

The Introduction of Moose to the Island of Newfoundland

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On 19 July 1904, James Patrick Howley received correspondence from W. Harlow in Bridgeport, Nova Scotia informing him that four moose had arrived safely in Newfoundland from the Miramichi area of New Brunswick. There were originally seven animals, but three died while waiting to be transferred to Port Aux Basques. The surviving moose were apparently in good health upon arrival. Howley was told that “...were all well, never missed a meal...and played when I turned them loose.” The letter ended with the assurance that importing more animals to the colony would be no trouble if Howley desired.¹ The moose were set free near the community of Howley, roughly 20 kilometers from the present-day boundary line marking Gros Morne National Park. As early as 1907, there had already been several reports of moose in various parts of the island.

The 1904 expedition was actually the second such attempt to populate the island with moose. An earlier one was made in 1878 when a cow and a bull were brought from Nova Scotia and released at Gander Bay. Whether or not a resident population emerged from the 1878 expedition is unclear. Some wildlife biologists suggest that a series of intense forest fires in the Gander area prohibited the animals from spreading out of that region. Certainly, reports of moose sightings in the interior were much more frequent after the second importation in 1904. In 1912, an adult bull was shot on the Gander River, and James Howley declared in 1913 that this animal was indeed offspring from the original pair in 1878.² Regardless, the consistency of moose sightings in the first decades of the twentieth century confirmed the vitality of the species on the island. As Douglas H.

¹ PANL. MG 105. File 25. Correspondence from W. Harlow to Howley. 19 July 1904

Pimlott has noted, “the second attempt certainly was complete establishment providing most of the stock which eventually populated the entire island.”³

To date, historians have made little effort to determine why moose were brought to Newfoundland, and there has been little examination into the subject by historians in general. Historians have instead focused on the decline, and eventual destruction, of the nineteenth century caribou population by sport hunters. The bulk of scholarly material on the Newfoundland moose population is credited to wildlife biologists who have published several studies reporting the negative effects of moose grazing upon the regeneration of forest stands in the Newfoundland wilderness, and its related ecological side effects.

The 1904 moose experiment is only understood through an examination of contemporary attitudes towards economic development in Newfoundland during the early twentieth century. Contemporary politicians and industrialists describe this period as the beginning of a new age in Newfoundland’s development, with the colony seen to be on the cusp of prosperity. The Newfoundland Railway’s construction by the Reid family was an enormous achievement in the infrastructural and economic development in a colony long criticized for its economic overdependence on the cod fishery. The completion of the railway in 1898 made the interior of the island accessible for its pristine wilderness, but also exploitable for its inland resources such as timber and coal. Furthermore, men such as D.W. Prowse, James Howley, and Moses Harvey viewed the completion of the first Geological Survey of Newfoundland as conclusive evidence that the interior of Newfoundland contained underutilized mineral resources. These men were among many who had expressed frustration that the promising findings of the Geological Survey had

³ Douglas Pimlott, “Newfoundland Moose,” *North American Wildlife Conference: Transactions* 18 (1953): 563-581

yet to result in any long-term industry. An important part of claiming land in the British Empire during the late Victorian period was the process of populating the island's interior with people as well as new species to be utilized for sport or economic gain.

Newfoundland was also quickly developing a reputation across North America as a "sportsman's paradise." Sport hunters and fishermen began venturing to the island to hunt and fish, lured by stories of trophy salmon and caribou that had inhabited the interior in vast numbers. Travelers now had access to a growing number of hotels, sport camps, and amenities situated along the Newfoundland railway track. All of these developments created an unprecedented air of optimism for economic prosperity on the island.

Promotional literature about Newfoundland during this period aimed to bolster the image of the island as an untamed and uninhabited wilderness, newly accessible via railway.⁴

An implicit aim behind this literature was to attract foreign industrial capital to the island, in hopes that industrial development would take hold in the island's interior. The introduction of moose to the island was part of an effort to attract sport hunters to the region, as these types of travelers were often sources of industrial investment capital. In 1913, James Howley welcomed the animals, stating, "It is to be hoped the experiment will be followed up, and more Moose introduced, when we would soon be in possession of a herd or herds of this noble animal, thus affording still greater inducement to outside sportsmen to visit our country."⁵ In the same address, Howley added that the introduction of a fur-bearing species could also serve as a viable source of economic revenue.

⁴ For a good survey of tourism imagery from this period, see Susan Williams. "Images of Newfoundland in Promotional Literature, 1890-1914," M.A Thesis, McGill University, 1980.

⁵ James Howley. *Nature Studies: With Observations on the Natural History of Newfoundland*. St. John's, 1913.

Efforts to develop and diversify Newfoundland interior and economy had actually been pursued by local capitalists since about the 1880s. In this cause, the Newfoundland caribou had historically played a pivotal role. During the nineteenth century, herds of caribou roamed Newfoundland in numbers similar to those of moose in the late twentieth century. Although local people did rely upon caribou as a food source, it was more highly regarded as an animal to be hunted for sport. In fact, the annual caribou sport hunt generated a wave of literature during this period, known as hunter-narratives. Men such as F.C Selous, J.G Millais, Samuel Davis, P.T Grath and many others all documented their hunting expeditions in Newfoundland.⁶ Consequently, the image of the victorious hunter holding a trophy caribou rack on the Newfoundland barrens has emerged as one of the most recognized examples of hunter-masculinity during the British Empire.⁷ By the twentieth century, however, the island's caribou population was decimated to a fraction of its former numbers. In the absence of any strict game laws and enforcement, and no active efforts to conserve wildlife, the caribou hovered close to extinction where it remains today. An infamous photograph of a large pile of caribou carcasses dumped at St. John's harbor is a reminder of what became of many species that were hunted for sport rather than subsistence during the nineteenth century.⁸ The addition of moose to the

⁶ For examples of this promotional literature, as well as hunter narratives, see Samuel T. Davis, *Caribou Shooting in Newfoundland: with a History of England's Oldest Colony from 1001 to 1895* (Lancaster: The New Era Printing House, 1895); Moses Harvey, *Newfoundland as it is in 1894: A Handbook and Tourists' Guide* (St. John's: J.W. Withers, Queen's Printer, 1894); Patrick T. McGrath, *Newfoundland in 1911 Being the Coronation Year of King George V and the Opening of the Second Decade of the Twentieth Century* (London: Whitehead, Morris, 1911); John Guille Millais, *Newfoundland and its Untrodden Ways* [1907] (Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, Nfld.: Boulder Publications, 2005), and Frederick Courteney Selous, *Recent Hunting Trips in British North America* (London: Witherby and Co., 1909).

⁷ There is a developed body of Canadian scholarship exploring the idea of hunting as it relates to masculinity during the Victorian period. See Tina Loo. "Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939," *Western Historical Quarterly* 32 (2001), pp. 296-319.

⁸ For a thorough study of the destruction of the Newfoundland caribou during this time, see Darrin M. McGrath, "Salted Caribou and Sportsmen-Tourists: Conflicts over Wildlife Resources in Newfoundland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Newfoundland Studies* 10 (1994): 208-225

island was an effort to populate the interior with a species that could be hunted at a time when the caribou population was declining, and the island was garnering widespread attention as a popular hunting and tourist destination.

Introduction of Moose Hunting Season

Statistical data indicates that the moose population increased steadily from 1904 until the 1960s. The first regulated season on moose hunting took place in 1935, with a maximum of 80 licenses sold. This license quota was later increased to 300 before being removed altogether in 1945. By this time, moose had populated the entire island. The island's annual moose hunt increased rapidly, with nearly 8800 licenses issued in 1957, and a reported kill of 4577 animals that year. The population experienced a moderate decline between the period 1960 to 1972, largely due to pressure from hunters. As a conservation measure, wildlife officials introduced a lottery-licensing model, still in effect today. Hunters obtained licenses through entry into an annual "lottery" in which they selected preferred hunting zones. Areas on the island where moose populations required "thinning out" were those in which licenses were most likely to be awarded. While this system has been deemed successful, the island's moose population has continued to expand.

Environmental Effects of Moose in Newfoundland

As previously mentioned, academic studies on the Newfoundland moose population are largely credited to biologists who have monitored the effects of moose on Newfoundland forest ecosystems. These studies have provided conclusive scientific evidence indicating that moose grazing has had a profoundly negative effect on the regeneration of balsam fir and hardwoods after they have been harvested by the lumber industry. Regenerating tree stands such as balsam fir are a heavily consumed food source for moose, which can prevent these trees from growing above one meter in height. Additionally, Terra Nova National Park (area 344 km²) poses another interesting case study. Although no lumber has been harvested from this area since the 1950s, the park experienced several small insect outbreaks in the 1970s that affected several large patches of its trees. In these areas, moose have virtually eliminated tree growth. The study of moose in isolated areas, such as the transportation of moose to Brunette Island in 1974, showed further evidence of the detrimental effects that moose grazing has upon forest plant species. Wildlife biologists have also noted that the alteration of forest ecosystems by moose also has an effect on the habitat of other species such as birds and lichens.⁹ In sum, there does not appear to be a stable equilibrium between the moose population and forest resources available to moose on the island. Furthermore, these studies suggest that moose grazing in areas of forest regeneration could have a negative long-term impact on the sustainable growth of the lumber industry in Newfoundland.

⁹ The best examination of the detrimental effects of moose on Newfoundland forests has been done by Brian E. McLaren, Bruce A. Roberts, Natalie Djan-Chekar, and Keith Lewis, "Effects of Overabundant Moose on the Newfoundland Landscape," *Alces* 40 (2004: 45-59).

The ecological impact of moose on Newfoundland forests, particularly in both Gros Morne and Terra Nova National Parks where hunting is prohibited, have caused many to call for stricter controls and a province-wide cull of the population. The parks have already instituted efforts to kill moose within the park in hopes of saving vegetation within its boundaries. A steadily increasing number of moose-vehicle collisions on the island's highways also suggest an overabundance of moose. At the 2004 North American Moose Conference in Corner Brook, research scientists examined the effects of moose on the ecology of Gros Morne National Park, but also examined thirty years of data collected on moose-vehicles collisions. The conference reported that since 1974, the number of moose-vehicle collisions on the island's 900 km of Trans-Canada Highway is nearly equal to the number of collisions on the 4500 km of secondary highways. These numbers suggest an inadequacy in the current model of moose harvesting.

Social and Cultural Impact of Moose in Newfoundland

The introduction of moose to the island bears a cultural significance as well. Moose have become a valuable food source consumed by local residents all across the island, a food source that comes strictly from recreational hunting. Given that moose were originally brought to the island to fulfill a tourist demand, it is somewhat of a phenomenon that the annual moose hunt has now become firmly embedded as annual local tradition among local residents, and an important cultural practice amongst Newfoundlanders. Moose has taken the place of the caribou not only as a sport animal,

but also as an important food source. Moose meat is an important food staple in the traditional diet across the province, and has become an important ingredient in a number of traditional Newfoundland dishes. Perhaps most importantly, Newfoundlanders have claimed moose hunting as a significant cultural practice, particularly in rural parts of the island. The social and cultural elements of the hunt are immortalized in local song, literature and folklore from all parts of the island, and the practice of hunting and eating moose has become a cultural identifier.

The introduction of moose to the Newfoundland wilderness was one of several initiatives by government and policy makers to develop the Newfoundland wilderness in hopes that it might be inhabitable and exploitable for resources. During the late Victorian period, the idea of populating landscapes with foreign species of wildlife was a common method by which claims were staked upon areas of land within the British Empire. In the particular case of the moose, it was hoped that the resource would populate the island in numbers that would generate sport hunters in the wake of the destruction of the Newfoundland caribou population. The Newfoundland government developed a vested interest in spreading awareness of mineral resources in the Newfoundland interior, as such endeavors served to diversify the island's industry. Decades later, the moose population had exploded across the island which resulted in lessened restrictions upon the annual moose hunt, as well as a number of scientific analyses providing evidence that moose were having a significant effect upon the growth of forest ecosystems, particularly on the regeneration of native forest hardwoods. Today, the island's moose population is firmly entrenched in the cultural identity of Newfoundlanders. Much less than a source of economic revenue from tourists or sport hunters, the annual moose hunt is an activity

enjoyed by local people, as indicated by its inclusion in local songs, stories and the oral history of rural communities.

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James Patrick Howley fond MG 25

By 1935 moose occupied much of the island. In 1941 moose were first reported from the Avalon Peninsula. That a healthy population of animals has arisen from such a small original population raises some interesting questions about the concept of genetic bottlenecks. While most active during the twilight and early dawn, moose may be observed abroad at any time of the day or night. They are solitary animals. A collision with a moose is a very real possibility for every driver on the roads of Newfoundland, especially at night.

References: Northcott, Tom H., *The Land Mammals of Insular Newfoundland*. Wildlife Division, Dept of Tourism. Government of Newfoundland. 1974. Canadian Wildlife Service, *Hinterland Who's Who Series*. Moose were introduced to Newfoundland in 1904 and are now a prevalent species there, more so than the introduction in Anticosti Island. The same Moose species (*Alces alces*), can be found across Europe and parts of Russia and China, but is known by the name Elk. See the related link for a map of the moose's world wide range. If one moose is a moose what are two moose called? Two or more moose is called moose. That is the plural for a herd or group of moose. Who does the voice of Moose A Moose? Paul Christie does the voice of Moose A. Moose. Why is the plural form for moose moose? The Plura Newfoundland is a large island off the east coast of the North American mainland, and the most populous part of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It has 29 percent of the province's land area. The island is separated from the Labrador Peninsula by the Strait of Belle Isle and from Cape Breton Island by the Cabot Strait. It blocks the mouth of the Saint Lawrence River, creating the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, the world's largest estuary. Newfoundland's nearest neighbour is the French From these introductions, moose rapidly colonized their new environment and were distributed across the Island by 1945. Moose on the Island of Newfoundland have no significant predator such as wolves, although black bears are known to prey on moose calves. In the absence of a top predator like wolves, hunting continues to be the primary mechanism for managing moose populations in Newfoundland. The moose population was allowed to expand without targeted hunting until 1935, when a Bull Only hunt was introduced in some regions. More licenses were issued in 1945 but the hunt remained a Bull Only h Introduction. 13. Moose is a species that brings many benefits to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador but it is also seen by many as an environmental disamenity, due to the rising number of negative moose-people interactions, particularly in the form of moose-vehicle collisions (MVCs). There is also an, often emotional and at times even bitter, ongoing public debate about how to address this issue.