

All creatures great and small

Canada's wildlife is not only prolific, it's different. Our two countries share squirrels and geese but surprisingly little else. What follows is a guide to some of the more distinctive Canadian birds, beasts, reptiles and fish — the ones you won't find in Britain except in Regent's Park or Whipsnade.



Moose

There are probably half a million moose in Canada, short-sighted, rather dense, greedy (they eat as much as fifty or sixty pounds of twigs and plants every day) and huge (a big bull moose can weight up to 1,800 lb). Over the years there has been a shift in moose population. Next to marshes, they like scrubland and forest fires and lumbering operations have both opened up new areas for them. The ideal moose population is about one moose per square mile. Sometimes in

summer there is overcrowding when moose congregate in lush, willow-rich valleys and up to 35 per square mile have been reported. In winter such concentrations lead to mass starvation, for there simply aren't enough edible twigs above the snow to go round. Moose need to be managed, and with a little help they are now increasing in numbers. Newfoundland, for instance, which used to be devoid of moose now has a large population, all descended from a few pairs who were "seeded" there.

"The French Canadian fur traders of old had a name for the moose that was aptly descriptive. They called him l'Original, which embodies in its meaning grotesque, awkward, fantastic, and freak. So the name is fitting for the appearance of the moose, which under certain adverse conditions is anything but beautiful, while at his best he is nothing less than magnificent."

—A. L. Karras, North to Cree Lake (1970)