

Barbary Sheep

Ammotragus lervia

Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Chordata
Class	Mammalia
Order	Artiodactyla
Family	Bovidae



Native to: Northern Africa, where it is distributed from Morocco and Western Sahara, east to Egypt and Sudan.

Status: Vulnerable

Although this sheep is becoming more and more difficult to find in its native North Africa, introduced populations in Spain and the southern United States are flourishing. In Africa it is hunted for its skin, meat, and sinew, which are tendons.

Appearance & Lifespan

Barbary sheep are known for their thick horns. Both males and females have horns but the females are slightly smaller than the males. The horns have numerous fine rings, although in older individuals these may be worn down, causing the horn surface to look smooth. They curve in a semi-circle over the back and can be up to 55 cm (22 inches) long. The body of the Barbary sheep is covered with a short, bristly outer coat that is reddish to sandy brown in colour. The under parts are a little bit lighter in colour. Both males and females have a heavy fringe of hair on their throat, although in males this extends down the neck to cover the chest and front legs. Barbary sheep can weigh anywhere between 65-320 pounds. The life span of Barbary sheep is around 20 years.



Behavior & Reproduction

Barbary sheep are generally solitary animals but sometimes live in small groups. Like most desert dwellers, the Barbary sheep is most active in the cooler times of the day, dawn and dusk, seeking shade and shelter during the day. Barbary sheep are exceptionally sure-footed and have such jumping power that they can clear a 2 meter (6.6 ft) obstacle with ease from a standing start. The lack of vegetation for cover in their habitat has caused the Barbary sheep to hide itself by freezing in the presence of danger.

Although breeding can occur throughout the year, there is a peak from September to November, with the young being born from March to May. Females can give birth twice per year. Newborns are able to climb the rocky hills almost immediately after birth. Barbary sheep usually give birth after a gestation period of 160 days and have one baby at a time but can have up to three in rare cases.

Ecology & Habitat

Barbary sheep live in rocky, arid mountains in isolated pockets throughout northern Africa. The Barbary sheep has been introduced to North America and it is thought that it may interfere with the native Bighorn sheep populations due to competition for food resources.

In the wild Barbary sheep eat sparse grasses, bushes, acacia, and lichens. Because Barbary sheep live in arid environments they get most of their water supply from the plants they eat. However, they will drink water if it is available.

At the zoo the Barbary Sheep are fed herbivore cubes, alfalfa hay, carrots and apples.

Did You Know?

1. Aoudad (pronounced "OO-dad" or "OW-dad") is the name for this sheep used by the Berbers, a North African tribe.
2. Male sheep are called rams. Females are called ewes.
3. They have a four-chambered stomach that allows them to ruminate.

