



# THE MOOSE



**Y**our first moose sighting is something you'll never forget. Enormous, lanky, ungainly creatures with powerful forequarters, they strike awe in even the most seasoned outdoors person, causing one to suddenly feel strangely dwarfed and vulnerable.

While moose aren't common in New York, more people are being treated to the sight of these impressive animals as their numbers slowly increase, especially in northeastern New York.

The largest member of the deer family, adult male (bull) moose average 6 feet tall at the shoulder and can weigh as much as 1,400 pounds; females (cows) are smaller. Heavy-bodied with a hump on their shoulder, moose have large, almost horse-like heads, with a flap of skin that hangs beneath the chin. Called a bell, this skin flap is very pronounced on males. All moose have longer front legs, enabling them to jump over fallen trees, slash and other debris. Moose vary in color from light brown to dusty black, with the face generally dark brown or black on bulls, and light brown on cows.

Though nearsighted, moose have keen senses of smell and hearing which warn them of potential danger. Despite their ungainly appearance, these large animals can run through the forest quietly at speeds up to 35 mph. Good swimmers, moose are known to swiftly move through the water for many miles. When black flies and mosquitoes torment them, moose may nearly submerge themselves or roll in mud to acquire a protective coating.

Depending on the season, moose are found in a variety of habitats, including mixed conifer and hardwood forests, brush, beaver flows and other wetland areas. They seek out areas with plenty of cover and nutritious food. Cows with calves prefer to be near water, which offers a ready escape route. Though generally solitary animals, several moose may gather near streams and lakes to feed. In winter, moose may herd to share favorable habitat.

Primarily browsers, moose eat large amounts of leaves, twigs, buds and aquatic vegetation. Willows, birches, aspens, maples, fir and viburnums are their preferred foods. Land areas recently logged or disturbed by fire, wind throw or beaver provide excellent moose habitat as these sites contain new plant growth. A healthy adult moose can eat 40-60 pounds of browse daily. Like deer, moose lack upper incisors and so they strip off browse and bark rather than snipping it neatly. Salt is an important nutrient requirement for moose. During summer, moose feed heavily on sodium-rich aquatic plants. In winter, they may get their salt from the wet areas along highways where road salt accumulates.

Moose breed from mid-September through mid-October. During the breeding season, bull moose will create wallows by pawing out depressions in the mud, and then urinating in them. Bulls and cows will then roll in the wallows. While typically only mature bulls five years or older breed, cows begin breeding at two to three years of age. After an eight-month gestation period, cows give birth to one or two calves in May or early June. Twins are common when cows are healthy and well fed. Calves are reddish brown and weigh 25-35 pounds. By fall they weigh 300-400 pounds. Newborn calves can stand up the first day, and swim within a couple of weeks. They are weaned at about six months, but remain with their mother for one year until she drives them off shortly before her next calf is born.

Each spring and summer, bull moose grow antlers that fall off during winter. Antler growth is nourished through a network of blood vessels contained in a soft smooth skin called velvet. The velvet is usually shed by August or September. The flat, shovel-like antlers of big bulls can measure as much as four to five feet wide and weigh 25-30 lbs. Antler size is not always an indication of a moose's age. The largest antler growth generally occurs at age five, and then declines when bulls are in their teens. Males use their antlers to thrash brush, threaten and fight for mates, and to root plants from the pond floor.

Normally a retiring animal that avoids human contact, the moose is unpredictable and can be dangerous. A cow with calves is irritable and fiercely protective, and rutting bulls are extremely unpredictable, sometimes charging people, farm animals and even cars. So if you come across a moose, remember to watch them from a distance. Moose are bigger and faster than any person and give little warning before attacking a perceived threat. Evidence of moose in an area include: deer-shaped tracks the size of an adult human's hand; piles of oversized deer droppings; and browsing of trees 6-8 feet above the ground.

Because of their large size and strength, adult moose have very few natural predators. However, young, sick or injured moose will succumb to predation by black bears or coyotes. Generally though, most moose die from vehicle collisions, accidents in the wild (drowning, falls, etc.), disease, starvation and old age. Brainworm, a tiny parasite carried by white-tailed deer (who are unaffected), and liver flukes are problems for some moose who usually die from the infections.

# MOOSE FACTS



Antler Growth

- ❖ Moose are one of the largest land mammals in North America.
- ❖ Moose occur in Alaska, Canada and the northern U.S. (from North Dakota to northern New England, and from the northern Rockies south to Utah).
- ❖ Moose can move each ear and each eye independently.
- ❖ A moose's home range varies from 5 to 50 square miles.
- ❖ The average life span is 8 years for a cow, 7 years for a bull, though some may live 20 years.
- ❖ Bull moose make several noises, including a loud bellow, as well as croaks and barks during rut. Cows make long quavering moans, ending in cough-like moo-aghs, and a grunt when gathering their young.
- ❖ Moose sleep on the ground, like deer, leaving beds of flattened vegetation, or depressions in the snow.
- ❖ Moose can store over 100 pounds of food in their stomachs.
- ❖ Each year, from April to August, bull moose grow a new set of antlers that can be as much as 4-5 feet wide and weigh 25-30 pounds.

## NEW YORK'S MOOSE POPULATION

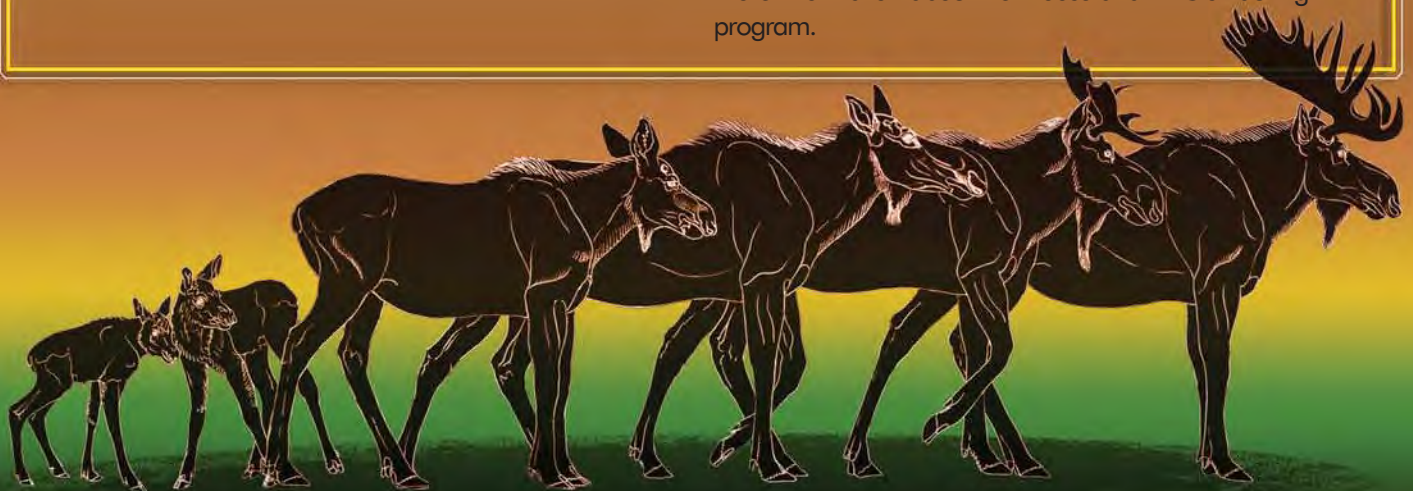
Once common in New York, moose disappeared from the state in the 1860s largely due to habitat change and unregulated hunting. It was not until 1980 that moose once again roamed New York's forests, moving in from neighboring states. By this time, abandoned farmlands and forest practice changes created areas of new and old growth, providing excellent moose habitat.

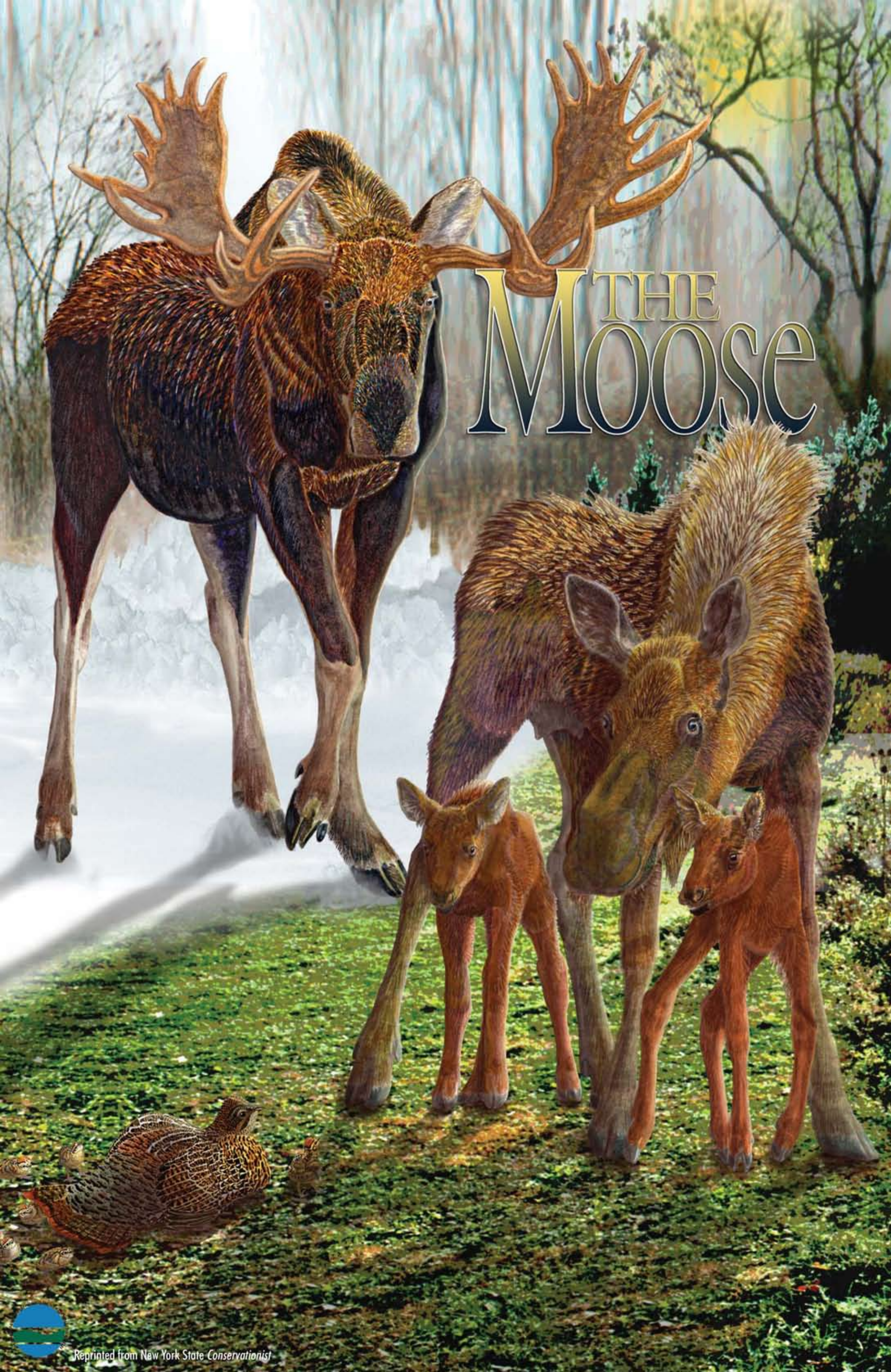
To informally monitor the species' progress, DEC began collecting reports of moose sightings. When feasible, animals were captured and outfitted with radio collars and tags before being released back to the wild, enabling biologists to gather better information on moose movements within the state.

Today, the data collected from reports of collared moose, moose/vehicle collisions and moose mortalities indicate that New York's moose population is now firmly established. However, DEC continues to collect reports of public sightings of collared animals. DEC staff also monitor collared animals when possible and attempt to locate uncollared animals during occasional mid-winter aerial surveys. When feasible, biologists attach radio collars on new moose, such as nuisance animals that must be relocated.

Currently, DEC estimates that more than 200 moose live in New York State.

Visit DEC's website at: [www.dec.state.ny.us](http://www.dec.state.ny.us) to find out more information about the moose and DEC's tracking program.





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