



Animals of the Season



photo courtesy Bureau of Land Management

Mini Fact:

Reindeer are strong and work well together as a team. Northern peoples use reindeer to pull sleighs.

It's fun to share stories and legends about animals during the winter holidays. For example, one legend from Europe is that at midnight, as Christmas Eve turns into Christmas Day, animals can speak for one hour. However, animals may not *choose* to speak to people. And the legend warns that people might not always want to hear what the animals have to say!



The Mini Page looks at some of the real animals that we think of during the winter holiday season.

Reindeer

According to legend, Santa delivers kids' presents from a sleigh pulled by nine reindeer.

Reindeer are the same **species**, or type, of animal as **caribou** (KAR-uh-boo). They live in northern Europe, Asia and North America.

Reindeer have long fur with hollow hairs in the outer layer. These hairs trap air to keep them warm.

When food is scarce, they can get by with less food. In winter they eat **lichen** (LIE-kun), a plantlike organism that resembles moss. It may be the only thing to eat under the snow.

Reindeer's strong legs and large, wide hooves help them stay on top of the snow. They hooves help them dig through snow to find food. They have long hair on their feet to help them get more traction on the snow.

Donkey

Donkeys are smaller cousins of the horse. They are slower than horses.

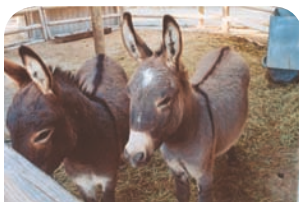
Donkeys are known for their endurance rather than their speed. They can carry heavy loads for long distances. They are able to travel easily over rocky land. They also do well in dry climates.

Donkeys are known for their stubbornness, but they have worked well with people for thousands of years.

Camel

Camels are adapted for life in the hot desert. They can go for 10 days without any water, and they can drink salty water.

Camels store fat in their humps. When they need food, the fat in their humps can break down into nutrients and water. When a camel goes without food and water for a long time, the hump goes flat.



Mini Page photo by Lucy Lien

Most donkeys have a dark cross in the fur on their backs and shoulders. The legend is that this cross appeared after the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus.



photo courtesy George Washington's Mount Vernon

Camels are known as the ships of the desert because they can carry up to 1,000 pounds for long distances. And they rock from side to side, so riders feel as if they are on a ship.

Partridge

The partridge is related to the quail. It is associated with the holidays because of a popular holiday song about a partridge. But it actually builds its nest on the ground.



"... And a partridge in a pear tree" are the famous words in every verse of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" song.

Sheep

People have raised sheep for thousands of years. They are raised on every continent except Antarctica.

Sheep have few defenses and are in danger from animals such as wolves. That is why they stay together in a herd. They are shy animals that follow their leaders.



People use sheep for food, clothing, and products such as soap and glue.

Shepherds watch over sheep when they are in a place with no fences. Sheep can graze in areas where grass may be hard for other animals to get to, such as on hills and cliffs. They can eat grass that is very close to the ground.

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPcamels
- bit.ly/MPreindeer
- bit.ly/MPdonkey

At the library:

- "Reindeer Christmas" by Mark Kimball Moulton

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of holiday animals are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



ADAPT, ANIMAL, CAMEL,
CARIBOU, DESERT,
DONKEY, ENDURANCE,
GRAZE, HOLIDAY,
HUMP, LEGEND, LICHEN,
PARTRIDGE, QUAIL,
REINDEER, SHEEP,
SHEPHERD, SPECIES,
STRONG, STUBBORN.

S S H E E P H P E L L S W E M
E A L B W G M N I I E H N U U
I D P S N U D C O A M E R N O
C A C O H U H H K U A P O Y B
E P R T R E S E D Q C H B E I
P T E A N L E G E N D E B K R
S J N Y X Q E Z A R G R U N A
A C E G D I R T R A P D T O C
E K V Y A D I L O H S V S D V
D R E I N D E E R A N I M A L

Cook's Corner

Cinnamon Rolls With Brown Sugar & Walnuts

You'll need:

- cooking spray
- 1 pound frozen bread dough, thawed according to package directions
- 1/4 cup packed light brown sugar

- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/3 cup finely chopped walnuts
- 1/4 cup confectioner's sugar



What to do:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat two 9-inch round cake pans with cooking spray.
2. Roll bread dough into a rectangle about 1/8 inch thick and about 12 by 15 inches. Spread brown sugar all over dough to within 1/8 inch of edge. Sprinkle cinnamon over brown sugar and top with walnuts.
3. Starting at a short end, roll up dough tightly. Using a sharp knife, cut roll crosswise into 12 1-inch-thick rounds. Put 6 rounds into each pan, leaving space between them.
4. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until rolls are puffed up and golden brown.
5. Whisk together confectioner's sugar and 2 teaspoons water. Drizzle glaze over rolls.

Adapted from "The Robin Takes 5 Cookbook for Busy Families" with permission from Andrews McMeel Publishing (andrewsmcmeel.com).

* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

7 Little Words for Kids

Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

1. masked animal (7) _____
2. where cows eat (7) _____
3. what a fireman uses (4) _____
4. spice in a shaker (6) _____
5. where travelers sleep (5) _____
6. mammal with a flat tail (6) _____
7. schoolbook carrier (8) _____

PE	CC	BACK	OON
TEL	URE	ER	RA
HO	PACK	PP	PAST
VER	SE	BEA	HO

Answers: raccoon, pasture, hotel, beaver, backpack, pepper, hotel, beaver, backpack.

Mini Jokes



Kris: What does Rudolph want for Christmas?

Karl: A pony sleigh station!

Eco Note



Living things are suited to their environment. This is called **adaptation**. For instance, although jackrabbits and Arctic hares belong to the same group of mammals, they have adapted to live in very different places. Jackrabbits are suited to a hot, dry climate and would not survive in the Arctic. Arctic hares thrive in the frozen tundra and could not survive in a desert. Within any species, individuals that are well-suited to their environment are more likely to survive long enough to breed.

adapted with permission from "50 Things You Should Know About the Environment" by Jen Green (QEB Publishing)

For later:

Look through your newspaper for stories about and pictures of animals.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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