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A Study of Social Behavior Patterns in Moose of Wyoming

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The project in its first summer was carried out as planned from June 10 to September 10, 1955 at the Jackson Hole Biological Research Station, Moran, Wyoming. The results were highly satisfactory. Ample material on moose behavior could be secured and examined.

In the initial phases of the three-year project a survey of suitable habitats and moose locations was undertaken. Most important goal of this summer's work was to get repeated observations on the same moose group(s) and a standardization of field notes for detailed evaluation. Marking and identification of individual moose was partially accomplished, but needs much further experimentation and development.

Besides regularly spaced moose observations in the areas accessible from the Station by automobile, eight major packtrips into the Teton Forest Wilderness areas and into Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks areas were undertaken to gather observations. From the moose calving season (June) to the onset of the rutting season (Sept.) behavioral changes were closely observed and recorded.

The location and character of the Research Station proved to be very suitable for this kind of project. Frequently moose came right into the pasture and yard of the Station, grazing and browsing on the banks of the Snake River, so that additional observations could be made at the doorstep of the laboratory.

While the majority of the findings will have to be carefully evaluated and exposed to well-planned checkups and repetitions, a few facts appear quite clearly to stand out as characteristics of moose behavior. For example the delayed reaction to a disturbance: The moose (both sexes) upon noticing a disturbance, i.e. a person appearing, will not like the elk or deer immediately react, but seems in most cases to ignore the incident at first. After a delay of 50 to 150 seconds the moose will retreat or deflect the course often so quietly that it is hard to notice the direction or place of refuge. Contrary to popular belief and legend, no cases of aggression toward the observers were noted in the hundreds of encounters with moose at close quarters during this summer's work.

Summarizing this brief report it can be stated: The research project has been conducted according to the planned schedule. Moose behavior patterns were successfully studied throughout the summer. Methods were adapted and improved, evaluation of results is in progress.

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