

THE HEAT IS ON

Species feeling the effects of climate change



Moose

Alces americanus

Region:

Northern United States and Canada

Area affected:

New Hampshire and Minnesota

Climatic change:

Warming temperatures

Impact:

Parasite infestation

ABOUT THIS SPECIES

With their long legs, large heads and the males' palm-shaped antlers, moose are one of our most distinctive mammal species. They are also the largest members of the deer family, ranging in size from 800 to 1,600 pounds. Moose live in boreal forest regions and are most common in Alaska and Canada, but their range also extends through the northern tier of the Lower 48, particularly in New England, Minnesota and the Northern Rockies. They feed on a wide variety of terrestrial vegetation, including the branches and leaves of willow, birch and aspen and other plants. They also forage in small ponds and streams for aquatic vegetation, particularly in summer. They are mostly solitary and range over short distances rather than undertaking long migrations.

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACT

After making a comeback in the 20th century from losses due to overhunting and habitat loss, moose are once again in alarming decline across the southern part of their range. Numbers have dropped by 75 percent in Minnesota, 30 percent in New Hampshire and 50 percent in parts of southern Canada. Some of this decline may be attributable to hunting or predation, but climate change is emerging as a major problem. Moose are susceptible to heat stress in warm summers, but the bigger problem seems to be that tick populations explode when winters are warmer and the period of snow cover is shorter. **Individual moose have been found with 100,000 ticks attached and sucking their blood.** In addition to causing anemia, tick infestation causes moose to scratch obsessively and wear off fur to the point of losing the insulation they need for cold weather.

References

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