



DIKANAS, Sweden: Reindeer belonging to Vilhelmina Norra Sameby run during a reindeer herding near the village of Dikanaess, about 800 kilometers north-west of the capital Sweden. —AFP photos

A REINDEER'S PERILOUS JOURNEY IN SWEDISH LAPLAND

DIKANAS: A herd of reindeer moves silently down the mountain, their silver coats and majestic antlers blending into the Swedish tundra as their herder leads them to their winter grazing grounds in the plains below. The annual pilgrimage, called transhumance, takes on almost sacred meaning for Sweden's indigenous Sami reindeer herders nowadays, as they face modern-day threats to their livelihood from wind turbines, global warming, logging, and mining. "It's a painful life, but the most beautiful there is," says Margret Fjellstrom, who owns several hundred reindeer in Dikanas, a village in Sweden's mountains 800 kilometers north of the capital Stockholm. "My identity depends on this life. When a fawn is born, we forget all of our troubles," the 30-year-old Sami said.

Every autumn, the reindeer are taken to their winter pasture in the plains by their owners, the Sami-formerly called Lapps—the only people authorized to herd reindeer in Sweden. In Dikanas, helpers on snowmobiles and quad bikes prepare for the move by leading thousands of the animals into an enclosure. There the fawns are marked, and the adults are separated. The fattest are sent to the slaughterhouse—their meat is considered a delicacy in the Nordic countries—while the others are sent to the forests in the plains teeming with lichen, a type of moss that makes up the reindeer's main diet.

Margret Fjellstrom's lasso whirled above her furled hat as she shouted out orders to her helpers. Around her waist in a sheath rests the indispensable knife used to carve

the mark in the animals' ears. They need to move quickly. Night falls before 3:00 pm this far north, the semi-domesticated reindeer are getting stressed and the herders are exhausted from a hard day's work. Under the watchful gaze of a group of fascinated children, the herders lay the reindeer down and hold them still as they mark and vaccinate them. The herders then load them onto the trucks that will take them to their winter pasture, 200 kilometers east.

Deadly dangers

In Dikanas, reindeer herding is no longer done the traditional way, on foot: the animals' journey through the wilderness full of peat bogs, dense forests and lakes has become too perilous. With global warming, the crossing has become more treacherous as the ice on the lakes is not thick enough to walk on yet. "The water (current) is strong and therefore impassable, or the ice is too fragile. A farmer from a Sami village a little further north drowned in early November," Fjellstrom recalls. This leaves the herders no other choice than to take to the road, even though it costs more. Other dangers lie in wait. Forty percent of fawns die from the cold, while wolverines, bears, wolves, lynx and eagles all prey on the reindeer. Fjellstrom estimates her losses in 2015 at 250,000 kronor (23,400 euros), despite the damages paid by local authorities to compensate for her reindeer lost to predators. "Sweden has decided to protect its species to diversify its wildlife. That's good, but is it fair that I have to pay for it?" she asks. —AFP



DIKANAS, Sweden: A Sami man from the Vilhelmina Norra Sameby, catches a reindeer during a gathering of his reindeers herd for selection and calf labeling.

DOES MY HAIR LOOK OK? WORLD'S OLDEST PERSON TURNS 117 IN STYLE

'I THINK HER SECRET IS GENETIC'

ROME: Emma Morano, humanity's last known survivor of the 19th century, turned 117 in style yesterday, dressing up for the occasion and demanding to know "does my hair look all right?" before having her photograph taken. The oldest known person alive can hardly see, is very hard of hearing, has been largely bed-bound for the last year and has not left her small second-storey flat in Verbania on the shores of Lake Maggiore in northern Italy for over two decades. But her doctor, Carlo Bava, said his patient remained alert and continued to have a reasonable quality of life.

Bava told AFP she was very aware of all the fuss being made about her reaching the latest milestone in a remarkable life that began on November 29, 1899. "She is very lucid, very present," Bava said. "She was very happy and honored to get a telegram of congratulations this morning from President (Sergio) Mattarella. "There was a television crew there and she got flowers. She had dressed up and she was very proud. She posed for a photographer and even asked if her hair looked good. "So I think you can say she is on good form."

No veggies, thanks

Morano has reached a ripe old age despite an extraordinarily tough life, even by the standards of many of her contemporaries, and following a diet that flouts almost every piece of established medical wisdom. "I eat two eggs a day, and that's it. And cookies. But I do not eat much because I have no teeth," she told AFP in an interview last month. She has long eschewed vegetables and her consumption of fruit is limited to the occasional handful of grapes or snacks of apple puree. Her prodigious egg habit started when she was diagnosed with anaemia at 20 and a doctor told her to start eating two raw and one cooked every day: a habit she maintained until her appetite began to ebb slightly around the age of 110.

When she still had teeth, she was also fond of chomping chicken and lean raw steak. Along with her fondness for pure protein, she has always had a sweet tooth meaning visitors were usually advised to come bearing gifts of Colomba, a cake rich in egg and butter that Italians associate with Easter, or Pannetone and Pandoro, traditional Christmas treats of a similar ilk.



VERBANIA, PIEMONTE, Italy: (FILES) This file photo shows Emma Morano, 116, posing for AFP photographer in Verbania, North Italy. —AFP

Very strong character

But it wasn't clear if she would be enjoying any of the birthday cake she received on yesterday. "The last time I ate a little, but then I did not feel good," she confided to AFP last month. Bava suspects that Morano has thrived despite her unusual diet, not because of it. "I think her secret is genetic. All of her family lived very a very long time," the doctor said. "The diet she has had would have destroyed the liver of most people. But with Emma, I think she could even eat pebbles and she would still have lived a very long time. "What might be more important is that she has always had a very strong strong character. It has always been her who decides

what she does or doesn't do." Morano herself has attributed her longevity to having the courage to take the life-changing decision of leaving a violent husband in 1938, shortly after the death in infancy of their son, her only child. It was always an unhappy marriage. Years before, her true love had gone off to fight in World War I and not come back.

Leaving a husband was no easy thing to do in the Church-dominated Italy of the 1930s and Morano worked in a factory producing jute sacks to support herself. "Back then, the workers in those factories were constantly breathing in dust and yet her lungs are fine—that's genetics," said Bava. —AFP

SOUTHERN STORMS SHOULD EASE DROUGHT; FIRE THREAT REMAINS

ATLANTA: Storms roaring across the South appeared to be taking aim at some of the largest wildfires burning across the region, which could finally help firefighters in their efforts to subdue the blazes, authorities said Monday. As the storm system passed over Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee late Monday, it was heading toward some of the largest wildfires in Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina. In Gatlinburg, Tennessee, smoke and fire caused the mandatory evacuation of downtown and surrounding areas, according to the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency.

The wildfire set 30 buildings ablaze and was at the edge of Dollywood, Dolly Parton's theme park, TEMA spokesman Dean Flener said in a news release. TV news broadcasts showed residents

streaming out of town just as rain started to wet roads. The rain forecast "puts the bull's-eye of the greatest amounts right at the bull's-eye of where we've been having our greatest activity," said Dave Martin, deputy director of operations for fire and aviation management with the southern region of the US Forest Service. The projected rainfall amounts "really lines up with where we need it," Martin said Monday.

"We're all knocking on wood." Yet after weeks of punishing drought, any rain that falls should be soaked up quickly, forecasters said. It will provide some relief but won't end the drought - or the fire threat, they say. Drought conditions will likely persist, authorities said. The problem is that rainfall amounts have been 10 to 15 inches below normal during the past three

months in many parts of the South, authorities said. "I think we racked up deficits that are going to be too much to overcome with just one storm system," said Mark Svoboda, director of the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. "I would say it's way too early to say 'Yes, this drought is over,'" Svoboda said. "Does it put a dent in it? Yes, but we have a long ways to go."

The rain also brings danger because strong winds at the leading edge of the storms can topple trees and limbs that can kill and injure firefighters, he said. In Mississippi, trees were reported downed in nearly 20 counties across the state. Sustained winds of 30 to 40 mph with gusts of more than 50 mph were reported and more than 2 inches of rain fell in some areas. Power outages peaked

at more than 23,000 statewide in Mississippi. Powerlines downed by winds sparked grass fires in four counties, said Greg Flynn, a spokesman for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency.

The storms were moving across Alabama on Monday night and were expected to slam into Georgia during the overnight hours. High wind warnings were issued for mountainous areas in northern parts of Georgia.

In South Carolina, the stormy forecast was giving hope to firefighters battling a blaze in the northwest corner of the state. The South Carolina Forestry Commission hopes to contain the Pinnacle Mountain fire by the middle of next week. More rain was expected today morning in parts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. — AP

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