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New data on chamois Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica Bolkay, 1925 (Mammalia: Bovidae) in the Eastern Stara Planina Mts Bulgaria

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Abstract. The Balkan chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica* Bolkay, 1925 has a highly fragmented distribution in the mountainous regions of the Balkan Range, including Bulgaria. In 2021, the Balkan chamois was recorded in two locations outside its known distribution range, i.e., in the natural park "Sinite Kamani", eastern Stara Planina Mts. This is the first hard evidence of the presence of the species in the Eastern Stara Planina Mts. Two new records of Balkan chamois were documented in two different parts of the nature park in the second half of 2025. In the second record, it was observed among a herd of stray grazing domestic goats.

Key words: endangered species, long-distance dispersal, recovery.

Introduction

The Balkan chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica* Bolkay, 1925 is found in Bulgaria in a much smaller part of the range it once inhabited (Genov et al., 2003). Although the species is included in the Bulgarian Biodiversity Law as Strictly Protected (Appendices 2 and 3) (Bulgarian Biodiversity Law, 2022) and the Red Data Book of Bulgaria as Endangered (Spiridonov et al., 2015), this subspecies is subject to a strong poaching pressure. Six isolated populations have been identified on the territory of Bulgaria: (1) Central Balkans, (2) Rila, (3) Pirin, (4) Western Rhodopi, (5) Vitosha, and (6) Western Stara Planina Mts (Dolapchiev et al., 2023).

In the Stara Planina Mts, before 2022, its presence was limited to the "Central Balkan" National Park and the "Balgarka" Nature Park (Spiridonov et al., 2015). After 2022, the species was repeatedly recorded in the Western Stara Planina Mts, Chuprene Municipality (on the territory of the Midzhur State Forestry Enterprise) (Dolapchiev et al., 2023).

A further fragmented presence was recorded in the Eastern Balkan Mountains, where a total of four registrations of single specimens of the species were documented in the area of the "Sinite Kamani" Nature park (NP) in the period 2021-2025.

This publication will examine these records and make a hypothesis regarding the origin of these individuals in the "Sinite kamani" NP area.

Materials and methods

Study area

The "Sinite Kamani" Nature Park is located in the eastern part of Stara Planina Mts (Fig. 1), stretching over an area of 11380.1 ha (113.8 km^2). The highest peak is Bulgarka (1181 m.). The climate is temperate-continental with characteristic and frequent winds from the Mediterranean region. The amplitude in absolute temperatures varies between +41°C to -20°C. In the summer, it is cool in the higher parts and dry and hot in the lower parts. In some areas of the park in winter, snow often lingers. The maximum rainfall is in

May, and the minimum is in August (Dolapchiev et al., 2023).

Deciduous forests (9,000 ha) occupy most of the park's territory, and over 600 ha are occupied by conifers. Forests are characterized as monodominant and mixed. The most common are the Common beech (*Fagus silvatica*), Cornish oak (*Quercus petraea*), common hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Turkish oak (*Quercus cerris*), Hungarian oak (*Quercus frainetto*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Oriental hornbeam (*Carpinus orientalis*), Silver lime (*Tilia tomentosa*), etc.

38 species of mammals are registered on the territory of the park, of which 24 are protected by the Biodiversity Act (Bulgarian Biodiversity Law, 2022). In the areas around settlements, especially in the northern part of the town of Sliven, bordering the park, a frequent presence of domestic or stray cats and free-ranging and stray dogs is detected (Dolapchiev et al., 2024).

As a Nature Park, there are several restrictions (Law on Protected Areas, 1998) on human activity, but at the same time, it is a year-round tourist destination.

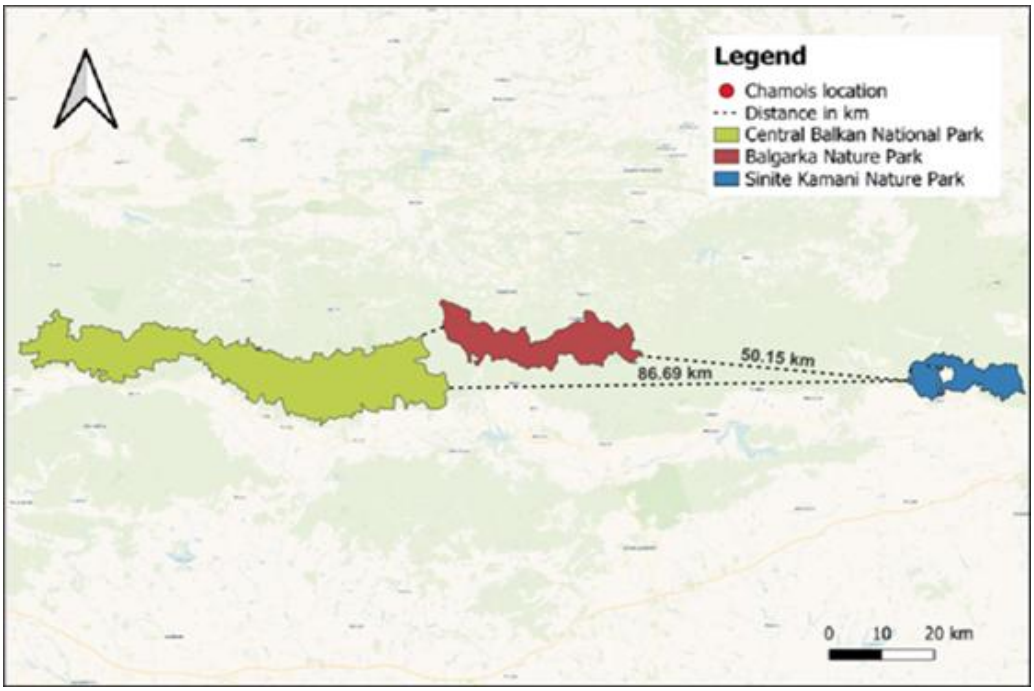

Fig. 1. Location of the "Sinite Kamani" Nature Park and the distance (in kilometres) to the "Bulgarka" Nature Park and the "Central Balkan" National Park.

Results

Locations of places where the chamois have been photographed in the "Sinite Kamani" Natural Park are presented on Fig. 2.

The first reported sighting of a chamois in the area of the "Sinite Kamani" NP was made on March 28, 2021, by Andrey Stoyanov in the eastern part of the nature park (Peshtenik area).

Unfortunately, the animal was photographed from a long distance with a mobile phone, and the photo is of such low quality that it does not allow for identification of the species. Due to the lack of a high-quality photo allowing for a reliable identification of the species, this case is considered from an informative point of view only.

On 09.04.2021, approximately 1.5 km south of the first sighting, Simo Marin, a long-time expert from the environmental non-governmental organization "Green Balkans", managed to photograph a chamois (Fig. 3.1) near the Mollova Kuria area. It cannot be confirmed whether the same animal appears in both sightings. After these sightings, no other signals of sightings of the species in the park area were received until 2025.

In 2025 the species was photographed (Fig. 3.2) in the Golyama Chatalka area, located in the "Kutelka" Reserve (which is located in the central part of the "Sinite Kamani" NP). The author of the photos, the local hut keeper Georgi Tomov, claims to have regularly observed the individual in this

area, from August until the last observation made on 12.10.2025.

After this date (on 16.10.2025), two camera traps were placed in the area, but for now, the species has not been registered.

A few months after the last observation on 04.12.2025, at a distance of approximately 4 km in a southeasterly direction, a chamois was photographed again (Fig 3.3) - Mollova kuria area. The author of the photo, Iliana Miteva, photographed the chamois among a herd of homeless domestic goats. A few years ago, a tragic incident occurred in which a local elderly goat keeper died while herding a herd of goats. From that moment on, the goats became homeless and inhabited the mountainous region. After receiving the signal and the photo from this observation, two camera traps were also placed in the area (17.12.2025).

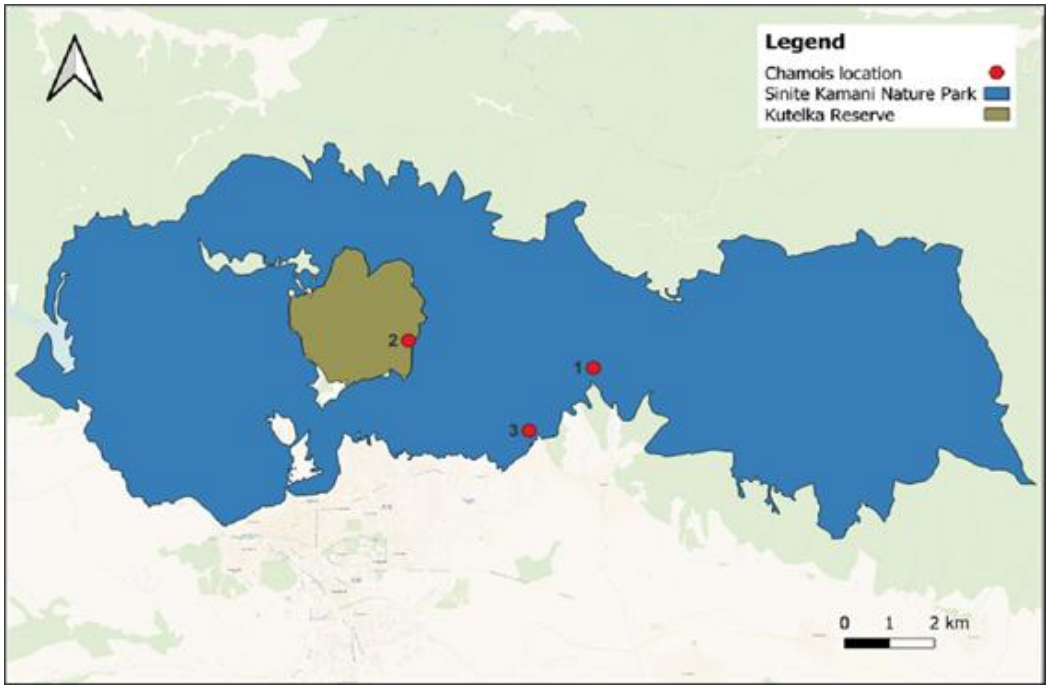

Fig. 2 Locations of places where the chamois have been photographed in the "Sinite Kamani" Natural Park: 1 - 09.04.2021; 2 - 12.10.2025: 3 - 04.12.2025.

3.1 3.2 3.3

Fig. 3 The photos of the fotografired chamois in the "Sinite Kamani" Natural Park: 3.1. - 09.04.2021; 3.2. - 12.10.2025: 3.3. - 04.12.2025.

Discussion

According to literature data, chamois inhabited the nature park until the middle of the 20th century (Spiridonov, 1977).

The closest colonies of chamois to the current observations are located about 50 km away in the "Balgarka" Nature Park and about 100 km away in the "Central Balkan" National Park (Fig. 2).

According to the data published so far, traveling such a distance is not typical for the species. The largest distance recorded so far is 17 km (Loison et al., 1999). It should be noted, however, that the species inhabits areas that are difficult to monitor, and it is possible that longer "long-distance dispersal" events are being made that have not been recorded.

Our hypothesis, which remains to be proven, is that somewhere in the area between the "Central Balkan" and "Bulgarka" parks and, respectively, the "Sinite Kamani" NP, there is a previously unestablished colony of chamois. Accordingly, the individuals observed in the "Sinite Kamani" NP are from it. The arguments that make us think so are the large distance that separates these parks and, according to literature data, the atypical distance for the species of such a distance, the largest documented distance traveled is 17 (Loison et al. 1999).

According to experts familiar with the species, for example, Simeon Arangelov, in a private conversation, claims that such "long-distance dispersal" is not foreign to the species, especially for males during the mating season.

The observations from 2025 were exactly at the time when the mating season of the species takes place from October to December (Spiridonov et al., 2015), but this is not the case in 2021, when the observations were reported in the months of March and April.

Future research in the region of eastern Stara Planina Mtn. will show whether a previously unknown colony of the species exists.

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