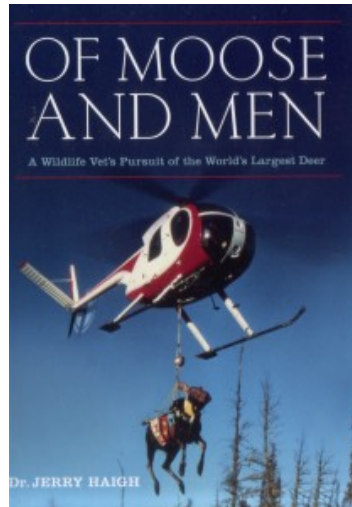


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Book Review: Of Moose and Men

By [Steve Donoghue](#)



Of Moose and Men

by Dr. Jerry Haigh

ECW Press, 2012

The North American moose (specifically the *Alces Gigas*) is the largest member of the deer family and quite possibly the largest type of deer that's ever lived. Adult males can stand well over seven feet at the shoulder and weigh nearly a ton, with enormous flat antlers spanning as much as six feet from tip to tip. And yet despite these Pleistocene dimensions, moose are almost unbelievably nimble and can move through heavy undergrowth with owl-like silence. Anyone who's ever tramped extensively in the Northwest Territories or the Yukon will likely have a hair-raising story or two about calmly scanning a line of nearby trees from left to right, taking a restorative deep breath, scanning back right to left, seeing a van-sized moose *suddenly right there*, and promptly pooping their undergarments.

Galvanic responses are entirely justified in this case, because if you're near enough to look up into a moose's eyes, you're very shortly going to be glancing over your shoulder at those same blood-red cauldrons of hate as that moose avalanches after you intent on mashing you into tick-paste on the forest floor. In his utterly fantastic new book *Of Moose and Men*, legendary Dr. Jerry Haigh, veteran traveller and the world's foremost expert on the extended deer family, is

often at pains to stress that moose are basically gentle creatures who just want to be left alone – and yet, the frequent and vividly- described *chase-anecdotes*:

Petruska let out a loud snort as she set off at a full charge, and then I could hear her breath as she crashed through the underbrush, her hooves pounding on the hard ground. It became a sort of Mexican stand-off. Petruska looked at me between the fortunately thick branches of the spruce and tried to get at me, first by stamping her feet, much as she would if she were killing a predator, and second by trying to move around the tree to get a clearer run. Of course there was nothing I could do about the stamping except be glad that it was occurring six or so metres from me, but I could and did move around the tree to make sure that we remained at exactly opposite sides. Not that she came round all the way. That would have put me between her and her calf, which would have been quite an unnatural manoeuvre: she presumably viewed me as some sort of predator that was going to get the most precious thing in her world.



Yes, the moose in question was a mother protecting her calf, and Haigh's

book is full of kinder, gentler beasts as well (indeed, there are several horrifying pictures of the satanic beasts actually *relaxing* with humans instead of spearing them on the Inquisition torture-device they've got growing out of their heads). There are cuddly moose in these pages, and in addition to vast amounts of the *Alces* natural history Haigh has picked up in his forty years of animal experience, there's also a good deal of conservation-aimed information. Like all other megafauna on Earth, moose are increasingly endangered by the sprawl of mankind, and Haigh champions the spread of "the conservation ethic" in an effort to save these brutish, terrifying, beagle-chasing creatures.

Those championing efforts, like everything else in *Of Moose and Men*, are given heft and zest by the ebullient narrative presence of Haigh himself, an indefatigable optimist whose raucous, self-deprecating, seat-of-the-pants story stretches from Kenya to Scotland to Saskatchewan and whose endless trove of stories could fill

five books this size (ECW Press has my strongest possible urging to prevail upon Haigh to produce those books). Whether he's running for his life from one enraged moose or another (those gentle, misunderstood little lambs) or dancing at his son's wedding in Krakow to "Itsy-Bitsy Teenie-Weenie Yellow Polka-Dot Bikini," he's a uniformly sunny presence. He employs a chatty, down-to-earth voice that can evoke a smile over even the least pleasant of digressions:

The test was known as a test for occult blood in stool, "occult" meaning hidden and having little to do with science fiction, fantasy, or ghost stories. When blood does enter the stool in any large amount, the smell is a real nose curler. It is almost impossible not to rear back when you smell it. Any owner of a dog that has had the virus infection called parvo will know exactly what I mean. As for the rest of you, the old cliché about ignorance and bliss really fits here.

Of Moose and Men is at once informative and entertaining, the whole spectrum of a natural world filtered through a smart, quirky, caring man who knows that world better than any other human (it's tempting to say "only a moose could do a more thorough job," but any moose would be content merely to stomp the typewriter into tiny bits for no reason at all and then wander off to eat for fifteen hours straight, so the task is left up to humans). It will surely and deservedly become a classic of natural history, and it's highly recommended to all readers – whether they've ever been chased by one of these snorting, goggle-eyed, nostril-flaring monsters of pure malice or not.00