and pollution.
 - Land is often cleared for livestock pastures and degraded over time.
 - Livestock are a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.
- Be a responsible pet owner – not all animals make good pets for everyone, make sure that you know how to properly care for an animal before getting it as a pet.
- 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.

Additional Resources and References:

- Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/pages/328660/details>
- IUCN Red List: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/summary/136383/1>
- Global Invasive Species Data Base:
<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=40>
- Animal Diversity Web: http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Capra_hircus/
- University of Wisconsin:
http://bioweb.uwlax.edu/bio203/s2009/brown_kris/Kristin_Browns_Goat_Website/Home.html