

- With what methods does the writer of this text both entertain and inform the reader?

Hunters will tell you that a moose is a wily¹ and ferocious forest creature. In fact, a moose is a cow drawn by a three-year-old. That's all there is to it. Without doubt, the moose is the most improbable, endearingly hopeless creature ever to live in the wilds. It is huge—as big as a horse—but magnificently ungainly². A moose runs as if its legs have never been introduced to each other. Even its antlers³ are hopeless. Other creatures grow antlers with sharp points that look wonderful in profile and command the respect of adversaries. Moose grow antlers that look like oven gloves.

Above all what distinguishes the moose is its almost boundless lack of intelligence. If you are driving down a highway and a moose steps from the woods ahead of you, he will squint at you for a long minute, then abruptly hie⁴ off down the road away from you, legs flailing in eight directions at once. Never mind that there are perhaps 10,000 square miles of safe, dense forest on either side of the highway. Clueless as to where he is and what exactly is going on, the moose doggedly follows the highway before his peculiar gait⁵ inadvertently steers him back in to the woods, where he immediately stops and takes on a perplexed expression that says, “Hey – woods. Now how the heck did I get here?”

What is amazing, given the moose's lack of cunning and curiously blunted survival instincts, is that it is one of the longest-surviving creatures in North America. When mastadons walked the earth, the moose were there with them. Woolly mammoths, saber-toothed tigers, mountain lions, wolves, caribou, wild horses and even camels all once thrived in the eastern United States but gradually stumbled into extinction, while the moose just plodded on, untroubled by ice ages, meteor impacts, volcanic eruptions and shifting continents.

Today New Hampshire has an estimated 5,000 moose, Vermont 1,000 more and Maine anything up to 30,000. It is because of these robust and growing numbers that hunting has been gradually re-introduced as a way of keeping the numbers from getting out of hand. However, there are two problems with this. First, the population numbers are really just guesses. Moose clearly don't line up to be counted. At least one leading naturalist thinks the population numbers may have been overstated by as much as 20 per cent, which would mean that moose aren't so much being selectively culled⁶ as carelessly slaughtered. Even more pertinent, to my mind, is the thought that there is just something wrong about hunting and killing an animal as dopey and unassuming as a moose. Shooting a moose is not an achievement.

Bill Bryson (1998) *Notes from a Big Country*, Doubleday, Random House.

¹ wily: smart, cunning

² ungainly: awkward, clumsy

³ antlers: branched horns on an animal's head

⁴ hie: go quickly

⁵ gait: manner of walking

⁶ culled: killing animals with the aim of population control