



MEXICO DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP
MEXICO, Caborca
JANUARY 2016
MECHISLAV KLIMOVICH



GOLD AWARD
174 5/8

Ovis canadensis mexicana

DESCRIPTION Three subspecies or varieties of desert bighorn occur in Mexico. These subspecies are formally recognized by zoologists and have scientific validity. Their validity is based on anatomical differences and biographical considerations. All three subspecies in Mexico are based on specimens originally from Mexico and form the basis for recognized regional differences among them. The adult body weight of the male is 150-200 lbs. whereas the weight of the female is 100-125lbs. The body length of the adult is 50 to 62 inches and the height at the shoulder is 32-40 inches. The male's horns become a full curl by 7 to 8 years of age and have a spread of up to 33 inches and can weigh 30lbs. The female horns are smaller than the rams and never exceed half a curl.

The Mexican desert bighorn sheep has a smooth coat of brittle guard hairs and short, gray, crimped fleece under fur. The fur is pale brown and pales in appearance than the bighorn sheep of the United States.

HABITAT All of the areas where they can be found are desert that consist of low, arid plains separated by barren, often detached mountains. Sometimes it is referred to as a tree desert because of the sizeable trees and treelike cacti. Temperatures range from about 10°C (50°F) in January to about 30°C (85°F) in July. The rainfall averages from a mere trace in the west to 25cm (10in.) in the east. Elevations range from sea level to merely 1500 m (5000 ft.). Characteristic plants are palo verdes, ironwood, mesquite, and the saguaro or giant cactus.

DISTRIBUTION The Mexican Desert Bighorn Sheep are recognized: **Mexico:** In the Sonoran Desert of the state of Sonora. Wild sheep also formerly occurred in the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila in the Chihuahuan Desert, but are extinct; however the populations have been restored with sheep captured in the state of Sonora, Mexico. Also in Mexico, the sheep can be found on the Island of Tiburon. **Arizona:** Southern half of the state. **New Mexico:** Southwest corner of the state.

REMARKS The Mexican government has turned the care, conservation and harvest of these magnificent sheep over to the private land owners. Therefore although these hunts are extremely expensive, the future of these sheep is good because of both facts, IE: Privately owned and of great value.

TAXONOMIC NOTES Linneus described the genus *Ovis* in his 1766 taxonomy. The official description and naming did not occur until 1804 although an American wild sheep was recorded by the Spanish explorer Coronado in 1540. No consensus exists concerning the number of subspecies of *Ovis canadensis*. Early zoologists recognized many subspecies based solely on morphology and geographic separation. Cowan's definitive 1940 nomenclature of North American mountain sheep recognizes two species: Thinhorn sheep (*Ovis dalli*) and Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*). Seven subspecies are listed: auduboni (extinct), californiana, canadensis, cremnobates, mexicana, nelsoni, and weemsi. Subsequent genetic studies have not been able to establish a consensus on the number of subspecies. Mitochondrial DNA analysis by Bayreetal (1999), indicate that the multiple ewe subpopulation existing within the peninsular area are basic genetic units.

STATUS These Mexican desert bighorn sheep have a large range that is huntable and private citizens to protect them.

