

NUMBERS, DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION CHANGES OF THE TATRA CHAMOIS
RUPICAPRA RUPICAPRA TATRICA BLAHOUT, 1971

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Abstract: The Tatra chamois, the last sub-species of *Rupicapra rupicapra* to be described, is Critically Endangered. Several times since the second half of the 19th century it came close to extinction. It has been rescued largely due to the founding of the Tatra National Parks: Slovakian (1949) and Polish (1954). Since 1957 both parks have carried out an annual inventory of chamois by counting them directly in a total of 90 census areas, and since 1999 there has been permanent monitoring, including both spring and autumn counting, as well as observations recorded throughout the whole year on observation cards. A total of one thousand such cards were analysed during the years 1999-2003 in the Polish TPN. From the 1960s to the end of the 1980s the number of Tatra chamois remained stable at about 800. However, during the 1990s, the numbers dropped to a mere 200-300 in the entire Tatras. During recent years this number has grown: from over 200 in 1999 to 345 in 2003. Approximately 25-30% of the Tatra chamois were found on the Polish side in ten herds. Four of these herds had home ranges covering 2.5-7.5 km², with 6-13 heads per herd. Their mean growth rate was 25%. The greatest pressure from tourism was felt by the herd in the Kasprowy Wierch region. This was the largest herd, covering the smallest area. Its annual and daily activity was definitely related to the intensity of tourism. The high population growth rate of the chamois seen in the Polish Tatras during the years 1992-2003 (16-20%) may be the end of a severe drop in population numbers.

Key words: *Rupicapra rupicapra tatrlica*, historical data, numbers, distribution, population growth rate, tourism, behaviour, Tatra N.P., Poland.