



Ghost Moose (winter tick)



What is a ghost moose?

Ghost moose is often the name given to moose that have lost large sections of hair on their body. This condition is caused by the winter tick (*Dermacentor albipictus*).

Where are winter ticks found?

Dermacentor albipictus is found throughout the U.S. and Canada, Generally associated with home ranges of moose, this tick has also been found on species as far south as Mexico. In Wyoming, cases of ghost moose are most commonly seen in Jackson, Cody, Kemmerer, Pinedale, the Snowy Range and Happy Jack areas.

How is it spread?

This species of tick has a 1 host life cycle. Females lay eggs on the ground between the months of May and June. Larvae hatch during the summer and in the fall begin to scale vegetation to quest for hosts. Ticks attach to passing hosts where they finish development by feeding on the host's blood. After mating at the end of winter, engorged females drop off the host to lay eggs and die.

What are some clinical signs of disease?

Most often a condition of moose, the most common sign observed is the white to greyish appearance on large sections of the body due to hair loss. Other signs can include, observing heavy tick burdens, skin erosions, weight loss and abnormal behavior. Combined with winter conditions, cumulative effects can negatively impact the health of the moose, making them more vulnerable to predators, human conflict and vehicle collisions. This condition is typically seen in calves and yearlings.

How does this affect me?

This species of tick does not pose any human health concerns.

Information for outdoor recreationists:

Please report any observances of ghost moose to your local biologists.

For additional information on ghost moose or any other wildlife disease, please contact the WGFD Wildlife Health Laboratory at 307-745-5865.