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BOWSC 251

BARREN-GROUND CARIBOU SURVEY AKLAVIK
TO BABBAGE RIVER ON APRIL 18, 1952.

by
E.H. McEwen

PRELIMINARY DATA
NOT FOR PUBLICATION
WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION

The purpose of this survey was to photograph with a k-20 aerial camera the caribou in the Blow River area, which we observed on a previous survey. The flight was made in an Aeronco aircraft piloted by M. Zubko, with the Chief Warden acting as the second observer.

The course followed after leaving Aklavik at 10.45 a.m. was northwest to Canoe Lake (68° 25' N., 136° 10' W.). From this lake we flew north to Coalmine Lake, then towards Escape Reef (68° 58' N., 137° 15' W.), which is about eight miles southeast of Shingle Point. About 17 minutes were spent circling and photographing the scattered caribou herds in this area. We then flew parallel to the coast about eight miles inland to the forks of the Babbage river, which was followed to the coast.

At 11.59 a.m. we turned back and flew along the coast to Shingle Point, crossing the Blow River about six miles from the forks, and continuing southeast to Aklavik, where we landed at 1.20 p.m. Three hours and five minutes were flown on this survey, covering a distance of about 240 miles. A map is enclosed showing the course followed.

A total of 1,334 caribou were counted from the air and 1,291 caribou were counted from the aerial photographs, a total of 2,625 or, in round numbers, 2,700.

This was much less than the number of caribou seen on March 25, 1952. The small number of caribou observed may be the result of two severe blizzards which occurred during the period between the two surveys. I think the herds would split up as do the reindeer during a snow storm. Besides this visibility became poorer after we passed the Blow River. Then too the caribou may have reached the northern limit of their range and tended to separate into small groups of their accord.

The caribou were in small groups from about seven miles northwest of Coalmine lake to the Babbage river. The following data indicates the number of caribou between different points along the course and the times.

Coalmine Lake to Blow River (10.57 - 11.09) -	91	caribou
Blow River to Shingle Point (11.09 - 11.20) -	832	"
Shingle Point to Babbage River (11.20-11.27) -	406	"
Babbage River to coast Forks) (11.27 - 11.50) -	617	"
Forks of Babbage to Shingle Pt. (11.50 - 12.07)	583	"
Shingle Pt. to Blow River (12.07 - 12.29)	<u>96</u>	"
	2625	

It was necessary to fly at 1,500 feet from the Blow River to Aklavik, because visibility was closing in and because of the shortage of fuel. Thus some of the caribou in this area may not have been seen.

An Eskimo, George Akgeak, a native of Herschel Island supplied information on the caribou in that area. In August, 1951, on the mainland opposite Herschel Island, large numbers of caribou moved north along the coast, and returned southward within a short time, possibly two weeks. This may have been part of the herd that moved south to Aklavik last October and November.

Last year, some of the caribou had their fawns on the mainland opposite Herschel Island. While the fawns were still young, a severe storm occurred, after which he found nine fawns which were frozen.

This February, he travelled up the Firth River, but saw no caribou. At Sheep Creek about 40 miles up the Firth River there are a few mountain sheep. In the summer of 1948, he saw "thousands" of caribou moving northwest up Sheep Creek towards Alaska. In June 1951, he saw caribou moving west from the Firth River to the Kongakut River (Alaska). He does not know whether these caribou in the Firth River area move towards the Old Crow area and back to the Firth River or return east again in the spring.

He believes that the caribou in the Blow and Babbage River area are moving inland towards Old Crow. They move southwest across the low country at the Babbage River and the Blow River.

Then in late August the caribou return to the coast, moving northeast along the Blow River towards Escape Reef. In September the caribou move southeast along the Richardson Mountains.

Another Eskimo from the Herschel Island area, Paul Kayatuk, said that there were no caribou on the Firth River this winter. He reported also that there was an unusual number of caribou on the mainland opposite Herschel to the Blow River, in February and March.

He stated that the caribou in the Firth River area travel towards Alaska in June and July. In May the caribou return from Alaska towards the Firth River. It may be that this is a separate herd, not the one which is contacted by the hunters from Aklavik.

I recorded the information obtained from these two natives because it may have some bearing on the future study of these caribou.

The other observations on this survey included one wolf, one coloured fox, and flocks of ptarmigan. The wolf was seen near the Blow River and the coloured fox in the same area. Large flocks of ptarmigan were seen from Coalmine Lake to the Babbage River. More were seen on this survey than on the previous one. No attempt was made to count them but their numbers must have been in the thousands.

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