

ZOOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS



Mountain Goats

► **HIGH UP** in the Rockies and in the Cascade Mountains, in the more inaccessible reaches of Montana, Idaho, and Washington, the kids are being born.

From the human point of view, the footing is tricky and the scenery breath-taking, but the mother mountain goat is equally unaware of both danger and beauty. And the kid is too preoccupied getting its breakfast and testing its mountain legs to notice.

Throughout the end of April, May and June the kids are born, singly or in litters of two. The lying-in takes place in some well-hidden cranny, from which the mother ventures to forage for her own repast, returning at frequent intervals to cater to her hungry offspring.

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This period of infantile isolation does not last long. Very soon, a matter of days, mothers and kids congregate in nursery herds a couple of dozen strong, feeding together over a comparatively restricted area. The adult males do not participate in this domestic band, preferring to range far, alone and untrammelled.

The mountain goat is a member of the antelope family, and is a close relative of the Alp-climbing chamois. It is marvelously adapted to its chill and precarious environment. It has a long shaggy coat with a dense soft woolly underfur. Its white color renders it all but invisible against snow, and its suction-cup hoofs and elastic, spreading toes give it a sure-footed agility that sometimes seems to defy the laws of gravity.

The prodigies of climbing and leaping that these animals are capable of always brings out a mingled exasperation and admiration in those venturesome people who try to get close. Owen Wister once described following tracks through snow and soft shale. The marks showed that the perverse animals "invariably chose the sharpest slant they could find to walk on, often with a decent level just beside it that we were glad enough to have. If there were a precipice and a sound flat-top, they took the precipice, and crossed its face on juts that did not look as if your hat would hang on them."

Another observer, Frederic Irland, has recorded a winter trip in the Cascade Mountains. "We had nearly burst our hearts by climbing for an hour or two," he writes, when suddenly they spied four mountain goats "on the edge of an abyss of the kind which Dore has portrayed in illustrating Dante." The goats saw them too, and scampered away "along scandalous precipices."

After a perilous pursuit "wholly unsuited to nervous persons . . . we saw those four fool goats again, the big one and a small one looking back around the corner to see if we were really coming." The men never did catch up with the goats.

Science News Letter, May 8, 1954

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Questions

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Photographs: Cover and p. 298, Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories; p. 291, Fremont Davis; pp. 295 and 304, General Electric Company.

PSYCHOLOGY

Noise in One Ear, Hear in the Other

► **YOU CAN** understand speech in spite of interfering noise surprisingly well, provided the voice comes in one ear and the noise comes in the other. This finding was reported to the Midwestern Psychological Association meeting in Columbus, Ohio, by Drs. Edward C. Carterette and James P. Egan of Indiana University.

It is only necessary to increase the loudness of the voice five decibels, compared to an increase of 37 decibels required when both voice and masking noise come in the same ear.

Two ears are also better than the same ear when the interfering noise is another voice, the investigators found.

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