

Endangered Species and Spaces

[Home](#)
[Up](#)
[Table of Contents](#)
[Introduction](#)
[Classification Systems](#)
[Birds](#)
[Amphibians and Reptiles](#)
[Freshwater Fishes](#)
[Invertebrates](#)
[Vascular Plants](#)
[Non-Vascular Plants](#)
[Plant Communities](#)
[Exotic Species](#)
[Protected Areas](#)
[Summary-Conclusions](#)
[Appendix](#)
[Mammals](#)
[Back](#)
[Next](#)

3.5 Mountain Caribou: *Rangifer tarandus* (Linnaeus), southern population

Order: *Artiodactyla*
Family: *Cervidae*

Status

Global Rank: G5T2T3Q
Provincial Rank: S2S3
COSEWIC: Vulnerable

Provincial Listing: [Blue list](#)



Distinguishing Features

Caribou possess a number of adaptations to cold winter conditions. The muzzle, ears and tail are well furred. The body is compact and covered in thick fur. The feet are unusually large, and the large crescent-shaped hooves grow in the winter to facilitate travel over snow. Antlers are extremely variable. Bucks have larger antlers than does, but young males may be hard to distinguish from females. Some females do not carry antlers. The colour pattern varies, but the basic dorsal colour is clove brown, darker on the face, chest and dorsal side of the tail. Legs are brown except for narrow white 'socks' just above the hooves. Males (avg. 110 kg) are larger than females (80 kg). (Banfield, 1974).

Distribution

Columbia Basin: In suitable habitat in the Columbia and Purcell Mountains south to about Kitchener west of Kootenay Lake. In the Selkirk Mountains, Mountain Caribou occur as far south as Kaslo and the east side of northern Lower Arrow Lake. Then there is a break in their distribution until it begins again in the southern Purcells where animals from northwestern Washington and northeastern Idaho populations extend into British Columbia.

British Columbia: In the Rocky Mountains, Mountain Caribou range from north of Mount Robson, south to the central Rockies northwest of Mount Columbia. They are also found on the east side of the Fraser River through the Quesnel Highlands, south of Prince George, through the Monashee Mountains to Whatshan Lake.

Global: As a species, *R. tarandus* is associated with the boreal, tundra, and mountainous regions of Eurasia and North America. As defined here, the southern mountain population is restricted to the Columbia and Rocky

Mountains of British Columbia and Idaho, north to the Hart Range (south of Chetwynd).

Habitat

The southern mountain populations of Caribou prefer open alpine, subalpine, and semi-open to open bogs in the summer where they feed on grasses, sedges, mushrooms and forbs. In the winter they are found in mature coniferous forest, where they feed on terrestrial and arboreal lichens, as well as some leaves and buds. Falsebox, an evergreen shrub, is important in the late fall and early winter. In late winter they use subalpine old-growth/mature forests extensively because of the abundant arboreal lichens. (Cannings et al. 1999).

Threats

Recent total population estimates range from 2300 to 2500 animals. Widespread declines in Caribou numbers, including the Mountain Caribou, occurred in the 1900s and have been linked to the spread of Moose into the province and the subsequent increase in Wolf numbers. Estimates of herds from Prince George to Revelstoke (including the southern Selkirks) have increased by about 50% since the 1970s. The main threats for Mountain Caribou are loss of winter food supply (arboreal lichens that grow in older forests), forest habitat fragmentation, increased human access (disturbance and mortality), and high rates of predation (Cannings et al. 1999).

Biology

Seasonally, loose bands of 10-50 Caribou can migrate over large distances, and utilize vastly different elevations for habitat preference. The breeding season is in October; gestation lasts about 227-230 days, after which cows usually bear one calf (Banfield 1974). Caribou abundance seems to be dependent upon the effectiveness of their ability to avoid predators. By migrating to higher grounds in the summer they reduce exposure to Wolves which are staying in the valleys along with the Moose (Cannings et al. 1999).



[[Home](#)] [[Up](#)] [[Grizzly Bear](#)] [[Wolverine](#)] [[Fisher](#)] [[Badger](#)] [[Mtn. Caribou](#)] [[Rocky Mtn. Bighorn Sheep](#)]
 [[California Bighorn Sheep](#)] [[Least Chipmunk oreocetes](#)] [[Least Chipmunk selkirkii](#)] [[Red-tailed Chipmunk ruficaudus](#)]
 [[Re Tailed Chipmunk simulans](#)] [[Southern Red-backed Vole galei](#)] [[Northern Pocket Gopher segeregatus](#)]
 [[Northern Long-eared Myotis](#)] [[Townsend's Birg-eared Bat](#)] [[Mammals References](#)]