

Effects of age and endoparasites on feeding and vigilance behaviour in male Alpine ibex

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Feeding activity in ungulates is potentially costly because of an increased risk of predation and infection. The aim of this study was to verify if there were significant differences in feeding and vigilance behaviour in male Alpine ibex belonging to different age groups and in different sanitary conditions (presence/absence of endo-parasite infestation in the gastroenteric tract). The study was carried out in Levionaz (Gran Paradiso National Park, Italy) from June to September 2001 and 2002, on a marked sample of male Alpine ibex (2001: N=41, 2002: N=47). We found that, during feeding activity, the younger subjects (<8 years) had shorter foraging bouts than adults (≥8 years). This result suggests higher selectivity in grazing behavior in younger individuals in accordance with the different metabolic needs of younger and older individuals. Also inter-vigilance bouts were shorter in younger individuals, suggesting lower vigilance in older (and larger) individuals. We also found that the duration of foraging bouts was longer in subjects treated with anti-helminthic drugs compared to untreated controls, suggesting higher selectivity in grazing by parasitized individuals possibly in order to avoid further infection.