



DOMINIQUE BRAUD

i
O
h

If Minnesota held a popularity contest for wild animals, the white-tailed deer would probably win. Admired for its speed and jumping ability, a deer can run 40 miles per hour and leap over a fence 8 feet tall. Even from a standstill, a deer could jump straight up and over your teacher's head.

People like the beauty and graceful movements of the white-tailed deer. The buck's antlers look like an ivory crown. When it walks, a deer seems almost to float. It moves silently into the woods, sometimes disappearing from sight in the blink of an eye.

D
eer!

The whitetail is one of five members of the deer family living in Minnesota. The others are moose, elk, mule deer, and caribou.

BY TOM DICKSON

Suddenly, you see a white flash. Is it a flag? No. It is a white-tailed deer running. Its bright tail waves back and forth, warning other deer of danger.

BILL MARCHEL





ALLEN BLAKE SHELDON

(1)

Parts of All Deer

Antlers Male deer grow new antlers each year. Two soft bumps (1) begin growing on the head in the spring. They grow quickly but stay soft and tender until late summer. The antlers are covered with fuzzy skin, called *velvet* (2). Then the velvet dries, and the antler gets hard as bone. The male deer

DOMINIQUE BRAUD



(2)

scrapes its hard antlers against trees to remove the velvet and expose the sharp points, called *tines* (3).

Young male deer grow small antlers with two points. Older deer grow large antlers with six or more tines.

Male deer use their antlers to fight each other during the fall breeding season, called the *rut*. They try to stab each other's sides. Or, with antlers locked, two males will push each other back and forth until the weaker one runs away. The winner goes off to mate with a female.

(3)

DOMINIQUE BRAUD



Male deer also use their antlers to fight off dogs, coyotes, wolves, and other predators.

In midwinter the antlers fall off. Mice and squirrels often eat the fallen antlers, called *sheds*, for the nutritious minerals.

THE MINNESOTA VOLUNTEER

(4) Life-size track of a whitetail

Clover Hoof A deer's hoof (4) is divided in two and spreads like two fingers to make it easier to walk in mud. Deer use their hooves to dig through snow to find nuts and acorns.

A gland (5) between the toes produces an odor. Deer can smell this scent on the ground and tell if another deer has been there.

Male deer use their hooves to scrape at the ground. *Scrapes* (6) mark territory and tell other males to keep out.

DOMINIQUE BRAUD



(6)

Digestive System A deer gulps down its food without chewing. Later, after acids in its stomach break up leaves, stems, and other large items, the deer throws the food back up its throat and chews it. Like a cow, the deer "chews its cud." Imagine what the cud tastes like! By eating this way, a deer can gobble up a lot of food quickly, then go to a safer place to chew it.

Hollow Hair Fur coats (7) help deer survive cold weather. Hollow brown hairs trap air and act like the insulation in your winter jacket. A thick layer of underfur adds extra warmth. Snow, wind, and water cannot penetrate these hairs to the skin, so deer stay warm and dry.

Tom Dickson is staff writer for the DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife, St. Paul.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1996

VISUALS UNLIMITED

(5)

(7)

BILL MARCHEL





BILL MARCHEL

White-tailed Deer

Adult female white-tailed deer weigh about 145 pounds, males 170—about the average weight of female and male humans. Some whitetails are much larger than that. The biggest one ever recorded in the United States was a 500-pound Minnesota buck.

Minnesota has about 1 million white-tailed deer. Deer are so adaptable they are found in every county. They live in farmlands, deep forests, and wide-open bog country. They even live in cities such as Duluth,

In summer the deer's coat turns red. Fawns have white spots that look like sunlight on the forest floor. If a predator comes near, a fawn lies still, not even blinking its eyes.

Rochester, Minneapolis, and St. Paul!

Early American Indians hunted deer for meat and deerskins to make soft moccasins, pants, and shirts. The valuable skins were called "bucks," a nickname we still use for money. When you ask your parents for "five bucks," would you want them to give you five deerskins?

Deer are *herbivores*: They eat plants. In spring and summer, they graze on clover, grasses, and tree buds. In the fall they switch to high-energy food such as acorns, wild grapes, and other fruits. During the winter they nibble the tender shoots and twigs of trees and shrubs. Deer also like corn, soybeans, and other farm crops. And they love apples. Deer munch on flowers and shrubs in people's yards. Most gardeners enjoy seeing deer, but not in the garden!

DANIEL J. COX





PHOTOS BY DANIEL J. COX

Moose

In some ways, a moose looks comical. It has a big snout shaped like a watermelon, a hump on its shoulders, and a flap of skin that hangs from its throat.

But other parts of a moose are beautiful. It has thick, dark brown or black fur, and wide, flat, cream-colored antlers with deep

curves. American Indians once used moose antlers as food-serving trays.

Minnesota has about 10,000 moose. Most live in northeastern coniferous forests. Some live in the northwestern corner. Once in a while, one even wanders into southern Minnesota.

The moose is the biggest, strongest member of the deer family. Minnesota moose can weigh more than 1,000 pounds and stand 6 feet tall—as tall as a horse.

Because they are so big, moose must eat a lot. A big bull can eat 50 pounds of leaves, shoots, and other plant parts in a single day. That's like eating 200 bowls of salad every day!

Compared to the sleek whitetail, the moose plods along on land. An adult moose in Minnesota doesn't have to run fast or hide well because it has no predators except people and wolves. In summer, moose spend most of the day in lakes and wetlands, eating plants. They can swim as far as 10 miles across a lake. Even the fastest canoeists would have a hard time keeping up with a moose.

Life-size
track of a
moose

A female moose, above, is called a cow. A male, right, is called a bull.



ELK PHOTOS BY DANIEL J. COX

Elk

About 200 years ago, Minnesota and other prairie states had large herds of *wapiti*—wild elk—living in the wide-open grasslands. Today, about 40 elk live in northwestern Minnesota near Grygla.

The second biggest member of the deer family, the elk weighs as much as 1,000 pounds.

Bull elk have long, wide antlers. In the fall during breeding season, bull elk blare like trumpets to warn off other bulls. This is called *bugling*.

Life-size track of an elk



Elk calf and cow



Bull elk

Mule Deer

Mule deer live throughout the West. Each year a few “mulies” roam into Minnesota from the Dakotas. Mule deer are a little heavier than whitetails, with bigger ears (like a mule’s) and larger antlers. When scared, mule deer bound along stiff-legged as if jumping on a trampoline. Boing, boing, boing!

DOMINIQUE BRAUD



Mule deer buck

Woodland Caribou

Once common in northeastern Minnesota, caribou are rare here. The last caribou herd in Minnesota disappeared in the 1940s. Sometimes, someone sees a caribou track along the Canadian border.

Caribou live in wilderness bogs and forests. They can weigh as much as 600 pounds. The caribou has bigger antlers than a white-tailed deer has. Female caribou are the only female deer with antlers.



DOMINIQUE BRAUD

Caribou

Learn More

Deer might be the most written-about animal in North America. Look for books at your local library. Find out about the Forkhorn Program of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association. It teaches kids ages 12–14 about deer biology, habitat, management, and hunting skills. Call 218-327-1103 or toll-free in Minnesota 800-450-3337.

Deer Hunt!

- ✓ CARIBOU
- VENISON
- CUD
- MULIES
- BUCK
- WOLVES
- DEER
- FAWN
- MOOSE
- RUT
- ELK
- TINE
- DOE

C	A	R	I	B	O	U	N
U	B	M	D	Z	E	O	F
D	R	U	T	A	S	R	A
B	Q	L	Y	I	E	M	W
U	T	I	N	E	D	O	N
C	H	E	D	L	O	O	G
K	V	S	N	K	E	S	A
W	O	L	V	E	S	E	L

Find and circle the words listed. To show you how, we did the word *caribou*.