

Supplementary feeding changing reindeer behavior and reindeer husbandry culture

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Changing land use and the changing climate have both contributed towards supplementary feeding of reindeer becoming an established practice in the reindeer husbandry areas of Finland, Sweden and

Norway. According to a recent Nordic research report, supplementary feeding seems to be changing reindeer behavior and the entire reindeer husbandry culture.

The multidisciplinary report 'Supplementary feeding in reindeer husbandry' is based on a joint workshop involving Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian reindeer herders and researchers from Finland, Sweden and Norway, which examined the herders' experiences of supplementary feeding of reindeer and its consequences. The aim of the workshop was to offer an arena to herders from three countries to share their experiences with the use of supplementary feeding and to increase public awareness that supplementary feeding can help in adapting to a changing society and natural environment.

The purpose of supplementary feeding has traditionally been to prevent the reindeer from going hungry and to protect them from predators. The need for supplementary feeding has been increased by interference caused by alternative land use and the loss of natural pasture areas to forestry, the mining industry, wind power stations and the tourist industry. Climate change is also causing increasingly difficult conditions in pasture areas; temperature fluctuations and winter rain will become more common and lead to freezing of pasture areas.

Reindeer are becoming tamer and traditional pasture use and reindeer husbandry is changing

According to the reindeer herders in Finland and Sweden, supplementary feeding is visibly changing reindeer behavior. For example, reindeer are unwilling to move from feeding areas to traditional spring or summer pastures. Feeding has also made reindeer tamer, which means they are easier to handle. The downside of this process, however, is that it can increase conflicts with the surrounding population.

Reindeer herders estimate that the increase in supplementary feeding is changing reindeer husbandry culture. Within the Finnish context, reindeer herders pointed out that supplementary feeding can lead to the individualisation of reindeer husbandry practices and the isolation of reindeer herders from one another. It can erode communality and social practices and alter the division of labor in reindeer husbandry communities. In areas where reindeer herding in corrals is the only sensible supplementary feeding solution in winter, reindeer husbandry has turned into work carried out alone on one's own place.

Reindeer herders also fear that the increase in supplementary feeding may change the image of reindeer meat as a pure and sustainably produced natural product, which may in turn affect the status of reindeer husbandry in society and the demand for reindeer meat. The herders pointed out that the majority of meat sold in the Nordic countries is from reindeer which are slaughtered in the autumn and do not receive supplementary feeding.

Reindeer herders believe that supplementary feeding should not be seen as a long-term solution to the crisis caused by the loss of grazing resources. In areas where supplementary feeding is necessary, however, there are many different ways of arranging it in a manner that is sensible both economically and for [reindeer](#) husbandry as a whole. Several such methods are listed in the research report.

More information: Publication of Report: Supplementary feeding in reindeer husbandry: www oulu.fi/culturalanthropology/node/209206

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