

ADIRONDACK OUTDOORS

Moose still on the loose!

Moose, the largest animal species in the park were extirpated for over a century, yet they have always been considered an iconic, 'landscape species.'

Since the 1970's, moose have been entering New York state on a continuous basis. The New York's moose population is now firmly established and large enough to be considered secure.

Moose have become so common that the NYSDEC no longer solicits nor collects reported sightings. Officials explain that the continued collection of this data will no longer contribute in a substantial or cost-effective way.

"People don't even bother to call them in anymore," explained Ken Kogut a wildlife biologist with DEC Region 6. "I guess the novelty has worn off."

Currently, DEC biologists estimate that there are more than 500 moose in the park and that the population is increasing at about the same rate as Vermont's, about 10-15 percent per year.

"We believe that moose have become reestablished to a point where a threshold has been reached to enable a breeding population to exist," explained Ed Reid, a DEC Wildlife Biologist with Region 5.

The Seasons

Since the 1990's, park residents have become increasingly aware of the presence of moose in the park. They've found moose scat and tracks, or watched them in the water or along the highways.



Despite an increase in the number of sightings during the fall, moose are still in the process of reestablishing a population on the Adirondacks.

Photo by Eric Granger

Moose scat, which resembles an oversized gum drop in shape, can be found in ponds and lakes stretching from the West Canada Lakes to the St. Regis Area to the Five Ponds Wilderness. The droppings can usually be found along the pond's bottom in four to six feet of water where moose commonly feast on water plants such as lily pads, arrowheads, cattails or similar tubers.

The droppings are easily recognizable due to their size, quantity and light, tan color which stands out against a pond's mucky bottom. Last year, over the final weekend of the trout season, I discovered moose drop-

pings in nine out of the 12 waters I visited.

Obviously, others are seeing moose as well, a point illustrated by the nearly two dozen state road signs posted across the park.

In places such as Newcomb, Indian Lake, Bloomingdale or Inlet, the sight of a moose is no longer considered an unusual occurrence.

The Animal

Moose are primarily active during the morning and evening hours, but they often switch to a nocturnal life during the summer, when insect harassment is at its peak. Sightings increase as the rut begins in the late summer and continues through the early fall.

During the rutting season, a bull moose covers upwards of 70 miles in a day searching for a mate. Moose travel at about 9 mph, but they can double that speed in a gallop for a short distance. They are also extremely proficient swimmers and have been known to cross Lake Champlain.

The rut begins in August as bulls begin shedding antler velvet. The bellow to produce sounds similar to groans. Similar to whitetail deer rubs, moose also break branches, strip bark, or tangle with bushes.

The bell, a hairy skin flap under the jaw, is their scent distribution organ. It is splashed with urine when bulls dig rutting pits. It serves to attract females, which are greatly attracted to bull moose scent.

From August to mid October, during rut, females come to heat every 18-21 days. Moose reach sexual maturity at one and a half years, bulls mate from an age of two and a half years.

After one to two days together, a mating pair parts and the bull begins searching for another female.

Observe with a wary eye

Moose are unique and exciting animals to observe. They can frequently be found in wetland areas with streams or lakes with nearby poplar, maple or coniferous forests.

While moose have been observed throughout the day, the peak hours of dawn

or dusk are usually best for viewing wildlife. While moose are fairly tolerant of humans, all wildlife should be viewed and photographed from a safe distance.

People should exercise caution when around these large and powerful animals. Efforts must be ensured that observation is done carefully. Make no mistake, moose are dangerous animals. Weighing up to 1,500 pounds, standing 6-1/2 feet at the shoulder, with long legs, sharp hooves and impressive antlers; moose will attack a human.

The most dangerous time of the year to meet up with a cow moose is in the spring and early summer when they may have young calves. Use common sense and never walk between a moose and its calf.

When traveling in moose country, dogs should be left home. Moose have an instinctive fear of canines and even a leashed dog may agitate a moose and provoke a charge or an attack.

Males act aggressively, especially during the fall breeding season when they may perceive you as a threat or potential competitor. Bull moose have been known to tangle with a train locomotive, so a human being presents very little danger.

Signs of moose aggression include the animal walking toward you, laying back its ears, stomping the ground, licking its nose, swinging its head from side to side while the hair on the back of its neck is standing on end.

If a moose is acting aggressive, abnormally or seems disturbed by your presence, back away slowly and leave the area.

If charged, run and try to get a tree, vehicle or other large object between you and the moose. Should you encounter a moose be sure to back off a bit and give it plenty of room. Always back away slowly and calmly.

Remember, dangerous wildlife encounters are nearly always caused by a foolish decision on the part of humans. Use your head, rather than your feet, to avoid a confrontation.



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