



Living With Wildlife

Moose in Massachusetts



Many people are surprised to learn there are moose (*Alces alces*) living in Massachusetts. Moose have been absent from the state since the early 1700s. As early settlers cleared the extensive forests in the state for pastures and farming, moose habitat disappeared and so did the moose. As recently as the 1970s a moose sighting was considered rare. Why are moose here now? Moose populations got a boost in northern New England from a combination of forest cutting practices and protection from hunting which created ideal moose habitat and allowed for high reproduction and survival rates. Gradually, as the population increased, moose moved southward into their historic range, and by the early 1980s moose moved into northern Worcester and Middlesex Counties and had begun to breed and disperse throughout central and western Massachusetts.

Description: Moose are the largest members of the deer family in North America. In the fall, an adult cow (female) moose can weigh from 500-700 pounds and a bull (male) moose will weigh anywhere from 600-1000 pounds. They can stand up to 6 feet tall at the shoulder including legs 3 to 4 feet in length. Only bulls grow antlers. These antlers begin growing in March to early April, and are fully grown by August when the velvet is shed. Antlers are shed beginning in December, though some young bulls retain their antlers until late winter. The bell, a flap of skin and long hair that hangs from the throat, is more pronounced in adult bulls than in cows or immature bulls.

Life History: Moose are most active between dawn and dusk. The breeding period for moose runs September through October. This is a time when many moose sightings are reported. The bull stays with the cow only long enough to breed; then he leaves for another cow. Both bulls and cows travel more during this time in pursuit of a mate. Females can breed as early as 1+ years of age. The other period of high moose activity is in May, when the young of the past year are driven off by the adult cow before she calves. Cows usually give birth to 1-2 calves between late May and the end of June. Moose calves weigh 20-25 pounds at birth. By fall they will have gained nearly 300 pounds!

Food: Moose, like deer, lack upper incisors; they strip off browse (twigs and other plants) and bark rather than snipping it neatly. During summer, moose prefer to feed in or near clearings and other open areas where they browse on tender leaves, twigs and tree bark as well as aquatic and semi-aquatic vegetation. Grasses, lichens, mosses, mushrooms and other herbaceous plants are also a part of their diet. In the summer, moose tend to seek food and relief from flies and mosquitoes by spending time in wetlands. Winter food mostly consists of needle bearing trees and hardwood bark, buds and twigs.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SEE A MOOSE

Wildlife viewers, hunters and other outdoor people may encounter a moose in their travels through Massachusetts forests. Stay a respectful distance away and enjoy this magnificent animal. In most cases, the moose will move off. During the breeding season in fall, or the calving season in spring, be especially cautious because bulls can be unpredictable and cows can be very protective of their calves. Keep dogs under control.

Drivers — Brake For Moose; It Could Save Your Life! — Be particularly alert, especially at night during the fall breeding season and in May and June when yearling moose are driven away by their mother. Moose will step out onto a roadway without showing the slightest concern for oncoming traffic. The dark body is difficult to see and its eyes are much higher than those of white tail deer.

Suburban/Residential Homeowners — With no natural predators in Massachusetts, moose are unwary as they move through populated areas, particularly during the mating season. Spring yearlings will sometimes appear in densely populated areas, having followed waterways or forests into the heart of an urban center. Never try to approach or pursue a moose. Pursuit not only stresses the animal, but it adds the risk of having a moose chased out into traffic or into a group of bystanders. Keep dogs under control. Leave the moose alone and call MassWildlife or the Environmental Police if the moose is in a highly populated area. Usually the moose will find its way out if given the chance, especially in semi-suburban and rural areas.

Options available for wildlife professionals when dealing with suburban or urban moose situations:

1. Watching the animal from a distance is often all that is needed to allow the moose to move on. Keeping people away from the animal is the bigger issue.
2. Encourage the moose to go in a specific direction by using hazing techniques.
3. If the animal is cornered and can be confined to an area, immobilizing drugs may be used. Trained staff from MassWildlife and/or the Environmental Police must be on hand to make this decision.
4. The last resort, only when an immediate threat to public safety exists, is to destroy the moose.

Moose are an important natural resource in Massachusetts and their recent return is a testament to the state's high quality wildlife habitat. MassWildlife is monitoring moose populations through sighting reports and roadkills. If you have a problem or further questions regarding moose, contact your nearest MassWildlife District Office or the Environmental Police.

Environmental Police Radio Room 1-800-632-8075 available 24 hours / 7 days a week

Further information on moose is available on our website at www.mass.gov/masswildlife.

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For more information contact **MassWildlife** at:

Western Wildlife District, Dalton: (413) 684-1646

Connecticut Valley Wildlife Dist., Belchertown: (413) 323-7632

Central Wildlife District, West Boylston: (508) 835-3607

Northeast Wildlife District, Ayer: (978) 772-2145

Southeast Wildlife District, Bourne: (508) 759-3406

Field Headquarters, Westborough: (508) 389-6300

or visit our website at www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/facilities/districts

MassWildlife "Balancing the needs of wildlife with the needs of people."