

*First record of Balkan chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica* Bolkay, 1925) in Gornata Koriya Reserve, Northwestern Bulgaria*

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Abstract. This short note presents the first record of a Balkan chamois in the Berkovitsa region. The study was conducted using camera traps placed in the Goranta Koriya Reserve in Berkovitsa municipality. The photo shows a male specimen in an old forest. There are several possibilities regarding its presence in this part of the Balkan Mountains: a wandering animal from a nearby population or a specimen from a reintroduction attempt.

Key words: Stara planina, camera traps, population.

Introduction

The Balkan chamois inhabits rocky elevations in the Central Balkans, Rila, Pirin, Western Rhodopes, and Vitosha from about 600 to 2,900 m asl (Zlatanova & Popova, 2022). The population in Vitosha exists due to reintroduction, which began in 2002 (Valchev et al., 2010). The Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra* L.) is included in Annex III of Bern Convention and the Balkan subspecies (*Rupicapra r. balcanica* Bolkay, 1925) is included in Annex II and Annex IV (strictly protected) of Directive 92/43/EEC of EU for the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna as well as Annex III (strictly protected) of Biological Diversity Act in Bulgaria. The Chamois is included in the Bulgarian Red Data Book as an endangered species (Spiridonov et al., 2011). There is no known population of the species in the Western Balkan Mountains, except for a reintroduction attempt near Chuprene, which began in 2012 (Zlatanova & Popova, 2022). This short note presents the first record of a Balkan chamois in the Berkovitsa region.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted in the Gornata Koriya Reserve, Western Stara Planina (Fig. 1). The

Gornata Koriya Reserve is located near the town of Berkovitsa, the territory of the Berkovitsa municipality, Montana region. One of the few compact natural areas of pure and mixed spruce-fir-beech forests in the Stara Planina is located there. The altitude of the area is 1100 to 1932 m (MOEW, 2015).

Results and Discussion

The only photo of a chamois during the survey period was taken on October 22 (Fig. 2). The specimen was noticed in the old-growth forest of the Gornata Koriya Reserve. The closest populations of the species are in the Central Balkan National Park and the Vitosha Nature Park. There was also a reintroduced attempt into the Chuprene reserve in 2012. It is possible to assume that the animal is a male specimen based on the description of the horns by Popov & Sedefchev (2003), which have downward-pointing tips. Males also spend most of the year alone, unlike females and young, who move mainly in herds.

The species is characterized by spending most of the year close to the forest edge and rocky habitats, but in winter, the chamois stays in the forests (Popov & Sedefchev, 2003).

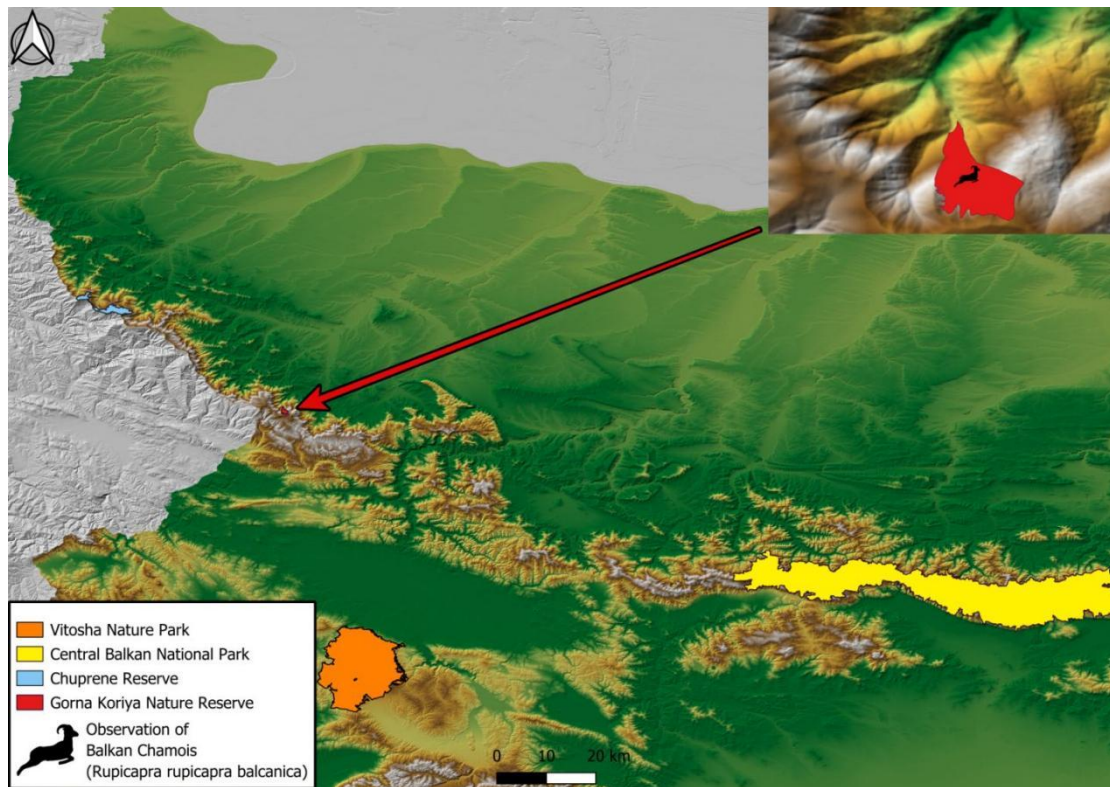


Fig. 1. A map showing the location of Gornata Koriya Reserve and the nearest territories with a chamois population in Bulgaria.



Fig. 2. Male chamois in the Gornata Koriya Reserve. (Photo credit: Alexander E. Petrov)

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Conclusions

The presence of chamois in the Gornata Koriya reserve is still of unclear origin. It seems that the photographed specimen is part of the reintroduction attempt in the Chuprene Reserve, which is the closest known location of the species. It is also possible that the photographed animal came from a more distant territory due to the usual long distances that males travel. In order to reach a clear picture of the presence of the Balkan chamois in the area, as well as its movement, a longer and more extensive study is needed. The study is already being planned.

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