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BIOLOGISTS SEARCH FOR A MOOSE ON THE LOOSE

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Richard's ways with females have kept biologists busy for four years.

They've had to remove him from dairy **farms** in Lewis County where he tried to woo the cows. They've documented his flirtation with a pig. And now when they need him most, Richard has disappeared. Instead of striking up another unlikely romance, the 8-year-old bull moose has begun leading state biologists on a wild moose chase. It's not easy being a bull moose in New York. There are only 15 to 30 moose in the state. Males outnumber females three to one.

"We're not even sure he knows what a female moose looks like," said Alan Hicks, senior wildlife biologist with the state Department of Environmental Conservation. "He had not been in the company of a female moose since he entered the state of New York."

Richard's fondness for cows once made him easy to keep track of, Hicks said.

The DEC has had to move him four times. "He's seen most of Northern New York from the back of a trailer," Hicks said.

Hicks uses a simple analogy to explain Richard's odd preferences.

"It's like they say about being in a bar — everybody looks better at closing time," Hicks explained. "When this moose gets to a pasture and sees a couple of cows, he stays."

AT LEAST he used to. The DEC would welcome the chance to be able to get so close to the 1,100-pound animal now. Biologists placed a radio collar on him and three other moose in 1985. Two of the moose have died, another's radio collar wore out. Richard's collar is fading fast and needs to be replaced.

Richard is not cooperating. This fall he made only occasional visits to horses near Saranac Lake. He spent several days munching apples on a **farm** near **Gabriels**.

Ruth **Tucker** watched the moose nibble at her apple trees on her family's 500-acre potato **farm** in early October. He began drawing spectators after he started appearing regularly between 6 and 8 a.m.

"We'd go out and talk to him while he'd eat, and he'd completely ignore us," she said. "When there were too many people, he'd leave. He didn't run, but he just ambled off."

THE DEC tried to approach Richard twice. On their first foray, DEC workers tracked Richard for three hours. When Hicks fired a dart gun to tranquilize him, Richard moved and the dart went behind him.

On the second expedition, Hicks and his companions couldn't find the moose anywhere.

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Tucker said men working on dog sled trails on her 500-acre potato farm saw Richard only once since the last DEC expedition, but she hasn't spotted him near her house.

The DEC's chances to nab Richard are fading this year, Hicks said. Bull moose are less sensitive to human activity during their breeding season, from mid-September to mid-October. Hicks suspects Richard is now heading back to an area south of Newcomb, where he spends the winter and summer.

AFTER MOOSE reappeared in the state in 1980, the DEC decided to affix radio collars to those who turned up where they shouldn't. Four moose were tagged in 1985, the first in the Syracuse area. It later died of a bacterial infection. Richard was the second to be collared. A third was tagged in Fort Edward, near Glens Falls, and has been sighted around Old Forge, but its collar has worn out. The fourth was found in Lyons Falls but died after it stepped into a hole and broke its leg.

HICKS, who works at the DEC's Wildlife Resources Center in Delmar, is studying whether moose should be reintroduced in the state. The Adirondacks appear able to support a larger population, he said, but the DEC is studying social concerns as well.

"If you're a dairy farmer whose cows are being harassed for weeks at a time, you'd be concerned if you thought you were going to have a thousand moose coming at you," he said.

Moose disappeared from New York in the 1860s but reappeared in 1980. Most are believed to have traveled from New England, Hicks said.

Illustration: PHOTO

New York state photo

RICHARD THE MOOSE as he looked during a visit to Lewis County in 1986.

Color.

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