



Wildlife Express!

Volume 27/Issue 7                      Moose                      March 2014



# MOOSE

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# MOOSE

There are large shadows in Idaho's forests. They are huge but hide very well. These shadows love to be around wet meadows, streams, lakes and ponds. Sometimes the only way you may know they are there is by the rustling of leaves and shaking of twigs. This shadow is the moose (*Alces americanus*).

The name moose comes from the Algonquian Indian word "mons" which means twig eater. What an appropriate name; moose are herbivores. They eat only plants, and the twigs and leaves of willows, quaking aspen, dogwood and birch are favorites. Moose also love water plants. Moose do not have any upper front teeth, so they don't just nip off leaves and twigs. Instead, they often pull twigs sideways through their mouths. They have really tough lips and tongues. Stripping off two feet of leaves and shoots from a branch is no problem at all for a moose. An adult moose can eat 40 to 50 pounds of food a day! That's a lot of leaves.

Moose are the largest members of the deer family. They have long, thin legs and long, square heads.

Only males grow antlers. Both the males and females have a flap of skin and hair hanging from their throats. It's called a bell or dewlap. The bell helps moose "talk" to each other. The bell has scent glands on it. The smells on a male's bell lets a female know that he likes her. A full grown male, called a bull, may stand six feet high at the shoulder and weigh 1,000 to 1,600 pounds. The female, called a cow, is smaller; she may weigh between 800 and 1,300 pounds.

Moose are covered by a thick layer of dark hair. During the winter, it is a nice warm coat that absorbs heat from the sun. During the summer, it becomes a burden. Moose do have a thinner layer of hair in the summer, but they still get hot. Moose cool off the same way you might. They go swimming! Moose love the water. A thick forest with lots of shade is also a welcome retreat for a hot moose.

In late May or early June, a cow moose seeks out a quiet, hidden place to give birth to her baby, called a calf. Usually the cow will give birth to one calf, but sometime twins are born. The mother will

keep the calf well hidden for the first few weeks. A moose is very protective of her calf. She will charge anything that gets too close by rushing forward and striking with both front feet.

A calf weighs between 20 to 35 pounds when born, but it grows quickly on its mother's rich milk. By the time the calf is one week old, it can run faster than a man. Plants become part of a calf's diet when it is two weeks old. By the second month, a calf can gain over two pounds a day! A six month old calf will weigh around 400 pounds. Wow! The calf stays with its mother for the first winter. Then the mother forces the calf away to live in another area.

Moose are magnificent! They may look big and awkward on their long legs, but watch them for a while. You might see what powerful, graceful creatures they truly are.



# The Deer Family

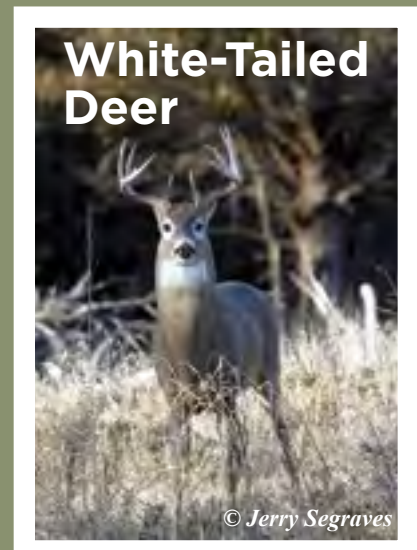
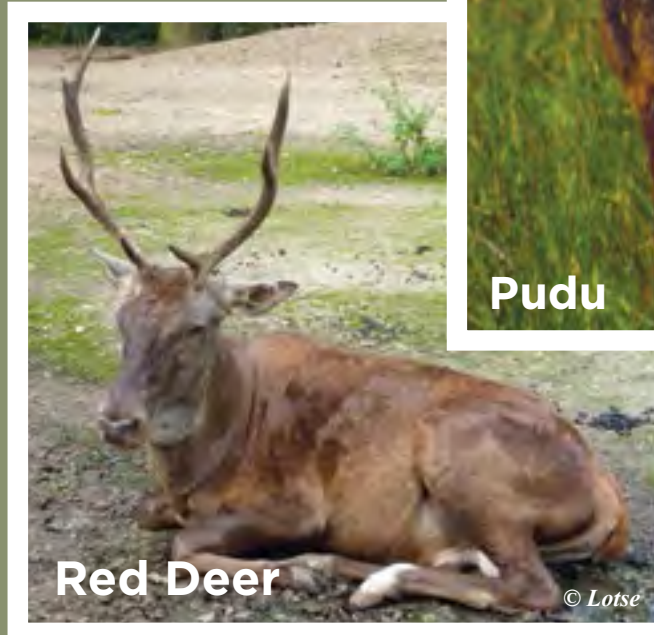
Throughout the world there are about 40 different species (kinds) of deer. They are found on every continent except Antarctica and Australia. Africa has only one native deer, the red deer.

Deer come in many sizes. The smallest deer in the world lives in the Andes Mountains. The pudu stands about one foot tall and weighs less than 20 pounds. The biggest deer in the world is the North American moose. A male moose can weigh nearly 80 times more than the pudu.

One thing all deer have in common is that they are ungulates (UN-gyu-lits). All ungulates have hooves. They are also herbivores; they eat plants. Grasses, leaves and twigs are tough to eat. To help them digest plants, ungulates have stomachs divided into four different chambers or rooms. They nip off plants, but they don't chew their food much before swallowing it. The plants go into the first chamber of the stomach. It is full of bacteria and other organisms that help break down the plants. Later, deer spit up the food and chew it again. Have you ever heard of cows chewing their cud? They are chewing food regurgitated from their stomachs. Once chewed, the food is swallowed again and passes into the second and third parts of the stomach where water is taken out. The fourth chamber is the one that is most like your stomach. It absorbs the nutrients out of the food.

Having a stomach with many chambers not only allows deer to eat tough plants, it also helps to keep them safe. Many animals are at risk when they eat. Predators are more likely to see a deer eating in a clearing than hiding under a tree, so deer eat quickly. They nip off plants, chew them just a little and then swallow them. Once their first stomach is full, deer find a place to rest and hide. Now the deer can fully chew and digest their food, without having to constantly look out for danger.

Members of the deer family in North America include elk, moose, caribou, mule deer and white-tailed deer. Wherever you live in North America, you are likely to be near at least one member of the deer family. Idaho, however, is lucky. We have all five species living in our state!



# Awesome Antlers

Antlers grow on members of the deer family, like moose. They are bones that grow out of the animal's skull. An antler grows faster than any other kind of bone. It can grow up to one inch a day during the summer! Usually only the males grow antlers, but female caribou can grow antlers. There is even a species of deer where neither the male nor female grow antlers – the Chinese water deer. But they grow something else, fang-like tusks!

Antlers are light and easily damaged until late summer. At this time, they are covered with a thin skin called velvet. Velvet is covered with fine, short hairs and contains thousands of blood vessels. The blood vessels carry calcium and minerals needed for building strong bones. If a mule deer damages his antlers badly at this point, he could actually bleed to death! Deer don't do much as their antlers are growing; they stay hidden and are not aggressive. Once the antlers have grown, the blood vessels in the velvet close off. The velvet dries up and starts to fall off. By October or September, the velvet has been completely rubbed off, and the antlers are hard and polished - ready to show off for the females and intimidate younger males. Deer shed their antlers in early winter and then immediately begin to grow another set. Then the process starts all over again!



# Humongous Horns

Mountain goats, bison, pronghorn, and bighorn sheep have horns. Horns are a bit different than antlers. Horns have two parts, a boney middle and an outer sheath. The inside part is bone that is attached to the skull. The outside of the horn, the sheath, is a covering made of a tough fiber-like material called keratin. Your fingernails and hair also contain keratin. What purpose does the sheath serve? It protects the delicate bone underneath.

Both males and females may grow horns. Horns are permanent. In most cases, they continue to grow throughout an animal's life. Pronghorns are an exception to this rule. A pronghorn will shed and re-grow its sheath each year.

If you take a close look at most horns, you may see rings or segments. Counting the segments may give you an idea of an animal's age. Mountain goats' horns grow quickly during their first three years of life. About 94% of the horn growth happens during the first three years. The first year's growth ring is not visible on a mountain goat. To estimate a mountain goat's age, count the segments and add "1" to your total. This is the age of the mountain goat. Who knew you could learn so much just from a horn?



# Let Them Be

Spring is a time for renewal. It's a time to get out of the house and explore all the wonders of nature. Walks, bike rides and fishing trips may take us closer to wildlife. You may see baby animals. It's a true sign that spring has arrived.

When you hear people talking about enjoying animals, remember it is especially important that we leave animals alone. Let them do the things they need to do to survive. Getting too close to wild animals might stress them and cause them to die.

As humans, we have an urge to take care of things we think are helpless, especially "cute" animals, like young deer or rabbits. If you see a baby animal, don't assume it has been abandoned by its mother. Most of the time, this isn't the case. Mothers often leave their young hidden while they go away to eat. If the mother stayed close to her baby, she could actually draw the

attention of a predator. You may have scared the mother away. She will return once "danger" has passed.

If you know that an animal is orphaned because the mother has died, call your local Fish and Game office. They will take the animal to a wildlife rehabilitator. Chances are if you take an animal home, it will die. Caring for a wild animal is not the same as caring for a pet. They need special foods, cages and treatments. Wildlife rehabilitators are specially trained and licensed to care for them.

Wildlife should not be handled, fed, chased or disturbed. If an animal will let you close enough to pick it up, it may be sick. Do not pick up a wild animal – dead or alive.

Wild animals survive on their own just fine without any help from people. Wild animals are unique and wonderful, view them from a distance and leave wildlife in the wild.

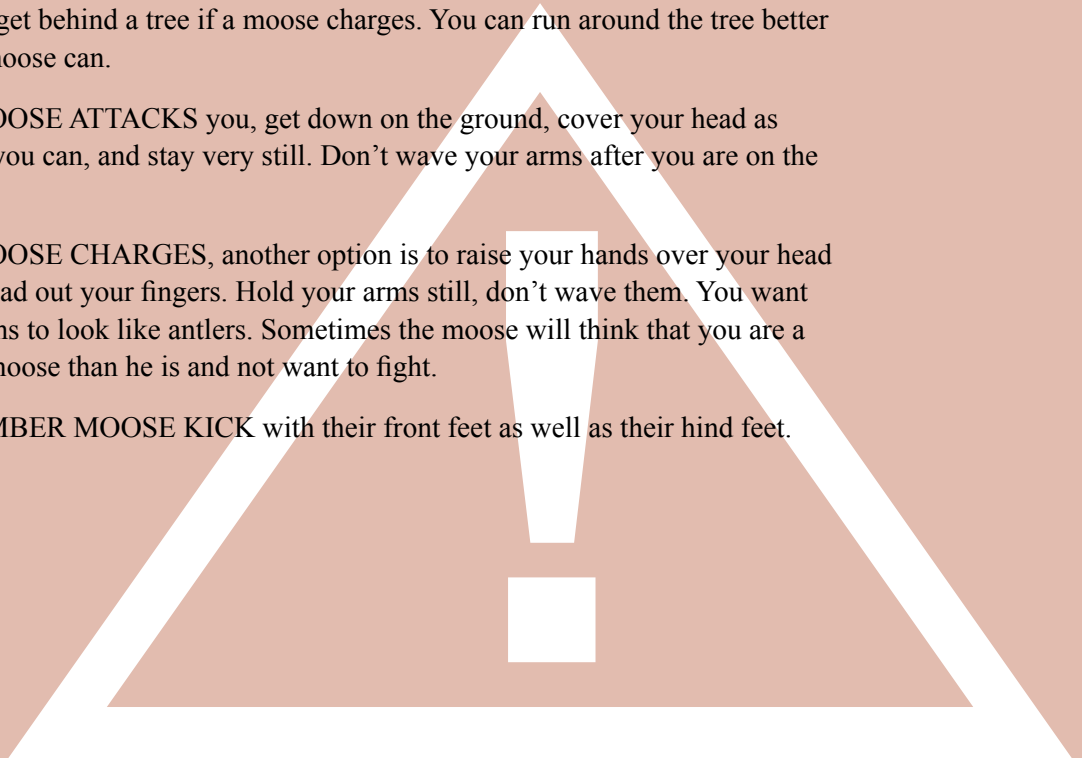


# Be Moose Aware

**M**oose are animals that sometimes come into Idaho's towns and cities. This often happens during the winter. Moose come down out of the snow-covered mountains looking for food. Moose are large, curious animals. They usually don't want to cause harm, but with the average moose weighing about 15 times more than your average fourth grader, things sometimes happen.

If you see a moose, here are some things to remember:

- NEVER feed a moose.
- NEVER get between a cow and a calf. Remember, moose are very protective mothers.
- DON'T walk toward a moose if you can avoid it; try to remain at least 50 feet away.
- NEVER throw anything at a moose.
- ALWAYS keep dogs under control or on a leash. A dog may chase after a moose and suddenly find the moose chasing it. Naturally, the dog runs back to its owner bringing an angry moose back, too.
- AVOID moose that are in a fenced area or between houses; they may feel cornered.
- REMEMBER, if you see its ears laid back or the hair on its shoulders stand up, the moose is angry or afraid and it may charge.
- TRY to get behind a tree if a moose charges. You can run around the tree better than a moose can.
- IF A MOOSE ATTACKS you, get down on the ground, cover your head as well as you can, and stay very still. Don't wave your arms after you are on the ground.
- IF A MOOSE CHARGES, another option is to raise your hands over your head and spread out your fingers. Hold your arms still, don't wave them. You want your arms to look like antlers. Sometimes the moose will think that you are a bigger moose than he is and not want to fight.
- REMEMBER MOOSE KICK with their front feet as well as their hind feet.



# Together or Alone?

Moose are animals that like to live alone. They usually don't live in groups like elk. Why do some animals live together and others live alone?



Elk are animals that live in groups. Usually, the female elk and their young live in herds. The main reason they live together is for protection. Females leave the group to give birth, but soon come back when their babies are a few weeks old. By living together, elk have more sets of the eyes looking out for danger. If a predator does attack, there will be more hooves to fight it off. Elk can also take advantage of babysitters. Elk take turns eating and looking after their young. A well fed mother can take better care of herself and her baby.

Wolves also usually live in groups, called packs. Wolves like to eat elk. One wolf would have a difficult time bringing down a large elk by itself, but by working together, wolves are more successful hunters.

Moose like to live alone. Moose can eat 40 to 50 pounds of food a day. It wouldn't take a group of moose very long to do some serious damage to a grove of trees. By spacing out, they help to keep the habitat productive. Sometimes moose live together in groups called "yards." You are likely to see a yard of moose during the winter. Food is often limited and more difficult to find covered in snow. Moose are sometimes forced to live together if food is only found in a few places. When food is plentiful, moose don't want or have to share.

These are just a few examples of why animals may live in groups or by themselves. Can you think of other animals that live in groups? How does this strategy help them survive? What about a solitary animal? Does living alone offer it benefits?





# Be Outside - Wildlife Watching

Watching wildlife can be so much fun! We are lucky to live in a state with such a diversity of wildlife species. Idaho has 357 bird, 22 reptile, 15 amphibian, and 68 fish species! While out enjoying our natural wonders, it's important to keep some things in mind. Not only to protect wildlife, but also to protect yourself.

One very important thing to remember is wild animals are WILD. Animals are often unpredictable. They may look calm, but then suddenly charge, so don't get too close - especially around moose, bears or rattlesnakes. If an animal has its head raised and ears pointed in your direction, it knows you are watching. If the animal is pacing and jumping around, stomping its feet or making alarm calls, move farther away. These are all signs that you are too close and are disturbing the animal. Getting too close to nesting birds or young animals may scare the parents away. They might never come back, and the young could die.

Use quiet, slow movements and try not to startle an animal. A car or boat is a great place to spy on wildlife. Never chase, feed or try to pick up wild animals. You are putting yourself in danger when you do.

The most important thing to have is a good pair of binoculars. High powered binoculars or a spotting scope will let you observe wildlife from a safe distance. Field guides will help you identify what you are looking at. Don't forget to dress for the weather. A great trip can turn sour if your toes or hands get wet and cold.

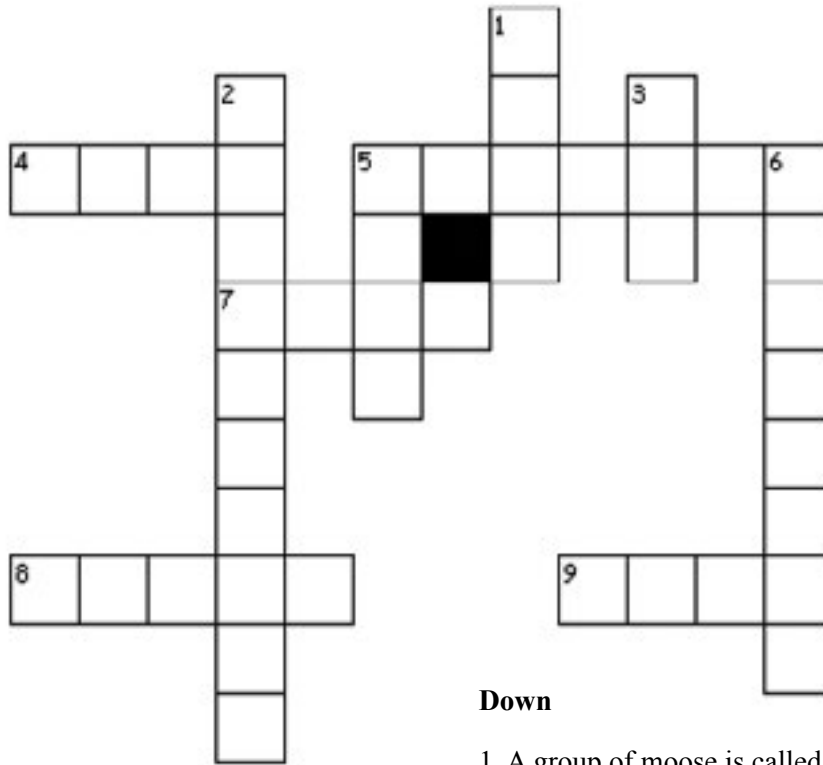


**BE OUTSIDE**  
IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

Watching animals can teach you so much. You might learn something about the animal you are watching, and you might also learn something about yourself. You might discover hidden skills and patience you never knew you had.



# Moose Crossword



## Words

Angry	Curious	Solitary
Bull	Deer	Yard
Calf	Herbivores	
Cow	Male	

## Down

1. A group of moose is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Moose eat plants; they are \_\_\_\_\_.
3. A female moose.
5. A baby moose.
6. Moose are \_\_\_\_\_ animals.

## Across

4. Antlers are found on \_\_\_\_\_ moose.
5. Moose are \_\_\_\_\_ animals.
7. A male moose.
8. Laid back ears are a sign a moose is \_\_\_\_\_ or afraid.
9. Moose are members of the \_\_\_\_\_ family.

## WILDLIFE EXPRESS

Volume 27 • Issue 7 • Moose • March 2014

Wildlife Express is published nine times a year (September-May) by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Classroom subscriptions and an Educator's Guide are available for \$45.00 per year and includes a classroom set of 30 copies mailed to your school each month. Subscriptions of 10 copies or less are available for \$25.00.

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For more information, call or write: Wildlife Express, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, 600 South Walnut, PO Box 25, Boise, Idaho, 83707 (208) 287-2890.

Lead Writer: Adare Evans    Layout: Kelly Kennedy Yokoyama    Contributors: Vicky Runnoe, Lori Adams  
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