Radiant Reindeer!



This month, we thought we'd find out more about a very special Arctic animal, and one that's very popular at this time of year - the reindeer!

Where do reindeer live?

Reindeer - or Caribou as they're known in North America - originally lived in the forests of northern Russia and Scandinavia, before being introduced into Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Iceland. And yes, they do live in Lapland!

Reindeer are the only species of deer to be domesticated (meaning they are tame and live on a farm, for example) in some parts of the world. It's thought this could have happened as long as 7,000 years ago by people in the Arctic, so they've lived with humans for a very long time!

DID YOU KNOW?

Both male and female reindeer have antlers, and their antlers fall off and grow back larger every year! Male reindeer grow their antlers in February and lose them in November, and female reindeer grow theirs in May but keep hold of their antlers all through winter until their babies (known as calves) are born in May.

So what do reindeer use their antlers for? Male reindeer use them to attract females, while females very cleverly use them to scoop away snow when looking for food. They can also protect reindeer against attacks from predators such as Arctic foxes, brown bears and mountain lions.

As the antlers are growing, they're covered in skin, blood vessels and fur - there's a special term for this for our reindeer friends, known as 'being in velvet'. When the velvet dries up, the reindeer will rub their antlers against hard objects such as trees or rocks, removing the velvet and leaving the reindeer with just the hard core of the antler we're more used to seeing.

What do reindeer eat?

Reindeer are ruminants - meaning they have more than one stomach and so they swallow food and then bring it back up again to continue chewing it (a bit gross, huh?!). They like to eat herbs, ferns, grass, mosses and the leaves of shrubs and trees. Throughout winter, they eat something known as lichen - or 'reindeer moss' - and fungi.

Do reindeer have friends?

Yes! Reindeer LOVE to be with other reindeer. They form herds of anything from ten to hundreds of reindeer, and in the spring, they often form super herds of 50,000 to 500,000 reindeer! Can you imagine seeing so many reindeer together? It must be amazing!



DID YOU KNOW?

There are around 5 million reindeer worldwide!

FUN FACT!

Reindeer can run at speeds of up to 50 miles per hour!

That's super fast!



FUN FACT!

When they walk, reindeer make a loud 'clicking' sound. This is caused by a tendon slipping over their foot bone.



JUST FOR FUN!

Can you name Santa's 9 reindeer? Write them down and check the answers at the bottom of the page.

Answer: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen and of course, Rudolph!

TAMAR VETS