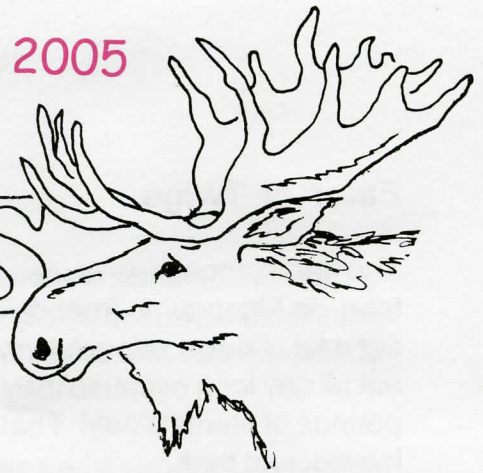


NATURE DETECTIVES

Spring 2005



Moose Not Meese

"Meese" would be a good word to use for more than one moose. After all, one goose plus one goose equals two geese. But one moose or many moose, the word is the same, just plain moose. Not "meese" or even "mooses." People have used a lot of words to describe moose. Words such as gangly, lumpy, rubber-lipped, flop-eared, and goofy-looking are a few, but the word that fits best is big.

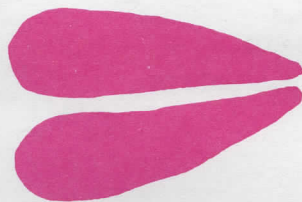
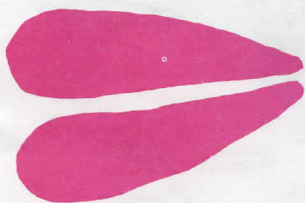
Moose are big. They are the biggest members of the deer family, bigger than mule deer, bigger than elk. Moose living in Boulder County are the smallest kind of moose, a little smaller than the moose that live in Alaska. But even our moose, called the Shiras moose or Wyoming moose (*Alces alces shirasi*), weigh about a thousand pounds. They can be six feet tall from toe to shoulder, and ten feet long from the tip of their huge funny nose to the tip of their little stubby tail. And, they have enormous antlers, or at least the males do.

Hefty Antlers

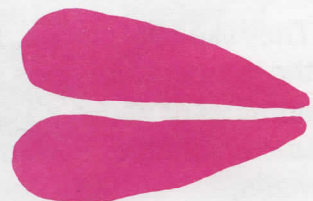
Moose grow the biggest antlers of any animal in the world, and they grow new ones every year. Only the male moose, called bulls, grow antlers. Bulls crash antlers together and push each other around in the fall when they are trying to prove they are the strongest and win the affections of the females, called cows.

The bulls' growing antlers are covered with thin hairy skin called velvet. The antlers must very tender while they grow because bulls avoid banging them into things. In the fall, the antlers stop growing and the velvet dries up and falls off. Bulls thrash around in shrubbery to rub every bit of dried velvet off their now-hard antlers. Sometimes the bulls eat the strips of dried skin left hanging on bushes.

A healthy eight-year-old bull balances antlers that measure four feet from one side to the other and weigh more than 55 pounds! The antlers fall off during the winter and by late winter a new set will begin to grow. Look out when you meet a bull moose in the fall because they are ready to use their antlers against anything that moves.



Moose TRACKS
1/4 life size



Eater of Twigs

The name, moose, was given by people of the Algonquin tribe. In Algonquian "moose" means "twig eater." Moose eat a lot of twigs, especially willow and aspen. They eat all day long because they need to eat forty pounds of plants a day! That is a lot of twigs, leaves, and bark.

They eat fast but they have a stomach made especially to handle bulky, unchewed plant material. The plants go into one part of their stomach into a sort of temporary storage. Later, the moose will regurgitate what they bit off, chew it up and reswallow it so the tough plant material can be digested.

When water plants begin to grow in spring, moose will wade or swim into deep water to reach them. Water lilies seem to be a moose's favorite food. Moose can stay underwater chomping plants for more than three minutes. In the winter they eat the needles of pine trees.

Wetland Home

Moose like the plants that grow in soggy wetland areas best so you are most likely to find them hanging out near ponds, streams, and marshes from spring through fall. In winter, they spend more time in the forest. Moose will wander in search of food, but they usually don't travel far. They may spend their entire lives within a three to six square mile home range.

They like cool places. Moose cannot sweat so when the temperature goes above 57 degrees F. in summer or above 23 degrees F. in winter, they are uncomfortable. In warm weather, they cool off in shade or water.



Enemies

Healthy, full-grown moose are very good at fighting off wolves, mountain lions, and bears. Moose cows are fierce in defending their babies against teeth and claws, and predators are wary of a moose mom's stomping kick and snapping teeth. Still, babies and sick moose can become prey for strong predators or even coyotes.

Avoid going near a cow moose and her baby because she will use her sharp hooves against any animal she sees as a threat to her calf.

Calves

A newborn moose calf is about the size and color of a golden retriever. Cows usually have one calf, but sometimes they have two. The calves weigh around 25 – 35 pounds when they are born at the end of May or in early June. Their long legs are wobbly at first but in only a week they can outrun a human. They can learn to swim their first week, too.

They gain around two pounds a day during the five months they are drinking milk from their mothers. They start following the cow and nibbling on plants when they are just three weeks old. They keep following mom for about a year, until just before she gives birth to a new calf.

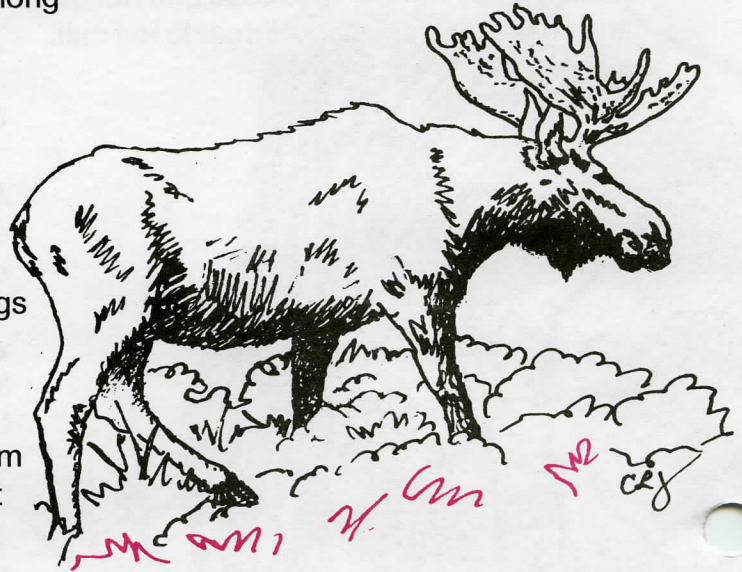
The cow uses body language such as laid back ears and raised neck hairs to tell her year-old calf it is time to go it alone. Sometimes the confused calf will trail behind the mom, keeping a safe distance from her hooves. Calves have been known to follow another moose or even a human before they find their own space. Usually, from then on, the calf will live without the company of other moose. Except for a brief period when the bull and female mate in the fall, the only social life a moose has is the year of closeness between the calf and cow. Sometimes in the winter, moose gather where there is a lot of food, but they don't socialize together.



Body Parts that Work

Match the goofy-looking moose body part (1-9) with the way it helps the moose to survive (a-i).
The first match is done for you.

- 1 i Long snout
- 2 Large hooves with 2 big toes that can spread apart
- 3 Soft flexible snout with rubbery lips
- 4 Forty-inch long legs
- 5 Hollow hairs that are 6-10 inches long
- 6 Big nose
- 7 Humped muscular shoulders
- 8 Eyes on the sides of the head
- 9 Wide floppy ears



- a. Good for mouthing and grabbing twigs and feeling for the softest branches, which are the most nutritious
- b. Provide insulation and protection from the weather, make swimming without sinking easier
- c. Make walking easy on wet, squishy ground or soft snow, can paw through deep snow to get to food
- d. Can turn toward sounds for best hearing
- e. Provide moose the power to run 35 miles per hour (faster than a man can run) and swim 6 miles per hour (faster than a person can paddle a canoe)
- f. Wade through deep water, step over logs, stumps, and rocks, plow through deep snow
- g. Detects things good to eat, even smells food beneath a foot and a half of snow
- h. Can see a wide area, and can especially notice things that move, but can't see well up close
- i. Makes it possible to eat underwater plants while keeping eyes above the water to watch for danger

Answers: 1i, 2c, 3a, 4f, 5b, 6g, 7e, 8h, 9d