



Species, Description and Habits

The moufflon is the biggest animal of the Cyprus Fauna. Its former scientific name was *Ovis orientalis orientalis*. However, in recent years following long and in depth studies a new scientific name was given to it, *Ovis gmelini ophion*.

The Cyprus moufflon is a kind of wild sheep and is found only in Cyprus. Other kinds of moufflon can be found in various

mediterranean countries such as Turkey, Syria, the island of Sardinia etc.

The moufflons are very shy and agile, they move very fast on the steep slopes of the Paphos forest and are very difficult to approach, especially when they are frightened. The mature male moufflon is a strong, well-built and beautiful animal. It has a thick and plentiful hide which in winter is of a light brown colour, with light grey on the back and an elongated black patch round the neck. In summer its hide becomes short and smooth, with a uniform brown colour and white underparts.

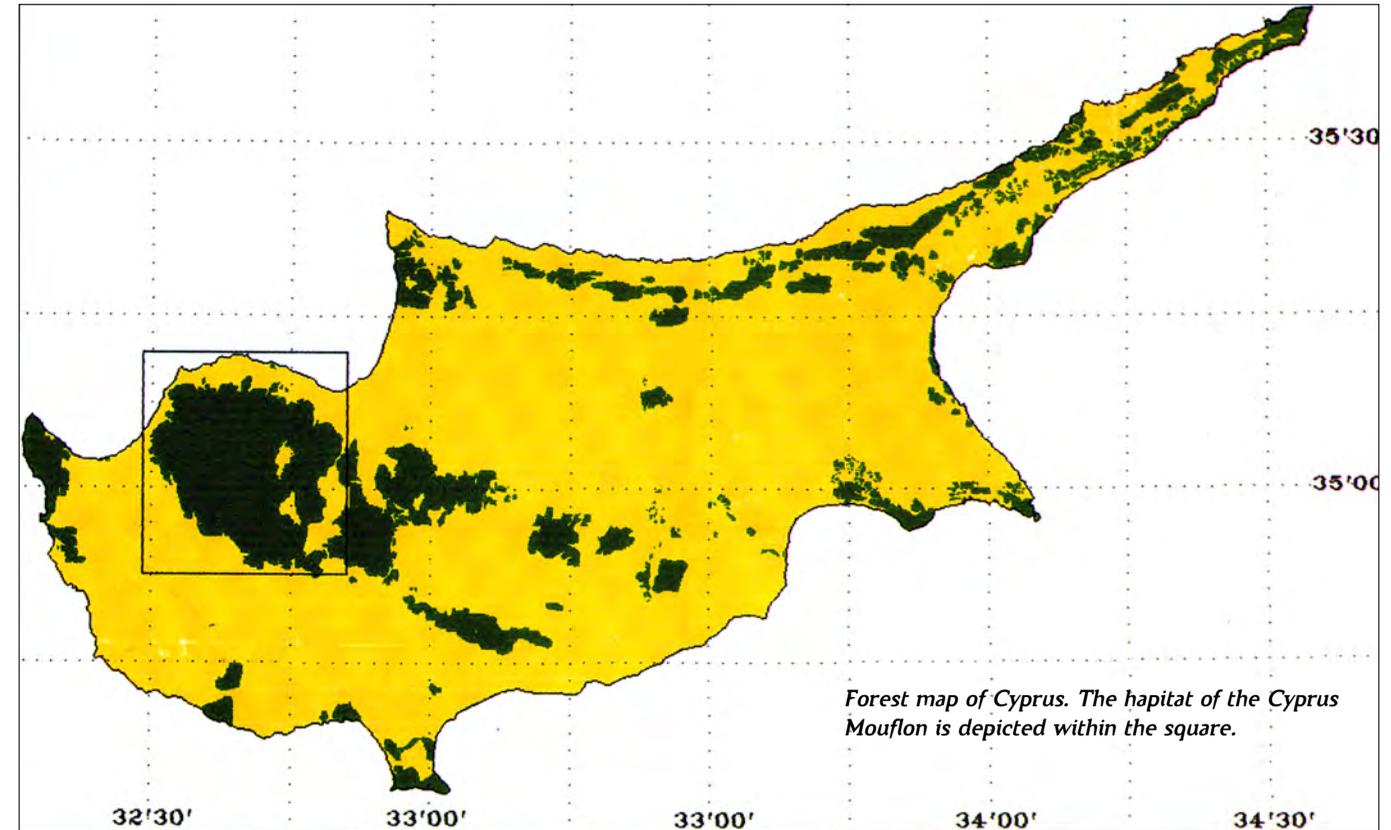


The male moufflons have heavy horns in the shape of a sickle. The length of the horns of the mature animals is between 55 and 60 centimetres. The weight of the male is around 35 kilos while the female weighs around 25 kilos. Its height is around one metre.

Its seasonal activity pattern is considerably variable. During summer, the animal is active in early morning and late afternoon, whereas in winter is active over the entire day.

During the summer, the moufflons live on the high mountains of the Paphos forest, like the Tripilos region. The Tripilos mountains stand at 1.362 metres and overlook the Cedar valley. In winter, when the high peaks of the mountains are covered with snow, the moufflons come down to lower pastures in search of food. At times, when there is not enough food in the forest, the moufflons venture to move to the edge of the forest to search for food.

The same can happen during summer when available food is very scarce in the forest. During this season



Forest map of Cyprus. The habitat of the Cyprus Moufflon is depicted within the square.

moufflon causes considerable damages to various agricultural crops.

In autumn, during the mating period, the moufflons form herds in groups of 10-20 male and female animals. In spring, however, when the delivery time is approaching, the herds are divided into small groups of two to three animals, or even one in the case of male moufflons which roam about alone.

The female moufflons give birth to either one and rarely two young ones in April or May. The newborns are very lively from the moment they are born so that they can face the many dangers that threaten them.

The History of the Moufflon

There is enough evidence to prove that in the past, at least in all the mountainous and semi-mountainous regions of the island, moufflons existed in abundance. In excavated mosaics it appears that the moufflon was very well known during the Hellenistic-Roman period.

During the Middle Ages, in the documents of various visitors, the moufflon is also mentioned. The moufflon was generally referred to as "ram" or "wildsheep" and in several cases it was included in the descriptions of the hunting expeditions organized by

the aristocracy of that period. At that time the hunting of the moufflon was carried out with dogs.

Habitat

The moufflon is an animal that loves the forest. It can be found in small herds in the Paphos forest which covers an area of 60.000 hectares with natural vegetation consisting mainly of pine trees (*Pinus brutia*) cedar trees (*Cedrus brevifolia*) golden oaks (*Quercus alnifolia*) Strawberry trees (*Arbutus andrachne* etc).

The moufflon feeds on various kinds of wild growth that flourish in the shady valleys of the forest. In summer, when the wild growth tends to wither, the moufflons wander out of the forest to look for food. It is during this time that the passers-by are able to see the moufflons in forests with low vegetation or in fields that are close to the forests.

Protection management of the moufflon

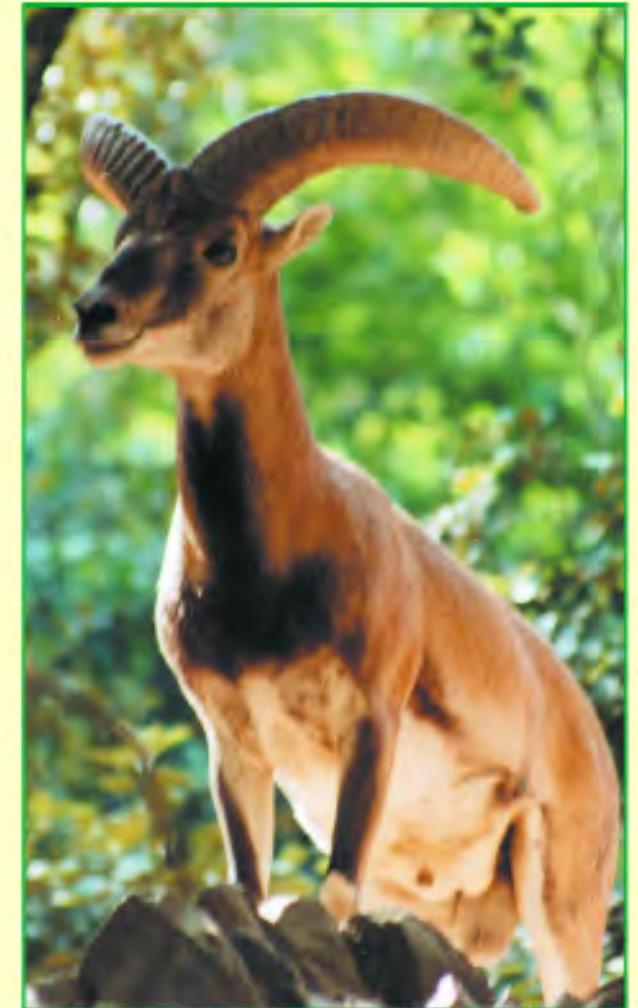
In 1878, when the island became a British colony, despite the fact that the number of moufflons had been reduced although they concentrated in the Paphos forest, their number was still quite high. Unfortunately, during the years that followed and due to the appearance of hunting guns it became much easier to kill the moufflons. The increase in the number of hunters and the non existence of a suitable policy for the protection of the moufflon resulted in the drastic reduction of this animal in the Paphos forest. Until 1937 the only people who were worried about the decrease in the number of moufflons were the foresters.

In 1938 the hunting law was revised in order to provide a greater protection to the moufflon. Both the Forestry Department and the police were especially

seconded for the protection of the moufflon against poaching. In 1939 the whole of the Paphos forest was declared as Game Protected Area for hunting, primarily for the protection of the moufflon. Later, with the declaration of the Cyprus Republic, additional measures were taken to protect the moufflon. A considerable part of the Paphos Forest has been declared as Nature Reserve under the Forest Law. Additionally, the whole area will be included in the European network of protected areas, the "Natura 2000". Four sites of the forest have been proposed as "Sites of Community Importance" (24.000ha), whereas the whole area has been declared as "Special Protected Area". Today, their number has increased to a satisfactory level and any danger of their disappearance has been eliminated. The moufflon is an indispensable part of our natural heritage and one of the symbols of Cyprus.



The Cyprus Moufflon



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