

As warmer world makes them sick, moose go on the move

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A warmer planet caused by climate change is creating new diseases for moose. Photo: Wikipedia

Kantar is a moose biologist. Over the past years, he has seen many moose die at a young age. Scientists believe that the cause is climate change in the northern U.S. and Canada. Climate change can happen when the temperature of the Earth changes.

As the climate warms up, more moose are becoming sick. Insects that are harmful for moose are spreading. Winter ticks, for example, stick to the moose's body and feed on their blood. By doing so, they carry diseases into the moose's body.

Because of all this, half the number of moose in Maine have died before they were 2 years old. In parts of Minnesota, moose have almost disappeared.

Where Food Grows, Moose Follow

There are still signs of hope. Scientists have studied how climate change sometimes helps plant life. It is easier for plants to grow when temperatures are higher. Since moose feed on them, they follow the plants as they grow north. By moving to where plants grow, according to Kantar, these moose will be able to live on.

Native Alaskans already knew that moose were migrating. They saw them as they arrived to their villages. However, it was not clear what the cause was. Ken Tape, who studies plants and animals in Alaska, already suspected climate change. He says that rising temperatures are almost always to blame when animals start to behave differently.

Tape decided to see if the warmer climate had really changed how plants grow. He conducted a study with his team of scientists. They knew that as summers get hotter, plants grow taller. They looked at the temperatures measured over the past 100 years. Then they looked at how much plants had grown over the past 200 years. They saw that, over this period, plants had grown twice as big.

Plants Spread Toward The North Pole

Plants are not just growing taller. They are also spreading in land all around the North Pole. The moose are following them north in Alaska, Canada and Russia.

But will traveling north be enough to save the moose? The amount of disease in the south might be too much to escape. Even so, experts believe they have a chance.

Even though moose could live through climate change, they may cause other problems. When they move north, they change how other animals live. They will have to fight over food with animals like the caribou.

In the south, moose themselves are dying because new animals are moving where they live. For example, white-tailed deer are bringing diseases with them. They are also bringing ticks and worms.

Moose Can Cause Trouble For Other Animals

Moose are forced to get rid of these ticks. They use up energy trying to get them off their bodies. They end up with less time to search for food. White-tailed deer also bring diseases that stop moose from digesting food. Other diseases cause them to lose blood.

Similarly, moose also cause problems for other animals. They eat the same plants as a bird called the ptarmigan. If their food keeps getting eaten by moose, the birds will disappear.

If the ptarmigan disappears, so will its predators. The red fox or lynx need to feed on it. When there are no birds to eat, these animals can no longer live.

Tape is also concerned about the plants that moose do not eat. They eat willow, but they leave alder alone. This imbalance may change how other animals feed and live. Tape says it is hard to know for sure how the animals and plants will adapt.

Quiz

- 1 Why are red foxes and lynxes affected when moose live near them?
 - (A) There may not be enough food for red foxes, lynxes and moose to share.
 - (B) If the moose eat too much of the ptarmigans' food, there won't be any ptarmigans left for the red foxes and lynxes to eat.
 - (C) Red foxes, lynxes and moose might kill and eat one another.
 - (D) If the moose eat too much of the caribou's food, there won't be any caribou left for the red foxes and lynxes to eat.
- 2 Which statement would scientist Ken Tape agree with?
 - (A) It is challenging to guess exactly how climate change will affect animals and plants.
 - (B) Climate change affects only one animal or plant at a time.
 - (C) It is not possible for moose to survive climate change.
 - (D) Climate change is not a problem for animals and plants in the south.
- 3 Read the sentence from the section "Where Food Grows, Moose Follow."

Native Alaskans already knew that moose were migrating.

- Which word could replace the word "migrating" without changing the meaning of the sentence?
- (A) growing
 - (B) dying
 - (C) visiting
 - (D) moving

- 4 Read the sentence from the section "Moose Can Cause Trouble For Other Animals."

This imbalance may change how other animals feed and live.

What does "imbalance" mean in this sentence?

- (A) when an animal eats plants but does not eat other animals
- (B) when trees lean over to one side
- (C) when two scientists disagree
- (D) when there is more of one thing than another thing

Answer Key

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