



Chamois

Recreational hunting in Nelson/Marlborough

History and dispersal

Chamois were first introduced to this country when the Emperor of Austria, Franz Josef, sent a gift of six does and two bucks to the New Zealand Government.

They were liberated at Mount Cook, being transported in a crate via the Hooker cableway to the north bank of the Hooker River. A further pair were imported in 1914, but the male was shot by a guide after it attacked some tourists.

After liberation they dispersed in small groups, rapidly spreading along the Southern Alps, sooner, further and faster than any other introduced ungulates. They were completely or partially protected until 1930.

Current distribution and habits

Chamois are probably the most numerous and widespread wild ungulates in the South island next to red deer.

They occupy a wide range of mountain habitats including alpine bluffs, grasslands/ herbfield, subalpine shrublands and forest. Steep rugged areas are favoured although in Marlborough many live in low-altitude bluff systems and gorges. They are capable of surprising speed and are not afraid of water, often swimming rivers and occasionally lakes.

In summer they feed from dawn for three to four hours, then rest until three to four hours before dusk, when they feed again. In winter, feeding is confined to mid morning and mid afternoon.

Most chamois tend to avoid each other, although females and their young form loose unstable groups, while males are mostly solitary.

In the Nelson/Marlborough area moderate to light numbers of chamois can be found, mainly around Nelson Lakes National Park and South Marlborough. They are still colonising north west Nelson and sightings have been reported as far north as the head of the Cobb Valley.

Environmental impact

Chamois eat a wide range of plants and may adversely affect rare or localised plants. During the winter months they eat more shrubs than in the

summer when their diet varies considerably. In the Cupola Basin in Nelson Lakes National Park their principle foods are short grasses, snowgrass and shrubs. They are also partial to herb species.

Together with other browsing and grazing animals they have contributed to the greatly modified state of mountain vegetation today. Alpine herbfields, shrublands and sparsely vegetated rugged areas have suffered the most harm.

Chamois can cause damage to soil in bedding areas, on tracks and on feeding sites such as alpine mires and tarns.

Hunting opportunities

Kahurangi National Park

Only occasionally found at Mt Owen and the Fyfe River via Granity Pass.

Nelson Lakes National Park

East Matakita, Paske, Spenser Range, East Sabine and Mahanga Range.

Marlborough

Branch/Leatham, Ferny Gair, Spray/Waihopai/Wye, Molesworth.

Kaikoura

Jam, Charwell, Clarence.

