

The Invasive Species Biologist's version of "The Night Before Christmas"

Dr. Clement C. Moore wrote the original "A Visit from St. Nicholas" often known as "The Night Before Christmas" or "Twas the Night Before Christmas" in 1823 as a Christmas poem for his children. Later, Thomas Nast inflated St. Nicholas to the "chubby and plump" Santa that we know these days. I am sure that neither envisaged this humble little elf turning their masterpieces into the version that you see here. Neither of them probably ever thought about invasive species either, I suspect. It is with the greatest respect for their genius and in the spirit of the holiday season that I share with you a little piece, versions of which I have read to students for years, now with a new twist, the perspective of an invasive species biologist.

Les Mehrhoff,
Chief Botanical Officer
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I'was the night before Christmas,

when all through the habitat

Not an organism was locomoting,

*not even a nonindigenous *Mus musculus*.*

The posterior appendage covers were hung by the chimney by care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

*The F₁ generation were nestled all snug in their hibernacula,
While visions of monosaccharide pruni danced through their cephalia.*

And mamma in her kerchief and I in my cephalial cover,

Had just settled our crania for a long winter's hibernation.

When out on the hoped-for monoculture of non-native

**Poa pratensis* there arose such a clatter,*

I locomoted from my bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I locomoted like a flash,

Fore open the shutter and threw up the sash.

The moon on the mammary of new-fallen frozen precipitation

Gave a luster of mid-day to objects below;

When what to my wondering ocular organs should appear,

*But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny *Rangifera tarandi*,*

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,

I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

*More rapid than *Haliaeetus leucocephali* his coursers they came,*

And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:

*“Now Dasher! now, Dancer! now Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on Cupid! on Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the Porch! To the top of the wall!
Now dash away! Dash away! Dash away all!”*

*As desiccated photosynthetic organs that
before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleighful of toys, and St. Nicholas too.*

*And then in a scintilla, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little ungula.
As I drew in my cephalium and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.*

*He was dressed all in mammalian epidermal covering
from his cephalium to his pedis.
And his clothes were all tarnished with the products
of incomplete combustion.
A bundle of toys he had slung on his dorsal surface,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.*

*His ocular organs, how they twinkled! His dimples, how merry!
His mela were like the overbred flowers of
some cultivar of the genus *Rosa*,
his naris like the fruit of the non-native *Prunus avium*!
His droll little stoma was drawn up like a bow,
And the pubescence on his antherion was as
white as the frozen precipitation.*

*The stump of a pipe he held tight in his dens,
And the smoke, it encircled his cephalium
like a circular arrangement of gymnosperm
branches with *Ilex opaca* and *Phoradendron leucarpum*.
He had a broad protome, and a little round abdomen,
That shook when he laughed, like a bowl full of gelatin.*

*He was chubby and glibbous—a right jolly old elf—
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself.
A wink of his ocular organ, and a twist of his cephalium,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.*

*He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the posterior appendage covers;
then turned with a jerk,
And laying his digit aside of his naris,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.*

*He sprang to his sleigh, to the team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew, like the pappus of the
highly invasive *Cirsium arvense*,
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
“Happy Christmas to all, and to
all a good night!”*

**invasive**
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