



Muskox – Habitat and Diet

Habitat

Although muskox are known to expand their range, they are not migratory animals like caribou. Instead they tend to remain in a home range with areas of well-vegetated tundra, where wind, drainage and snow conditions provide reasonable growing conditions. Muskox make seasonal movements between feeding areas in their home range. In the summer, they like moist habitats such as river valleys, lake shores and meadows. Muskox often congregate in river valleys where willow grows abundantly. In the winter, they choose areas such as hilltops, slopes and plateaus where the Arctic winds sweep scour away surface snow, exposing vegetation.

In the Yukon, most muskox can be found in summer along the river corridors of the Malcolm, Firth and Babbage rivers. In the winter, they can be found on slopes and ridges in the foothills of the British Mountains, where strong winds blow away the snow.



Diet

Muskox eat most arctic shrubs, grasses and leafy plants. They do not eat large quantities of lichen like caribou do. In the winter, depth of snow limits muskox to taller plants, like willow, that are more easily dug out.

In the winter, they browse on Labrador tea, crowberry, blueberry, birch and willow, using their front hooves as snow shovels to dig out plants. Muskox also pound their chins on the crust of the snow to break their way through. In the summer, they also munch on sedges, rushes, grasses, horsetails and leafy plants like willowherb, knotweed and daisies.

Photo by Ken Madsen

For more information, visit the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) web site on muskox of the Yukon and Alaska North Slope at www.taiga.net/wmac/species/muskox.