



CARIBOU



"Caribou Convention:" An Unusual Gathering

What do you get when you cross a Porcupine with a Teshekpuk or a Central Arctic? You get an unusual gathering of caribou! If only we could transport ourselves up to the countryside around Arctic Village this winter to witness this interesting phenomenon.

Wildlife biologist, Dr. Stephen Arthur sent us the news this week (Feb. 24, 2002) along with his comments:

"Although this has been documented occasionally in the past, it is unusual. However, it appears that about half of the Porcupine Herd is wintering in the vicinity of Arctic Village, while the main segment of the Central Arctic Herd is wintering about 50-100 miles west of there. One of the Porcupine satellite collars has been spending the winter with a group of caribou from the Central Arctic Herd (CAH).

"This puts the 2 groups close enough so that there may be more overlap than we can see from the satellite collars alone. We (Alaska Department of Fish and Game and US Fish and Wildlife Service) are planning an extensive radio-tracking survey for the last week of February to delineate wintering areas used by the two herds. This information should help us determine if the herds have overlapped. There are also 3 bulls wintering with the CAH that were thought to be from the Teshekpuk Lake Herd. However, they were just collared last summer, so they may actually be CAH caribou. We will need to follow them through June to decide which herd they actually belong to. In any case, we have not tracked many bulls from these herds before, so we don't know how well they fit the herd definition that is based on movements of cow caribou.

"Both the Teshekpuk and Central Arctic herds migrate, but not in the same way as the Porcupine herd. The Central Arctic herd has a much smaller annual range, and they migrate between calving areas on the coastal plain and wintering areas in the Brooks range about 150 miles south. Individual caribou from the Teshekpuk herd migrate anywhere from a few tens of miles to over 300 miles, though most move about 100 miles.



Dr. Stephen Arthur
Alaska Department of Fish
and Game

"We are preparing to begin the radiotracking work on Porcupine and Central Arctic caribou tomorrow. I will have more information on the winter distributions by next week."

When we asked Dr. Arthur about the possibility of interbreeding of the herds and whether there were differences in their appearances, he replied:

"The limited genetic studies that have been done so far indicate that all caribou in northern Alaska are closely related, thus, there likely is some genetic interchange. However, it doesn't take much interaction to maintain this degree of relatedness. Individual animals from all 4 herds (Porcupine, Central Arctic, Teshekpuk, and Western Arctic) are similar in appearance.

The question of how much interaction occurs between herds is of great interest to biologists right now, and we are hoping to do some more genetics work to look into this further. Our continuing radio-tracking studies will also help indicate how much interaction might occur."

- Link to see a map showing ranges of [All Alaskan Caribou Herds](#)

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