



Santa's Reindeer

Santa's Magical Reindeer (*R.t. sainnicolas magicalus*) look very similar to common reindeer or caribou, but have many characteristics that distinguish them from the seven common subspecies: barrenground (*Rangifer tarandus granti*), Svalbard (*R.t. platyrhynchus*), European (*R.t. tarandus*), Finnish forest reindeer (*R.t. fennicus*), Greenland (*R.t. groenlandicus*), woodland (*R.t. caribou*), and Peary (*R.t. pearyi*).

Home Range and Population: Santa's reindeer live at the North Pole. They are cared for by Mr. and Mrs. Claus and a few specially trained elves. Even though there are only nine *R.t. sainnicolas magicalus*, they are not listed as a threatened or endangered species. The life expectancy of Santa's reindeer is infinite. There have been no deaths or fatalities, though some very close calls have been reported due to slippery rooftops and heavy jet traffic around the Los Angeles airport. The nine reindeer are named: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen, and Rudolph. All are extremely agile, quick, and friendly.

General Description and Differences Between Subspecies: Among the common subspecies of reindeer, the largest bulls shed their antlers in late October and the small bulls and non-pregnant cows shed their antlers in April. It is not known when or if Santa's reindeer shed their antlers. We do know, from a few furtive sightings, that their antlers appear to be extremely velvety and robust in late December. Santa's reindeer also have the unique and remarkable ability to fly. The Claus' have helped to further develop and condition this ability enabling them to fly great distances in a very short time period, provided they receive frequent carrot snacks.



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© ADFG: The only known photo of Rudolph taken while he was vacationing in ANWR

Rudolph: One of Santa's reindeer, Rudolph, was born with a genetic abnormality. His nose is bright red. As a calf, the other reindeer excluded Rudolph and often made disparaging remarks about his nose. However, this genetic abnormality became his greatest asset. One fateful, snowy and foggy Christmas Eve, Santa summoned Rudolph for his bright red beacon of a nose. Rudolph guided Santa and his sleigh through the treacherous night by the light of his nose. Had it not been for Rudolph, Santa's sleigh would have been grounded. Christmas stockings would have remained devoid and limp, and Christmas day would have been marked with cries of sad disappointment. From that fateful eve forward, Rudolph has been revered and honored by his fellows and through stories, legends and songs.

Little more is known of Santa's reindeer. They remain well loved and rarely seen, though several reports of harness bells and hoof sounds on rooftops are reported each Christmas Eve.

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