

Nature Notes

Moose (*Alces alces*)



This biggest member of the deer family (and largest animal found in the Kimberley Nature Park) avoids humans if at all possible but should, like all wild things, be treated with respect. If you keep your dog close by and your eyes open you are unlikely to have an unpleasant encounter with a moose, but cows with calves and rutting bulls can charge with no warning and have been known to charge cars and even trains. You are more likely to see their 12 to 15 cm long tracks or their super-sized glossette droppings than to see an actual animal.



Cow & calf in the KNP Photo by Lyle Grisdale

Moose spend much of their time feeding on the shoots of woody plants all year and a variety of aquatic plants in summer. They are excellent swimmers and divers, possessing valvular nostrils that close when they submerge.

There are three subspecies of moose in BC, of which the southeastern variety (Shiras moose) is the smallest. Moose are widely distributed across British Columbia and have expanded their range greatly in the last 60 to 80

years. Before 1900 Moose were absent from most of Southern BC.

Their range is limited to cooler climates since their large bodies, heat from gut fermentation and inability to sweat mean they can not tolerate temperatures above 27°C for long. During hot spells the moose will therefore spend much of the day in water as a means of cooling off.

Their long guard hairs and fine inner coats are excellent insulation so moose do well in cold winter temperatures provided they get the 20 kg of forage they need per day. Their long legs allow them to move easily through deep snow, which minimizes competition from other herbivores for winter food. Despite these adaptations, peak mortality is in winter when either starvation or predations on weakened animals take their toll. Vehicles can also be a cause of mortality as it is very difficult to see the dark coloured moose on the highway at night.

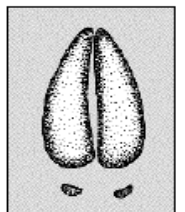


Diagram BC Adventure

Moose are solitary animals. In late May or June after a gestation period of 8 months, the females will chase away last year's calf and give birth. Yearling females can breed but usually the first calving season is in the second year with 10 to 20% of births being twins. Calves will start eating vegetation when two weeks old, but milk remains a key source of nutrients until September. The calves will soon mature into ungainly looking but extremely well adapted residents of the KNP.

Visit www.kimberleynaturepark.ca for a hard copy or more information about Nature Park events.