

DEER FAMILY IN ALBERTA

Mule Deer

Odocoileus hemionus



Mule Deer have large, mule-like ears (hence their name), dark forehead and a noticeably large white rump area with a short black-tipped tail. When fast-moving, they break into a stiff-legged, bounding gait, earning them their alternate name of 'jumping deer'. This gait is suited for overcoming obstacles on the brushy hillsides which they prefer to inhabit. They can also trot and gallop and usually go uphill to escape a pursuing predator.

The adult males of deer develop antlers, bony outgrowth of the skull, which sprout in early spring and are shed annually, usually by mid winter.

The young (fawns) weighs a little more than 3.5 kg, very similar to that of humans.

Mule Deer fawns have light spots on the upper back. Fawns lie hidden for up to four hours at a time; the mother approaching them only to nurse and clean them, keeping them scent-free.

As winter approaches, deer exchange their tawny summer coat for a heavier, darker grey one with hollow tubular hairs for added insulation. At that time, they also tend to gather into large groups.



White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus

White-tailed Deer, when running, always raise their longer, broad tail, wagging it from side to side, exposing

a large white flag, which may act as a danger signal to others of their species. They tend to run downhill.

The adult male deer develop antlers, bony outgrowth of the skull, which sprout in early spring and are shed annually, usually by mid-winter.

The young (fawns) weigh a little more than 3 kg, similar to that of humans. The back and sides of White-tail fawns are extensively spotted, allowing them to hide in the sunlight-dappled woodland environment. Fawns lie hidden for up to four hours at a time; the female approaching them only to nurse and clean them, keeping them scent-free.

As winter approaches, these deer exchange their reddish-brown summer coat for a heavier, grey one, with hollow tubular hairs for added insulation. In areas of high snowfall, White-tails tend to gather within stands of coniferous trees.

As a result, the snow is beaten down and trails are created, making it easier for them to get around. During the winter, their food is largely the twigs of woody vegetation. Should this become scarce, especially for the smaller ones who cannot reach as high,

many will die of starvation



Moose *Alces alces*

The name was derived from the Algonkian term, 'Moz' meaning twig-eater.

This is the largest living member of the Deer Family.

The large males stand an average of six to seven feet tall at the shoulders and weigh an average of 453kg or 1000 pounds.

The long legs of the Moose make it wonderfully adapted for traveling through the forests, allowing it to easily step over fallen trees and other debris. In the winter, it readily walks through waste-deep snow, lifting its legs straight up and down, minimizing snowdrag. Those long legs allow it to easily step over most man-made fences. Its low dew-claws (the two hind toes) aid it in crossing streams, preventing it from sinking deeply in wet areas.

As their Algonkian name suggests, Moose are primarily browsers. In summer, they strip the leaves of willows and other preferred, mostly deciduous, shrubs or young trees.

The antlers, which are light-colored, are polished by thrashing them against vegetation. Since they reflect light as a mirror, they may act as a signal to the females (cows), which now tend to gather near the male.

The female gives birth, usually to twins, but singles or triplets are not uncommon. Each weighs about 14 kg (30 pounds). The calves,

which are unspotted, double their weight in three weeks. The cow staunchly defends them, even attacking a bulldozer approaching a calf that had its leg trapped in roots.

For most of the year, Moose lead a solitary existence, seeking out each other only during the rutting season.

In Alberta, they can be found almost anywhere in the province, and when following river valleys, sometimes even appear in our cities.



Elk Cervus elaphus

It is also commonly known as Wapiti, a Shawnee Indian name meaning 'white rump'. Other native names are Ponoka and Waskasoo

The Elk or Wapiti is the second largest member of the

Deer Family, exceeded in size only by the Moose. Mature males (stags) weigh an average of 315kg or 700pounds. Stags measure 140 cm (56 in) tall at the shoulder; hinds (females) stand 130 cm (52 in) tall.

The stags develop an impressive set of antlers. The velvet is rubbed off in late August or early September and are shed from late February into early April.

In the evenings, from late August to November, the stag utters a high-pitched bugling sound which carries for about a mile across the clear autumn air. This vocalization likely indicates his whereabouts

to the females. Up to thirty hinds, plus their young, may make up a single harem.

Calves are fawn-coloured and have long rows of creamy spots along their back and flanks.

In Alberta, they are now along the full length of the Rockies, in the western Boreal forest, in the Cypress Hills area,



Caribou Rangifer tarandus

The Woodlands are the largest; the Barren Grounds, which are about mid-size; the high Arctic islands and NW Greenland Peary Caribou are the smallest. Males are about 25% larger than the females.

Caribou obtain most of their nourishment from lichens - that unique partnership between algae and fungi, especially in winter.

The adult males and most female Caribou develop antlers -- bony outgrowth of the skull. The males, which have the largest and most magnificent set, sprout theirs in March, which are mature in mid September.

Massive herds of 200,000 or more individuals may be encountered on the tundra at certain times of the year.

In mid-June, usually a single, precocious fawn is born. At birth, it weighs about of 5 kg (11 pounds). At only four hours of age, it follows the doe as she rejoins the slowly drifting herd. It can keep up with a running

herd when only one day old and can outrun a wolf in a direct race a few days after birth.

It was the reindeer/caribou that supplied our ancestors with much of their food, shelter, clothing, fuel and tools. Without their existence we might never have been able to master the occupancy of much of landmass of the globe. We truly need to respect and appreciate the role that this species has played in our lives.

[Help protect our wildlife and their habitat. When hiking or camping, please take all your trash with you when you leave the area.](#)