

FERAL GOAT

Capra hircus (Linnaeus, 1758)

Order: Artiodactyla



Feral goats are smaller and stockier than domestic breeds and have shaggy coats.

Colour varies from black, brown, white and grey.

Both sexes have horns, which can be variable in shape. Males have larger horns than females.

Males are larger than females; 30-45g compared to 25-35g.

Feral goats typically live in separate sex groups outside the rut, which occurs in autumn. During the rut, high quality males defend the best females, leaving the lower quality males to search large distances for unguarded oestrus females. Females give birth to one, occasionally two kids in late winter.

Feral goats prefer rocky areas that provide shelter and allow good escape access. They are typically found in mountainous regions or coastal cliffs.

Feral goats will feed on herbs and grasses, but prefer shrubs and trees.

The feral goat has no real predators in the UK. In some areas the species is controlled by shooting.

Distribution map not yet available

Local distribution and key sites

Feral goats occur in a few isolated sites on the coast of Cornwall

Number of records per date class

It is not known when feral goats became established in the UK, but populations have been known for more than 100 years. They are now widespread across mountainous regions of Scotland, Ireland and North and West England and Wales. Small populations are common on islands off the west coast of the UK.

Not under threat. Considered a pest in some areas. Sometimes used for conservation grazing, to control undesirable weeds and scrub.

Survey Methods

The best way to survey for feral goats is to scan rocky cliffs and slopes. Care must be taken to avoid confusion with domestic stock.

Did you know?

Domestic and feral goats were of considerable commercial value in the 17th century, as their hair was used to make wigs

Key references

Harris, S. & Yalden, D.W. (2008) Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook (4th edn.). The Mammal Society, Southampton.