

**** REINDEER ****

Reindeer are indigenous (native) to the Arctic Circle...areas above the tree line including Alaska, Canada, Russia, Lapland, Greenland, and of course the North Pole.

Reindeer are the same species (cervidae) as Caribou but they are different. Caribou are large, wild, elk-like animals native to the arctic tundra areas of North America and Greenland where they migrate great distances each year. Reindeer are slightly smaller and were recently domesticated in northern Eurasia about 2000 years ago—although there is evidence from about 1000 bc that they were also domesticated for use with saddles and sleighs, hence the use of “rein” in their name. Today they are herded by many Arctic peoples in Europe and Asia including the Sami in Scandinavia, other tribes in Russia, and the Eskimos in Alaska, who rely on the reindeer for almost everything in their lives including food, clothing and shelter. Many natives in these areas still prefer to hunt caribou rather than herd reindeer, however. Santa of course has relied on reindeer forever because they can tolerate and maneuver in every kind of bad weather the North Pole can experience.

Both male and female reindeer have antlers (not horns)—which are part of their skeletal systems. They drop their antlers every year in the winter-spring and grow new ones every year. In the wild, the females keep their antlers longer because in God’s infinite wisdom, he or she who has the biggest antlers in the wild gets the most food. So because the females always calve once a year in spring, they keep their antlers typically until they calve so they are assured of getting food to nourish them and their babies.

Reindeer are wonderfully adaptable to their harsh Arctic environment. They do not like hot weather. In Minnesota, their favorite summer place to be is in their building in the shade in front of a huge fan. Their thick double coats insulate them against the cold and wind. As seen under a microscope, their unique hairs are actually hollow, which is a great insulator against the cold, and

which also keep them buoyant in the water. Even their noses are covered with hair—because in the wild (tundra land with no trees and covered with ice and snow), their native food is lichens (pronounced lie'-kins), a moss that is extremely cold hardy, native to alpine tundra areas, and even grows under the snow. So they have to dig down to get them—including their noses, which would freeze if not covered with hair. Their body temperatures actually drop to very low temperatures to enable them to tolerate the severe cold in their native environment.

Reindeer are excellent strong swimmers so they can move across wide rushing rivers and even the frozen ice of the Arctic Ocean. They have webbed feet! Because they make virtually no sounds of their own (other than an occasional “hrumph” or grunt), they also make little clicking noises from tendons in their feet when they walk...enabling them to hear each other in the wild in large groups as they are traveling. This is where the wording in the famous Christmas song “Up on the housetop, click click click” came from...the clicking noises that reindeer make when they walk.

Baby reindeer—calves—are always born in the spring as the bulls always go into rut in the fall. Rut usually starts in early September and lasts 3-4 weeks. Typical gestation period is about 7 months. The babies are typically born during the night so they can immediately (about 90 minutes) be up and running to travel with the herd. As babies they make noises that sound like seals barking—which is why it is called barking—which is how they call to their mothers and how their mothers keep track of their babies. They are very soft and typically weigh about 10-18 pounds when born; mostly born black, their coats change to typical light color as they grow. They soon also grow baby antlers the very year they are born—which look like little twigs. 😊

In the wild, female reindeer live longer than the males. Going through rut every fall is extremely hard on the males. They typically lose lots of weight due to the stress of going through rut...and of course once they drop their antlers, the females get the most food because they still have their antlers until their babies are born in the spring.

Reindeer do not kick like horses or jump like white tail deer. They also do not bite; they only have bottom teeth with a bony upper plate to help them grind their food. The reason some health agencies require 8 ft fencing for reindeer is not to keep the reindeer in—but to keep the white tail out due to issues in some areas with chronic wasting disease in white tails.

And finally, as to everyone's question: "*Can reindeer really fly?*"

The answer is: "*Yes...but only on Christmas Eve!*" 😊😊😊