

## Species Brief

### *Alces alces* Moose



The Pleistocene epoch is famous for a wide variety of huge, strange mammals. From mammoths, to giant sloths, to saber-toothed tigers, it was, in some ways, the mammalian version of the age of the dinosaurs.

The moose is one of the few creatures that still remains from that period, and that becomes clear when you see a moose up close.

Moose are imposing, usually weighing over half a ton, with large, flat antlers that can grow to up to six feet across. They're found throughout the northern temperate and southern arctic zones of Earth, and are a symbol of real wilderness.

Despite their size, moose are prey animals for grizzly bears, wolves, mountain lions, and even occasionally wolverines. Wolverines and mountain lions generally only attack small, sick, or snow-bound moose.

In more recent years, however, a new threat has emerged for this remarkable species — ticks. All mammals in New England have to deal with ticks, and for the most part, they are a nuisance, more than any kind of real danger. Their small size means that they don't take much blood, even if left to drink as much as they want, and the cold winters kill off vast numbers of them, keeping their population from getting out of hand.

But now things are different. Earth is warming due to human activity, and that has meant winters with fewer days below freezing, and so more ticks have survived. It's hard to imagine the number of tiny arthropods it would take to really cause problems for a creature as massive as a moose, but it seems those numbers exist, now. In one of the most horrific effects of climate change, some moose in New Hampshire, and other areas, have been suffering from anemia (too few red blood cells), and even dying from it, as thousands of ticks have drained them. Moose spend a lot of time in the water, browsing on water plants; those weakened by

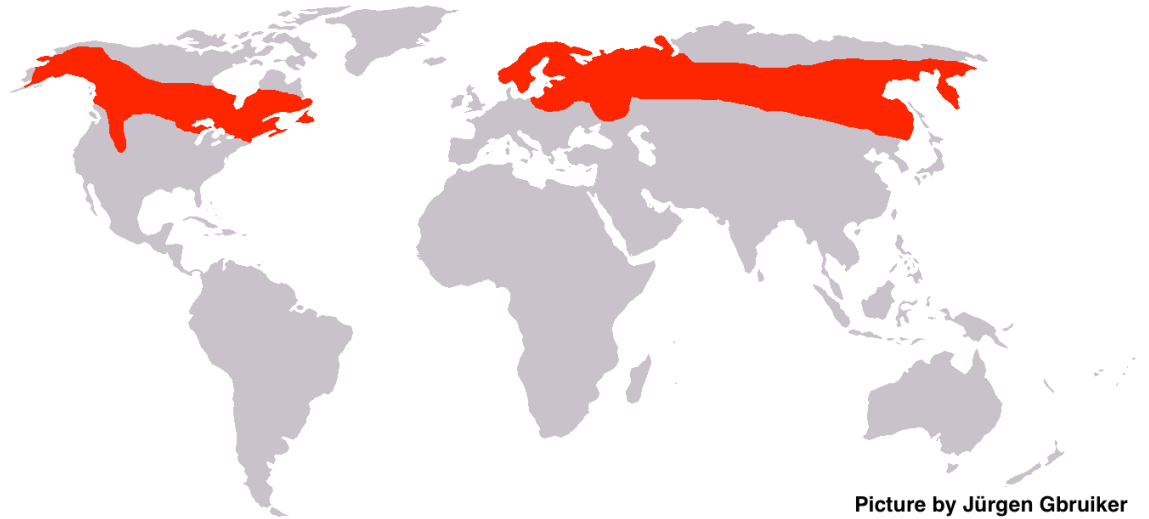
#### Response type:

Range Shift • Evolution • Behavior Change • **Community Imbalance** • Extinction

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blood-loss are at an increased risk of hypothermia — body temperature lowered to deadly levels.

While it's not clear how much damage this new threat will do to moose populations already strained by other human activities, it's another example of the ways our ecosystems are being thrown out of balance by the planet's rising temperature.



Picture by Jürgen Gbruiker

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