

Alpine Animals and Plants



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Where are the Alps?

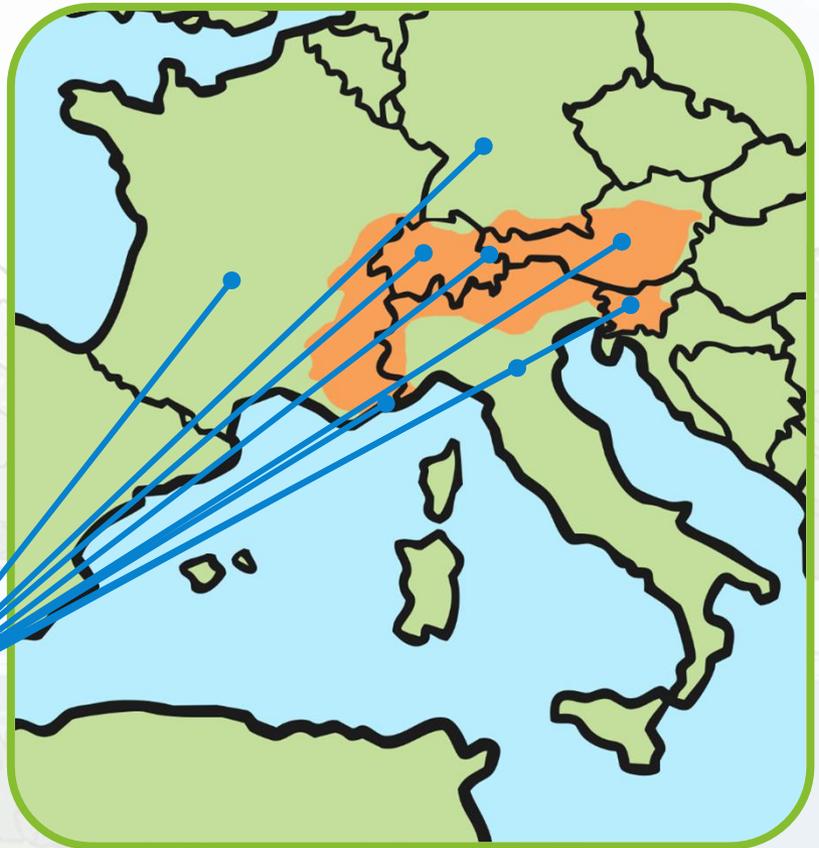
The Alps are the most important and extensive mountain range in Europe.

In the Alps, there are some of the highest mountains in Europe like Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa.

The Alps stretch across eight countries.



Liechtenstein



The Climate of the Alps

The climate of the Alps is typical for great altitudes: the higher the peak, the colder it is!

It is so cold that snow does not melt on the mountain peaks all year round. Both alpine plants and animals have evolved to withstand these cold temperatures and the lack of oxygen.

Since the Alps are so high, they prevent a lot of bad weather and strong winds coming from Asia and the Atlantic Ocean from reaching the Mediterranean regions.



Alpine Animals



The Alpine Marmot

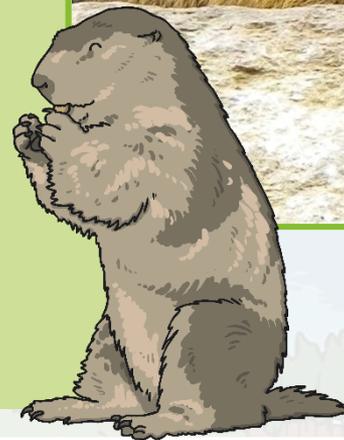
Normally, marmots live at altitudes between 2000 to 3000 meters.

At the end of September, they hide in dens, block the entrance and hibernate until spring.

The marmots make a whistle as an alarm signal.

A single whistle indicates a threat coming from above. A series of whistles signals a danger coming from the side.

The intensity of the whistle indicates the distance of the threat; the louder the whistle, the closer the danger!



The European Lynx

A century ago, the lynx became extinct in many Central and Western European countries, but many reintroduction projects have been successful.

The colour of the coat of the European lynx is very variable: it goes from a uniform dark grey to a reddish brown, with evident spots.

The hind legs are longer than the front ones, making it easier for the lynxes to make big, fast leaps.

They have been observed to mew, hiss, growl, and purr, and, like domestic cats, will chatter at prey that is out of reach.



The Brown Bear

This species of bear eats mainly mushrooms, roots and fish.

The entire alpine population of brown bears is about 50 individuals, most of them live in the Brenta nature park in Italy.

Ten Slovenian brown bears were reintroduced to the northern Italian regions in 1998 and in the following years, some bears have wandered to South Tyrol, the Swiss Eastern Alps, Bavaria and the Central Alps.



The Alpine Ibex

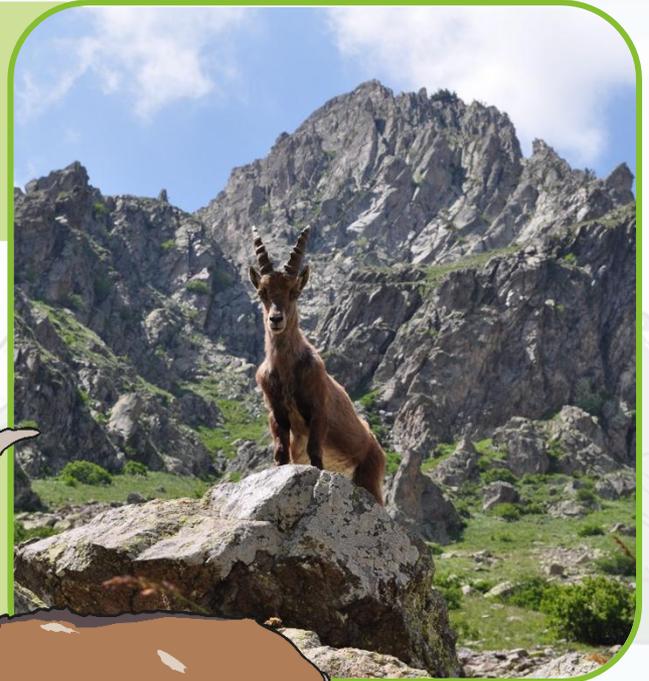
100,000 years ago, the ibex lived in all the rocky regions of central Europe. Palaeolithic people used to draw this animal in their caves.

The ibex is now widespread throughout the Alps, in altitudes between 500 and 3000 metres.

The colour of the mantle of the ibex changes with the seasons.

In the summer, the hair is short, in autumn it falls and is replaced by a thick fur with longer dark brown hairs: it will protect it from the cold and the darker colour will absorb the sun's rays better.

The ibex will moult in the spring rubbing against rocks and trunks to get rid of fur.



The Boreal Owl

In the cold season, boreal owls travel to higher altitudes from 600 to 2000 meters.

The colour of the lower parts is white, grey and brown; the wings are dark brown with white dots.

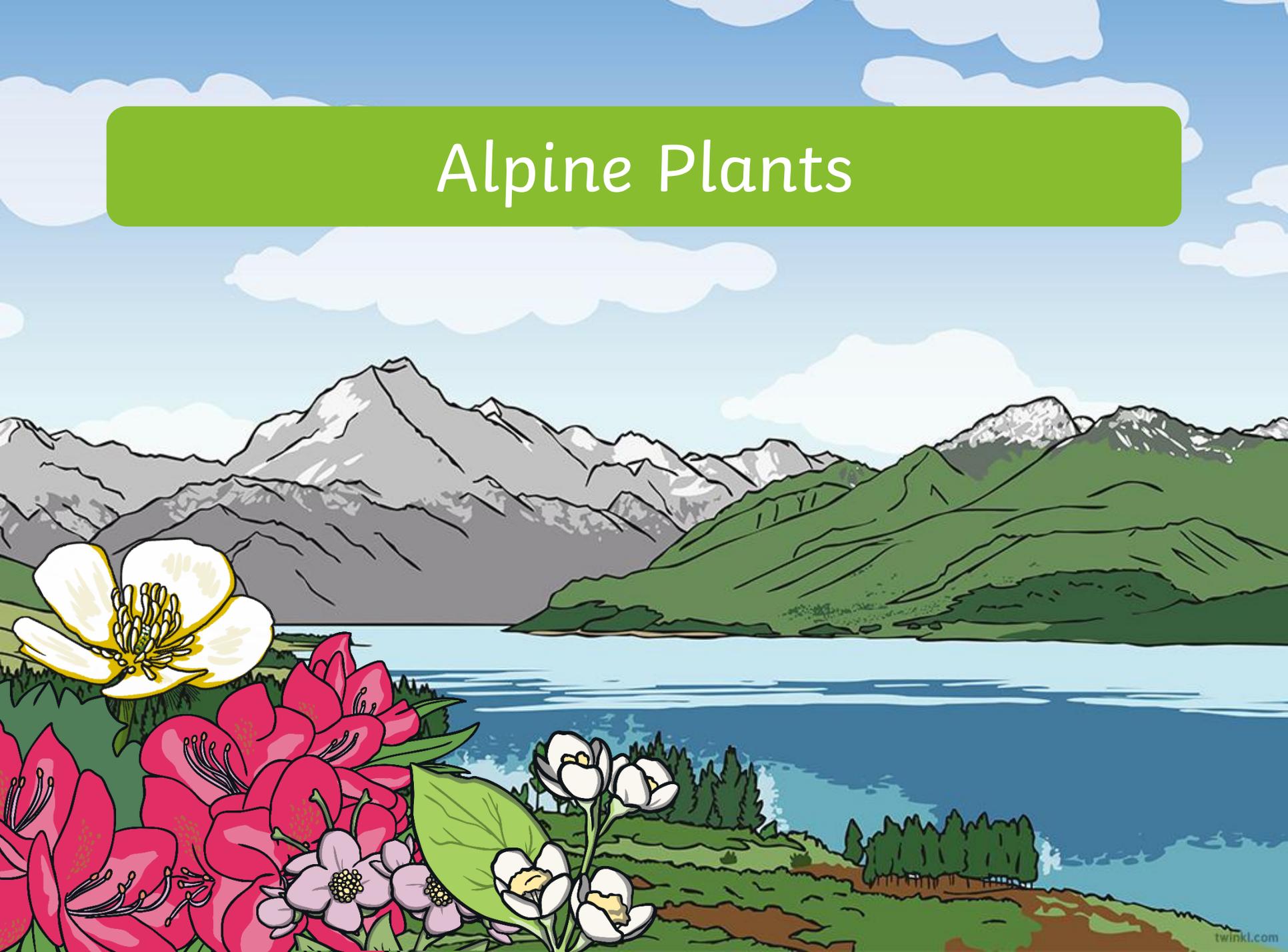
The young are easy to spot as they are fully brown with creamy white areas between the beak and the eyes.

The boreal owl's song is composed of a series of five or seven notes in rapid succession "ou-ou-ou-ou-ou"; the sound is repeated and is emitted especially in winter or spring nights.

It sounds like the whistle of a steam locomotive.



Alpine Plants



The Alpenrose

The alpenrose is an evergreen shrub that grows just above the tree line in the Alps.

It can grow up to 60 cm tall and produces clusters of pinkish-red, bell-shaped flowers throughout the summer. It grows a bit bent to be able to support snow loads.

The alpenrose is actually a rhododendron and it can be toxic.



The Mountain Pine

The Mountain Pine is usually found at altitudes between 1000 and 2200 metres.

This pine is a stabilizer plant of stony soils; it contributes to keep the soil together protecting valleys from avalanches.

It offers shelter to many animal species.

A recent trend is the increase in use of this tree in cooking. Buds and young cones are left to dry. The cones and buds gradually drip syrup which is refined and used as a sweet garnish.



The Glacier Buttercup

It has been described as being the highest ascending plant in the Alps, flowering at over 4000 metres.

This plant is successful in surviving in such cold temperatures as it keeps its bulbs near the ground, protected from the snow.

It flowers depending on the period of the year where there's the least amount of snow, normally the summer.



The Edelweiss

The edelweiss is an evergreen plant that grows on the Alps. It appears fluffy and hairy, probably as a defence mechanism against the cold temperatures of the mountains.

The edelweiss is on the Austrian 2-cent coin and it was used as a medicinal remedy against respiratory diseases.

A northern Italian tale narrates the story of a princess of the ice whose tears turn into edelweiss when they touch the ground.

In the Swiss and German Alps, the legends says that the flower is the reincarnated soul of a pure and beautiful lady who died unmarried.

