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Ecological effects of climate variability: studies on mammals



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Population density in mammals such as the Alpine ibex *Capra ibex* (above) is driven by climatic factors, but causal relationships still defy quantitative assessment and prediction.

Photo: Patrick Bergeron

SPECIALS of Climate Research (CR) present important new information on climate phenomena measured and assessed by closely coordinated group efforts. They concentrate on specific research themes or geographic areas.

CR SPECIAL 15 is based on the results of the symposium 'Effects of large-scale climatic variability on mammals' held at the 9th Mammalogical Congress in Sapporo, Japan. This is the first SPECIAL to target specifically the effects of climate variability on the ecology of animals, and it underlines the focus of CR on the interactions of climate with organisms.

The articles analyze the dynamics of rodent and ungulate populations in temperate, mountain and tundra ecosystems. From a methodological standpoint, studies are concerned with the use of

climatic indices and the importance of data quality and choice of models for assessing climate effects on population dynamics. Impacts on human societies of fluctuations in mammal populations are also considered.

Attempts to predict the effects of climate change on animal populations have generated great excitement and great frustration, illustrating the expectations and challenges faced by ecologists. CR SPECIAL 15 identifies the constraints on predictability, thus driving the discussion on how to overcome them.

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