

Name: _____

Is That a Reindeer or a Caribou?

By Guy Belleranti

Did you know Rudolph, Dasher, Comet, and the rest of Santa's reindeer are actually domesticated caribou? What does *domesticated* mean? A domesticated animal is one that has been tamed to do work or to keep as a pet.

"Caribou" is the term used for wild reindeer in North America. You won't find that word used to describe wild reindeer in Europe or Asia, though. In Europe and Asia, the name



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have more than a thousand individuals! Herds travel hundreds of miles looking for food. These long treks are called migrations. In the winter months, the herds move south to escape the worst weather. In summer, they move north to escape biting insects. They eat grasses, leaves, herbs, mosses, ferns, and other plants in summer, and fungi and lichens in winter.

Reindeer are built for their cold habitat. A thick undercoat and an outer coat of long hollow hairs keep them warm. The hollow outer hairs also help them float when they swim! They use their large hooves to paddle through water and to dig in snow for food. Their hairy hooves harden in winter, helping them walk on ice without slipping.

Male reindeer grow antlers that are larger than any other deer in relation to body

size. The males use their antlers to attract females. Female reindeer often grow antlers as well, just not as large. Both males and females use their antlers to uncover food in the snow and as defense against predators.



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About the Author

Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. According to the information in the article, which of the following animals would be called a "caribou"?
 - a. A domesticated reindeer in Asia
 - b. A wild reindeer in North America
 - c. A domesticated reindeer in North America
 - d. A wild reindeer in Europe
2. Describe two ways reindeer protect themselves against predators.



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- c. They are larger than the antlers of any other deer relative to body size.
 - d. They are covered in fungi and lichen.
4. Why do reindeer move south in the winter? Why do they move north in the summer?

 5. Which of the following reasons for domesticating reindeer is **not** mentioned in the article?
 - a. Reindeer can pull heavy loads.
 - b. Reindeer provide food and milk for people.
 - c. Reindeer hides are useful to people.
 - d. Reindeer are gentle and friendly pets.

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

_____ 1. habitat

a. one individual

_____ 2. fungi

b. the layer of short fur that is closest to an animal's body

_____ 3. hollow

c. animals that prey on other animals



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_____ 7. predators

g. animal skins

_____ 8. single

h. empty on the inside

_____ 9. occasionally

i. long, tiring journeys

_____ 10. hides

j. a group of organisms that includes mold, mushrooms, and toadstools

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In the article, "Is That a Reindeer or a Caribou?", you learned that reindeer have been domesticated, or tamed, by humans to do work and that they are also useful for food, milk, and their hides.

Choose another animal that humans have domesticated and write about it on the lines below. Describe how that animal helps people or why it makes a good pet.



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ANSWER KEY

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1. According to the information in the article, which of the following animals would be called a “caribou”? **b**
- a. A domesticated reindeer in Asia
 - b. A wild reindeer in North America**
 - c. A domesticated reindeer in North America
 - d. A wild reindeer in Europe

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ANSWER KEY

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.



f 1. habitat

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b. the layer of short fur that is closest to an animal's body

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