

West Caucasian Tur (*Capra [ibex] caucasica* Güld. et Pall.), biology, status and taxonomy

P. J. Weinberg

North Ossetian Nature Reserve, Basieva str. 3-8, Alagir,
North Ossetia – Alania, Russia 363240, tur@osetia.ru

West Caucasian tur range stretches in a narrow (≤ 70 km) stripe for 250 km along the western part of the Greater Caucasus from appr. 44°N , $39^{\circ}45'\text{E}$ to 43°N , $42^{\circ}50'\text{E}$, occurring in Russia and Georgia. Mountains are usually below 4000 m of elevation. Annual precipitation exceeds 1200 mm. Average annual temperature is 3.7°C . In winter, tur concentrate on sunny slopes of the North Caucasus, 30 to 80% of the animals staying below timberline. In summer, distribution over slopes of different exposures is more even. Average group size at high population density (13 animals/ km^2 in summer habitat and 44 animals/ km^2 in wintering areas) is 11.7 and 20.3 respectively. Females begin participating in the rut at the age of 3 years. Rut lasts from mid-November till beginning of January. Birth-giving season occurs in May - July. There is one kid. One month after parturition, average proportion of kids is 13%, yearlings make only 5-9%. Sex ratio usually favours females. Grasses make 80-90% of raw contents of stomach in summer and up to 70% in winter, when animals also browse. Though West Caucasian tur is protected in 5 nature reserves and national parks in Russia and Georgia, total numbers hardly exceed some 5000-6000 now. West Caucasian tur is morphologically intermediate between ibex and East Caucasian tur. Taxonomic status of tur population of the Central Caucasus is indefinite. The natural barrier that might have separated East and West Caucasian tur could have been glaciation in the Central Caucasus.