

Spreading holiday cheer with reindeer

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

Cindy Murdoch, 65, owner of Timberview Farm, stretched out her hand.

“C’mere, silly,” she said. A reindeer wearing a red and green halter bearing the name “Comet” in white lettering stepped forward, allowing Murdoch to stroke its antlers.

When the average American thinks of reindeer, said Murdoch, they think of Santa Claus. Reindeer have been synonymous with Christmas since Clement C. Moore penned his famous poem, “A Visit from Saint Nicholas,” in 1823.

According to Michelle Dennehy, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman, this is Oregon’s only permitted reindeer operation, a farm with nine licensed reindeer.

Because of the folklore surrounding flying reindeer, Murdoch said people are often surprised to learn that reindeer are real.

“Some people think they’re like unicorns,” Murdoch said. “They think they’re fairytale creatures.”

Experts say the species, though not magical, is remarkable.

The reindeer, a member of the Cervidae family of hoofed ruminant mammals, is a circumpolar species, meaning it lives in countries all around the arctic circle, according to the Smithsonian Institution.

Reindeer have been domesticated for millennia. According to a 2021 study in the Journal of Anthropological Archaeology, “reindeer herding has been culturally and economically important for many peoples.”

The earliest known domestication, according to the journal, can be traced to northern Fennoscandia — northern Finland, Swe-



Reindeer at Timberview Farm.

Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press



Cindy Murdoch, owner of Timberview Farm, talks to ‘Noel’

Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

den, Norway and northwest Russia — circa 800 A.D. For many cultures, reindeer have served as an important source of meat, hide and “draught” work, meaning

pulling carts or sleighs. Today, the semi-nomadic Dukha people of northern Mongolia still rely on domesticated reindeer for milk, leather, transportation

and, occasionally, meat. So, how did a herd of reindeer end up in Oregon? In the 1990s, Murdoch and her late husband read an article on reindeer.

Delighted by the species, they started a farm in 1999.

The couple began by rescuing two reindeer and later, through breeders, added others.

Raising reindeer was a learning curve. Murdoch worked with Purina to develop a special feed and Oregon State University veterinarians to understand the species’ health needs.

“I wish people understood more about the species,” Murdoch said.

Both male and female reindeer have velvety antlers, which they shed and regrow annually.

Each reindeer has its own personality. “Dancer,” one of Murdoch’s reindeer, has even learned to play “soccer.” Murdoch kicks the ball; Dancer returns it with her antlers.

Murdoch has turned the operation into a business. Throughout most of the year, the reindeer wan-

der the barn or hillsides. But during Christmastime, they’re busy travelers. Murdoch takes the reindeer to Christmas festivals, educational events and retail stores, including Coastal Farm & Ranch Supply.

According to Dennehy, Murdoch’s reindeer must be transported under strict requirements, ensuring “safe and humane treatment.”

Nevertheless, the farm has faced opposition from PETA, an animal rights group. Due to PETA’s recent efforts to shut down the farm, Murdoch no longer publishes her address.

Murdoch plans to continue growing her herd, since Oregon no longer allows importation of live cervids, Murdoch is working with a veterinarian to artificially inseminate her females.

“I hope we get another generation,” she said.

Holiday Worship Service

“32 And he shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

~ Luke 1 32-33

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