

# Reindeer Of St Matthew Island Worksheet Answers

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reindeer of St. Matthew Island

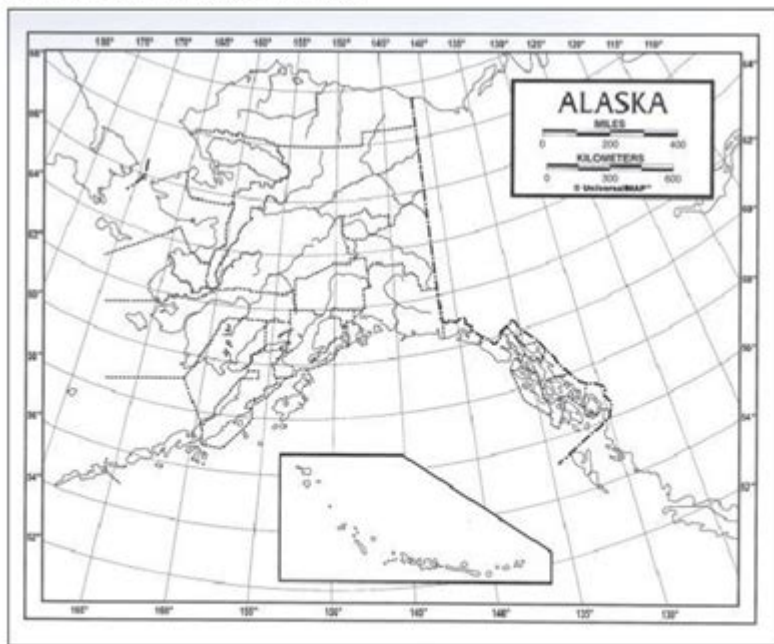
### Introduction

Every ecosystem has a carrying capacity for each of the organisms in it. **Carrying capacity** is defined as the number of individuals within a species that the ecosystem can support over the long-term. When a population grows so quickly that it exceeds the carrying capacity, an **overshoot** occurs. This can be disastrous, as a lack of resources will lead to wide-spread death due to starvation or disease. The resulting drop in population is called a **dieback**. This activity will show you one famous example of a population that overshoot its carrying capacity.

### The Story

In August of 1944, the United States coast guard captured and transported 29 reindeer from Nunivak Island and floated them 200 miles north on a barge to St. Matthew Island. This island is one of the most remote places in Alaska. The Coast Guard had a small manned station here, and the reindeer herd was intended to be a food source. The only potential predator for the reindeer on this island was Arctic fox, which are too small to kill anything but newly born reindeer calves.

Locate St. Matthew Island (60.4°N, 172.7°W) and Nunivak Island (60.4°N, 166.1°W) on this map. Draw an arrow to show the movement of the reindeer on the barge.



**Reindeer of St. Matthew Island worksheet answers** offer a fascinating glimpse into the ecological dynamics and historical events that transpired on this remote island in the Bering Sea. As we delve into the reindeer population on St. Matthew Island, we uncover not only their biological and ecological significance but also the implications of human intervention and environmental changes. This article will explore the reindeer of St. Matthew Island, their history, the ecological consequences of their introduction, and the educational value of worksheets designed to enhance understanding of this unique case study.

# Introduction to St. Matthew Island

St. Matthew Island is a small, uninhabited island located in the Bering Sea, part of the U.S. state of Alaska. The island covers approximately 50 square miles and is characterized by its rugged terrain, tundra vegetation, and a harsh climate. This isolated environment has seen limited human activity, making it an intriguing subject for ecological studies.

## The Introduction of Reindeer

In 1944, a group of reindeer was introduced to St. Matthew Island as part of a government experiment to provide a food source for future military personnel. This introduction was intended to create a stable population that could sustain hunters and settlers in the region. The initial herd consisted of 29 reindeer, which quickly adapted to the island's environment.

## Population Growth and Its Consequences

The reindeer population on St. Matthew Island grew exponentially over the following decades. By the late 1960s, estimates indicated that the population had surged to approximately 6,000 individuals. This rapid growth, however, had significant ecological repercussions:

- **Overgrazing:** The lush vegetation that initially supported the reindeer became overconsumed, leading to a decline in plant diversity and coverage.
- **Soil Erosion:** With the decrease in plant life, soil erosion became a serious issue, destabilizing the island's ecosystems.
- **Decline in Other Species:** The overpopulation of reindeer affected other wildlife, as competition for food resources intensified.

## Ecological Impact of Reindeer Overpopulation

The introduction of reindeer to St. Matthew Island provides an excellent case study on the consequences of introducing non-native species to an ecosystem. The ecological impact can be examined through several lenses:

### Vegetation Changes

The grazing habits of the reindeer altered the island's vegetation significantly. Key species that once thrived began to disappear, and the overall biodiversity of the region suffered. The following factors contributed to these changes:

1. **Selective Grazing:** Reindeer preferentially grazed on certain plant species, reducing their populations and allowing less palatable species to flourish.
2. **Increased Competition:** As the reindeer population grew, they competed more fiercely for limited food resources, leading to starvation and a decline in health.
3. **Altered Soil Composition:** Overgrazing led to changes in soil composition, which affected plant growth and regeneration.

## Effects on Other Wildlife

The ecological imbalance caused by the reindeer population explosion had cascading effects on other species inhabiting the island. With dwindling food resources, other herbivores faced increased pressure. Predatory species, too, were affected by the changes in prey availability.

## Human Intervention and Management Efforts

Recognizing the ecological crisis, wildlife managers took action in the late 1960s and early 1970s to control the reindeer population. Efforts included:

- **Hunting:** Limited hunting was permitted to reduce the herd size.
- **Relocation:** Some reindeer were relocated to other areas where they could thrive without causing ecological damage.
- **Monitoring:** Ongoing monitoring of the remaining population was established to assess the recovery of the ecosystem.

## Educational Value of Worksheets

Worksheets focusing on the reindeer of St. Matthew Island serve as valuable educational tools for students and educators alike. These worksheets can facilitate learning in various ways:

## Promoting Critical Thinking

Worksheets can contain questions that challenge students to think critically about the ecological implications of introducing non-native species. For example, students might be asked:

1. What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of introducing a non-native species to an isolated ecosystem?
2. How can the lessons learned from St. Matthew Island be applied to current conservation efforts?

## Understanding Ecosystem Dynamics

By studying the reindeer population and its effects on the island's ecosystem, students can better understand complex ecological relationships. Worksheets can include diagrams, case studies, and data analysis exercises that illustrate these dynamics.

## Real-World Applications

Educators can use the case of St. Matthew Island as a jumping-off point for discussing broader environmental issues, such as climate change, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss. Students can be encouraged to:

- Research other instances of species introduction and their effects.
- Engage in debates about the ethics of wildlife management.
- Explore conservation strategies that promote biodiversity.

## Conclusion

The story of the reindeer of St. Matthew Island serves as a powerful reminder of the intricate balance within ecosystems and the potential consequences of human intervention. As we analyze the ecological impacts of the reindeer population and the subsequent management efforts, we gain valuable insights into conservation and environmental stewardship. Worksheets centered around this topic not only engage students in critical thinking but also foster a deeper understanding of ecological principles and real-world applications.

By studying the reindeer of St. Matthew Island, we can learn important lessons about biodiversity, ecosystem health, and the responsibility we hold in managing the natural world.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are the key characteristics of the reindeer population on St. Matthew Island?**

The reindeer on St. Matthew Island are known for their adaptability to harsh Arctic conditions, including thick fur for insulation and strong hooves for traversing snow and ice. They also exhibit a significant increase in population due to the absence of natural predators.

### **How did the reindeer on St. Matthew Island adapt to their environment?**

The reindeer adapted by developing foraging strategies to find food during the winter months, such as digging through snow to access lichen and other vegetation. Their social structure also allows for cooperative behavior in navigating and surviving in extreme conditions.

### **What factors contributed to the decline of the reindeer population on St. Matthew Island?**

The decline was primarily due to overpopulation leading to overgrazing, which depleted available food resources. Additionally, harsh winters and limited genetic diversity contributed to their vulnerability and eventual decline.

### **What lessons can be learned from the reindeer population dynamics on St. Matthew Island?**

The situation highlights the importance of sustainable population management and the impact of environmental changes on species survival. It emphasizes the need for balance between population growth and resource availability.

### **What role do worksheets play in understanding the reindeer of St. Matthew Island?**

Worksheets provide structured activities that help students analyze data, understand ecological concepts, and engage with real-world scenarios involving wildlife management and conservation efforts.

### **How can the study of St. Matthew Island's reindeer**

## contribute to conservation efforts elsewhere?

Studying the reindeer can inform conservation strategies by illustrating the consequences of unchecked population growth and habitat degradation, offering models for managing other species facing similar challenges.

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