



Arctic Caribou



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Latin name: *Rangifer tarandus*

Common names: Caribou, reindeer

Status (COSEWIC):

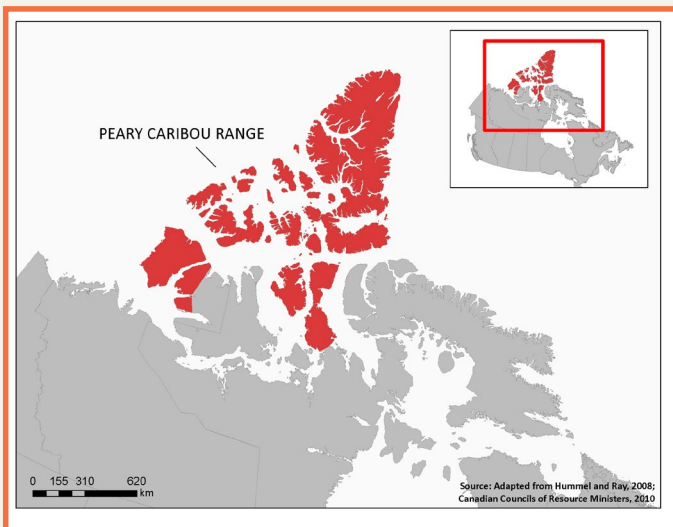
Barren-ground caribou: Currently being assessed
(Dolphin and Union herd: Special Concern)

Peary caribou: Threatened

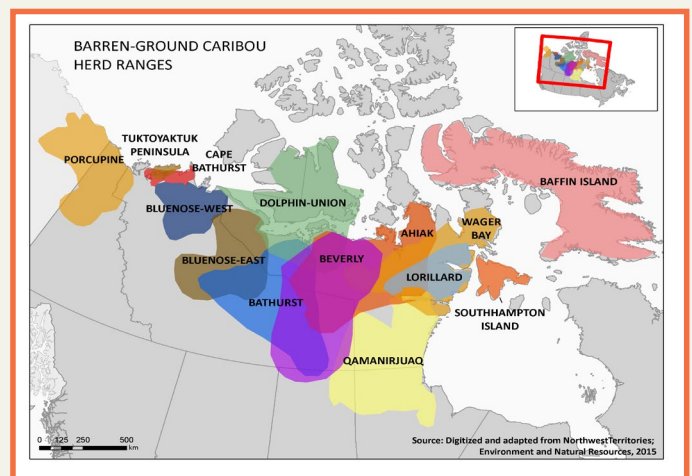
With its distinctive tall and flat antlers, the caribou is one of Canada's most recognizable species, inhabiting the Arctic as well as boreal and mountain regions. Male caribou are called bulls and weigh around 150kg, while females are called cows and weigh around 90kg. These stately members of the deer family were once one of Canada's most widespread wildlife species, found in over 80% of the country. Today though, their numbers are dropping dramatically—for many herds by more than 90%.

CARIBOU RANGE

Peary caribou (*R.t. pearyi*) are a subspecies of migratory tundra caribou found in the High Arctic islands of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. They are smaller in stature and lighter in colour than their mainland counterparts, with females weighing only 60kg. They remain on the islands of the Canadian Arctic archipelago year round, migrating over the sea ice in the winter months to access lichen found under the ice and snow.



Barren-ground caribou (*R.t. groenlandicus*) are migratory tundra caribou found right across the Canadian Arctic, inhabiting large swaths of mainland Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. The Dolphin-Union herd also inhabits Victoria Island, migrating across the sea ice each year to access their traditional habitat. Permanent herds are found on both Southampton and Baffin Island. The more southern herds migrate into the northern boreal forest of Saskatchewan and Manitoba for the winter.



KEY THREATS

Caribou populations fluctuate dramatically under natural conditions. When faced with external threats, their numbers can drop to dangerous levels and may fail to recover from natural population lows. There are multiple cumulative environmental and human-caused stressors that are contributing to Peary and barren-ground caribou decline.

- **Climate change** is altering the habitat of Arctic caribou, increasing the presence of biting flies in the summer, and creating irregular icing events in the winter that prevent caribou from accessing their food.
- **Increased mining exploration and development** across their ranges put caribou herds under pressure, with the most significant risk of habitat loss and disturbance occurring when industrial development occurs on their calving grounds.
- **Harvest management** during times of low abundance is challenging due to the difficulty in assessing the status of populations and a lack of reported harvest information.

INDIGENOUS PARTNERS IN THE NORTH

Across their range, caribou are an essential resource to Indigenous peoples. Northern communities have an intimate relationship with caribou herds, and have relied on them as a source of traditional food and clothing for millennia. With such a strong interest in the persistence of caribou, and as the only people living among the most northern caribou herds, northern communities are essential partners in caribou conservation projects.

WHAT WWF IS DOING

- **Working with northern communities** in the Arctic by providing resources and expertise to ensure that community viewpoints on conservation issues are heard in decision-making processes impacting caribou habitat.
- **Promoting the protection of barren-ground caribou calving areas** through our inputs into land use plans, by intervening in regulatory processes on specific development projects that threaten caribou, and through partnerships with companies prepared to voluntarily surrender mineral leases in key caribou habitats.
- **Helping fund research on barren-ground caribou** to monitor the population status of herds and understand the effects of industrial development on caribou and their habitat.
- **Studying the Last Ice Area**, one of WWF's flagship Arctic initiatives, to help protect Peary caribou habitat, particularly sea ice crossings used for migration between islands.



Universal Antlers

Caribou are the only member of the deer family Cervidae in which both males and females have antlers.

Caribou or Reindeer?

“Reindeer” is the name given to caribou in Scandinavia and Russia, but caribou and reindeer are the same species (*Rangifer tarandus*), wherever they are found in the world.

Smelling Danger

Caribou have scent glands located at the base of their ankles which are used to emit an odour to alert the rest of the herd to impending danger.



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