

The Goat

Scientific name: *Capra hircus*

Irish name: Gabhar

Domestic goats are small animals, similar in size to their relative the sheep. The goat has a shorter tail, which is turned upwards, horns that grow upwards (on both male and females) and the male usually has a beard.



Maisy the goat enjoying a little rest!

Goats are herbivores and their diet consists of grass, leaves, trees, hay, grain, food scraps - in fact it appears that goats will try to eat just about anything! Like cows they ruminate, or "chew the cud". Animals that ruminate have four chambers in the stomach. These chambers are full of bacteria, which help to break down the food that the animal eats, so that the nutrients can be

absorbed into its body. Having chewed and swallowed the food (now known as cud), the food is often brought back up into the mouth to be chewed some more and then swallowed again. This is known as "chewing the cud".

FACT FILE

Height: 70-120 cm

Weight: 45-54 kg

Colour: Varies - white, brown, grey, red, cream, black or a mixture of these colours.

Food: Grass, foliage from trees, shrubs bushes and other plants.

Male: Called a ram, buck or billy goat.

Female: Called a doe or nanny goat.

Young: Called a kid.

Life span: Approximately 15 years.

Feral Goats

Feral goats are domestic goats that have gone "wild".

The ancestors of feral goats were farm animals that either escaped or were set free, to roam in the wild. Even today, the odd domestic goat will join a feral herd.

In Ireland these feral goats can be found in remote mountain areas in Killarney, Glendalough, the Burren, Waterford, Connemara and in the Mourne Mountains.



Produce

Humans rely on goats for many things.

Goats provide us with milk and cheese, often used by people who have allergies to cow's milk, as goat's milk is easier to digest. Goat meat is popular in many parts of the world, though not as much in Ireland. Goat's wool, like sheep's wool, can be used to create clothing, with the fine wool from the Cashmere goat and Angora goat particularly prized. The skin or hide of the goat is soft so is often useful for making gloves and shoes. It is also used to cover drums, such as the bodhrán, the Irish drum.



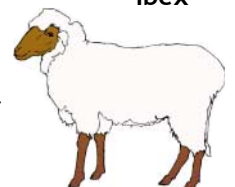
Relatives

Goats belong to a family of species known as bovids. This family includes all animals that have cloven hooves (hooves that are divided into two) and unbranched horns, such as goats, sheep, cows, bison, wildebeest and antelope.

Goats are believed to have been domesticated from wild goats about 8,000-9,000 years ago in South Asia. There are still about 10 different species of wild goat found on mountains in Europe, Africa and Asia, with one of the most well-known wild goat being the Ibex. In America there is a Mountain Goat, but it is really a type of antelope.



Ibex



Sheep