



Finland's Reindeer

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Exterminated in Finland in the 19th century, a number of wild reindeer crossed the frontier into Russia, and a small population built up there. But after the war development in their new Russian habitat drove the reindeer away; some crossed back into Finland where now there is once again a small population close to the frontier. But forestry operations on both sides of the frontier threaten them with extermination again and only the preservation of their habitat can save them. The animals have a special importance because they are quite uncontaminated by domestic stock.

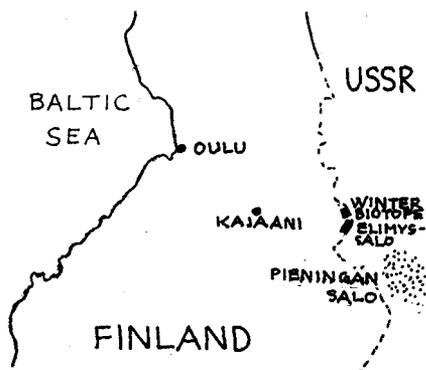
The reindeer *Rangifer tarandus fennicus* was exterminated in Finland in the 19th century. In 1750 its range had extended over the greater part of forest-clad Finland, although its summer biotopes and calving grounds were restricted mainly to marshy watersheds north and north-west of our extensive lake district. It was not described scientifically until 1909, when Einar Lönnberg, a Swedish biologist, gave it the subspecific name *fennicus*, Finland being, in his opinion, its *terra typica*. The last reliable breeding record in Finland was in 1883; the last rumoured occurrence was in 1912 or 1913, and was almost certainly not reliable. In 1913 the reindeer was protected by law, 'a bitter irony', as Lonnberg said.

At the time that the last wild reindeer was shot in Finland a small population had found a sanctuary behind our eastern border in Russian Karelia, in a vast and virgin taiga called Pieningänsalo. Between the two world wars the *fennicus* was all but forgotten in Finland, but it was rediscovered when Finnish troops occupied Pieningänsalo in 1939. Perhaps a hundred were shot by military hunting parties, but the military authorities tried to protect the reindeer, and the best part of the population survived the war. When our troops withdrew from East Karelia the reindeer were left in their splendid isolation.

Peace, however, proved more hazardous for the reindeer than war. In the late forties the Russians started to build a railway through Pieningänsalo, and large-scale forestry operations began to destroy the largest virgin coniferous forest of Northern Europe. The whole ancient ecosystem of that precarious wilderness was wrecked, and reindeer and wolves made their escape to Finland and in other unknown directions. The reindeer moved north-west along the watershed and crossed into Finland in the Kuhmo area about 1950. As far as I know this was the first time that a wild animal, exterminated in Finland, had come back — even if not of its own will at least on its own feet.

The first arrivals were mostly males, but females followed. They used to calve in USSR but spend July, August and September in Finland with their calves, mainly in Elimyssalo, in a roadless

watershed of virgin spruce forests *Picea abies* and *Equisetum* and *Carex* marshes with *Eriophorum*, which are essential elements of their summer biotope. In 1967 for the first time I found a doe that had calved in Elimyssalo; since then does have calved there in increasing numbers, mainly in thick fir forests. It seems to me that each doe has her own calving territory of one square kilometre. When her calf is about three weeks old a doe may join with one or two other females, but most does spend the whole summer alone with their calves. Both males and females are mainly solitary animals in summer; if they often also go in pairs, it is never in the does' summer pastures. Near the rut the males join the does who have already formed herds of about 6-15 animals, and after the rut the herds move to their winter pastures, about 15 km north of Elimyssalo, where they spend the winter on pine forest ridges between lakes. Reindeer moss *Cladonia rangiferina* is their main winter food.



The permanent wild reindeer population in Finland now consists of perhaps 50-70 animals, but in summer there may be as many as 200. If Elimyssalo is to be preserved in its virgin state, as Mr Reino Kalliola has proposed to the Management of State Forests, a hundred or so wild forest reindeer could survive in Finland, but if Elimyssalo, their only calving ground and best summer pasture, is cut down, Finland will lose the *fennicus* and Europe its only genuinely wild reindeer, for the 'wild' reindeer of Norway and the Kola Peninsula are mainly descendants of domesticated animals, and, even fifteen years ago the small isolated *fennicus* populations between Finland and the Urals were already declining rapidly.

Rangifer tarandus fennicus differs as a race from other European reindeer; it is not mixed with domestic stock, and it is on the verge of extinction because of forestry operations. The population which inhabits both sides of the Finnish-Soviet border is the largest one in Europe, and forestry from both east and west is going to destroy its newest and last biotope. It can only be saved if special measures are taken. The preservation of Elimyssalo is a most important task for Finland.

Return of the Eagle Owl to Sweden

For fifteen years the Norfolk Wildlife Park has been supplying pairs of eagle owls bred in the park to Sweden in an attempt to re-establish the species there in the wild. Eighteen birds have been sent and now some pairs are breeding regularly. The method used, as described by Philip Wayne in *Nature in Focus*, is to put the birds in pairs in large cages and allow them to breed, then release their young when fully fledged, but continue to supply food on the top of the cage until the young can fend for themselves and stop coming back for the food on the cage.