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Why are moose dying out in the U.S? Sudden decline baffles scientists

- U.S. biologists have noticed the steep drop in moose numbers in Minnesota, New Hampshire, Montana and British Columbia
- Theories range from brainworms infecting animals to warming temperatures that could be depleting populations
- Nicholas DeCesare, of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks said there are fewer moose and it is harder for hunters to find them

By [Sarah Griffiths](#)

PUBLISHED: 09:28 EST, 16 October 2013 | **UPDATED:** 09:29 EST, 16 October 2013

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Moose populations are declining rapidly and could disappear from some states in North America.

But while scientists have noticed the steep drop in numbers in Minnesota, New Hampshire, Montana and British Columbia, the reason for the animal's plight remains a mystery.

Scientists' theories range from brainworms infecting animals to ticks sucking their blood that could be depleting populations but it seems that global warming could be a common theme.



Biologist Nicholas DeCesare, of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, who

counts moose in the state, told *The New York Times* 'there's fewer moose out there, and hunters are working harder to find them'

Minnesota had two separate moose populations just 20 years ago but one of them has all but vanished, while the other is falling from 25 per cent a year to around 3,000 animals, despite hunting permits almost halving since 1995.

Biologist Nicholas DeCesare, of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, who counts moose in the state, told [The New York Times](#) 'there's fewer moose out there, and hunters are working harder to find them'.

One theory is that climate change is damaging moose populations. Winters are shorter and Autumns milder in New Hampshire, leading to the animals suffering from more parasitic ticks.

Moose living in Minnesota have been found to have brain worms and liver flukes - parasitic flatworms that feed on blood and are located in the liver that spend most of their lives in snails that live in moist areas.

Global warming could also be affecting moose as the creatures, which are built for cold weather, can expend extra energy staying cool in milder weather, which can make them exhausted and even kill them.



Moose living in Minnesota (pictured) have been found to have brain worms and liver flukes. Global warming could also be affecting moose as the creatures, which are built for cold weather, can expend extra energy staying cool in milder weather, which can make them exhausted and even kill them

Another recent study found moose living in mountains in British Columbia have suffered habitat loss as an epidemic of pine beetles have stripped forests bare, leaving the animals exposed to human and animal predators.

Experts believe unregulated hunting might also play a role in increasing moose mortality rates.

As autumn approaches, which is when most moose die, scientists hope to solve the mystery of why populations have been hit so hard.

Erika Butler, a former vet at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, said: 'It's complicated because there's so many pieces of this puzzle that could be impacted by climate change.'

Experts said moose deaths are hard to study as they are solitary animals and consequently can be difficult to track.

When they die, the animals have so much body fat that their bodies decompose quickly, leaving few clues behind for scientists.



Researchers think ticks (pictured) are partially responsible for declining numbers of moose. They lose a lot of blood and become anemic, tearing out their fur so that in springtime, despite broadly warmer temperatures, the animals can die of hypothermia as they are without their warm, waterproof coats

Minnesota began a \$1.2million study using cutting-edge technology to find moose as quickly as possible after they die, by fitting live animals with collars that show researchers their location every 15 minutes.

If an animal's heart stops beating, the collars send a text message with its coordinates so scientists can recover the body to look for causes of death.

Researchers are relatively sure that ticks are partially responsible for declining numbers of moose.

The animals lose a lot of blood and become anemic, tearing out their fur and becoming 'crazy' so that in springtime, despite broadly warmer temperatures, the animals can die of hypothermia as they are without their warm, waterproof coats.

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