

The Kings of the Mountains

The capricorn is the heraldic animal of the canton of Graubünden and holds particular significance for Pontresina. Every year – usually from April until the beginning of June at the latest – the capricorn of the Piz Albris colony descend to the edge of the village of Pontresina.

There are 6,000 capricorn in Graubünden, 1,800 of which live in the Albris colony. The capricorn spend the summer months above 3,500 meters above sea level. In winter, they migrate to lower elevations due to the need for food and the risk of avalanches. As soon as the meadows are snow-free, the Pontresina capricorn appear in droves above the village. These capricorn are accustomed to the presence of people and are undisturbed by the annual influx of tourists.

Pontresina therefore promotes itself with the slogan „Capricorn Paradise.“ The Capricorn Promenade is designed so that even families with children can get very close to the capricorn. Along the adventure trail, seven stations provide a wealth of information about the lives of capricorn. Pontresina Tourism also offers guided tours. The experienced guides not only know where the animals are at any given time, but above all, they impart a great deal of knowledge. Did you know, for example, that the horns of male capricorn can grow up to one meter long and weigh ten kilograms? The horns of female capricorn, on the other hand, only reach a length of 30 centimeters. However, the females live longer on average. Males live up to 16 years, females up to 20. Their climbing skills are legendary, and they have perfectly adapted to the alpine habitat, which is why they are also a symbol of perseverance and the will to live. The capricorn was almost extinct. The last capricorn in Valais was killed in 1809. Only in the Gran Paradiso region, between the Aosta Valley and Piedmont, did the Alpine capricorn survive. From the mid-19th century onward, efforts began to reintroduce capricorn to the Alps. Kids were smuggled from the Aosta Valley to St. Gallen, where they were raised in the Peter and Paul Wildlife Park. Later, a federally subsidized breeding program for capricorn was established there. Following the founding of the Swiss National Park, four capricorn were released into the park in 1920. The males were poached in Livigno, but the females settled on Piz Albris. A sign at the Capricorn Promenade in Pontresina lists the rules of conduct: stay on the hiking trail, do not feed the capricorn, keep dogs on a leash, and no biking. Capricorn rangers patrol above Pontresina during the capricorn season to ensure visitors adhere to these rules. Many visitors come to Pontresina specifically to see the capricorn, from all over Switzerland and neighboring countries, and even from further afield. It's no wonder that being able to observe these impressive kings of the Alps up close is an unforgettable experience.

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