

## **Moose on the loose in Colorado**

Colorado is at the southern edge of the range for moose in North America, so they were rarely sighted in the State in the past. However, in 1978 the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) began introducing moose for sport and as watchable wildlife. The most recent chapter in this effort is a multi-year reintroduction project on the Grand Mesa, which is the topic of the next presentation in the *Living with Wildlife* series, Thursday, July 9, 7 p.m., Ridgway Community Center, Railroad Avenue, Ridgway. Stephanie Duckett, the CDOW terrestrial biologist working on the project, will evaluate their progress and describe how moose were transplanted from other Colorado herds and from Utah.

Moose are found in the cooler and wetter, subarctic forests of North America, Europe, and Russia. Rock drawings and cave painting reveal that moose have been hunted since the Stone Age. They are still a major source of meat in many areas of the world, especially Sweden. Moose are the largest member of the deer family and second only to bison as the largest land animal in both North America and Europe. On average, an adult moose stands 6-7 feet high at the shoulder and weighs 850-1580 pounds for males and 600-800 pounds for females. The antlers of the male are the largest of any mammal, weighing as much as 77 pounds and measuring a record 80 inches.

Moose are generally solitary, except for mothers and calves, and they are not territorial. They do not usually migrate long distances unless changes in food supply require it. Moose are most active at sunrise and sunset. They browse on a wide variety of plant species but prefer willows, aspen, pine, and fir with aquatic vegetation supplementing their diet in summer. Their long legs and splayed hooves are well suited to wading through wetlands and ponds. They are strong swimmers and can dive to depths of 25 feet in search of plants. Despite their ungainly appearance, moose can run silently and swiftly through dense forests at speeds up to 35 mph and sustained speeds of 6 mph. Moose are not known to have good eyesight, but they have acute hearing and an exceptional sense of smell.

Wolves, bears, and cougars are the major predators of moose. Predation by bears, especially of the calves, is higher in the spring, and predation by wolves is higher in the winter when the deep snow impedes the ability of the moose to escape.

Humans are most at risk from moose on the highway where animal vehicle collisions are the cause of many fatalities in regions where moose are abundant. For example, in Maine people are killed or seriously injured in one out of four of the 700 or so moose-vehicle collisions that have occurred every year for the past decade. Moose are especially hard to see at night because of their dark coloring and the fact that their eyes do not reflect light as those of deer do. The height of moose makes them especially lethal in an accident because the car hits their legs causing the head and body to hurtle toward the windshield.

In Colorado, moose have made themselves at home in North Park, the Laramie River drainage, Middle Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, the upper reaches of the Cache la Poudre River, Spring Creek Pass northwest of Creede, and South Park near the town of Jefferson. The town of Walden has been designated by the state legislature as the "Moose Viewing Capital of Colorado," and the Colorado State Forest State Park near there has a Moose Center providing

visitors with viewing areas for the largest concentration of moose in the state. The total moose population statewide is estimated at about 1,000.

In 2005, CDOW began the translocation of moose to the Grand Mesa to establish a self-sustaining population. Ninety-one moose have been released in the Skyway area and in the Muddy Creek and Buzzard Creek drainages where there is excellent habitat, low recreation usage, and adjacent habitat of high quality for dispersal. The majority of moose have remained in the release area, but some have migrated into the Leroux Creek and Roaring Fork drainages and into the upper Battlements. They generally stay in elevations between 7,500 and 9,500 feet. Thirty-six of the Grand Mesa moose are being tracked with radio telemetry. In addition, ongoing efforts include monitoring moose during heavy oil and gas development across the release area.

Stephanie Duckett, whose name should be familiar to locals from her in-laws' market in Ouray, graduated from Colorado College with a degree in biology. She has worked with CDOW since 2001, first as a wildlife officer in Brighton, and, since 2005, as a Terrestrial Biologist in Grand Junction.

Doors for this presentation will open at 6:30. Refreshments will include homemade cookies, coffee provided by Mountain Market, and tea provided by Cups.

For further information and to offer suggestions for this series, please contact Sara Coulter (626-4496, [scoulter@towson.edu](mailto:scoulter@towson.edu)) or Shirley Jentsch (240-1319, [sjentsch@montrose.net](mailto:sjentsch@montrose.net)).

Sources:

<http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moose>

[http://animaldiversity.ummich.edu/site/accounts/information/Alces\\_alces.html](http://animaldiversity.ummich.edu/site/accounts/information/Alces_alces.html)

Stephanie Duckett, "Grand Mesa Moose Project, Progress Report 1/12/09"

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