



(Photo: BC Parks)

2.4 Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*)

Appearance and Size

Woodland Caribou are classified into three ecotypes: Mountain, Northern and Boreal. The ecotypes look about the same but differ with behavior, habitat use, distribution and migration. Woodland Caribou have soft medium brown coats, but their colour pales as guard hairs break and fade during winter. In males, the head and neck are often white or greyish-white, with a mane on the underside of the neck. The tail and rump area, as well as a band around each hoof, are also whitish. Their long dense winter coat provides effective insulation against low temperatures and high winds. Caribou have erect, spreading antlers. Males have a flattened (palmate) brow tine that points down over the forehead. Female Caribou also have antlers, which is unique among females in the deer family. Woodland Caribou can range in height at the shoulder from 100 cm to 120 cm. Males typically weigh 180 kg to 270 kg, while females usually weigh about 90 to 135 kg.



(Photo: BC Ministry of Forests)

Life History



(Photo: Mike Fenger)

The breeding season is much shorter for Caribou than for other deer. The majority of the breeding occurs in a one-week period in the middle of October. Gestation averages seven to eight months, and calves are born in late May to early June. To avoid predators, pregnant females seek secluded sites in alpine and subalpine habitats. Single births are the most common, and females usually give birth to their first calf when they are three years old. Caribou calves are dark brown and have no spots. They are probably the most precocious of the deer family; calves must be up and travelling with their cows almost immediately in order to avoid predators. Generally, females live 10 to 15 years, while males live 8 to 12 years.



(Photo: Cliff Razzo, BC Ministry of Transportation)

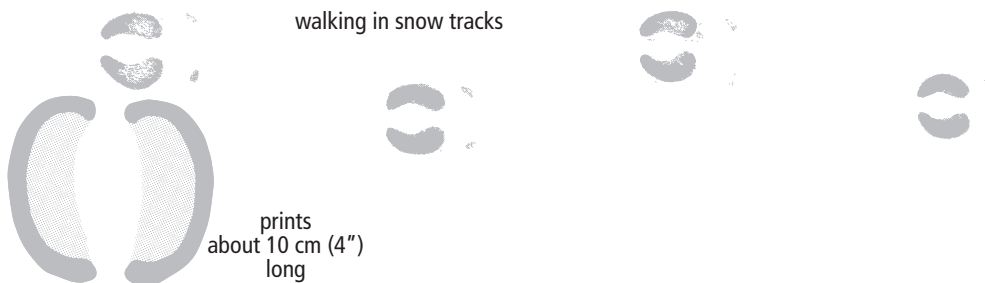
Abundance and Distribution

Woodland Caribou occur east of the Coast Mountains, from the Yukon border south to the Itcha-Ilgachuz in the Western Chilcotin, eastwards to the foothills of the northern Rocky Mountains; in the Cariboo, Selkirk, Purcell, and Monashee mountains in the southeast; and throughout the highlands and plateaus (e.g. Spatsizi, Omineca) in the northern and central interior. (Map 2.4)

Caribou occupy about 85 percent of their historic distribution in British Columbia.

Mountain Caribou occupy about 60 percent of their historic range. Mountain Caribou may make four migrations each year, moving down to lower elevations in early winter, back up to higher elevations in late winter, down to lower elevations again in spring, and finally back to high elevations for the summer. The range of movement up and down varies, however, and the deepest snow areas, such as Revelstoke, usually have the widest range of vertical migrations. Northern Caribou migrate twice a year, traveling more than 140 km in some cases. The migration patterns of Boreal Caribou are largely unknown. British Columbia has about 16,500 Caribou.

Text and map adapted from: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 2002.



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: Colin Leake)



(Photo: Cliff Razzo, BC Ministry of Transportation)

Characteristic Features



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

Map 2.4

