

# WHERE DOES RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER COME FROM?

Reindeer seem to be all over the place at Christmas time – they appear on jumpers, tablecloths, serviettes, key rings, cuddly toys and together with Father Christmas on greetings cards. In reality, however, we can only meet them in wildlife parks but in the far north they are kept as companions and working animals. Thanks to their significance to humans and their long history as companions, there are of course many stories about the reindeer. For example, legend has it that Father Christmas can speak the language of the reindeer who pull his sleigh and their journey takes them from Father Christmas' home in the north pole to all the people all over the world. The eight reindeer called Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen originate from an American poem written in 1822. The famous Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer is not one of them – he first appeared in another story (later made into the popular song) a hundred years later.

The experts from the specialist chain store Maxi Zoo follow the story of the antlered animals and provide answers to the questions behind the symbolic animal.

Reindeer are part of the deer family and have certain special traits. They are the only large mammals who live so far north and can survive temperatures of minus 50°C. They live on tundra – treeless areas usually covered in permafrost – in the north of North America and Eurasia, in Greenland and other arctic islands. Despite their resistance they will walk thousands of kilometres to get to milder, forested areas. Reindeer can spread their hooves wide so as to get a good grip in boggy areas or in snow, in addition to this they use their hooves as shovels in order to dig for food. Reindeer are

## PET POINTERS



herbivores; in winter they eat berries and vitamin rich lichen a fungus that grows with algae and forms a crust on rocks and tree trunks and in summer they eat leaves, grass, shoots and fungi – even the poisonous ones are on the menu.

The word “reindeer” comes from the Old Norse word “hrein” – it doesn't actually have anything to do with “reins” like Father Christmas uses! – and the Russian name translated into English means “northern deer”. Female

reindeer are the only type of deer to also have antlers and these fall off once a year. They need them as a means of defence, while the males use them to fight. The two sexes live in separate herds from one another except during the mating season when the females seek out the males.

Three quarters of all wild reindeer live in North America and are not usually kept as companions or working animals. On the contrary, in Europe and Asia, the majority of reindeer are domesticated with many of them living in Siberia. They are of great use to people and this is a tradition that goes back a long way. As early as the Stone Age, reindeer were highly prized kill from hunts and is proven by ancient cave paintings. The Sami people of Lapland are well known for their co-existence with reindeer and they pass their knowledge of these gentle creatures down from generation to generation. Reindeer are used as pack and draught animals, they provide meat to eat, fur for warmth, and antlers for tools or souvenirs. Even when they are kept as companions they are allowed to run free – reindeer owners can tell which animals are their own from the markings printed in the ear.



Log onto [www.maxizoo.ie](http://www.maxizoo.ie)  
for more pet tips and MAXI ZOO special offers.

[www.maxizoo.ie](http://www.maxizoo.ie)