

BY ELIZABETH SCHLEICHERT

Mighty MOOSE!

Meet the world's largest deer.

Look who's on the loose: a moose. And this *bull* (male) is wearing some *serious* head-gear! Face it, this huge deer—which can tower over a grown man—is one funny-looking animal. Check out that bulky body sitting atop those way-too-skinny legs. And what's with the goatlike beard dangling from that horsey muzzle? As you'll soon see, this mish-mash of silly parts works amazingly well for a moose!

LONG LEGS

Long legs help a moose get through the drifting snow of its northern woodland home. They also let the moose wade deep into ponds and lakes where it often hangs out.

HEFTY HOOFS

A moose's sharp, split hoofs and *dewclaws* (small, extra "toes" on its legs) work as snowshoes. They spread out to support the animal as it walks on snow or muddy ground. The front hoofs deliver nasty kicks to attackers, too.

dewclaw

BAGGY BELL

That flap of skin hanging from a moose's throat is called a *bell*. Its purpose? Scientists aren't sure. Most likely it helps a bull attract a mate. Bulls have larger bells than *cows* (females) do. Why would a cow need one, then? Guess you could say that the bell remains a bit of a *moose-tery*.

NEAT NOSE

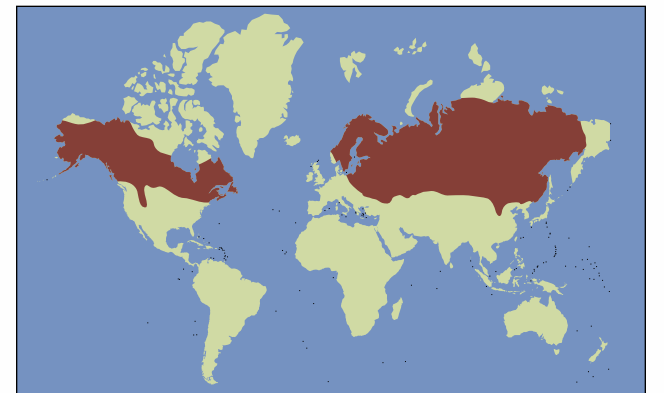
The moose's nose is great at sniffing out predators or potential mates. And the nostrils close when the moose dips its head underwater!

AWESOME ANTLERS

A bull moose's rack can be more than six feet wide! Cows don't have antlers. The bull grows new antlers each spring and sheds them in the winter. His antlers attract mates and, like giant satellite dishes, channel sounds to the bull's ears. Antlers have other uses, as you'll soon find out.

Hoof it over to the next page for more on moose.

WHERE MOOSE LIVE

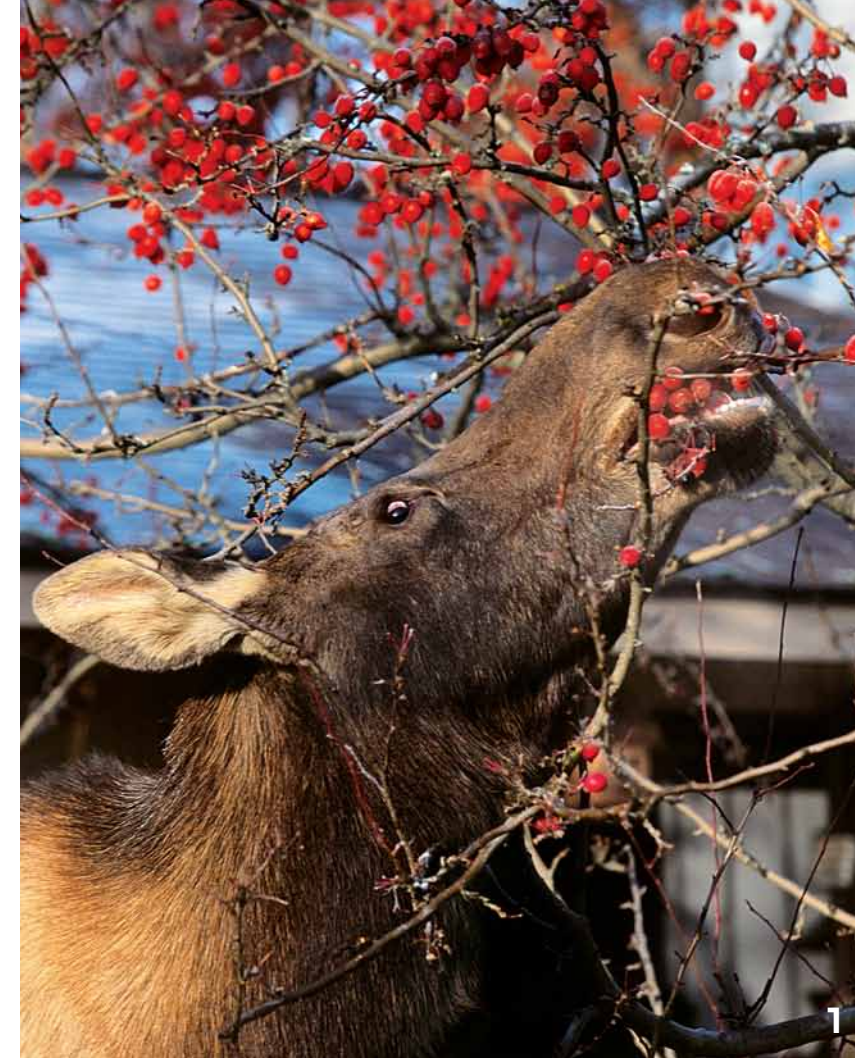


MOOSE MUNCHIES



“Mmmm. I sure love those lily padshhh!” That’s what this bull could be saying while chewing some water lilies. To reach such foods, a moose often wades far out into a pond.

In the summer, a moose may totally submerge itself in the water for a while—not just to feed, but also to escape a wolf pack or pesky flies, or to just plain chill out.



2

A moose’s height and flexible upper lip give it a chin up when grabbing overhanging crabapples (photo 1).

The tree in photo 2 shows teeth marks made by a moose that stripped and ate the bark.

Bet this Alaskan moose (3) is asking, “Could I get fries with that?” Who knew moose went for fast food?

The word “moose” comes from the Algonquin word for “twig eater.” And it’s true, moose do find twigs tasty. They also peel off and munch tree bark. In fact, moose are big-time plant-eaters, downing leaves and buds from trees, shrubs, and low-growing plants. In the summer, moose often feast on water plants such as grasses and pond lilies.

Come fall, a moose scarfs up lots and lots of these moose-ly meals. That helps it put on a layer of fat. The fat will supply the moose with energy during the long winter months when food is scarce.



3

DONALDMJONES.COM (8); MILO BURCHAM (9TL); NIAL BENVIE/NATUREPL.COM (9TR); STEVE KAUFMAN/DRK PHOTO (9B)



Two rival bulls battle it out during mating season.

Adding to all that *moose-ic*, bulls come together and noisily compete for mating rights. One bull may warn a rival with loud snorts. The two may get into a click-clacking, antler-shoving match. Most fights end quickly—and often with no harm done. The winner gets to mate

with nearby females.

In the spring, a cow gives birth. Mom gently licks the baby and lets it nurse her rich milk. The calf grows rapidly, gaining nearly three pounds a day. Before long, the calf is following Mom everywhere, watching and learning all it needs to.

By the time the baby is a year old, Mom drives it away just before her next calf is born. That may seem like a *moosetake*, but the youngster is now ready to survive on its own. And this way, a mama moose can give the newborn her full attention.

MILO BURCHAM (10T); RAY BULSON/ALASKA STOCK (10-11B)



A calf follows its mom into a creek. At a month or so of age, the baby is already nimble on its feet and a strong swimmer.

MAKING MORE MOOSE

If you were in “moose country” in the fall, chances are you’d hear some moose, even if you never saw any! Fall is moose mating season, called the *rut*. Grown moose, which are solitary most of the year, now call for mates. Cows make deep moans. Bulls grunt back.



Moose normally have to defend themselves against wolves, mountain lions, and bears. These predators usually go after calves and weak adults. Most likely the moose in **photo 1** was a sickly one.

But these days, moose face

new threats. That's because moose numbers are growing. And more people are living in moose country, too. That can spell trouble. For instance, moose often wander onto roads. Because a moose's eyes are on the sides of its head, it has

a blind spot in front and often can't see an oncoming vehicle until it's too late. Both moose and driver can be seriously injured—or even killed. Signs along many highways warn drivers to be careful **(2)**.

Things aren't all bad for moose living among people. The animals have plenty of backyard shrubs, trees, and gardens to feast on. And there are often fewer moose predators around. That may explain why so many moose have made themselves at home in places such as Anchorage, Alaska **(3)**.

While moose are usually gentle creatures that mind their own business, they can attack when threatened. So most people who live around these awesome animals give them plenty of space—while enjoying them as the mighty and marvelous creatures they are! 🐾



MICHAEL H. FRANCIS (1) ©, DAVID NOTON/NATUREPL.COM (2), CALVIN W. HALL/ALASKA STOCK (3)

