



FAST FACTS

Name: Bighorn sheep

Species name: *Ovis canadensis canadensis* (which means "sheep belonging to Canada")

Average weight: 119-127 kg (males)
53-91 kg (females)

Life expectancy: average 10-15 years

PHYSIOLOGY

The bighorn sheep is the larger, wild relative of the domesticated sheep. Males are called "rams" and have long spiral horns, while females, called "ewes", have shorter, spike-like horns. The coat is short, coarse and typically brown with white areas on the muzzle, the back of the legs and around the rump. Once a year, the sheep will shed its hair to reveal a new coat underneath.

The bighorn sheep's most important asset is its hoofs. The front hoofs are slightly larger than the hind. Each hoof has a hard rim on the outer edge with a soft, concave area in the middle, which gives the sheep excellent traction on steep, rocky terrain.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

The bighorn sheep grazes on grasses and vegetation that is available in its rugged habitat on mountain slopes. This sparse environment provides the bighorn sheep with the ability to escape potential predators, such as grizzly or black bears and wolverines. Its keen eyesight allows it to detect movement and objects up to a kilometre away, giving it time to climb up or down a steep incline to safety. It can use ledges only five centimetres wide for footholds and can jump as far as six metres from ledge to ledge.

Bighorn sheep are social animals and live in groups of anywhere from 10 to 100 sheep. They generally live separately in groups of rams and ewes, but mingle in the fall during the mating season.

RANGE

In Canada, the bighorn sheep lives in the snowfields of the Rockies, but their range extends from Alaska to northern Mexico. It has a very different range in the summer than in the winter, but the size for each averages around 17 squared kilometres.