



# The Bilberry Goats



## **Classification**

Kingdom:	Animalia
Subphylum:	Vertebrata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Artiodactyla
Family:	Bovidae
Genus:	Capra

## **Bilberry goats at a glance**

- Long silken shaggy coat
- Large and stocky
- Long beard
- Longest horns of any goat in the world – up to 49 inches! Males' horns are larger than females.
- Fringe that covers eyes.
- Colour – creamy/blonde.
- Only 27 goats left
- Found nowhere else in the world
- No one knows where they originated or how they came to be on Bilberry Rock but locals presume it was the Huguenots.
- Weight. Males – 50-75kg
- Females – 35-60kg.

## **Introduction**

The Bilberry Goats reside on Bilberry Rock in Waterford City. There are 19 billies (male) and only eight nannies (female). The young are called kids. The herd is led by a dominant nanny. In feral goat herds there should be at least 12 females, this is why the bilberry goats are in such danger of extinction. European goat experts have called them a 'unique ancient breed'. Other experts were amazed to see such a 'primitive herd still living in the wild'.

## **Origins**

Local historians believe the goats were brought to Waterford by French Huguenots in 1693 but there is no direct evidence to support this. International scientists and goat specialists continue to study the goats and, to gain answers, University College Dublin has taken biopsy samples for DNA analysis in order to discover the origins of the bilberry herd. A member of the National Dutch Landrace Goat Society said there was no sign of weakness or inbreeding in the herd and they believe that they have descended from a cold weather goat in general, due to the thick shaggy coat. In particular, the Bilberry goat resembles the central Asian Pashmina Down Breed Group.

## **Habitat**

Bilberry Rock, a steep quarry, with adjoining grassland is now only 14 acres in size but, in the past, the herd was larger and had a larger area in which to roam. The minerals contained in the rock are essential for the goats' survival and relocation could mean the goats may not survive.



### **Breeding**

Mating occurs between August and December. This time is called the 'rut'. Billies develop a strong musky smell in their scent glands. They will show off their strength to other males by shaking their heads and butting each other with their horns which are extremely long. Most nannies start to breed at a year old. They usually give birth to one or two kids. The kids follow their mothers until they are weaned at 6 weeks old. If they survive their first and hardest year of life, they usually live up to 8 years old.

### **Conservation of the Bilberry Goats**

The 14 acres of land on which the goats live and graze has recently been bought by a developer who wants to build houses on it. If this happens the goats will become extinct. The Bilberry Goat Herd Protection Trust was set up to see that this does not happen. The Irish Wildlife Trust is actively involved in the campaign. Unfortunately, the feral goat is not a protected species and Bilberry Rock is not a designated area under the Wildlife Act, however Waterford County Council could designate the area as a Special Amenity Area and this would protect the unique Bilberry Goat herd. Please sign the petition going to Waterford City Council at the following website: <https://bilberrygoats.wordpress.com/>

#### **Did you know?**

In winter the goats' hair grows longer and the male grows a mane around his neck!  
The age of a goat can be estimated by counting the 'growth rings' on their horns.  
Goats have large spongy pads on their feet, to help them balance on steep slopes and mountainsides!



#### **Irish Wildlife Trust      *FactFiles on Nature***

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