

Where the Buffalo Roam

The buffalo will never again roam the Western plains in millions as it once did, nor should we be too concerned that it has passed from the prairie scene. With fences, farm crops, hay stacks, and purebred cattle on a large part of the buffalo's former range, there is no room for the wild, roaming herds. Only in sanctuaries such as the 17,300-square-mile Wood Buffalo National Park is the buffalo free to roam. There were fewer than 500 buffalo in Canada by the year 1900. There are now approximately 16,000, and in 1959 the first hunting season in 60 years was allowed in an area adjacent to Wood Buffalo Park.

Wood Buffalo Park is also a haven for the whooping crane. The great white cranes formerly nested on the open prairie but they did not tolerate the presence of man and his livestock. They retreated north to one of the most inaccessible marshes of Northern Canada. There they can nest undisturbed by man, but the long autumn journey, 2,500 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, is still fraught with danger.

Sanctuary for the Musk-Ox

The musk-ox, once reduced in number to about 500, lives in a very different habitat. The arctic tundra looks like the open plains but has a much more rigorous climate. In winter, which lasts from September till June, the winds sweep constantly across this vast area, untempered by trees or mountains. Temperatures reach 50 to 60 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. During the brief summer, when daylight lasts for 24 hours in some areas, arctic flowers bloom in profusion and myriads of biting flies rise to torment all animals. In this inhospitable area the musk-ox lives and thrives, although it grows and reproduces very slowly. During the 1800's the heavy hunting that followed the introduction of firearms, and the musk-oxen's habit of forming a defensive ring and standing their ground, led to destruction of many herds. With rigid protection, the musk-ox too recovered somewhat and now is estimated to number about 5,000.

The musk-ox shares the northern tundra with some of Canada's most interesting animals. The barren-ground caribou, for example, which once numbered millions, still roams the tundra, though in greatly reduced numbers. The regular migrations which led them from tundra to forest during the winter and back to the tundra in spring gave many Indians and Eskimos the opportunity to hunt them for food, clothing (hides), implements (bones and antlers) and thread (sinew), which were the natives' main items of supply.

Wolf, Wolverine, Fox

The tundra wolf is found with the caribou and migrates with it, in contrast to his cousin the timber wolf, which is likely to spend all seasons in the same locality. He is a stocky animal, often pure white in colour. Some individuals weigh up to 140 pounds.

The wolverine, a 30-pound member of the weasel family, is found in much the same range as the wolf. It is noted for its strength, cunning and ferocity. It is rarely seen in the wild but many a trapper can testify to its destructiveness on the trapline or in the trapper's food cache. Much as wolverines