

Moose (*Alces alces*)



Key to Identifying:

A large body, dark brown to blackish fur, a long square face and a bell of skin and hair under the throat. Only males have antlers up to two meters in width.

Moose are found throughout northern North America. They occur throughout Alaska, Canada, the northeastern United States and as far south as the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. In British Columbia, moose are found in almost the entire interior and are most abundant in the central and subboreal interior, the northern boreal mountains and the boreal plains of northeastern BC.

Biology:

British Columbia has three subspecies of Moose which are all similar in appearance, but those in southeastern British Columbia have the smallest bodies and antlers. The biggest Moose reside in northern British Columbia.

Moose have long legs which help them to travel through fallen timber, muskeg and deep snow. They have a shoulder hump and a dark brown to blackish fur. They have a bell of skin and hair under the throat and a large overhanging upper lip.

In autumn, adult cows weigh between 340 kg and 420 kg, adult bulls weigh 450 kg to 500 kg. Adult bulls stand nearly 2m tall at the shoulder and have very massive antlers which they grow and shed each year. The antlers begin to develop in April/ May and reach full size in September. While the antlers are growing they are covered with a furry velvet which contains their nourishing blood supply. When the antlers are full-grown the velvet dries and get rubbed off.

Behavior

Moose are solitary animals that move within familiar summer and winter home ranges. In British Columbia, Moose usually migrate between winter-spring ranges in valley bottoms and higher-elevation summer ranges, except some Moose, which stay in their valley ranges all year long. In expansive northern shrublands, Moose commonly form groups of up to eight or ten Moose. But this behavior is very seldom in forested habitats. Sometimes they form small groups, but those lack a social base. The only lasting bond is the bond between a cow and her calf and also this lasts only one year.

In BC, Moose normally mate between September and November.. Prime bulls of equal size engage in shoving matches in which they lock their antlers. These fights intend to show the bull's superiority so that the females can choose their mates. More than 80% of the calves are conceived during the first estrus period in late September, early October. Those cows which do not conceive in this first period have second or third estrus periods in a 25 days interval. After a gestation period of eight months, the

birthing period- begins in late May and June. Normally, Moose have single births, only 10 -20% of the cows have twins.

Food Diet:

Moose are herbivores. They eat twigs, bark, roots and the shoots of woody plants, like willows and aspens. In the warm months, moose feed on water plants, water lilies, pondweed, and horsetails. In winter, moose have to eat up to 20 kg food a day in order to meet their energy need. In BC, Moose depend primarily on willows for winter food and red-osier dogwood, cotton wood, paper birch, aspen and high-bush cranberry, false box and subalpine fir.

Management:

During the 1900s, human activities have reduced the land area in British Columbia that can support Moose. Each year, hundreds of Moose die on highways and railway lines. Since 1981, the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks has undertaken a number of Moose habitat enhancement projects in central and northern British Columbia. The projects were aimed at increasing the supply of woody browse on Moose winter ranges. In future, increasing human populations and resource development in central and northern British Columbia could have adverse effects on Moose habitat. It will require comprehensive land-use planning to ensure that these developments have as little impact as possible on Moose populations.

