

Name _____

The Reindeer

The reindeer is a species of deer found in northern Europe, Greenland and the northernmost portion of North America. It is also known as the caribou.

A reindeer has very large antlers, second in size to the moose. In most types of reindeer, both the male and female grow antlers. Males use their antlers to fight other males. They then shed their antlers in December. Younger males lose their antlers in early spring and females lose theirs in the summer.

Normally, reindeer are herbivores. They eat lichen in the winter and leaves and grasses the rest of the year. Some scientists, however, have noted that reindeer will also eat eggs, fish and even lemmings, a small mammal.

As a member of the deer family, reindeer are also a prey species. Wolves, bears and wolverines will attack reindeer, especially small calves. Golden eagles have been known to carry away newborn calves.



Herds of reindeer migrate as much as 3,000 miles a year. In a day, a herd may travel 12 to 34 miles. Reindeer swim well and can run as fast as 50 mph.

For centuries, humans have hunted and herded reindeer as a source of food and hides. Some cultures, such as the Lapps, use reindeer to pull pulks, which is a short toboggan or sled.

What Does It Mean?

Circle the correct meaning for each of the following words from the passage.

1. herbivore

- a. fish eater
- b. meat eater
- c. plant eater

2. prey

- a. an animal hunted by another animal
- b. an animal worshiped by a tribe
- c. important, special

3. lichen

- a. snow
- b. a plant
- c. a type of fish

4. migrate

- a. carry a load of goods
- b. fly pulling a sleigh
- c. move from one place to another

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