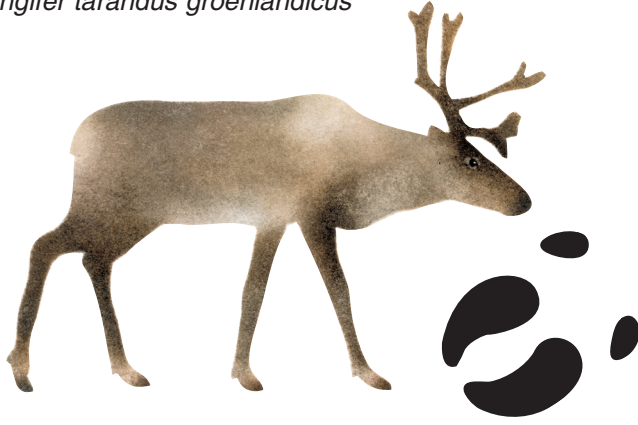




BARRENGROUND CARIBOU

Rangifer tarandus groenlandicus



Appearance

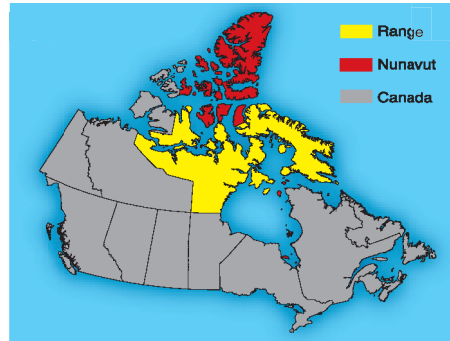
Barrenground caribou are medium sized cervids that have adapted to a life spent in the cold. They have large, well-furred muzzles; and short, broad, furred ears. They have a very warm coat of fur and can vary in colour from brown to cream to white depending on the region and the time of year. Both males and females have antlers. On the mainland of Nunavut, adult males weigh an average of about 150kgs in the autumn, while females average about 90kgs. Barrenground caribou on the southern arctic islands of Nunavut usually weigh somewhat less.

Food And Feeding

Caribou that winter in the forests south of Nunavut eat a high percentage of lichens. The barrenground caribou also eats grasses, sedges, mosses, forbs, willow leaves, twigs and mushrooms. They may sometimes chew on old discarded antlers, eat seaweed and lick salt deposits in the ground and fresh sea ice, likely for the mineral content. There are rare reports of lemmings, arctic char and bird eggs being consumed by caribou.

Behaviour

Barrenground caribou travel in herds of 10 to 50 animals or loose bands of a thousand on the mainland. They are almost always on the move from one seasonal pasture to the next and some seasonal migrations can be as far as 1200km. No matter the distance, their migrations take them across many rivers, and fortunately, caribou are excellent swimmers. Caribou are generally quiet animals but when they are surprised, or perhaps annoyed by insects, they snort loudly. Caribou have a great sense of smell but their hearing and eyesight are average. The average caribou can outrun a wolf.



Range

Barrenground caribou are found throughout the mainland in the Kivalliq and Kitikmeot regions and most of Baffin. Several herds on the mainland winter in the forests south of

Nunavut; while populations on the northern mainland and arctic islands occupy Nunavut's tundra year-round.

Habitat

Barrenground caribou live on the barren land or tundra of northern Canada.

Reproduction

Barrenground caribou breed in the autumn. Calving times are generally during the month of June following a gestation period of 7.5 to 8 months. At birth, fawns weigh about 5kg. They can usually stand up shortly after birth and within 2 days they are able to keep up with their mothers.

Status Survival and Management

According to the Nunavut Wild Species 2000 report, the status of barrenground caribou is secure. Their main predators in Nunavut include humans and wolves. Lichens can store high levels of radioactive fallout although the levels of contaminants found in caribou have decreased in recent years.

Other Species in Nunavut

It is generally accepted that barrenground and Peary caribou are different subspecies to the main species of caribou and reindeer. The caribou found on the Belcher islands and Sanikiluaq are reindeer that were introduced in 1978 from a semi-domesticated herd in the NWT.

Did You Know?

Upper canine teeth are generally found in males and females, however they remain unused and below their gums. This indicates that at one time the caribou may have had a use for canines.

