



Mountain goat mother and kid.

Mountain Goat

The mountain goat lives higher in the mountains than any other large mammal in the Rockies. Typically, the places where the goat chooses to live in winter have deep snow and very cold temperatures. To keep warm, the mountain goat has a thick blanket of fine wool, about eight to 10 centimetres (three to four inches) long, covering every part of its body except its lips and the tip of its nose. The goat has second fur coat on top of its woolly coat which is made of guard hairs 17 to 20 centimetres (seven to eight inches) long. These guard hairs are hollow and the air trapped inside of them insulates the goat from winter temperatures that can dip to a deadly -40°C (-40°F).

FAST FACTS

Size: Shoulder height: 100 cm (40 in), weight: 45-113 kg (100-250 lb); males are larger than females.

Habitat: Steep, rugged slopes in alpine and subalpine zones.

Diet: Grasses, lichens, mosses, and woody shrubs. In early summer visits roadside ditches to eat salty soil.

Strange but true: An adult male mountain goat is called a *billy*, an adult female is a *nanny*, and a baby is a *kid*.



Both male and female mountain goats grow sharp, dagger-like horns that they can use against each other in fights, and as weapons against predators. The horns of mountain goats are different than the antlers grown by elk, deer and moose. Antlers fall off every year and a new set grows again. Only male elk, deer and moose have antlers and they use them for fighting during the mating season. The horns of mountain goats never fall off and they grow slowly throughout the animal's life.

Female mountain goat.

The mountain goat sheds its thick winter wool in May. That's when you see clumps of hair hanging off their back, chest and shoulders. At this time of the year, the goats can look very shaggy and you might think they are sick. They need to lose their winter fur so that they don't become overheated in the warm summer sun.

The mountain goat is the super cliff-climber of the Canadian Rockies. It climbs along narrow ledges that are barely wide enough for it to stand, and leaps across wide gaps in the cliffs without hesitation. If it needs to climb down a steep cliff quickly it can bounce from ledge to ledge almost as fast as if it was falling. To climb so well, the mountain goat has short, strong legs and special hooves that give it traction on slippery rock and absorb the shock when it lands. By living in steep mountain areas, the goat has few predators. In rare instances, a cougar may succeed in catching a goat or a golden eagle flying over may pluck a young one from the cliffs. By far, the greatest danger in a mountain goat's life is from falls and winter avalanches.



Mountain goats are expert rock climbers.



Hunting great gray owl.

Owls

The two largest owls living in the Canadian Rockies are the great gray owl, pictured above, and the great horned owl, pictured on the right. Although both owls hunt at night, the great gray owl also hunts during the day. Both owls use a similar style of hunting, called *perch-and-pounce*. They sit quietly on a branch or a telephone pole and wait for some careless animal to flutter, scurry, or squeak and then they swoop down on it. The great horned owl also uses the flap-and-glide hunting tactic where it flies through open woods, hoping to frighten a squirrel or a hare into running from its hiding place.

FAST FACTS

Size: Great gray: height 68 cm (27 in), wingspan 132 cm (52 in), weight 1.1 kg (2.4 lb); great horned owls are slightly smaller.

Habitat: Dense evergreen forest near meadows; great horned owls favour open mixed forests.

Diet: Small mammals; great horned owls also eat small birds.

Strange but true: Once or twice a day, an owl vomits up a compact pellet of undigested food from its stomach.



Great gray owl.



Great horned owl.

Flying quietly is important if a hunting owl is to succeed. An owl needs to be quiet for two reasons. First, it always wants to attack by surprise. Any small sound might warn the prey, giving it time to escape. Second, noisy wings make it difficult for an owl to hear faint sounds of its prey in the snow or grass.

If you open a car window while driving along the highway, you immediately notice the noise of the wind and how much more difficult it is to hear conversation. This noise is called turbulence. To prevent **turbulence** when an owl flies, it has a fine feathery fringe along the front and rear edges of its wings. This muffles the noise when it is flying. Soft fuzz on the surface of its wings also prevents noise when its feathers rub against each other.



Great horned owl.

Owls never build their own nests. Great gray and great horned owls, like the birds pictured here, often use old stick nests that belonged to hawks, crows or ravens. The owls may use the same nest for several years in a row. They never fix it up or add anything to it, so when the nest finally falls apart the owls search for a new one. The great horned owl chicks in the picture are about two weeks old. They will leave the nest when they are about four to five weeks of age.