

The Ibex conservation project of the Dolomiti Friulane Natural Park

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The Dolomiti Friulane Regional Park covers the western pre-alpine sector of the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region. A group of 26 ibexes (*Capra ibex*) coming from the Gran Paradiso National Park were reintroduced in the Dolomiti Regional Park during three years (1985-1987). The new population has perfectly adapted to the pre-alpine habitat, where altitude is quite low as compared to their original alpine area. The ibex population use the low-altitude areas (800-1200 m above the sea level) during the winter months and in these areas we found the highest density (21 subject/100 ha). During the summer, on the contrary, the ibexes spread over a wider territory and they move to the highest altitudes (1900-2200 m above the sea level). A population census was carried out all over the Park area during July 2004 and a minimum of 154 ibexes were counted. The local movements of the animals inside the Park are studied using the radio-tracking technique. Several Ibexes representative of both sexes and class ages were captured. Standard clinical examinations and laboratory tests were carried out on all the animals. Further reintroductions in the southern area of the Park were successfully carried out during the years 2002 and 2004. Five ibexes were gently provided by Gran Paradiso National Park (2002) and six ibexes were released in cooperation with Alpi Marittime Regional Park (2004). The females established in the releasing area together with 2 males (one of the females released in 2002 died some months after the reintroduction); the other 4 males joined another herd of males crossing a deep valley (Val Settimana). The next program that concerns the Ibex conservation project in the Dolomiti Friulane Regional Park is to transfer some subjects from the central area of the park to the new reintroduction area to increase the numeric growth of the colony. The final goal is to reach the estimated carrying capacity of the Park, that is about 500-600 animals.