



## Musk Oxen

Many Canadians have never seen a musk ox. The animal lives too far north, mainly on the Arctic islands, though there are still some large herds on the northern mainland. Musk oxen eat the dwarf willows, saxifrages, grasses and sedges of the Arctic tundra, and their thick, almost neanderthal, shaggy coats protect them against the cold. Their main enemy is traditionally the wolf, against whom they protect themselves by forming circles—cows and calves on the inside, bulls on the perimeter—rather like a waggon train of pioneers fighting off Indians. Legislation protects them from overhunting by man, and they are reasonably plentiful. With their humped shoulders and broad, curved horns they are imposing and not entirely unbeautiful, particularly in the paintings and carvings of the local people.

*"Tell me, Father, what is the white man's Heaven?"*

*"It is the most beautiful place in the world."*

*"Tell me, Father, is it like the land of the little trees when the ice has left the lakes? Are the great musk oxen there? Are the hills covered with flowers? There will I see the caribou everywhere I look? Are the lakes blue with the sky of summer? Is every net full of great, fat white-fish? Is there room for me in this land, like our land, the Barrens? Can I camp anywhere and not find that someone else has camped? Can I feel the wind and be like the wind? Father, if your Heaven is not all these, leave me alone in my land, the land of the little sticks."*

—Conversation between a Dogrib Indian and an Oblate missionary, quoted by P. G. Downes in "Sleeping Island: The Story of One Man's Travels in the Great Barren Lands of the Canadian North," (1943)



## Chipmunks

Canada boasts two sorts of chipmunk. The easterner is larger and stouter than his western counterpart (an accusation occasionally also made of *homo canadensis*) and has wider stripes, though the easterner has such a bright reddish brown rump that it is sometimes impossible to see his stripes at all. Westerners have more offspring. They all eat nuts, berries, insects and, occasionally, birds' eggs. They are close cousins to squirrels, but prefer burrows to tree trunks for their homes, and, unlike most squirrels, hibernate in winter.