

The rise of exotic Barbary sheep (aoudad) in the Southwest has brought challenges to native desert bighorn sheep, ranging from disease to habitat degradation and competition for forage and water sources.

Another challenge is mistaken identity.



Multiple desert bighorn ewes have been inadvertently killed by hunters thinking they were shooting an aoudad. This impacts bighorn numbers and can cause significant legal troubles for hunters.

The following is a guide to help hunters distinguish bighorn sheep from aoudad.



If you see an ear tag or GPS collar, odds are you're looking at a bighorn sheep.

Scan code for more information and to order additional copies of this field identification brochure.



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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
NEW MEXICO WSF & TEXAS BIGHORN SOCIETY



BE SURE

FIELD IDENTIFICATION:
Bighorn Sheep **versus**
Barbary Sheep (Aoudad)



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Desert Bighorn Sheep

These native sheep have a muscular body with chocolate-colored, short, brown fur. Coloration around the rump, belly, and muzzle is white.

Ewes have horns that only curve slightly and can be anywhere from 8 to 15 inches long, while rams have much larger, curling horns.

BIGHORN



Barbary Sheep (Aoudad)

Aoudad are brown on the upper portions of their body. This brown is reddish on most animals, but some older specimens take on a grayish-brown color.

Only part of the inside legs and belly is white on most aoudad. Some, however, will have a bit of white around the muzzle. Aoudad have shaggy beards, with that of ewes being less pronounced than rams, running from a couple of inches below the head down to the chest. Mature rams may have the beard run all the way down the length of the legs to form what hunters often call "chaps."

Like bighorns, both males and females have horns. Aoudad horns curl out from the head, with mature rams' horns sweeping back and never making a full curl like desert bighorns.

LOOK BEYOND THE HORNS

- If it has a beard, it's an aoudad.
- If it has a white muzzle, it could be a bighorn or an aoudad. But if it has a white muzzle and a white rump, it's definitely a bighorn.
- Quite a few desert bighorn ewes will have ear tags and/or GPS collars, but very few aoudad will. If you see a tag or collar, take extra precaution because you're almost guaranteed to be looking at a desert bighorn.
- Do not let location be a factor in your identification. Their range overlaps in much of the Southwest, and both can travel great distances. Although not currently there, it might be possible for aoudad to venture into the southern-most distribution of Rocky Mountain bighorn as well. The same coloration and appearances apply to both desert and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, so be cautious anywhere when aoudad hunting in the Southwest. Pull the trigger only when you are 100 percent sure of your target.



AOUDAD

BE SURE



CRISTAL JONES

BIGHORN

White rump and muzzle



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / TWILDLIFE

BIGHORN

Ewe horns measure 8 to 15 inches



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AOUDAD

Shaggy beard on both ewes and rams



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / FRANKSHIRLEY

AOUDAD

Horns curl out and sweep back