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The Story of a Feral Flock of Goats in Norway

ERFP WG meeting, Sassari, Italy, May 19, 2026

Nina Svartedal, Norwegian Genetic Resource Centre, NIBIO



Photo: Gerd Auan Feb 2024

Feral flocks of goats in Norway



The goats from the farm Kvist in the Sognefjord

- Dairy goats up to the 1970's
- Gone feral since some time during the 1970's



The Sogn goats' grazing area





What is the problem?

- The Norwegian Food Safety Authority has placed the flock under restrictions, due to
 - Poor animal welfare for the feral flock
 - The owner cannot look after the flock as farm animals
 - The animal husbandry must be discontinued – culled
 - IF live animals from the flock are kept as tame goats
 - the animal health status is unknown, thus held on trust for at least three years



By law, all goats in Norway are farm animals

The Nature Diversity Act §3, letter p, defines the term wildlife:

“**wildlife**: naturally occurring wild terrestrial mammals...”

Explanation: “naturally” is added to exclude domesticated species that have escaped or are out grazing.

Further clarification from the Norwegian Environment Agency:

“The goats in question must be considered domesticated species, and regardless of whether they have escaped or been released, they will not fall within the definition of wildlife, irrespective of how long they have lived freely at the locations in question.”

Why oppose to the decision?

Face book group
18 000 members

- Food Safety Authority
- The Conservation programme
- The Norwegian Society for the Protection of Animals (Dyrebeskyttelsen Norge)





Snart snipp snapp snute ville Bukkene Bruse

rentyret er kommet til veis ende. Mattilsynet har bestemt at
teiflokken i Sogn skal sendes til de evige jaktmarker innen

STELLA BUGGE
mars

Why oppose the decision to cull the herd?

- Face book group:
 - The animal welfare is great!
 - It's a cultural heritage and we need grazing animals.
 - Why doesn't Norway accept feral flocks of farm animals?
 - A lot of resentment toward the Norwegian Food Safety Authority and other authorities.
- The Norwegian Society for the Protection of Animals
 - The animal welfare is really bad!
- The AnGR conservation programme:
 - No genetics conserved from "old Norwegian landrace/dairy goat"
 - The genetic material in this herd is of great interest
 - Been in dialogue with the Food Safety Authority for 15 yrs without finding a solution for taming the flock.
 - The animal welfare is not good.
- The owner
 - "I wish I didn't have to cull the herd, but I see that animal welfare is not good, and I am glad if a tame flock can be kept as farm animals."

FB-group: Oh – they are so cute and happy!



These are NOT posted in the FB-group:





The destiny of the feral Kvist-goats was discussed on Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, Feb 17, 2025.

Appr 2.5 mill listeners...

Dagsnytt 18 - TV



Erling Sande (Sp)

Næringskomiteen

Sogn og Fjordane

*Chair of The Norwegian Parliament's
Committee on Business and Industry*

The Norwegian Parliament in April 2025:

The Norwegian Parliament **urges** the government to take the initiative so that the Norwegian Food Safety Authority, **instead** of discontinuing the entire feral goat population... **continues** working to find solutions that *safeguard the welfare of the Kvist goats and preserve their genetic resources for future livestock production.*

2025 – finally a solution is in sight!

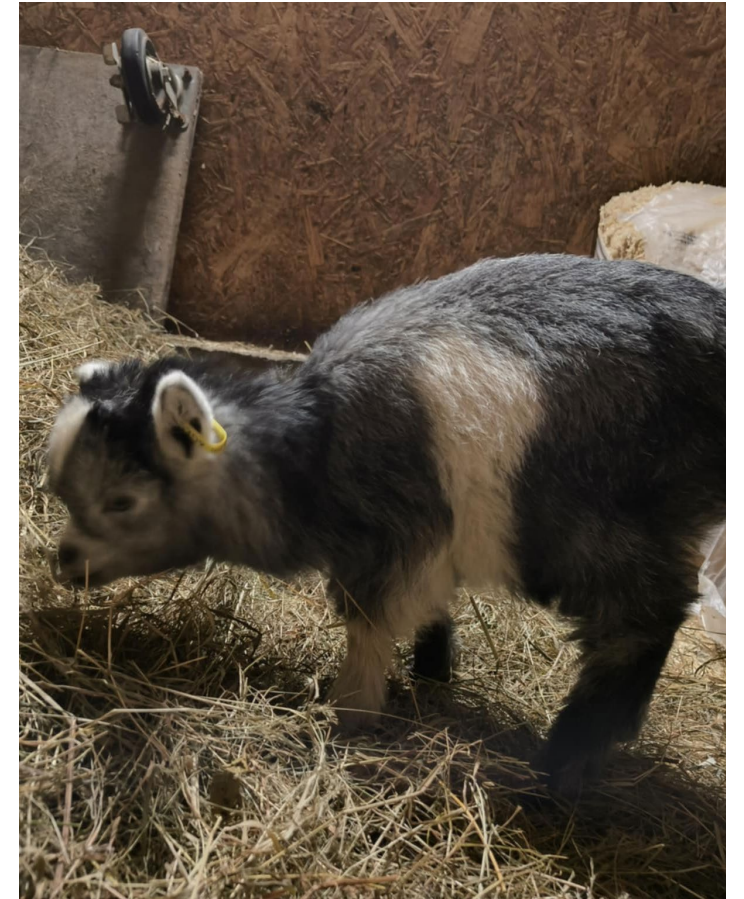


- 11th of February : a newborn kid was rescued and picked up by a passing local ambulance driver and given to a local kid host 😊.
- During February 2025 nine kids (**4+5**) were picked up along this road by The Norwegian Society for the Protection of Animals.
- Feb-March 2026 (**9+5**) were picked up by this road – **in total 23 kids (13+10)**



The kid-host lives here

The kids were malnourished and deficient in selenium and vitamin D.



Good or bad legs?

- The images on the right show two animals that have lived outdoors for a long time. The goat's feet are deformed, the legs are short, and the knees are thick.
- The legs of the bucks on the left, which are offspring of the feral goats and has grown up with sufficient and good feed and care. They had problems with their legs as kids, but received, among other things, selenium supplements and developed strong legs and are very robust.



The rescued kids in July 2025



DNA Analyses of the Feral Goats at Kvist



Project by Cathrine Brekke, NMBU
cathrine.brekke@nmbu.no

Objective:

- To assess whether there is a genetic basis for conserving the herd
- Inbreeding
- Relatedness between individuals
- Genetic uniqueness

Three goat breeds in Norway



Norwegian Dairy Goat
20 000 breeding goats
Commercial breeding organisation



Norwegian Coastal Goat
1 500 breeding goats – included in the
conservation programme for AnGR



Norwegian Sogn Goat from Kvist (old N
dairy goat flock from the Sognefjord)
appr 60 in 2025, now 23 + some feral not
yet an officially approved breed.

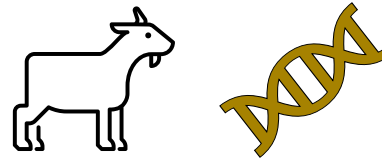
DNA Extracted from Blood Samples and Sequenced



August 2025 – blood samples from the nine kids captured during winter



Whole-genome sequencing performed



Detailed information on the entire genome of each goat

Data from Previous Coastal Goat Projects



Feral coastal goats from Skorpa
7 Bucks



Coastal goats from Selje
37 ind (4 herds)



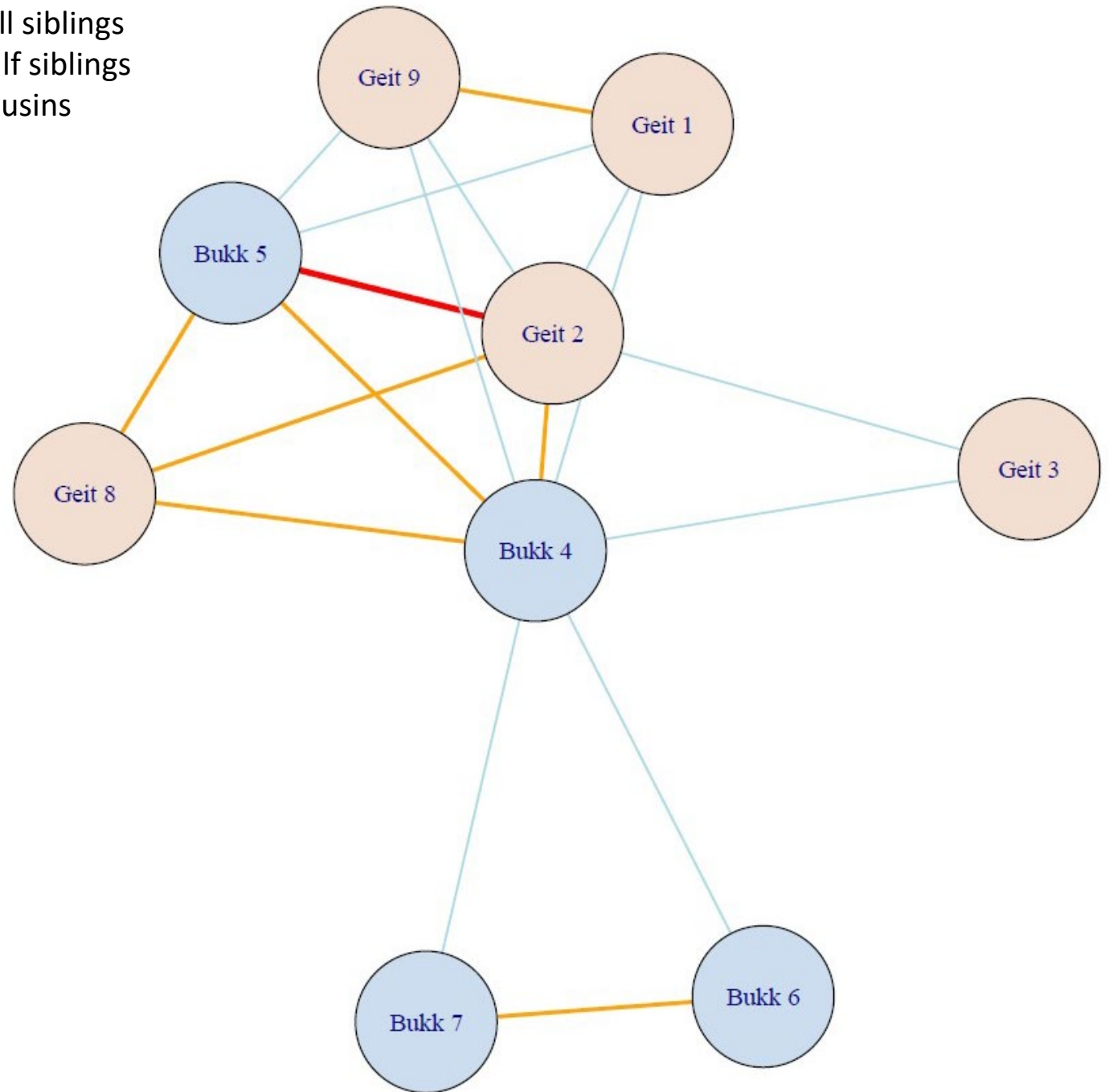
Norwegian dairy goat
52 ai-bucks

Genotyped using SNP array (50K) 37,000 overlapping markers with Kvist goat data

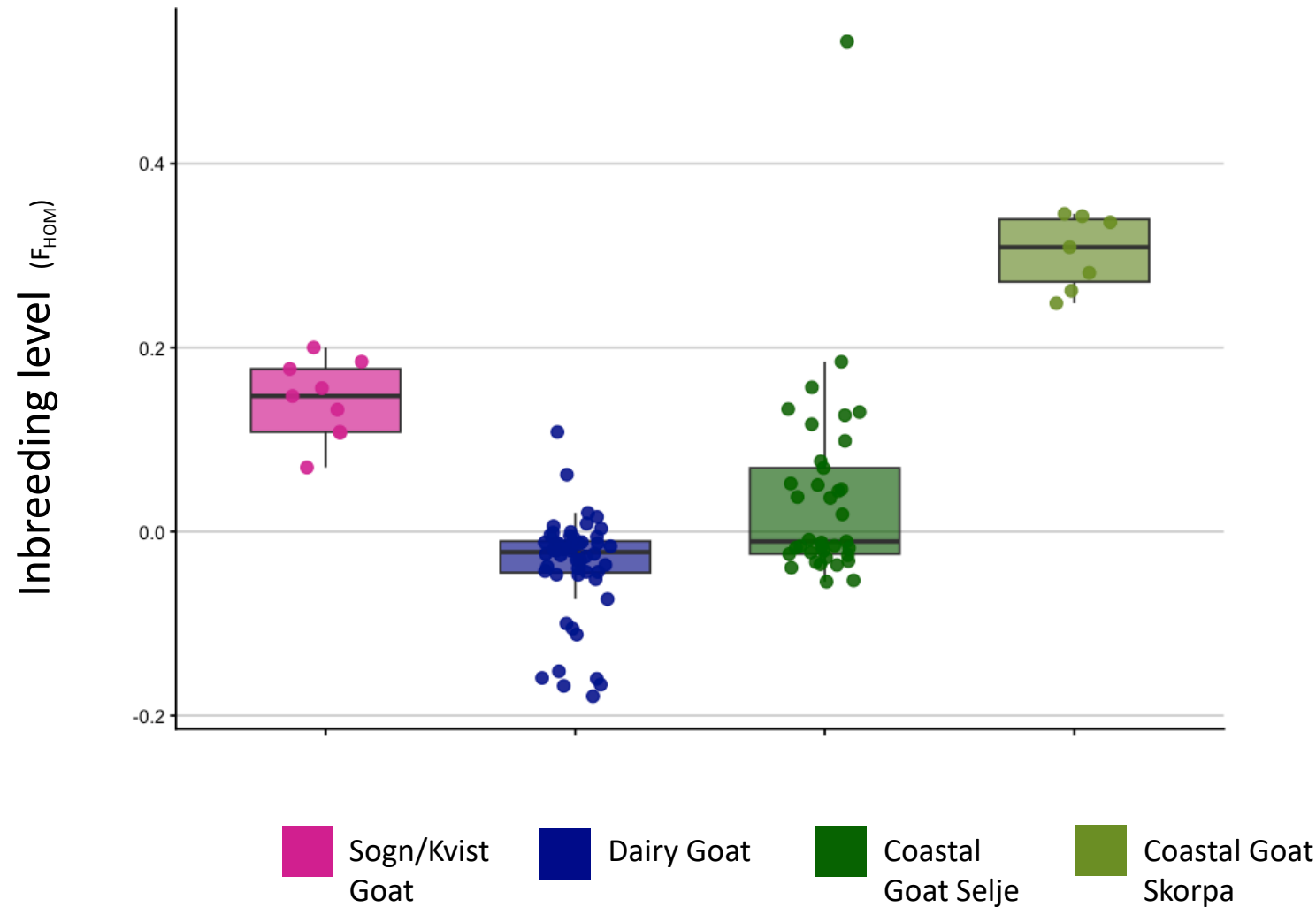
Relatedness Among the Kids

Four different bucks fathered the 2026 age group 😊

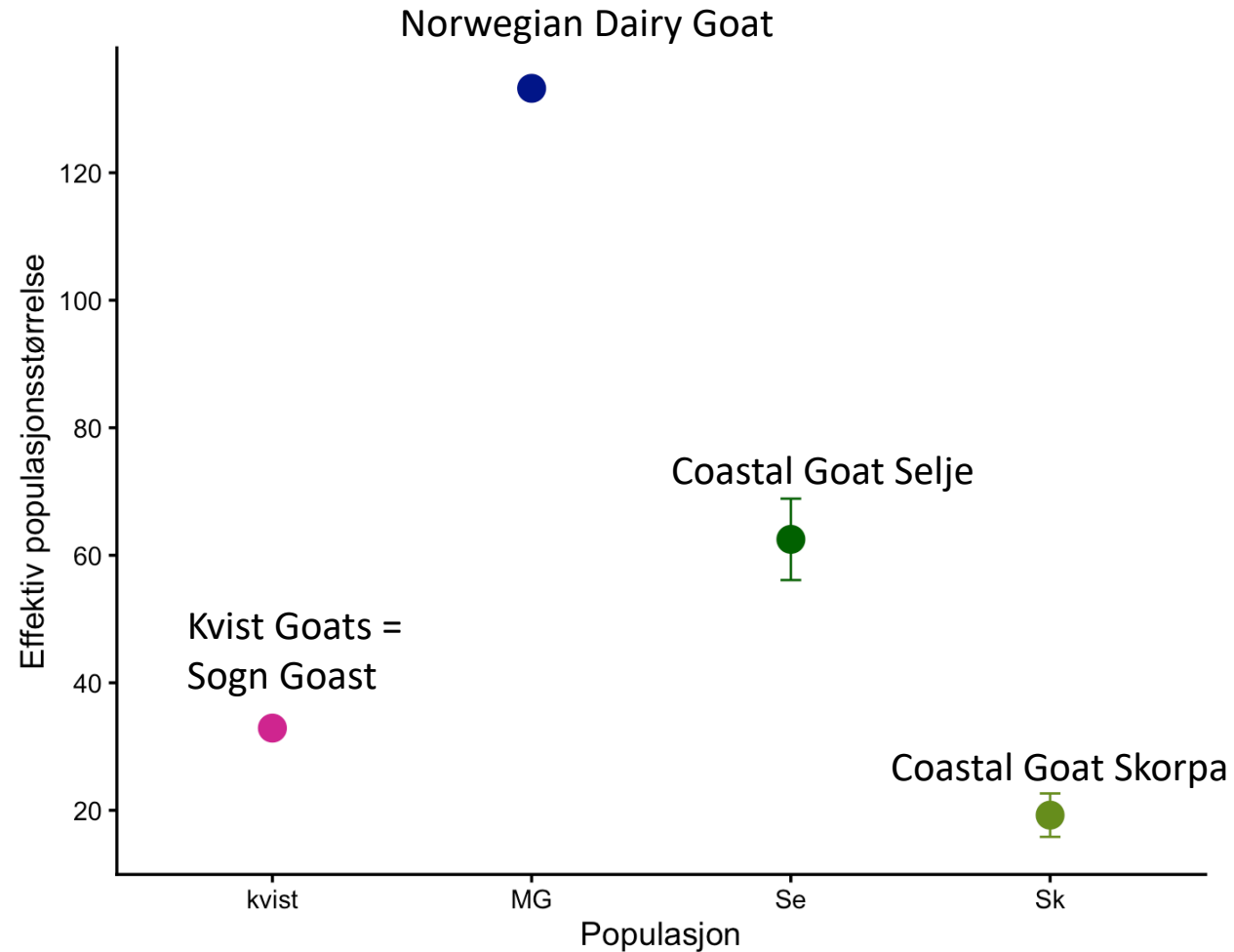
- Full siblings
- Half siblings
- Cousins



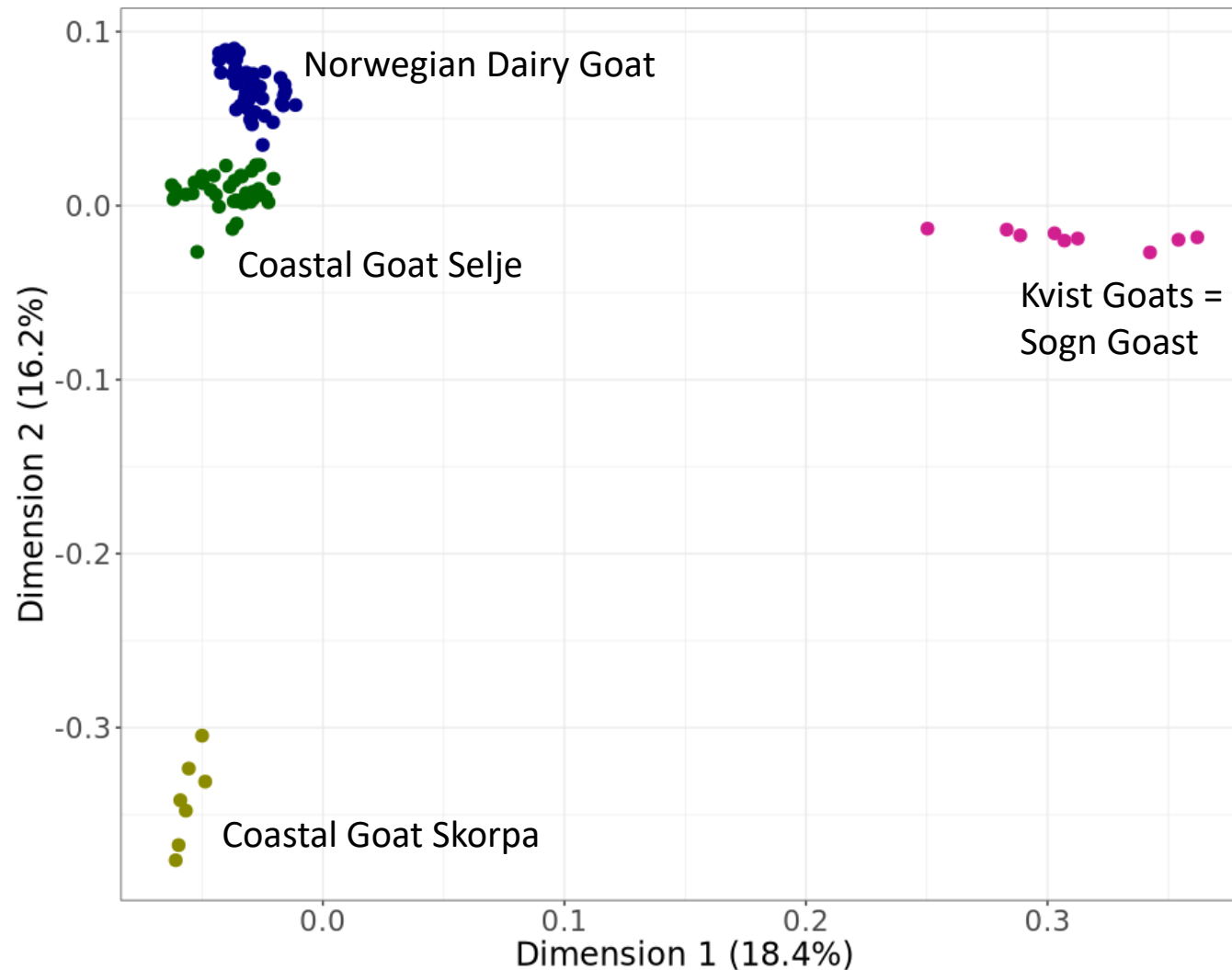
Inbreeding Compared with Coastal Goats and Dairy Goats



Effective Population Size



The Sogn Goats Are Clearly Distinct from Norwegian Dairy Goats Goats and Coastal Goats



Basis for Conserving a Kvist/Sogn Goat Population



- The Kvist/Sogn goats represent a unique population
- Moderate level of inbreeding
- Well planned breeding is necessary, but feasible
- Possibility for mating between individuals from 2025
- Genetic data from goats captured in 2026 will be essential for further work
- Introgression (crossbreeding) will be considered at a later stage

The Way Forward

- Sequence and analyze the 2026 age group and DNA from tissues = 50 individuals
- Identify regions/genes under strong selection
- Are these goats genetically adapted to more extensive management?
- Unique gene variants linked to specific traits, what about Scrapie resistance?



Unique gene variants linked to specific traits, like



Appr 40 % of the kids born in 2025 and 2026 are polled



Lykler:
None in 2025 – appr 50 % i 2026

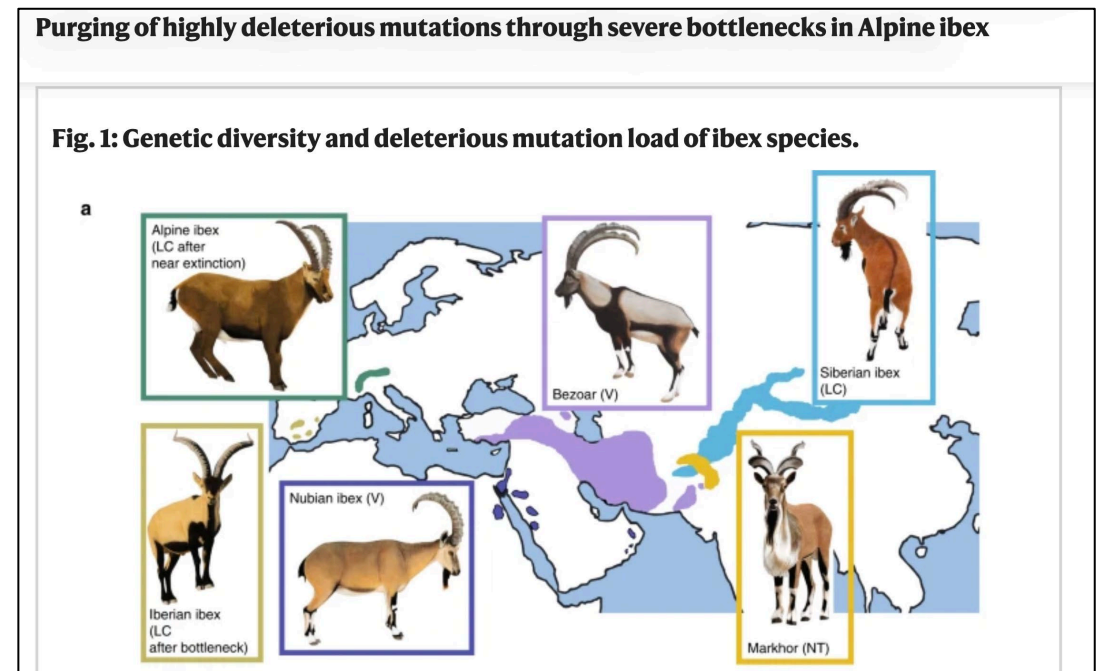


Alfa S1 null-variant is almost gone in Norwegian dairy goat 😊

Still a dominant variant in Sogn Goats?

Further Analyses – Research Paper

- The Sogn goats are an interesting population for further research
- Measures of inbreeding depression (mutation load)
- Comparison with other studies on wild/ferals flocks of goats



To be
continued...

Thanks for your
attention!

