



**von Hardenberg A., Bassano P., Peracino A. & Lovari S. (2000). Male alpine chamois occupy territories at hotspots before the mating season. *Ethology*, 106, 617-630**

Ungulate mating systems vary broadly both between and within species. Studies on mating systems in different habitats can provide clues to the ecological factors determining this diversity. Despite its abundance in the European Alps and its importance as a game species, surprisingly little is known about the mating system of Alpine chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra rupicapra*. We tested the hypothesis that adult males first defend mating territories in late spring, when females segregate from males and well before the Nov. rut. In the Gran Paradiso National Park (north-western Italian Alps), adult males shared a winter range but occupied individual ranges in summer and early autumn. Males were more aggressive to each other in the summer than in the spring. A strong site fidelity from one year to the next was found for the summer and early autumn months. Those males that occupied the same territories both in the summer and during the rut (Nov.) appeared to be at hotspots, attractive to females during the rut because of reduced snow cover. Other males appeared to cluster around these hotspots during the rut. Territories that were first occupied during the summer were visited by more females than those that were not established until the rut began. Our results suggest that the mating system of this population of Alpine chamois consists of the early occupation of clustered mating territories. The early establishment of mating territories in areas frequented by females during the rut may lead to reproductive benefits for male chamois.

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