

Glowing antlers failed, so Finns try app to save reindeer

June 8 2016, by Matti HUUHTANEN



Fluorescent paint makes the antlers of a reindeer shine, in this photo dated February 15, 2014, after Finnish herders painted the animal in an attempt at halting the thousands of road deaths of the roaming caribou in Rovaniemi, the wilds of Finland's Lapland. This novel attempt to reduce the annual 4,000 reindeer road deaths was not successful, so in a pilot project announced Wednesday June 8, 2016, drivers of heavy transport vehicles are being offered a reindeer warning app for their mobile devices, to warn them of nearby reindeer. If successful, The Reindeer Herders Association hope the app will be available for download on all smart phones later in 2016. (ANNE OLLILA/Lehtikuva via AP)

Finnish reindeer herders in the Arctic have painted Rudolph's antlers in fluorescent colors, hung reflectors around their necks and even used movable traffic signs, but none of the efforts have helped reduce the annual 4,000 reindeer road deaths.

Now they have decided on a new tactic: an interactive reindeer warning app where drivers can tap their mobile phone screens to register any reindeer they see and get warnings if they are approaching an area where reindeers have been spotted. They're hoping to save at least some of the 300,000 reindeer that wonder freely in the wilds of Lapland, sometimes described as the last wilderness in Europe.

In a pilot project, drivers of heavy transport vehicles are being given 1,000 free handsets, which have been deactivated for any other use than the reindeer warning system. If it proves successful, the app will be available for download on smartphones later this year.

Anne Ollila, director of the Finnish Reindeer Herders' Association, said Wednesday the other methods simply didn't work.

"Drivers often mistook reindeer with reflectors for people in the dark, thinking they wouldn't run into the middle of the road when they saw car headlights approaching," she told The Associated Press. "And the deer would tear the reflectors off."



In this picture taken July 13, 2009, reindeers walk across the road in Suomussalmi, Finland. Finnish reindeer herders launch app to cut road kills in northern Arctic where 300,000 reindeer regularly roam freely. (Vesa Moilanen/ Lehtikuva via AP)

Reindeer traffic warning signs were pinched by tourists for souvenirs, and reindeer would scrape off the fluorescent paint from their antlers. "Somehow the reindeer know they had paint on their antlers—maybe their friends laughed at them," Ollila said.

Reindeer husbandry provides work for some 10,000 people in the region.



In this picture taken August 21, 2009, a reindeer walks out of the road in Pudasjarvi, Finland. Finnish reindeer herders launch app to cut road kills in northern Arctic where 300,000 reindeer regularly roam freely. (Heikki Saukkomaa/ Lehtikuva via AP)

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