

1M

CWS-29-52

52-29

McEwen, E.H.

Barren-ground caribou survey from  
Aklavik to Herschel Island on March  
25th, 1952. [n.p., Canadian Wildlife  
Service] 1952

3h

1. Caribou - Aerial surveys 2. Barren-  
ground caribou - Aerial surveys I. Title

BARREN-GROUND CARIBOU SURVEY FROM AKLAVIK  
TO HERSCHEL ISLAND ON MAR. 25th, 1952.

This is the second report on caribou in this area. The first report, submitted on January 16th, dealt with some aspects of the movements, estimated size of, and kill of the caribou which migrated southward during October and November along the west side of the Richardson Mountains. This report consists of data collected on an aerial survey on March 25th in an "Aeronca" aircraft, piloted by Mr. Mike Zubko; the Chief Game Warden, F.A. McCall, acted as the second observer.

I believe that four aerial surveys have been made during the years 1947, 1948, 1949 and 1950 from Aklavik along the Richardson Mountains in order to locate and determine the size of this herd. There is no report available on the survey made by Mr. W.E. Stevens in 1947.

From December 2nd to 8th, 1949, F.A. McCall, made a survey over the same route as Stevens did in 1947. The following data has been taken from McCall's report - The route on December 3rd starting from Aklavik was along the eastern slope of the Richardson Mountains to Moose River. No caribou were seen on that day. On December 5th from Aklavik a flight was made along the east slope of the Richardson Mountains to the Rat River Pass. A course was flown up the Rat River for 25 miles, returning to the pass, then south to the Stony River, following down the Stony River to Fort McPherson and back to Aklavik. No caribou were observed. On December 7th a survey was conducted south and west of Fort McPherson to Vittrekwa River and the Yukon Border. Tracks of caribou were seen at the broadwaters of the Vittrekwa River, of an estimated herd of 200 caribou. The herd was not located, but the tracks were followed to the Yukon Border. On December 10th a survey was made east of the Delta, to Caribou Lake (Lat. 68° N, Long. 132° 30' W). No caribou were observed on that aerial survey, but a few were reported south of Fort McPherson along the Yukon Boundary.

In 1949, W.E. Stevens, made an aerial survey west of Aklavik, but no caribou were seen.

In the fall of 1950, an aerial survey was made by W.E. Stevens from Aklavik to Shingle Point area. No report is available on the results of this survey, but I believe, that a number of caribou were seen in the Shingle Point area.

A general description of the route followed on the present survey is given below, which is supplemented by a map (fig. 1). Leaving Aklavik at 10.30 a.m. we flew in a northwesterly direction close to the foothills of the Richardson Mountains. At the Yukon and Northwest Territories boundary, the course was changed to a more westerly direction passing over the forks of the Blow River and arriving at Shingle Point. From there, the course was inland about two to three miles from the coast of MacKenzie Bay crossing from the mainland directly to Herschel Island. At Herschel Island we landed and interviewed Cst. Mac Dougal and Cst. Mains at the R.C.M.P. Detachment.

Returning to Aklavik, we crossed from Herschel Island to the mainland west of Stokes Point, and flew about four to six miles inland from our previous route, arriving at Aklavik at 4.40 p.m. Four hours were flown on this survey, travelling a distance of 280 miles.

The first groups of caribou were observed west of the Yukon and N.W.T. boundary. They numbered 14, 8, 4, 35, 20 and 90. Then a large concentration of animals consisting of 7 groups was seen. Flying the length of the herd the time was clocked from 11.18 to 11.21 a.m. The length of this group, considering our ground speed at 75 m.p.h. because of a head wind estimated at 30 to 35 m.p.h., was four miles in length. The groups were estimated as follows:- 100, 1,000, 500, 1,500, 1,500, 1,000 and 1,500. The total number of this group was considered to be

between 7,000 and 8,000. The animals were not migrating but in small groups, the width of which could not be ascertained. The visibility here was about three to four miles because of ground drift.

A landing was made at 11.32 a.m. on a lake to observe the caribou. Here, groups of 500, 1,000, 500 and 900 were observed from the ground and the air. I counted 250 animals here and noted that the herd was of a heterogenous nature, but predominately antlered cows. A few large bulls with antlers and some bulls, with antlers 6 to 8 inches in length in velvet, were observed. There was insufficient time to attempt to sex this group. The lake was short and covered with medium sized drifts and except for the strong wind of 30 to 35 m.p.h. we could not have been able to take-off. After taking-off at 11.40 a.m., we circled these groups, estimated to be 2,900.

From this lake, passing over the eastern branch of the Blow River to the forks of the Blow River at 11.50 a.m. two groups estimated to be 150 each were seen.

From the forks of the Blow River to Shingle Point about 1,800 caribou were observed in 14 groups as follows:- 150, 100, 150, 5, 350, 350, 10, 70, 20, 15, 200, 100, and 100.

From Shingle Point to King Point about 410 caribou in eight groups were estimated and counted as follows: - 15, 50, 25, 50, 150, 10, 100 and 10.

Thirty caribou, 10 in one, and 20 in the other group, were counted just past King Point. From here to Herschel no caribou were seen.

At 12.50 p.m. we landed at Herschel Island and interviewed Cst. MacDougal and Cst. Mains. On March 10th while Cst. MacDougal was in Aklavik he reported that the caribou were inland from the coast between King Point and Shingle Point. Two caribou were found which had been killed by wolves. He was unable to estimate the number of caribou in this area. A small group arrived on the coast before Christmas. By February a marked increase in their number had occurred. In January 1950, there were practically no caribou along the coast. On returning to Herschel Island a few days after our conversation he counted over 300 caribou from Shingle Point to King Point.

At Herschel Island the temperature was 10° F below with a north wind of 15 to 20 m.p.h. We left at 3 p.m. and had crossed to the mainland by 3.15 p.m. The visibility had improved as compared to our northward flight. At 3.16 p.m. 20 caribou were counted on the west side of Phillips Bay. Then a group of 10 were counted near the creek emptying into Phillips Bay. Beyond the creek at 3.18 p.m. two groups numbering about 50 and 70 were seen. Only one caribou was observed from here to the west branch of the Blow River. At 3.37 p.m., Warden McCall reported seeing a wolf.

The west branch of the Blow River was reached at 3.43 p.m. Flying down this tributary eight groups were estimated as follows:- 500, 100, 150, 200, 150, 70, 50 and 200. Near the forks of the west side a large herd numbering about 3,000 animals was observed. It required two minutes to fly the length of the herd at an altitude of 300 feet. It was estimated to be four miles long and one to two miles wide. The width of the herd varied considerably from one end of it to the other. On the forks of the Blow River another herd was seen numbering possibly 2,000 animals, which was four miles in length. These groups had not been observed on the morning flight as this herd was seen in the same area as flown over before.

Only four caribou were seen at 4.10 p.m. in the Northwest Territories, about eight miles east of the boundary line. From here to Aklavik no caribou or tracks were observed. We returned to Aklavik at 4.50 p.m.

A flight to Herschel Island was made on April 2nd, 1952 by Mr. L.A.C.O. Hunt with Mike Zubko. The same large herd of caribou, which we observed on the morning flight east of the Blow River, was seen. The caribou had remained in the same area but had tended to scatter into smaller groups. From the Blow River to the coast about 8 miles southeast of Shingle Point few caribou were seen. The remainder of the flight to Herschel Island was flown over the sea ice where no caribou are present. On returning from Herschel, their course to the Blow River was practically the same as ours. A greater number of caribou had moved northward along the Babbage River. These animals were not there on our survey, so that this may be another group of caribou. The caribou near the forks of the Blow River had remained almost in the same area. Other observations included ptarmigan, fox and moose. Two large flocks of ptarmigan numbering over 100 were seen at 11.00 a.m. At 11.07 a flock numbering about 30 were observed. In the Blow River area and on the mainland opposite Herschel Island scattered flocks were seen. One coloured fox was seen at 4.25 p.m. in a creek and a moose track was seen at 4.30 p.m. near Cache Creek about 40 miles northwest of Aklavik.

In summarizing the results of this survey, the number of caribou was estimated at 20,000. The observations are listed as follows:-

From Yukon Boundary to Blow River.....	10,471		
From Blow River to Shingle Point.....	1,800		
From Shingle Point to King Point.....	430		
From King Point to Herschel Island.....	0		
		12,701	- (13,000)
From Phillips Bay to Blow River.....	131		
From Blow River to fork of Blow River.....	1,420		
From fork of Blow River to .....	5,000		
From Northwest Territories Boundary to Akl.....	4		
		6,555	- ( 7,000)
			<u>20,000</u>

A second survey is planned in this region so that the groups can be photographed using a K-20 aerial camera. By this method a more accurate estimate can be made of the number of caribou in the region.

Respectfully submitted,

'sgd' E. H. McEwen,  
Mammalogist.

Aklavik, N. W. T.,  
April 17th, 1952.



