

MEET WILD ANIMALS IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT

The Torgnon district is inhabited by many mountain animal species that have each adapted to a particular habitat and which can, therefore, only be observed in certain conditions, seasons and times. The habitats are distinguished by environmental factors, such as altitude, exposure, soil and geomorphological features (shape of the slopes, presence of rocky walls, damp areas, etc.), that have an impact on the animal and plant species present.

The possibility of observing wild animals in their natural environment is, therefore, affected by the concomitant presence of several factors that can be traced to the habits and behavioural patterns of the various species, mainly related to food sources, reproduction, care of the offspring, winter hibernation phase, position and type of nest or den.

The sequence of seasons plays a primary role in this overall picture. Different species that are busy performing a large variety of activities can be observed all year round. For instance, the marmot can only be seen in warm weather, focused on finding food. When winter sets in, it goes into hibernation in its nest. Likewise, it is easier to observe the rock goat at a low-medium altitude in winter when it seeks food; while, for the same reason, it moves to higher altitudes in summer.

The success of the observation is, anyhow, favoured by the adoption of a correct approach to carefully study signs of the animal's presence, and always be silent, discrete and respectful. For some species, you must watch without being seen, keeping an appropriate distance and using simple optical instruments (e.g., binoculars, telephoto lens).

The main habitats that can be observed in the Torgnon area are woodland, fields-pastures, alpine prairie and rocky walls. Each of these is distinguished by typical fauna.



FACE-TO-FACE WITH ANIMALS

DETAILED INFORMATION

THE WOODS - GENERAL DESCRIPTION

BIRDS

The woods are the haven of a large number of birds that, in the thick crown of the trees, build their nests, care for the young ones and find food. They cannot be instantly observed. A careful multi-sensory approach is required, and visual contact is often preceded by a search for signs of their presence and keen attention to their song.

MAMMALS

The most representative large mammals of the woodland habitat belong to the group of ungulates, and include roe and deer. These shy animals that are not easy to observe take shelter in the woods. At certain times of the day, mainly early morning and at dusk, they leave the woods to feed in clearings and fields.

MEDIUM-SMALL MAMMALS

Small squirrels are typical woodland animals. They are easy to observe as their habits are marked by continuous movements among the branches and in the undergrowth, and because they leave several traces, such as nibbled and broken pine cones.

The fox can be observed in the woods, which are only one of the many environments visited by these medium size mammals. It is also easy to encounter it in anthropised environments. Traces of its presence and transit are easily found (e.g., excrements and paw prints).

TYPICAL SPECIES

- Tomtit
- Cuckoo
- Chaffinch
- Goldfinch
- Woodpecker
- Jay
- Spotted nutcracker

- Roe
- Deer

- Squirrel
- Fox

BEST OBSERVATION PERIOD

All year round. The whole day with peak activity periods at dawn and dusk.

Spring and autumn, at dawn and dusk.



FACE-TO-FACE WITH ANIMALS

DETAILED INFORMATION

THE FIELD-PASTURE - GENERAL DESCRIPTION

BIRDS

Birds basically visit this habitat looking for food. Their nutritional habits present considerable differences, and have important consequences both on their morphology (e.g., the shape of the beak and of the legs) and on their behaviour. Some of them are mainly insectivores (red-backed shrike, tree pipit, fieldfare, mistle thrush), and others are especially frugivores (bunting). Generally, in cold weather, the common diet followed by all is centred on seeds and fruit.

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TYPICAL SPECIES

- Tree pipit
- Bunting
- Red-backed shrike
- Fieldfare
- Mistle thrush

- Roe
- Deer

- Common hare

BEST OBSERVATION PERIOD

All year round. The whole day with peak activity periods at dawn and dusk.

Spring and autumn, at dawn and dusk.

All year round. Whole day.



FACE-TO-FACE WITH ANIMALS

DETAILED INFORMATION



THE ALPINE PRAIRIE AND ROCKY WALLS - GENERAL DESCRIPTION

BIRDS

There is a remarkable presence of small and big birds of prey. Birds that live at high altitudes (over 2,000/2,200 m a.s.l.) include predator species that actively hunt their prey by flying over open spaces typical of the alpine prairies. The preferred nesting sites are rocky walls for eagles, and trees for the buzzard and the kestrel.

MAMMALS

Large mammals that visit the alpine prairie and rocky walls are the most common alpine bovids, such as the rock goat and the chamois. Their lifestyle and habits are strongly affected by the fact that they are ruminants. Hence, they spend most of the day moving around, looking for grass and plants to graze, which they later chew at leisure in calm protected areas.

MEDIUM-SMALL MAMMALS

The alpine prairie is the typical habitat of the marmot, which digs complex nests with multiple external openings that are connected by underground tunnels. It can be easily observed near its nests, either moving or standing up straight to carefully observe its surroundings. Indeed, it is a social animal that lives in families and has the typical gregarious behaviour. It communicates with encoded shouts, and takes it in turns to act as sentinel that protects the colony.

TYPICAL SPECIES

- Kestrel
- Buzzard
- Eagle
- Short-toed snake eagle

- Chamois
- Rock goat

- Marmot
- Small rodents

BEST OBSERVATION PERIOD

All year round. The whole day with peak activity periods at dawn and dusk.

**Spring and autumn.
Whole day.**

**Summer and autumn.
Whole day.**



THE FABLE OF THE OAK, THE WORM AND THE EURASIAN BLUE TIT

Hi, I am the Eurasian blue tit.

You certainly know me. I habitually live in the woods but I do not hesitate to visit parks, gardens and, especially, feeding stations that humans provide for birds in winter.

I live in the cavities of tree trunks, where I lay eggs in spring and care for my young ones.

It is not easy for a pair of Eurasian blue tits to raise a brood of 5-10 chicks. Every day we have to make at least 400 journeys back and forth from the nest to feed them. And, I must say that the young ones have difficult tastes. They do not eat worms!

Worm eggs open at the same time as the eggs of my little ones. It is convenient because I can feed them with the small larvae. But my young ones grow rapidly and so do the worms. So I have no trouble feeding them.

After three weeks the chicks become self-sufficient and are ready to take flight. It is about time! Worms become increasingly difficult to find... as they have become butterflies.

Over the past few years I have found it very difficult to find food for my chicks. Let me try and explain what is happening.

Of late worm eggs have started opening early in spring. Traitors! Well I don't understand them anymore.

What must I do? I tried laying the eggs early but the worm larvae grow too fast. When my little ones hatch, I only find chubby larvae that my chicks are unable to swallow. When the chicks grow and are hungry, it is too late. I can only find some old indigestible larvae to place on their beak. How can I feed my little ones? If I do not give them enough food, they will not become strong and will risk dying.

Is this the end of the Eurasian blue tit?