

## Ibex Breeder Loves The Curly-Horned Animals

Of all the diverse animals exhibited at the nonprofit Hollywild Animal Park, its founder David Meeks especially likes his ibex and turs. That's partly because of the wild goat's long, knotted and knurled horns. But there is far more to them than their horns.

"I just love everything about them," he says. "Their color, size, agility, gracefulness, comedian-like attitude, the sharp whistle they give when they feel threatened - and the gentleness displayed by the mother as she helps newborn kids get on their feet within minutes of birth. I also enjoy that the males do not have a scent, unlike some of the domesticated goat breeds."

He finds great satisfaction from having learned how to successfully breed several ibex species and the rare West Caucasian turs.

The wild goats are native to the mountainous regions of Europe, north central Asia and northern Africa. Males have the knotty, knurly horns up to 4 ft. long and weigh 100 lbs. or more. Females also have horns, but without the knots and knurled, and weigh less than 100 lbs.

Besides exhibiting them at the 100-acre

park in South Carolina, Meeks selectively sells them to people who are serious about studying, breeding and preserving the species.

They are a substantial investment. While they are hardy, they require planning and disciplined care to survive and thrive during a 20-year life expectancy.

"Ideally, they should be placed on virgin land where no other animals have ever been housed," Meeks says, explaining they are susceptible to the same parasites and diseases as domesticated breeds. Feeders and waterers must be kept clean and the animals regularly checked for parasites and treated as necessary.

"Ibex are browsers instead of grazers and are easy to manage and feed. You should not feed them a diet with more than 10 percent protein or their hooves will grow unusually fast," he adds. Meeks supplements their grazing with good quality hay and minerals.

They acclimate to warm or cold temperatures, but do best on dry ground. The biggest requirement for owning mountain goats is fencing. It must be at least 6 ft. tall but 8 ft. or more is best. Meeks notes that his kids are bottle-fed so they are somewhat manageable, although ibex and turs are never



Ibex wild goats have knotty, knurly horns up to 4 ft. long. David Meeks has learned how to breed several ibex species and exhibits them at his 100-acre park in South Carolina.

really tame.

Finally, the enclosed area where they live should have plenty of room for them to exercise and, ideally, hilly areas and large stones.

"They enjoy any opportunity to climb - babies only days old will quickly join in on a game of 'king of the hill,'" Meeks says, which is one of the reasons he loves the breed.

Kids are born March through May. He is expecting a very nice group this spring and has already started accepting deposits for 2016. "Serious breeders will find lifelong enjoyment from interacting with these magnificent animals," he says.

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## Rare Squash Variety Saved From Extinction

By Jackie Clay-Atkinson

Once a commonly grown large winter squash by many members of the Hopi tribe in the Southwest, the Hopi Pale Grey squash very nearly became extinct. First offered for sale by the Abundant Life Seeds Co., this variety nearly disappeared following a disastrous fire which not only burned their building but their valuable seed bank, including the Hopi Pale Grey seed. No one else was offering this seed.

Luckily, I had earlier purchased some seed, growing it out first on our homestead in northern New Mexico and then later in the mountains of Montana. After seeing how abundantly it produced in often less than prime growing conditions, I continued growing this squash and carefully saving pure seeds from my best squash. That was twenty some years ago.

There are a lot of varieties of squash out there today. Why is this particular one so good? First, it's hugely productive. It has rampant vines that frequently produce more than 6 big squash each. The squash range in size from 6 to more than 20 lbs. The skin of mature squash is a light pale bluish gray and each roundish or football-shaped squash has a "belly button" on the blossom end.

The orange flesh is sweet with fruity overtones. Best of all, Hopi Pale Greys will not only store over winter but will store often past 2 winters, in normal household conditions such as under beds or in closets. No wonder the Hopis valued this squash so much.

Today, my husband Will and I continue raising this great ancient squash on our homestead in northern Minnesota. As a writer and blogger for the Backwoods Home Magazine, I often mentioned the squash and readers viewed photos of it through the years. Soon, many of these readers began asking us if we could send



Hopi Pale Grey squash range from 6 to 20 lbs. and are colored a pale bluish gray.

them some seeds. And we did, free of charge.

People loved the squash they grew. Word spread. Three years ago, we sent out more than 200 packs of free seeds. Folks were discovering how versatile this squash was. Not only did they love it baked but also stuffed on salads, mashed in casseroles, shredded and using it like I do, in baked desserts including the best-ever pumpkin pie.

The response to requests for Hopi Pale Grey squash seed and others that we raise on our homestead led us to start a small heirloom and open-pollinated seed business, offering all untreated, non-GMO contaminated, often rare and hand-gathered seeds from our 120-acre homestead. It looks like although still very rare (no other seed companies currently offer this squash) it should be safe from extinction.

The Hopi Pale Grey squash is a Cucurbita maxima so in order to save pure seeds, no other squash of this species, including buttercup, Hubbard and some varieties of pumpkins, should be grown within at least a half mile as it is insect pollinated and can easily crossbreed.

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Charley Page uses relatively simple tools to recondition battery packs in Toyota Prius cars, saving owners thousands of dollars in the process.



## Prius Battery Fix Saves Thousands

Charley Page saved himself thousands of dollars by reconditioning his Prius HV battery pack. His Toyota dealer wanted \$4,900 to do the job, but Page spent just \$450, and that included the charger and \$100 for parts and information.

"It's aggravating how little they will give you when the battery goes bad on a Prius," says Page. "After I fixed it, I drove it for another 8 to 9 months and then sold it."

Page gives credit to the internet and sites like www.priuschat.com for the information he needed. He also met an electrical engineer with a hobby of rebuilding wrecked Prius cars. Page emphasizes the risk involved.

"High DC voltage is dangerous," says Page. "It can kill you, so you have to learn how to do the job safely."

Once he fixed his own battery successfully, Page began repairing others. He has completed a dozen or so since. He charges \$900 for a battery he has restored and some for labor and mileage, doing the installation and reconditioning on site. He then takes the bad battery to rebuild for the next job.

"It usually runs around \$1,050 with mileage," he says. "I give a 1-year warranty. I can get another battery with a 3-year warranty, but it costs \$400 more than mine."

Page is an experienced and trained mechanic and brings those skills to the job. He has salvaged several cars for batteries for

rebuilding and now also sells salvaged auto parts.

He notes that sometimes people think their battery has failed when the problem has a simpler solution. "I had a call about a bad battery, but when I hooked up my laptop, it proved to be a bad coil that I fixed for \$225," says Page.

He recalls his dealer acting like he was crazy to try and fix his own, due to the danger. "People are afraid of them and are told it is an expensive fix," he says. "It doesn't have to be. The cost of fixing one far outweighs trading it in."

Doing some regular maintenance can prolong the life of the Prius battery pack. "There is a battery cooling fan in the trunk that can get plugged up," says Page. "A dirty fan can lead to hybrid battery failure by failing to move enough air across the batteries."

Page explains that he isn't alone in rebuilding hybrid battery packs. "I work within driving distance of my home," he says. "A lot of people have begun rebuilding them. It's a nice sideline business."

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